

Meizad Tamar to the Small Crater

Meizad Tamar to Makhtesh Katan

The National Israel Trail Day 3 in the Negev.

Closest Town **Dimona**

Difficulty **Difficult**

Length **21 km**

Duration **6-8 hours**

Recommended season **Nov – Apr**

Recommended time **Early morning**

Hike Description:

Starting Point: Meizad Tamar CG

Finish Point: Makhtesh Katan CG

From Meizad Tamar campground, cross highway 25 and turn right onto the blue trail going south. Climb up the hill as the view of Nahal Tzafit from the overlook is worth it. Hike down into Nahal Tzafit. You can make a small detour and go to Ein Tzafit: Climb up the black trail going north west. If it rained lately, the Tzafit Spring (Ein = Spring) might be full with water - this is a great spot for a dip.

Go back to the blue trail, head up the steep climb and continue south for about 3 KM till you see a green trail crossing. Here you will encounter your first Makhtesh out of the 5 we have here in the Negev (out of 7 in the whole wide world). Take a moment to enjoy the scenery. You can see the entire Small Makhtesh. The cliffs you are standing on are about 400 meters above the lowest point below you.

Hike down the blue trail into the small Makhtesh. This section is called "Ma'ale Hatzera" (The Hatzera ascent). Hatzera is the name of the mountain ridge in which the small crater is located in). This ascent too was an ancient road.

Congratulations! you've made it to the bottom and have gone back in time about 120 million years. You'll be walking through the realm of sandstone from now on. Follow the trail as it goes through this vast colorful sandy-rocky kingdom.

At the bottom of "Ma'ale Hatzera" turn left, cross two wadis and the power line. The national Israeli trails continues west on a red trail, but before continuing with it, make another small detour - it is worth it.

Negev Trails

Turn east (left) on the red trail and hike out of the Makhtesh (out of what is also known as "Satan's Mouth) for about 800 Meters so you can really appreciate the tilted layers of the crater - creating a super dramatic landscape. The Makhtesh was created were an island was once pushed up from the seafloor. These layers, bent to 90 degrees in the most extreme places, are the result of the same warping force that lifted the island.

Going back into the Makhtesh, You'll notice twigs and branches caught and tangled in the electric pole on the northern side of the road. These are a great indicator for how different this place can be during a flash flood. In 1994 and again in 2004, this area saw record breaking amounts of rain over short periods of several hours. Since this is the only opening in the walls of the Makhtesh, all of the water that fell here had to find its way out and the height of the water at the peak of the flood is evident in the debris that got caught and abandoned by the flood.

Head back into the Makhtesh and continue west on the red trail. Enjoy the beautiful views of the crater walls from the inside, and the colored sands all around you, and arrive at the foothill of "Ma'ale Eli". (Eli Ascent).

Head up the Ascent. The trail is very steep and includes narrow ledges and a short climb up a hand-hold ladder. There is also a railing along a narrow rock slide.

As you get close to the top on this solid lime-stone cliff, keep you eyes open for fossils of the marine creatures that used to live in the ancient ocean that covered this are 100 million years ago.

At the top of Ma'ale Eli turn left continuing on the red trail. near the fence of the small military base, you can find a water faucet meant for hikers. After filling up your water bottles, head down till you come upon the two night camps. The one on your rights is the more intimate one, as you might encounter big groups in the left one.

Attractions: Majestic view, Steep Ascent, fossils, Colorful sand, Tilted layers, desert vegetation.