

# KIBBUTZ

**Kibbutz.** As one tours Israel today, he encounters several places whose names are prefixed by the Hebrew word *kibbutz*, which literally means a “gathering” or “clustering.” (The plural form of the word is *kibbutzim*.) Such places were established in the early 1900s as communes when Jews were immigrating to Palestine from Europe and the Soviet Union. At that time, these utopian societies were driven by socialism and Zionism. The people who formed the kibbutzim worked the land; it was originally an agricultural enterprise. They could not survive on their own, but could succeed in such communities.

Many of the immigrants had very little farming experience, so working the land proved to be a challenge. In addition, the land itself was difficult: The Negev (South) was desert, the Judean hills were rocky, and Galilee had its share of swamps. Diseases such as malaria were rampant. Further, the people had to fight off Bedouins who would periodically raid the farms and settlements, destroying crops and sabotaging irrigation canals.

The kibbutzim movement grew rapidly in the 1930s and 1940s as Jews escaped persecution and resettled in their ancient land. Many of the communes established during these decades were not religious; they were formed by younger people who did not uphold the Orthodox Judaism of their parents. Even so, distinct Jewish rituals like Sabbath observance and the celebration of the harvest festivals (Feast of Unleavened Bread, Feast of Weeks, and Feast of Tabernacles) were often maintained.

In the 1950s and 1960s, the establishment of additional kibbutzim fostered the extension of Israel’s borders. Members would be trained to protect their settlements and farmland. During this period, the kibbutzim appeared to be thriving.

One of the unusual aspects of communal living involved the children. From the 1920s until the 1970s, children who were born to couples in a kibbutz would be turned over to trained nurses and teachers; they were viewed as belonging to the community. It was thought that this arrangement would foster better relationships since parents would not have to discipline their children and women would have more time to work and for leisure. However, this left the children without the security that comes from a close relationship with parents. Moreover, since the children were raised together, they viewed each other as siblings. Therefore, after they grew up, they often married outside the kibbutz.

The number of people living at kibbutzim peaked in 1989 with 129,000, but by 2010 it decreased to about 100,000. Several factors have caused both the reduction and restructuring of their communities. Some of these include: (1) Other places in Israel became more industrial,

urban, and capitalistic. (2) The introduction of the television into the kibbutzim exposed members to a higher standard of living available in the cities. (3) The collapse of communism in other parts of the world weakened their socialist values. (4) Their pioneering spirit and collective vision dwindled over time.

Only a minority of these communes function according to the traditional model. In many kibbutzim, members are paid different wages based on the kind of work they perform. In some cases, they also own property. Today, only 15% of kibbutz members work in agriculture. Of the remaining 85%, some are involved in industry, while others engage in tourism and rent out guesthouses.

***Kibbutz Kalia.*** Kibbutz Kalia is located on the northwest edge of the Dead Sea near Qumran (in the West Bank region). It was originally established in the 1930s for the mining of potassium (Lat. *kalium*). The kibbutz was destroyed by the Jordanians in 1948. After the Six Day War, it was reclaimed by the Jewish people and rebuilt in 1968.

Today, Kibbutz Kalia has about 300 members. These people have several means of supporting themselves: (1) producing agricultural products (such as, dates, watermelons, cherry tomatoes, and dairy products), (2) operating Kalia Beach by the Dead Sea, (3) overseeing the Nature and Parks Authority visitor center at Qumran, and (4) maintaining guesthouses at their community. Kibbutz Kalia is simply beautiful—an oasis in the desert.

















