

# EPICS Inspiring EPICS

Full Sus's English connection

**Leona Kadir** was invited to take part in an Epic with a difference last September – the inaugural Epic Israel. And with our very own ABSA Cape Epic having just drawn to a close we thought you'd like to hear how South African mountain bike stage racing is shaping the global sport.

**E**pic Israel started in 2013 in memory of the founder Gal Tsachor's father who was tragically killed while out riding. Gal's father had supported him through several Cape Epics and they had always discussed starting a stage race in Israel. It helped that Gal inherited his father's meticulous eye for detailed planning too, which helped ensure the first race went off without a hitch.

The race ran in a clover leaf format from Kibbutz Dalia, and riders were treated to an on-site MTB expo, including a Shimano tech support zone (which we made good use of!) and a chill-out area with sofas and cushions and a massive freezer filled with free ice lollies. This was where most people spent the afternoons!

Breakfast and supper were served in the 'haderohel' which translates as food room. This must have been an experience in itself for the foreign entrants, not used to kibbutz life.

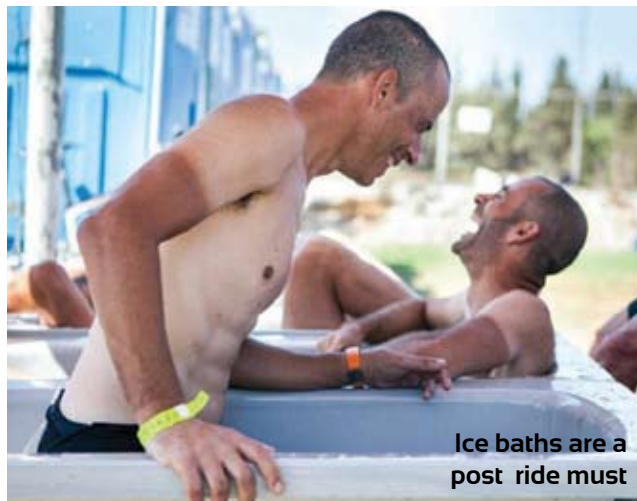
Although it has changed a lot over the years, traditionally everyone living on a kibbutz eats together communally and the clear-up is done in the same way. Fortunately we didn't have to do our own washing up during the race though!

Although my father and most of my family are from, and live in Israel, and I spent some of my childhood there; I have done very little riding in the country aside from some XCO in 2012. So I had no idea what to expect from the terrain but I knew that it



ALL PHOTOS BY KIM EPIC ISRAEL

The Epic Israel is hot and hard, but offers a different view of Israel from what you'd expect



Ice baths are a post ride must



Mediterranean landscapes and wheelies at the Epic Israel

would be very hot. In September the weather varies in Israel, but the race was held during one of the not uncommon heat waves! Coming from the by then distant memory of the English Summer, it was a bit of a shock to the system.

With the race being a team event I invited my Fruit4London team mate Graham Jones along. We've done quite a few of the same races, but we'd never raced together which made things interesting.

### Stage 1 90km 1 550m of climbing

The stage was beset with punctures. It was very rocky with sharp pointing things just waiting to prod your tyres. Between us we had four punctures, hearing that heartsinking 'pssshhhh'

coming from one of our tyres whilst sealant flew out coating both bike and rider. In between punctures the riding was great with rocky descents, smooth singletrack and short sharp climbs.

With 3km to go we passed another mixed pair obviously having serious mechanical issues. We crossed the line hoping we were in the top three only to find out later that we had won the stage!

### Stage 2 95km 2 200m of climbing

We were called up to the front on the morning of stage two with the other category leaders. This was better than the podium ceremony the night before, even getting interviewed on the line. It was a very special (probably never to be

repeated) experience!

We were fairly realistic in our expectations for the stage (and we were pretty sure we were going to lose the lead) that saw us go up Mount Carmel, which is a 39km long mountain range rather than a single peak. Although we never went above 500m, the climbing soon added up. The climbs were long and combined with the heat it felt very hard. The reward for all the climbing was some spectacular views back down into the dry valley. A good portion of the stage was within the forests that surround the area and this meant lovely smooth singletrack and even lovelier shade. The contrast between dense pine forest and arid rockiness meant you never had the same scenery for long. With much help from Graham, we finished a comfortable 20 minutes ahead of third place but crucially 20 minutes behind first which meant we were down to 2nd overall.

The fact that we got to race in the leaders' jerseys for the day meant we really weren't bothered!

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### Stage 3 94km 1700m of climbing

We were feeling pretty tired by this point. The plan for the day was just to maintain our position which we did, beating third with another 20 minutes. The stage consisted of two loops, the first was 38km with quite a lot of singletrack which was really good fun. It was quite hard coming back into the finish area knowing we had another 56km to go but the first descent out was great which helped!

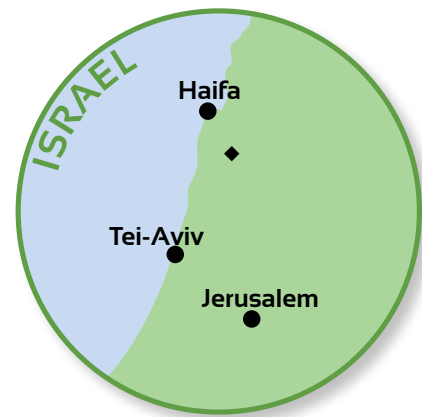
It was another scorcher, starting off at 6:30 am at around 25 degrees and seemingly suddenly getting to 30+ at around 10: am. It really was like someone had just turned the heating on!

We came in to the finish miles off first place but also miles ahead of third so we were delighted. The race was very hard, very rocky and very, very hot, truly Epic. I've been told it will take place in October 2015 so hopefully won't be quite so hot next time around. FS

The Epic Israel doing a passable Trans Karoo impression (without Karoo koppies)



**Leona Kadir** is a British mountain biker, who came to SA to train for the 2014 Epic in November 2013 and ended up staying for eight months. She's currently checking out the trails and racing in New Zealand. Follow her adventures on Twitter at @kaleona.



### SUS the Epic Israel

For 2015 the race has been rebranded the Hot Epic Israel, which by the sounds of it is very fitting! It takes place from 8 to 10 October 2015. The race village is once again in Kibbutz Dalia, which is located in northern Israel, in the province of Galilee about 30km from Haifa, near the Megiddo National Park. At the time of the most recent survey the kibbutz had a population of 737 people.

To find out more visit:  
[www.epicisrael.org.il](http://www.epicisrael.org.il)