

The HOLY LAND was calling



ALL PHOTOS BY JOHAN BADENHORST

Erik Kleinmans and the RECM crew were invited to the Hot Israel Epic by the race organisers and as it could well be his last stage race with Nico Bell they jumped at the chance to jet off to the Middle East.

Even though I knew about the country's incredible history, somehow I never thought that I would go and explore Israel. But boy, what an experience it ended up being!

After the Cape Epic, Christoph Sauser who is an ambassador for this race, nominated the RECM crew of Nico, JB and I to the Hot Epic Israel organisers for a journey to the holy land, and it wasn't a very hard decision to make when the invite arrived in our inboxes.

Thanks to the Israeli Tourism Board who covered our expenses, we formed part of the media contingent, and this trip would not have been the same without those perks. Our first stop was Tel Aviv on the Mediterranean Sea and none of us expected such a lively, metropolitan, exciting city! A swim in the warm water and dinner on the impressive promenade had us properly entertained. The amount of people running, cycling and enjoying life outside was an eye opener.

A guided tour through Tel Aviv was also on the cards before heading north to the race village at Kibbutz Dahlia. Apart from the history lessons, the market in Old Jaffa was the highlight for me.

We arrived in the dark at the race village after a full day of traveling, and the three of us were fortunately

put up in a mobile home rather than a tent. The organizer, Gal Tsachor, is a big MTB fan and has done the Cape Epic before, so the facilities were top class, with free beers and ice-creams too – which became our staple diet in the afternoons.

Apart from the friendly people in Israel, the race routes were the best thing about the race! It was rocky out there... The first day was a rather flat 105km with some cool singletracks and a loop to the Mediterranean. Day two up and around Mount Carmel with some of the most stunning views you can imagine, in another 100km loop. The race finished with a shorter 70km XCO style route on the last day which was full of entertainment.

Nico and I had a rather tough first day, with one of the millions of sharp rocks getting the better of Nico's tyre right at the start of the race. We spent the day chasing past hobbyriders through the singletracks, but managed to limit our losses to finish fourth on the day. We won the last two stages, with a fight against two German teams and a few tough Israeli's, but it was enough to seal the overall title in what was Nico and my last stage race together.

Luckily the trip did not end directly after the race, and it was back into our guided tour bus for two days in Jerusalem. And what an experience

Erik and Nico on a sight-seeing tour with the Hot Epic Israel media contingent.



Posing on the start line in the race leader's jerseys.



Browsing the market in Old Jaffa.

that turned out to be! There is so much history, sights and stories to hear that our time there was just not enough.

South Africa is full of stage races, but your life gets an upbeat kick when new things cross your path. I loved my visit there and will gladly recommend this race to anyone, get a tour guide and spend an extra week of sightseeing, chill on the beach, enjoy good food and some friendly people! **FS**



RECM se **Erik Kleinmans** is een van Suid-Afrika se gewildste bergfietsjaers. Hy is nou die eienaar en kaptein van die RECM bergfiets

span, en moet net so hard werk op die span admin as op sy oefening. Volg hom op Twitter by [@erikkleinmans](#).

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