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A lifeguard fisherman and surf teacher, gives surf lessons on the beach in the coastal village of Jisr al-Zarqa, north of Tel Aviv.



Arab-Israeli Hamama Jarban, 41, a lifeguard fisherman and surf teacher, gives surf lessons on the beach in the coastal village of Jisr al-Zarqa, north of Tel Aviv.



Arab-Israeli Hamama Jarban (right), 41, a lifeguard fisherman and surf teacher, gives surf lessons.



Arab-Israeli Hamama Jarban (C), 41, a lifeguard fisherman and surf teacher, gives surf lessons to teenagers and adults on the beach in the coastal village of Jisr al-Zarqa, north of Tel Aviv.



People arrive to have surfing lessons with Arab-Israeli Hamama Jarban (not pictured). — AFP Photos

Arab Israeli woman draws surfers to her fishing village

Standing barefoot on an Israeli beach, Hamama Jarban blew her whistle and watched her students race towards the water clutching their colorful surfboards. Each weekend she welcomes enthusiastic would-be surfers to the shore, teaching them how to lie and then stand on their boards. "I am a child of the sea, my father used to throw us in the water when we were little and tell us to swim," she said. Wearing a black wetsuit and cap, the 41-year-old's surfing venture brings much needed income to Jisr al-Zarqa, the only remaining Arab village on Israel's Mediterranean coast and one of the poorest in the north.

Her father, together with her grandfather, also taught her how to fish, but Jisr al-Zarqa is nowadays subject to environmental restrictions on fishing. Arabs constitute around 20 percent of Israel's nine million-strong population and say they are discriminated against by the Jewish state. Jarban won qualifications as a surfing and swimming instructor, as well as a lifeguard, from Israel's leading sports training facility, the Wingate Institute. Along with her brother Mohammed, she started teaching surfing six years ago to children and young adults from the village and elsewhere in northern Israel.

While most of the surfers are Israeli Arabs, Jarban said she once taught two Jewish girls on holiday from Jerusalem. On one Saturday morning, some of the young recruits wore blue tops with the club's "Surfing 4 Peace" logo across the back. Thirteen-year-old Sari Ammash said he still finds it hard to balance on the surfboard, but has gained better control since starting lessons last year. The beach sits in an idyllic spot, close to a forest and a river that the surfers must cross before starting their lesson. Ream, a 21-year-old architecture student, travels more than 30 kilometers for the lessons. "I love sport, I used to play basketball, and now I enjoy training with Hamama," she said.

Worlds apart

Jarban also works as a lifeguard in summer and volunteers with the maritime rescue unit in Caesarea, a nearby upmarket coastal resort. The contrast with her village - with its overcrowded housing and narrow streets - could not be starker. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has a home in Caesarea. To physically separate the two places, in 2002 a five-metre-high dirt wall was erected, which Caesarea residents said was intended to

shield them from the noise of the Muslim call to prayer, as well as village parties. The barrier runs for 1.5 kilometers (about a mile) and has been planted with flowers and trees by the resort town's residents. In Jisr al-Zarqa, tin shacks line the shore, while fishing boats bob at anchor, left idle by a dispute over fishing rights.

The Israel Nature and Parks Authority gave the area environmental protection in 2010, restricting fishing and coastal construction. Villagers say they were promised development and infrastructure in return, but this never came. A spokeswoman from the parks authority said they have worked with the village council to invest funds and build a promenade, while stopping construction work on the protected land. "People should dismantle any building that is not legal, we have inspectors to watch," she told AFP. Jarban has herself become embroiled in a dispute after building a wooden hut to store surfboards. In a letter from the authority seen by AFP, she was ordered last month to demolish it or face legal action. "We have suffered heavy losses," Jarban said of her village. — AFP

Sports, raspberries, but no sea: 5 things about Serbia

Serbs will elect a new parliament yesterday in a vote expected to bolster the rule of a center-right party that has led the Balkan state for the past eight years. Here five things to know about the former communist country that loves sports, food and has a long history of balancing East and West.

Landlocked country

Like neighboring Hungary and Macedonia, Serbs have to travel abroad to seaside vacation. But that wasn't always the case. Under the former Yugoslavia, Serbia was joined with its Adriatic neighbors Croatia and Montenegro, plus Slovenia, Bosnia and North Macedonia to form the socialist federation. A series of brutal 1990s wars under Serbian strongman Slobodan Milosevic unraveled the communist country. Today tensions are still high between Serbia and its former province Kosovo, whose 2008 declaration of independence Belgrade has never accepted. With no more access to the sea, Serbian navy ships now sail the country's rivers, notably the Danube that

winds through the capital Belgrade.

Balancing powers

Serbia has for six years been in negotiations to join the European Union, its main economic partner. But the country also maintains close relations with Russia and China. Some Serbs have a fondness for Moscow as the country's Orthodox Slav "big brother", while China has become growing source of investment. Both powers crucially back Serbia on the Kosovo issue, rejecting its independence and helping shut the former province out of the United Nations. Serbs are in fact used to looking in different directions: trapped for centuries between the Austro-Hungarian and Ottoman empires, they did not secure independence until the 19th century, though it has been constantly questioned amid the region's changing borders.

Serbs home and abroad

According to the 2011 census, ethnic Serbs

account for 83 percent of the population and most of them are Orthodox Christians. There are also about two dozen minorities living in the country including Croats, Roma, Albanians, Hungarians and Slovaks. While 7.1 million people live in Serbia, several million more Serbs live abroad. Vienna is considered the second-largest Serbian town in the world, while there are also large Serb communities in Toronto, Chicago, Paris and Australia. Serbs also make up significant minorities in neighboring Bosnia, Montenegro, Croatia and Kosovo.

Sports stars

The country's most popular ambassador is probably tennis king Novak Djokovic, the top-ranked player in the world. Though he spends most of his time in Monte Carlo, the Serb regularly visits home and recently brought top players to his native Belgrade for a charity tournament. Football remains the most popular sport, with a fierce rivalry - and rowdy hooligan scene - between Belgrade's main clubs Red Star

and Partizan. Yet Serbs seem to have more success internationally in other team sports such as basketball, volleyball and water polo, where they regularly beat world and European rivals. The country also takes credit for raising NBA center Nikola Jokic, a rising star with the Denver Nuggets.

The raspberry state

With bucolic rolling hills and rich soil, Serbia is an agricultural country that few may know is one of the world's top raspberry exporters. In 2019, exports came to around 215 million euros (\$242 million), according to the statistics bureau. Come spring, local markets are full of strawberries, blackberries and other fruits, which can be bought in the dried version in winter. Yet the real national passion is for grilled meat, the centre-piece of most meals at the lively kafanas - similar to taverns - where Serbs go to celebrate and enjoy traditional cuisine. — AFP



People eat at a hawker centre in Singapore as restrictions to prevent the spread of the COVID-19 novel coronavirus are eased. — AFP photos



People transport their children on personal mobility devices in Singapore as restrictions to prevent the spread of the COVID-19 novel coronavirus are eased.

Cafes, shops reopen as Singapore eases coronavirus curbs

Shops and cafes reopened in Singapore on Friday as coronavirus measures were relaxed - but the city-state's leader warned people "not to go overboard celebrating". More than two months after a partial lockdown was imposed, massage parlors and spas also resumed operations while beaches were no longer off limits and sports and other facilities opened again. "I

feel happy because I can come out... a few restrictions still apply but I'm happy. I feel safe," Mostafa Jamshidian, a computer science researcher, told AFP as he walked through the central business district.

Angelica Stasevich said she was "very happy". "Today it's like I want to sing, I want to dance, I want to walk," the 21-year-old said. Social gatherings of up to five are allowed under the relaxed rules, but people must wear face masks and stay one metre (3.3 feet) apart. Authorities have been gradually easing restrictions imposed in early April that shuttered schools and non-essential businesses, as a test-and-trace effort stabilized infection rates. The city-state's 5.7 million residents had been told to stay home unless they had good reason to go out.

Singapore has the second-highest number of confirmed infections in Southeast Asia with more than 41,000 cases, mostly among foreign workers living in crowded dormitories. The death toll stands at 26. In a Facebook post marking the reopening of most businesses, Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong said: "I am sure all of us have been eagerly looking forward to this day for a long time! But please don't go overboard celebrating." Potential super-spreader venues such as cinemas, bars and nightclubs remain closed. And live music and TV shows are not allowed at reopened businesses as the noise could cause customers to speak more loudly, spreading droplets which could contain the virus. — AFP

Colgate ponders more changes to 'Black Person Toothpaste'

Colgate said Friday it would make further changes to a top-selling Chinese toothpaste whose logo once employed blackface and whose name still translates to "Black Person Toothpaste." The move is the latest in the growing wave of companies overhauling marketing of household products with racial stereotypes in the wake of the killing of George Floyd, an unarmed African American man, at the hands of police. The incident has led to mass nationwide protests for racial justice in the United States and some other countries.

The popular Chinese toothpaste brand "Darlie," which was called "Darkie" until 1989, is owned jointly by Colgate-Palmolive and Hawley & Hazel of Hong Kong and also sells well in other Asian markets. "For more than 35 years, we have been working together to evolve the brand, including substantial changes to the name, logo and packaging," the company said in a statement. "We are currently working with our partner to review and further evolve all aspects of the brand, including the brand name."

Colgate-Palmolive bought a 50 percent stake in Hawley & Hazel in 1985 and overhauled the brand four years later, changing the name and removing the image of a man painted in blackface wearing a top hat, an offensive racist trope. — AFP