

## Episode 7 - Eilat

Hello everyone, and welcome to the new episode of the podcast "Yalla: Learning Hebrew with Steph." I'm Steph, and today we're going to talk about the city I love most in Israel - Eilat! This episode is very special for me, because Eilat is the city where Alon, my husband, grew up. And so it's a place that's important to me too.

Before we begin, I want to say that I've created a new website for you. There you can find all the episodes of the podcast, transcripts of the episodes, and more. If that interests you, you can visit [www.hebrew-with-steph.com](http://www.hebrew-with-steph.com) or just type "hebrew with steph" into Google. Okay, let's get started!

If you've been to Israel, you probably know that it's a small country but with a great variety of different places. You can see the green mountains in the north and the great desert in the south, all within a few hours. At the southern tip of the country lies the city of Eilat. Eilat is on the shore of the Red Sea and is famous for its hot weather, beautiful beaches, and blue sea full of corals and fish. It's a very popular place for Israelis, especially in winter when the rest of the country is cold and wet. When Tel Aviv is at 15°C in January, the temperature in Eilat is still between 20 and 25°C - and that's the reason so many people visit there.

I remember when Alon and I had just met, before I'd ever visited Israel. He'd show me videos and photos of Eilat, and I couldn't believe what I was seeing. The blue, clear sea, the desert mountains, the palm trees - I couldn't believe this was where he grew up. Eilat looked to me like a holiday destination, not like a regular city to live in. I come from a small town in England where the skies are grey most of the time. So for me, Eilat looked like another planet - it was so different from everything I knew.

The first time I visited Eilat was in September 2021, and it was a big shock for me. I knew it would be hot, but I wasn't ready for 40°C. I'd never experienced anything like it. In England, we don't know temperatures like that. It was almost impossible to go outside, and I was really glad we had air conditioning. I remember thinking to myself, how do people live here? But Alon and his family were already used to it. The sun didn't seem to bother them too much. I tried to stay in the shade as much as possible. Tzel (shade) is a place with no sun - for example, under the trees. It really makes me laugh to look back on it now. After that visit I understood that the most pleasant time to visit Eilat is in winter.

For most people, Eilat is a leisure spot you go to for a weekend break and to do some shopping. I think, for me, it's much more than that. Because Alon grew up there, on every visit we walk around the city and he tells me lots of memories and experiences from his childhood, places he loves going, and so on. It gives the city a different meaning for me.

The thing I love most about Eilat is snorkelling. The Red Sea is famous for its corals and its colourful fish and even dolphins! And you don't need to swim far to see them. You just have to get into the sea with a snorkel and within a few minutes you can see everything. When I first got into the sea in Eilat, it really was like watching a nature documentary, but in real life. I really recommend trying it. But if you don't want to snorkel, there's also the Underwater Observatory. There you can go below the sea and look through the glass at lots of fish and corals.

The city of Eilat is tax-free. That means you don't have to pay VAT (ma'am / tax in English) on things you buy, so everything is roughly 20% cheaper than anywhere else in Israel. Because of this, many Israelis visit Eilat especially to go shopping, and it's very common to see people walking around with loads and loads of bags full of things they've bought.

Now, Eilat has not only the sea and shopping, but also a beautiful desert that surrounds the city. One of my favourite memories from visiting Alon's family was a trip we took into the desert to make a poike. A poike is something a lot of people do when they're out on trips in Israel — you take a cast-iron pot and put in meat, vegetables, potatoes, and spices, and then cook it slowly over a fire for a few hours. The word poike is actually the name of the pot, not the food and in Afrikaans it means "small, round pot." If anyone ever offers to make a poike with you in the desert in Israel, say yes - it's not just a meal, it's really an experience.

Another thing I really enjoyed doing in Eilat was visiting Timna Park, which is about a 25-minute drive north of Eilat. Timna Park is a desert area with a lot of history and geology. There are very special rocks and minerals there. The park has a visitors' centre that tells the story of the area. In addition, there are lots of walking trails, and trails where you can travel by bike or by car and enjoy the nature and the beauty of the place.

Another thing that's very special about Eilat is its location. Eilat sits between the border with Jordan and the border with Egypt, and you can see both from the city. If you look out at the sea, on one side you can see the mountains of Jordan and Saudi Arabia, and on the other side you can see the beaches of Egypt. One of the interesting places to visit in Jordan is called Petra, and it's one of the Seven Wonders of the World. I really hope I get to visit there one day.

If I had to describe Eilat in three words, I'd say: special, hot, and surprising. And for me, it will always be more than just a holiday spot. It feels like a second home. If you live in Israel, or are coming to visit, I highly recommend visiting Eilat, especially if you want a break from the busy cities like Tel Aviv and Jerusalem.

That's all for today's episode. I really hope you enjoyed it and learned something new about Eilat, and maybe I've even made you want to visit. If you've been to Eilat before, or you have tips for other places to visit in Israel, I'd love to hear from you. You can leave a message on my website, or comment here on the podcast. I'll put a link to my website in the podcast description.

Lastly, if you have questions or ideas for topics I could talk about on the podcast, you're more than welcome to send me a message! And of course, you can find the transcript of the podcast on my website [www.hebrew-with-steph.com](http://www.hebrew-with-steph.com).

Thank you so much for listening to another episode of "Yalla: Learning Hebrew with Steph." Until next time — take care and keep learning.