

A Tale of Two Israeli Cities Part 2 Tel Aviv

By Janice Nieder





Cosmopolitan Tel Aviv is really having a moment. With over 1,200 high-tech companies, it is often referred to the “Next Silicon Valley,” so it’s no wonder that their economy is booming. What this means to visitors is a seemingly endless array of fashionable new restaurants, funky art galleries, re-purposed hipster neighborhoods and a variety of shopping choices that include everything from world-class designers to eclectic street markets. If/when you’re ever too tired to shop you can simply flop on one of the city’s golden beaches and soak up the sun.

Suite Sleep

The Intercontinental David Tel Aviv is a gleaming, light-filled, beachfront luxury hotel that makes a perfect home base for your girlfriend getaway. All your needs are met and they’ll even raise you one if you reserve one of their humongous suites with magnificent views of the Mediterranean Sea, since they comes with free access to the exclusive Club Lounge. We took full advantage of the tasty food and drinks available throughout the day, as well as the panoramic views and smiling service. After I handed the concierge a pile of scribbled notes, she immediately organized them into a perfect day of exploring. The spacious guest rooms are decorated in soothing earthtones, and the elegant bathrooms are filled with a generous assortment of Dead Sea products. (Shhh: I even managed to score a few extra bars of the healing soaps to bring home for gifts!)

Dining options include a buffet, a fine-dining restaurant, a sea-view terrace bar and a cigar lounge. Other amenities include a fitness center, a spa, and an outdoor pool with a bar.

I tended to overindulge at the international buffet breakfasts, piling my plate with a scrumptious array of smoked fish, Israeli salads, fresh breads and pastries. I loved the hot mini-cheesecakes, topping them with their homemade sugar-free fruit jams, which I chose to believe, offset the calories. Thankfully, I didn’t discover the addictive halvah smoothies until my last morning.

Tempting Eats

The stylish Social Club is always hopping due to its sexy black and

wood-filled décor, fab bar scene with a roster of signature cocktails, such as the Wild Berry (Beefeater Gin shaken with fresh strawberries, homemade Tonka Syrup and Cava) and the well-executed bistro food, ranging from a French classic: Pate de Foie Gras with onion marmalade, to an Israeli-influenced Calamari a la Plancha served with warm fava bean and tahini.

Mizlala (“stuff your face,” in Hebrew) is hip, without rubbing it in your face. Chef Meir Adoni creates Mediterranean comfort food with a sophisticated bent, served family style at the minimalist wooden tables. We preferred to watch all the action from the long marble bar which snakes through the restaurant. There are many tempting veggie options here, such as the rich spinach and ricotta ravioli, Jerusalem artichoke cream, Jordan mushrooms, asparagus, chestnuts, sage and butter sauce -- or you can go Paleo with a Palestinian version of the steak tartar made with chopped rump steak, tahini, pine nuts, yogurt and cumin.

For an authentic dining event, sign up for an EatWith dinner. EatWith is a wildly popular culinary experience, where local foodies invite people to dine in their homes. Although it is now available in over 150 cities around the world, EatWith originated in Tel Aviv. My friend and I took a chance and booked the “Secrets of My Magical Arabic Cuisine” which turned out to be an unforgettable evening. Dinner was at a cozy home on the outskirts of Jaffa, where our hostess, Alia, had prepared over a dozen Arab dishes based on old family recipes. Her gracious husband, Mahmoud, was kept busy translating our raves about her food, since she does not speak English. Ask him to show you his artwork, which consists of paintings, stained glass, etc.

Insider Tip: Alia also offers hands-on cooking workshops where she’ll divulge the “secrets” to preparing an Arab feast.

Drink the Night Away

Barhopping in Tel Aviv, the city that never snoozes, is almost as mandatory as serving in the Israeli armed forces. T.A. nightlife runs 24-7, so you can easily spend the night jumping between upscale bars, hipster hangouts and massive dance clubs with international DJs.

Since the concept of 'last-call' isn't used here, many partyers can be found strolling the beach at sunrise.

Big spenders will love the quality cocktails served at the intimate Imperial Craft Cocktail Bar, hidden within the unassuming Imperial Hotel, where the veteran bartenders' mission statement is to create a temple to the lost art of the cocktail -- which makes it extra nice that Imperial was recently voted "Best Bar in Africa and the Middle East."

Shpagat (the name roughly translates to 'spread your legs') is another multi-purpose, duplex venue; part pop-up store, part cozy coffee house, at night it turns into a laid-back, mostly-gay-but-all-are-welcome, packed dance bar. Shpagat bar hosts a women's night on Wednesdays featuring female DJs and artists.

Hoodna, in Florentin, is a rough and tumble spot, "decorated" with secondhand couches, wooden school chairs, graffiti walls and lights fixtures made from recycled coke bottles. Great spot to grab a seat in the alley, sip a beer, listen to the live music and people watch.



Take in the Art

The Ilana Goor Museum can be found in an exquisitely renovated 18th century building in Old Jaffa. (Jaffa, a 20-minute walk from the hotel, is a beautifully well-preserved old port city that has been revitalized with a recent influx of restaurants and cafés.) The museum once served as the first Jewish inn for pilgrims en route to Jerusalem. Later it became a synagogue for Libyan Jews. It is now both the private residence of Ilana Goor, one of Israel's most famous sculptors and artists, as well as a living museum filled with five hundred works of art created by Goor and other international artists.

Insider tip: Don't miss the rooftop sculpture garden for a panoramic view of the harbor. Also, ask if you can take a peek at her huge copper-filled kitchen.

Meshuna Gallery is a sassy, bare-bones, street-art and graffiti-focused gallery in the gentrified yet still gritty Florentine area. Founded by a couple of local artists who really just wanted studio space, it has morphed into an innovative cultural center that

promotes young underground artists from the nabe.

Insider tip: If you want to explore more of this contemporary neighborhood, sign up for The Next Florentin Urban Culture Tour with the Street Wise Hebrew-Guy Sharett.

Although the Design Museum Holon only opened five years ago, it is already considered one of the world's best contemporary art museums. Acclaimed Israeli architect, Ron Arad, created the innovative structure, which resembles a giant armload of tangled red bangles. The permanent collection presents the best of industrial, fashion, textile and jewelry design, while the changing exhibitions feature everything from lesser-known pieces from the Alessi Museum to examples from the early years of bicycle design. Insider tip: It's well worth the 20-minute taxi ride from Tel Aviv.

Shopping Galore

With its burgeoning stylish young population, Tel Aviv has become Israel's fashion capital with a plethora of prestigious designer boutiques (both international and local) new luxury malls, pop-up stores and open markets, all vying for the techies dollars.

Kikar Hamedina has pretty much kicked Dizengogg Center to the curb for posh shopping. Exclusive international designer stores including Gucci, Chanel and Versace surround this grassy "State Square."

The pretty neighborhood of Neve Tzedek also offers upscale shopping, but here you'll find mostly local designers inhabiting the quaint boutiques and galleries hidden along the winding alleyways.

Insider tip: Agas & Tamar create incredible "story-telling jewelry" from found flotsam and jetsam, ancient coins, precious stones, gold and silver. Tell them your purchase is to be a gift and they'll wrap it in a darling handmade muslin bag.

The Carmel Market, the frenetic soul of Tel Aviv, is filled with colorful stalls selling everything from fresh-baked Yemenite pancake-like flatbread called saluf to knock-off sunglasses. Shopping for an impromptu picnic yielded glistening black olives, hummus, flaky cheese burekas, hot pita, perfectly ripe tomatoes, succulent red strawberries, shelled pistachios,



a big bag of sour candy gummies and even a dirt-cheap blanket.

My favorite shopping was at the open-ai red Nachalat Binyamin Market, which is parallel to the Carmel Market. Open Tuesday and Friday only, the market offers hand-made Israeli arts and crafts at exceedingly reasonable prices for quality goods.

Some of my scores included a chunky museum-quality necklace made from polished olive wood and metal and a bunch of wallets and coin purses crafted from recycled plastic by a hubby and wife team at Beggar's.

But the winner for the most creative line of products is Eli Yashar, a stained glass artist. Many years ago, at a relative's wedding, during the custom of breaking a glass under the canopy, he got the idea of placing the glass shards into the pyramid to create a souvenir of the wedding day. Today, 13 years later, he sells a variety of stained glass memorabilia created from wedding glass shards.

For help in planning your exciting trip to Tel Aviv visit the helpful Israel Ministry of Tourism website.

