

DESTINATION ●

israel

iconic
SIGHTS

TOP 10 MUST-SEE
ATTRACTIONS



Tel Aviv

CITY & RESTAURANT GUIDE

Jerusalem

WALKING & CYCLING TOURS

INSIDE: *Activities • Attractions • Food • Drink • Travel Tips*



Welcome

Whether you've never set foot in the Land of Creation, or it's been a few years since your last visit, you'll be impressed at its vast diversity — and affordability.

There really has never been a better time to explore Israel, with new flights and attractions making it more accessible, coupled with its burgeoning hotel and foodie scene.

While Eilat is an attractive winter-sun hotspot, Tel Aviv is gaining a reputation among gourmet travelers. With a number of Israeli chefs becoming celebrity figures, we look at some of the top restaurants in the cosmopolitan city (p13); and, as the wines are also winning global awards and building an international reputation, a winery visit is a must (p16).

With most visitors keen to tick off Israel's top attractions (p4), there are also lots of different ways to experience them. Why not try a leisurely walking tour of Jerusalem (p22), see a larger section of the country by bike (p24), or experience the warm hospitality of an Israeli family by enjoying a typical breakfast in their home (p14).

Whichever way you choose to explore Israel, make sure you visit soon.

Sam Lewis
Editor



Destination Israel is published by APL Media Limited.

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IMAGE: SHUTTERSTOCK

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Cover image: Hands by Shutterstock, Western Wall by instagram.com/alexi_pix and illustration by Elyran Malka (elyran.com).



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TOP 10
UNMISSABLE
Israel

For those who want to see the highlights of the Holy Land, Chris Moss suggests Israel's most inspiring historical and religious sites



IMAGES: GETTY; AWL IMAGES

From left:
Western Wall,
Jerusalem;
Basilica of the
Annunciation,
Nazareth;
Tel Aviv
promenade



1
OLD CITY, JERUSALEM

Part of the joy of exploring Jerusalem's Old City is wandering down quiet alleys, discovering hidden shops, and having a pomegranate juice while watching the world go by in this historical but vibrant destination. But, among the sites you should make sure to tick off on a first foray are the Cardo, the renovated section of the Roman and Byzantine Jerusalem's old market street, now filled with stylish shops, and the Hurva synagogue, a key holy site for four centuries that has been rebuilt numerous times. Be sure to wander along the iconic Via Dolorosa — or 'Sorrowful Way' — following the last journey of Jesus and visit the Western Wall, one of the most photographed sites in Israel, then head for the bustling Souq Khan es-Zeit — it's the perfect place to get a tasty bite at one of the stalls.

3
TEL AVIV

With its sultry Mediterranean climate, stunning coastline, buzzing nightlife, and top-notch gastronomy, Israel's second-largest city is the ultimate for those seeking some rest and recreation. The UNESCO-listed, Bauhaus-era 'White City' is an architectural gem, ideal for a morning walk or bike ride — the latter is taking off in this compact, largely flat metropolis, with

the promenade along the beach another popular draw. Cosmopolitan Rothschild Boulevard, lined by cafes and bars is a major axis during the day and is close to some of the best art galleries and indie boutiques. After dark, nearby Neve Tzedek is a great place to go wine bar-hopping or craft-beer tasting, or to explore the latest in contemporary Israeli cuisine. ▶



4

JAFFA

Jaffa, or Yafo, is one of the oldest ports on the Mediterranean, serving pilgrims bound for Jerusalem. These days, the port proper is a cultural complex with a boardwalk and warehouses with shops, bars and restaurants and the not-for-profit Nalaga'at Center, home to a deaf-blind theater company, a cafe with deaf waiters and a 'blackout' restaurant with blind waiters. Built in 1891, the Old Railway Station is another key landmark and the first railway terminus in the Middle East. But Jaffa's real magic lies hidden away down its narrow alleyways and in its tranquil courtyards. Around 50 contemporary galleries, studios and design shops can be found here, as well as a famed flea market. Dining is also excellent, with plenty of alfresco options. From here you can look back on high-rise, contemporary Tel Aviv, which grew around Jaffa in the early 20th century.



instagram.com/camilaaa3

5

SAFED

Also known as Tzfat, this is the home of the Jewish mystical tradition known as Kabbalah. When Palestine fell to the Romans in AD70, the conquering leaders issued a decree ordering the death of Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai, a prominent opponent and community leader. The rabbi fled with his son to a cave near the northern town of Peki'in where he deciphered — allegedly aided by divine inspiration — the secrets hidden in the Torah. When the decree was lifted, he traveled widely, disseminating these truths. For more than a millennium, the study of Kabbalah was limited to a few select scholars of each generation. Tzfat is believed to have a special place in Kabbalah because of its proximity to the area where Rabbi Shimon had taught, as well as to his grave on Mount Meron. Today, a series of synagogues and a historical trail help visitors grasp the history and importance of Kabbalah — and, yes, Madonna has been here.

6

MARKETS

You can't be expected to go market-rummaging on an empty stomach. So start your pilgrimage to Israel's gastronomic bazaars at Tel Aviv's Carmel Market, the city's largest fruit and vegetable market. As well as groceries, there are stalls selling delicious *borekas* (filled salty pastries originating from Turkey), as well as smart eateries offering everything from sushi to fusion cuisine. Next door is the Nahalat Binyamin street market, bustling with musicians and circus acts and great for picking up high-quality original art and craft pieces, for gifts or souvenirs: standout items include glasswork, decorated gourds and paintings. In Jerusalem, the Mahane Yehuda market, known locally as the Shuk, is a people-watching paradise; enjoy the bargaining and banter exchanged by its multicultural traders and international clientele while feasting on tasty Middle Eastern pastries, freshly brewed coffee and every juice imaginable.

IMAGES: GETTY; SHUTTERSTOCK



7

CAESAREA

Caesarea was one of the great ports of antiquity, and archaeologists have found evidence of warehouses built in King Herod's day that once housed wine, olive oil, fruit syrups, metalwork, and even Chinese porcelain. At the time, the vast city was home to palaces, temples, a theater, a marketplace, a hippodrome, and advanced water and sewage systems. Since the 14th century, much of this ancient city has been allowed to slip beneath the sand dunes, but recent archaeological excavations have unearthed a Roman site, including — at the bottom of the harbor — over 1,300 column fragments (made of marble imported from Italy and pink granite from Aswan). Away from the treasures is some great alfresco dining and, north east of the ancient city, in modern Caesarea, one of Israel's two golf courses. >



This page: Roman aqueduct, Caesarea; Opposite: Mahane Yehuda market, Jerusalem; Old Railway Station, Jaffa



8

AKKO

Even by the mindbogglingly ancient standards of the Holy Land, Akko (Acre) — a UNESCO-listed city on a peninsula on the Mediterranean — is very old indeed. Cited in Egyptian sacred texts from the 19th century BC, it's been continuously settled since the times of the Phoenicians. What you see today is mainly a fortified town dating from the 18th and 19th centuries with typical Ottoman features, but the remains of the Crusader town, dating from 1104 to 1291, lie almost intact. A quiet, dreamy place of lofty ramparts, deep moats, green domes, slender minarets, church towers, secret passageways and subterranean vaults, it's a favorite among travelers.

9

ISRAEL MUSEUM

A lovely walk through Jerusalem's Emek HaMatsleva — Rehavia Park takes visitors up to one of Israel's most enthralling cultural assets. The Israel Museum covers 5,000 years of history, encompassing a huge antiquities wing, a similarly sized section devoted to Jewish art and life, and a fine arts gallery. Temporary shows with diverse themes — recent exhibitions included Roman emperor Hadrian and Weimar Berlin's art scene — complement the permanent displays. Outside the main complex lies an art garden and the Shrine of the Book, a sci-fi-looking building housing the Dead Sea Scrolls. Before starting a tour (which takes at least half a day), grab a complimentary audio guide from the visitor center. There's a good restaurant on site if you want to make a day of it.



instagram.com/camilaaa3

10

MASADA

Rise early to avoid the heat and trek the steep path to the top of this mountain fortress for panoramic views and to tour the ruins of Herod's palaces and some of the most complete siege works anywhere in the Roman world. The mass suicide of 960 people at Masada in AD73, recorded by historian Josephus as an act of resistance against the Roman invaders, marked the beginning of a 2,000-year diaspora for the Jewish people. No doubt this dramatic clifftop location was chosen in the hope that the landscape would aid resistance. The situation of the settlement is dizzyingly dramatic — standing around 200ft above sea level feels like five times that height because the Dead Sea, which Masada overlooks, is 1,400ft below sea level.

Take your camera and, if you can't face the hike, there's a cable car that will whisk you up and down in minutes.



From left: Akko; Masada

IMAGES: GETTY; ALAMY; ISRAELI MINISTRY OF TOURISM

AFFORDABLE *Israel*

You don't have to spend a fortune to explore Israel in style. Our experts share their top tips on how to see the country on a budget — and in comfort

ACCOMMODATION

Peer-to-peer websites are a good option for renting apartments and rooms in Israeli homes. For trips to northern and southern regions, check out the *Zimmer* (self-catering cabins). Alternatively, chains like Smart Hotels (*smarthotels.co.il*) for Jerusalem and Mitzpe Ramon; and Atlas Hotels (*atlas.co.il*) for Tel Aviv and Haifa offer great value without compromising on style or location.

FOOD & DRINK

Street food is cheap and tasty. At pizza and shawarma parlours, servings are under ILS35 (\$9). For coffee, juices, sandwiches and croissants at ILS5 (under \$2.50), visit nationwide chain Cofix (*cofix.co.il*). And if you wonder why bakeries are so crowded before closing time, it's because many have 'two for one' offers — market stalls do the same; notably at Tel Aviv's Shuk Ha'Carmel (*shuktlv.co.il*) on Friday afternoons.

ENTERTAINMENT

Some wineries offer free tasting sessions and there's always a street event happening somewhere in the country, whether it's a music festival or religious procession (especially in Haifa and Jerusalem). For one of the best free festivals, head to the northern Negev in February, when thousands of red poppies blossom and the Darom Adom Festival takes place.

TOURS & ACTIVITIES

In Tel Aviv, hire a Tel-O-Fun electric bike (*tel-o-fun.co.il*) — free for the first 30 minutes. There are free walking tours here each Saturday morning (*bauhaus-center.com*) as well as in Tiberias, the ancient city in Galilee. Hiking is also a cheap way to explore. Try the 620-mile Israel National Trail (*israeltrail.net*); it spans the whole country from north to south.

TRANSPORT

Taxis are reasonably priced and, if you can't read Hebrew, easier than the bus (there are no English timetables at bus stops). Most impressive is the cheap system of sherut (shared taxis) that connect cities — it's also the most cost-efficient way to go from the airport to Jerusalem or Haifa. Unfortunately, there's no sherut from the airport to Tel Aviv but the train is fast, comfortable and reliable.

ATTRACTIONS

Some of Israel's most magical sites are free: Jerusalem's Old City, Akko, Caesarea, Mitzpe Ramon and Timna Park, as well as many churches and all of the country's pristine beaches. Entrance fees to national parks (*parks.org.il*) are extremely low and, if you plan on visiting a few in one trip, it's worth purchasing a pass, which gives access to 65 sites for ILS150 (\$39).

DID YOU KNOW?

Fresh juices, such as those made from pressed pomegranates, are available at juice bars on most street corners and markets for less than ILS20 (\$5.30). Ask for a loyalty card — they're so refreshing you're certain to make it a daily habit.



Both images: Tel Aviv



48 HOURS

Tel Aviv

At-a-glance guide by writer and resident, Sonia Soltani, who left behind London life in favor of this cosmopolitan and hedonistic city by the sea



Yoga on Frishman beach by [instagram.com/alexi_pix](https://www.instagram.com/alexi_pix).
Below: Carmel market

DAY ONE

Morning: Head to Old Jaffa, one of the most ancient inhabited cities in the world. The former fortress hosts the remnants of the battles that took place in its midst, but it's the delightful cobbled alleys, myriad art galleries, renovated harbor, and lively Shuk Hapishpishim (flea market) that will capture your imagination.

Afternoon: Rent one of the city's green Tel-O-Fun bikes (the first 30 minutes are free) or walk along the seaside to reach Neve Tzedek, the atmospheric neighborhood that predates the foundation of Tel Aviv. This enchanting district is home to colorful low-rise buildings, designer boutiques, trendy cafes and restaurants.

Evening: Book a visit to the Suzanne Dellal Center, home to the Batsheva Dance Company, to watch a show.

DAY TWO

Morning: Join the locals and indulge in a typical breakfast of eggs, salad and coffee along leafy Rothschild Boulevard. Dubbed the White City and a designated UNESCO World Heritage Site for its magnificent cluster of Bauhaus buildings, free guided tours are offered around Tel Aviv on Saturdays at 11am.

Afternoon: Visit the Tel Aviv Museum of Art to browse the country's most comprehensive collection of modern art or go to one of the city's sandy beaches — Bograshov, Frishman or Gordon — where families sunbathe to the familiar tak-tak-tak sound of matkot, the popular Israeli beach paddle-ball game.

Evening: Join the fashionable crowds in the bars around Dizengoff Square or enjoy a cocktail on the beach as the sun goes down on the Med and night revelers hit the Tayelet (promenade).

Don't miss: Carmel market and adjacent Nachlat Binyamin street for its bustling craft fair on Tuesdays and Fridays



IMAGES: AVL IMAGES

5 of the best restaurants



SHILA

Every dish at Sharon Cohen's minimalist restaurant explodes with Mediterranean flavors. The red tuna carpaccio with a Campari lemongrass sorbet and pickled seaweed, and the octopus salads are highlights of the varied fish-heavy menu. Sit at the bar to admire the dexterity of the cooks. 182 Ben Yehuda Street. shila-rest.co.il



CATIT

This small restaurant (around 10 tables) remains the most experimental establishment belonging to leading fusion chef Meir Adoni. The veal fillet in espresso butter, shrimp gnocchi and confit mussels are just some of the exotic offerings on a menu that reads like a trip from the Med to Asia, including distinct Israeli flavours along the way. 57 Nahalat Binyamin. catit.co.il



LILIYOT

Just a few steps away from the Museum of Art, this is arguably the best high-end kosher restaurant in town. Chef Shmuel Kabody cleverly uses Jewish classics such as chopped liver and braised goose, but gives them such delicate companions that the experience is as far removed from shtetl (village) fare as imaginable. *Asia House Complex*, 2 Dafna Street. lilyot.co.il



DECA

It's worth venturing outside the city center to eat at this kosher fish restaurant. Set in a business district, it's the place to negotiate over a bouillabaisse fish stew or to taste chef Roi Cohen's rendering of classics such as the artichoke soup, ravioli and gnocchi. Go at night for a more romantic atmosphere and to indulge in a bottle of award-winning Israeli wine. 10 HaTa'assiya Street. deca.co.il



LILI24

For a delightful, kosher French-style dinner, few places can compete with the ambiance of this retro-chic bistro, which thankfully lacks the pompousness of some of its Gallic forebears. Here the crusty baguette is homemade and staples of the French culinary repertoire include steak tartare for those who despair at the scarcity of kosher versions. 24 Lilienblum Street. lili24.co.il

AT MY *table*

Nigel Wilson dines in a Tel Aviv home for a flavor of local cooking and hospitality

Sabbat morning in Tel Aviv is the city at its sleepest. The cafes in Neve Tzedek, Tel Aviv's oldest neighborhood, are shuttered. Aside from a few dog-walkers, the leafy sidewalks are deserted.

A couple of streets behind the main drag, a lost-looking man greets me in a British accent. "Are you looking for

number 13 too?" he asks. His name is Mike, and like me, he's hungry for this morning's Israeli breakfast.

Number 13 turns out to be close by and our host Noa appears at the door, beaming and welcoming us into her home. Noa's husband, Ran — busy preparing the final dishes for the morning feast — extends a cheery

greeting from the kitchen. Mike and I take a seat next to Brigid, from Germany, and Michal, a local from Tel Aviv, around a table laden with cold plates, including regional classics like hummus and labneh (yoghurt cheese). Ran arrives with a tray of shot glasses, filled with miniature Bloody Marys. "Lchaim!" we toast, then down them.



Nigel Wilson tucks into a home-cooked Israeli breakfast

IMAGES: NITZAN HAFNER; DECA



FISH FALAFEL

In Israel, there's no escaping falafel, but like any classic, variations have emerged. Deca restaurant in Tel Aviv shares its recipe for a fresh alternative to the ubiquitous deep-fried chickpea snack. deca.co.il

Serves 6 • Prep time 30 mins

- 18oz chickpeas (soaked for at least eight hours)**
- 1 pound ground mullet fish**
- 1 cup parsley**
- 1 cup cilantro**
- 1 cup chopped celery**
- 1 tbsp garlic**
- 2 tbsp salt**
- Grated nutmeg**
- Pinch of cumin**
- Breadcrumbs**

1. Blend the chickpeas, fish and celery together.
2. Add remaining ingredients, apart from the breadcrumbs. Mix well and check seasoning.
3. Create balls from the mix and roll in breadcrumbs.
4. Deep fry in oil until golden brown and serve hot with a salad of cherry tomatoes, herbs and tahini dressing.

Before I set out that morning, the idea of sitting with a handful of strangers for a two-hour breakfast in someone else's home prompted curiosity and anxiety in equal measure. But after just a few minutes, I was entirely relaxed — the Bloody Mary may have helped.

"It's the second time I've had a group foodie experience," Brigid says, enthusiastically describing the culinary market tour she tried a few days earlier. "It's such a good way to meet people from other countries and to learn about Israeli food, and the dishes taste great."

I dip an eggplant wrap into a bowl of nutty tahini and agree. Next, the hot food starts to arrive. A foot-long pastry stuffed with mashed sweet potato is followed by three kinds of shakshuka (a regional staple of poached eggs in a sauce of tomatoes, chili peppers, and onions), served in frying pans.

Mike delights the room with anecdotes from the rambunctious San Francisco of the 1970s, where he

once spent a night as an impromptu jazz pianist in a dive bar. And with the cooking over and tummies almost filled, Ran and Noa join the party and share tales from their unconventional wedding day, which included a trip to their favorite burger joint in Tel Aviv.

The conversation flows from the history of Tel Aviv and nearby Jaffa to a sprinkling of Israeli politics.

The couple have hosted events at their house via Israeli start-up, Eat With, for two years. "My favorite part is cooking, but I love hosting too," says

Ran, who works as a chef.

As afternoon approaches, Ran presents us with a final alcoholic treat — a choice between Grand Marnier and a mysterious unmarked bottle said to contain Romanian grappa. Continuing in the spirit of the morning's new experiences, we all opt for the grappa, before heading our separate ways.

The author booked his meal through Eat With, which offers edible experiences in eight locations in Israel. eatwith.com

A foot-long pastry stuffed with mashed sweet potato is followed by three kinds of shakshuka

5 OF THE BEST Wineries

There's no better place to taste Israel's award-winning wines than on home soil. With 300 wineries on offer, here's our pick of the bunch



1 FLAM WINERY
Expect a warm welcome from owner Golan Flam himself at this family-run boutique winery in the Judean Hills at Eshtaol. Wines made here are elegant and world class with Flam's reserve cabernet sauvignon rated 90 out of 100 by renowned wine critic Robert Parker. There are five distinctive reds, a white and a rose on offer. Go on a Friday (by appointment only) for guided tours to learn about the wine-making process and get to taste and purchase some impressive fine wines — don't miss the delicious cheeseboard, too. flamwinery.com

2 TABOR WINERY
If picturesque views enhance a wine-tasting session then this will be a memorable experience. Nestled in the foothills of Mount Tabor in the Galilee region, these award-winning wines include those made from Viognier, Gewürztraminer or Roussane (a Rhone Valley varietal grown in the Golan Heights) grapes. Visit during summer to join in one of the winery's family harvest days — book through the visitors' center (open Sunday to Thursday). Here you can pick and crush your own grapes before toasting your efforts with a flute of '562' sparkling wine, named after the height (in meters) of Mount Tabor. twc.co.il

4 TULIP WINERY
Israel's largest boutique winery produces stellar wines and a heart-warming community spirit in the mountainside village of Kfar Tikva (Village of Hope), where villagers with special needs or disabilities get involved in the production process. Over 220,000 bottles of the 12 varietals are produced each year entirely by hand. Situated north of Haifa, the winery's visitors' center offers insights into this special project, as well as those all-important tastings. tulip-winery.co.il

3 MORAD WINERY
Located in an idyllic setting at the foot of Mount Carmel, Morad Winery produces a host of wines using some of Israel's freshest fruits. Many kibbutzim across the country produce wine using banana and kumquat, but here the Morad and Bodner families create blends using passion fruit, pomegranates, apples, and red grapefruit, to name just a few. The pomegranate wine is said to help lower blood pressure and cholesterol and is full of antioxidants. morad.co.il



5 RECANATI WINERY
A relatively new winery in Israel, Recanati has carved out an impressive path for itself with international recognition ranging from numerous awards to high profile fans such as the master sommelier from Heston Blumenthal's restaurant in London. Located in the Hefer Valley, it produces a range of red and white wines using ever popular grapes such as the Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, Shiraz and Syrah. recanati-winery.com

WORDS: KEVIN PILLEY; IMAGE: ALAMY

ON THE Hop

Sampling beer on a tour of Israel can be a great way to get to know the country, its history and people, reports Kevin Pilley

Frank Zappa was right — you can't be a real country unless you have a beer and an airline. And with El Al now serving a full-bodied Belgian blonde-style ale from homegrown boutique Alexander Brewery on its flights, Israel certainly ticks both boxes.

Beer culture has been slowly fermenting in Israel — and it's not all about Gold Star, Neshet and Maccabee. The new Beer Bazaar in Jerusalem's Machane Yehuda Market, for instance, serves over 90 handcrafted beers, in bottles and on tap, including the potent Red Eye Special. Made from nitro-cold coffee and hand-crafted stout it's the perfect pick-me-up.

Brewing in Israel has come a long way since the first beer brand, Neshet, began production in 1934. In addition to the mass market giants, you'll now find around 120 beers being produced by 20 microbreweries.

The Alexander Brewery in Emek Hefer, near the site of David and Goliath's Biblical battle, produces five beers. Run by two former Israeli Air Force pilots and a pair of Israeli restaurateur brothers, the brewmaster is a Dutchman whose



BREWERY

CONTACTS

- Alexander Brewery**
19 Tzvi Hanahal St, Emek Hefer. alexander-brewery.co.il
- Dancing Camel**
Vital 10, Florentin, Tel Aviv. dancingcamel.com
- Negev Brewery**
Kislec St 27, Kiryat Gat. negevbrewery.com
- Lone Tree Brewery**
Abu Cleb, Gush Etzion. onetreebrewery.com
- Golan Brewery**
Qatzrin, Golan Heights. beergolan.co.il

Clockwise from left: Vineyard in Tabor; Morad Winery pomegranate wine; Beer Bazaar; Alexander Brewery beer



Did you know? The Beer Bazaar in Jerusalem's Mahane Yehuda market serves over 90 Israeli beers and has a kosher meat menu

beers — made from European hops, malt and yeast, and Israeli water — flow freely during the ILS50 (\$13) tasting tours.

Alexander also produces green beer from guava, grapefruit and mango. It's just one of a growing number of breweries experimenting with the fruits of the land. Elsewhere, Pumpkin Ale is a speciality of the Galil Brewery at Moran.

Negev Brewery owner Yochai Kudler isn't afraid to use new ingredients, either, having learned the craft in Alaska where he experimented with salmon beer. Head here and you can sip a variety of brews such as Genesis and Charlton (the latter named after a fourth-century desert hermit).

Alternatively, travel 15 miles from Jerusalem to the Lone Tree Brewery (West Bank). Here, Scottish former biologist David Shire and his Tunisian wife, Myriam, along with US couple Susan and John Levin, produce a range of ales, as well as an excellent extra oatmeal stout. With a tour costing just ILS20 (\$5.20) and a 330ml bottle ILS15 (\$4), you certainly don't want to be the designated driver.

Street FEAST

Josephine Price rounds up seven Israeli street foods, plus a recipe for those feeling ravenous at home



1 RED KUBBEH SOUP

There's something comforting about soups and this classic from Jerusalem packs a flavorsome punch. The 'kubbeh' (meat-filled semolina and bulgur wheat dumplings), float in a mildly-spiced broth of beetroot and root vegetables. Kubbeh soup is closely associated with the culinary heritage of the Iraqi and Kurdish Jewish communities and often known by its Kurdish name 'Marak Kubbeh Adom', the most basic version of the soup. But there are countless varieties with recipes passed down the generations.

Where to eat it: The Morduch restaurant in the shuk (market) in Jerusalem is legendary for its take on the classic. [morduch.com](#)

2 SHAWARMA

This iconic meat delicacy consists of fragrantly spiced meat (chicken, turkey or lamb) which is cooked for hours on a rotating spit to ensure the meat is tender. Like many things in Israel, it's served in a pita wrap with fresh salads and sauces, including hummus, tahini, and pickles.

Where to eat it: To taste the nation's best, head north to Haifa, famed for its shawarma shops.

3 SABICH

Often called the country's best-kept secret, sabich isn't well known in the US, but in Israel, it's an institution. Created near Tel Aviv, in the city of Ramat Gan by Iraqi Jewish immigrants, it's made from fried eggplant, hard-boiled eggs, hummus and pickles — all stuffed in a fresh, warm pita. Covered with a generous helping of amba, the Iraqi-Jewish mango sauce, sabich was once a humble breakfast dish, named after the Arabic word for 'morning', but has become an all-day snack.

Where to eat it: Top chefs have made this simple snack an irresistible delicacy. Try it at Oved Daniel's eatery on Sirkin Street in Givatayim, near Tel Aviv.

4 RUGELACH

Once simply a sweet treat served on Jewish holidays such as Hanukkah and Shavuot, rugelach — a slightly undercooked, gooey, rich butter pastry — has achieved legendary status and is eaten year round. Yiddish for 'little twists' or 'rolled things', the croissant-like pastry is usually filled with chocolate, or substituted for halva, or jelly and dried fruits.

Where to eat it: Ardent fans of rugelach flock to the Marzipan bakery on Agripas Street at the shuk in Jerusalem for what they believe is the best around. Such is the demand, it can be shipped — frozen — worldwide as some people simply can't live without it. [marzipanbakery.com](#)



5 KNAFEH

For those who can never quite decide on whether they're in the mood for sweet or savory... Recipes vary but in Jerusalem, knafeh consists of neon-orange filo dough layered with melted ricotta-like goat's cheese, covered in rosewater flavored sugar syrup and topped with chopped pistachios. A speciality of the Levant region — which consists of Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Cyprus, Palestine, Syria and southern Turkey — it's considered an Arab delicacy and the ultimate dessert during Ramadan, but is eaten by Jews and Arabs alike.

Where to eat it: Jaffar's Sweets on Souq Khan es-Zeir Rd, Jerusalem.

6 BUREKAS

Arriving in Israel from Turkey in 1935 with a small stand opening up in the Florentine area of Tel Aviv, burekas hail from the culinary traditions of



Sephardic and Mizrahi Jews. The filo pastry parcels are stuffed with cheese, spinach or potatoes and while it's possible to get meat versions, they've never quite reached the same level of popularity.

Where to eat it: Try Leon and Sons at 17 Olei Tzion in Jaffa.

7 HUMMUS

The deliciously creamy, flavorful homemade variety is best served with fresh pita bread, and Israelis eat this at morning, noon or night. Its lumpier cousin masabacha is made with whole chickpeas.

Where to eat it: Abu Hassan (also known as Ali Karavan) at 1, Dolphin Street, Jaffa. Open from 7.45am, it's totally addictive.

HUMMUS

As long as you've got a food processor, hummus is one of the easiest dishes to make. The chickpea dip can be jazzed up with a variety of spices, but here's the classic recipe

Serves 6 • Prep time 10 mins

5 cups canned chickpeas (drained)
5 tsp high quality tahini paste
2 garlic cloves
Sea salt
3½ tbs lemon juice
½ tsp ground cumin
6 tbs extra virgin olive oil

1. Rinse chickpeas in water and add to food processor.
2. Blend the chickpeas with all the ingredients except the oil. Add the oil slowly as the mixture comes together in a creamy purée.
3. Transfer to a bowl and smooth the surface with the back of a spoon. Drizzle a little oil into the middle, and top with some extra chickpeas or parsley, as pictured.



SHIFTING sands

Transformed from a former desert outpost into a popular Red Sea resort, Eilat offers plenty to do on vacation, says Sharron Livingston

IMAGES: ALAMY; GETTY

THINGS TO DO

WATCH THE FISH AT CORAL WORLD

Glass walls allow visitors to see the comings and goings of life in the deep blue sea, but above the water there are also turtles and exotic fish to watch, and a whole Amazon section where piranhas and anacondas seem positively harmless from behind the glass. A real highlight is the feeding of the sharks — in a flourish of showmanship, a diver swims among the fish and the sharks, offering food while entertaining onlookers, especially children. *Entrance ILS99 (\$26) for adults and ILS79 (\$20) for children.* coralworld.co.il

GET IN THE SADDLE AT CAMEL RANCH

Take a two-hour sunset camel trek through the desert, ending at nightfall. The guided tour includes a snack of Bedouin pita which is made on the ranch and served with labneh cheese, olives and tea made from plants grown in the desert. *Sunset treks from ILS245 (\$64).* camel-ranch.co.il

TAKE A DIP AT DOLPHIN REEF

Head here to see a school of bottlenose dolphins in their natural habitat. Swim with them or just watch them play

from the pretty palm-dotted, soft-sand beach while catching some rays. A wooden pier reaches out into the sea from which the dolphins are fed. There's also a series of heated wellness pools — one freshwater, one Red Sea water, one mineral water — and each one has soothing underwater music. Book a massage session with the resident hydrotherapist, who will hold you gently in the water, placing floats beneath your knees and back, and move various parts of your body to induce deep relaxation.

Entrance ILS67 (\$17.60) for adults and ILS46 (\$12) for children. dolphinreef.co.il



israel.travel

israel.travel

Did you know? The 1,200-meter reef at Coral Beach is home to over 5,000 types of marine life



Camel trekking.
Left: Beach in Eilat.
Below: Ice Mall

EAT

Breakfast/brunch: Il Pentolino

This kosher dairy Italian restaurant is located away from the city center, yet it's a great place to start the day. For around ILS50 (\$13) you can tuck into a generous Israeli breakfast as well as New York-style bagels. Best of all is the breathtaking view of the desert mountains from the balcony. rol.co.il/sites/eng/pentolino

Lunch: Shipudei Habustan

This restaurant at the Dan Eilat hotel serves some of the best kosher gourmet Israeli/Middle Eastern fare in the city. Don't miss the chips — possibly the best in town. Expect to pay ILS100 (\$26) for steak. danhotels.com

Dinner: Yakimono Royal Beach

The upscale, dimly lit Yakimono restaurant at the Royal Beach Hotel delivers probably the best kosher Japanese food in Eilat, offering seaweed salads, sashimi, sushi, tempura, and dim sum on the terrace overlooking the Gulf of Aqaba and marina. Expect to pay ILS130 (\$34) per head. yakimono.co.il

CHILL OUT AT ICE SPACE

The only place to don a hat and gloves in Eilat, this winter wonderland is located by the marina. Built from ice and dotted with magnificent sculptures of polar bears, penguins and flowers, highlights include an ice bar and a fast 18-meter ice slide — and it's not just for kids. *The entrance fee of ILS54 (\$14) includes the rental of warm clothes.* ice-space.co.il

SKATE AT THE MALL

Further along the promenade is one of the world's only shopping malls with an ice rink. Around 150 shops and cafes circle an ice rink and snow dome

and a miniature cinema offers a 7D experience that includes temperature and weather changes — expect wind and rain. icemalleilat.co.il

LISTEN TO LIVE MUSIC

Visit the atmospheric Three Monkeys Pub on the Royal Beach Promenade — one of the oldest and most popular bars in Eilat. Every night Israeli DJs and live bands pump out a mix of old classics and new chart songs, while punters drink beer (there's an impressive selection), wine or cocktails. There's lots of dancing space, too. *Cocktails from ILS25 (\$6.60).* threemonkeyspub.co.il

WALKING THROUGH *history*

The best way to immerse yourself in Jerusalem is on foot. Chris Moss takes a route that encompasses the city's most recent and historic highlights

Mount of Olives

There's only one place to start a walking tour of Jerusalem, and that's up on the Mount of Olives. From this eastern vantage point above the city, I can easily pick out at least a dozen landmarks.

On my left is the City of David, an archaeological site located where the Jerusalem of the pre-Babylonian exile era stood.

Beneath me lies a beautiful, sombre graveyard and, in the distance, church steeples and towers are scattered across the horizon. Glowing in the center of it all, high up on the Temple Mount, is the golden Dome of the Rock.



Old Jerusalem



I make my way down the hill and enter the city via the Lion's Gate. Rather confusingly, the fierce-looking carved animals that flank it are, in fact, tigers — the heraldic symbol of the 13th-century Sultan Beybars.

Old Jerusalem is divided into Jewish, Christian, Armenian and Arab/Muslim quarters. My stroll takes me down the storied Via Dolorosa and then along a zigzagging route through to the majestic Western Wall, associated with a number of pivotal moments in Jewish history.

Moving on, I stop short at the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, believed to be where Jesus was crucified and interred. Attempting to decode so many iconic sites at the same time as navigating narrow bazaar-lined alleyways leaves me both dizzy and exhilarated.

In the midst of the hustle and bustle, a thousand pilgrims push past; local shoppers haggle over weights and prices; and further away, heated games of backgammon carry on uninterrupted. There's no need to over-plan a journey through Old Jerusalem. Taking spontaneous twists and turns, and exploring quiet alleys is all part of the fun.

Grand European-style piazzas to the west are hemmed in by ancient landmarks: the Alexander Nevsky Church, housing remnants of emperor Constantine's Holy Sepulchre church; the Greek Patriarchate, seat of one of the most senior bishops of the Orthodox Church; and the Tower of David, a 16th-century citadel. The latter, I decide, is the perfect backdrop against which to simply sit and absorb the city's 4,000-year history.

IMAGES: ISRAELI MINISTRY OF TOURISM. NOTE: SOME DESTINATIONS ARE IN EAST JERUSALEM/WEST BANK

Mamilla

I exit via the Jaffa Gate, named after the westerly port where so many Christian and Jewish pilgrims once landed. A couple of minutes later, I'm strolling through the Mamilla Mall, a very modern counterpart to Old Jerusalem. Scattered all along the open-air promenade are sophisticated boutiques and stylish coffee shops. Beyond these, I pass the Mamilla Cemetery. Dating from Byzantine times, it houses several impressive Mamluk mausoleums and Sufi shrines. At its center is the Mamilla Pool, one of three reservoirs built by Herod the Great in the first century BC.



Mamilla Mall
Left to right: Gate of Mercy on the Mount of Olives; Church of Holy Sepulchre; Mahane Yehuda Market

Mahane Yehuda Market

Nicknamed 'the shuk' in Hebrew, this emblematic market is a colorful and clamorous place, and a favorite spot amongst locals to spend time mingling, browsing, trading and enjoying a quick coffee and chapuria (cheese pastry) from the Hachapuria Georgian bakery.

At Azura, I feast on freshly prepared hummus followed by kima — lamb kebab with layers of eggplant, potato and spinach leaves dipped in gravy. I can taste hints of Turkish, Iraqi, and perhaps even Tunisian influences. Fittingly, it's all kosher — the perfect meal for wrapping up a stroll through cosmopolitan Jerusalem.



ROAD TO *enlightenment*



You don't have to be a devout cyclist to enjoy a two-wheeled tour of the Holy Land, discovers Mark Stratton

We're midnight crusaders. Clad in lycra, we pierce Jerusalem's redoubtable city walls; slipping unnoticed through the imposing 16th-century Jaffa Gate.

By day ancient Jerusalem is so crowded with pilgrims and visitors that riding a bicycle would cause mayhem. But around midnight, it's tranquil enough to sense 4,000 years of history lingering among dimly lit lanes.

Following the back wheel of my guide, Amir Rockman, it feels almost sacrilegious to career around one of the world's holiest cities by bicycle as if it were some sort of a BMX playground.

But oh boy, it's fun. We judder along cobbles, rumble down flights of steps, and shimmy like slalom skiers between the colonnaded market of the ancient Roman-era Cardo thoroughfare. The

bells of an Armenian church chime crisply among Jerusalem's labyrinth of streets as we freewheel down Via Dolorosa, along which Jesus bore his cross en route to his crucifixion. I catch golden glimpses of the illuminated Dome of the Rock while the day's lengthy lines of Jewish pilgrims waiting to enter the sanctuary of the Western Wall have long vanished.

During five days' touring Israel by bicycle, every turn of my wheel presents a rich juxtaposition of old and new.

I'd started my tour in Tel Aviv, a stark contrast to Jerusalem's religious conservatism, where hedonism and modernity reign. Among some 44 miles of marked cycle routes, my favorite ride was along Tel Aviv's sun-drenched promenade, shadowing the Mediterranean. Here I join myriad roller

During my five days in Israel, every turn of my wheel presents a rich juxtaposition of old and new

skaters and joggers zipping insouciantly along Herbert Samuel street; passing beaches crowded with locals moving in and out of boisterous coastal bars and alfresco seafood restaurants. Follow the seafront cycle way as it continues south and you'll discover the ancient world in Jaffa: 9,500 years of continuous settlement now marked by Byzantine walls, mosques, and an Ottoman clocktower.

On other days I rode back into Biblical Israel: into the Judean Hills' parched landscape to where David is said to have slain Goliath in the Valley of Elah. I hare around a course amid pine forests that culminate with lofty views over the Gaza Strip and the Mediterranean.

Finally I cycle around the rim of the Negev Desert's mighty Ramon Crater where high-speed descents provide a delicious sense of coolness to counter southern Israel's furnace-like heat. *Mark Stratton travelled with Gordon Active Tours. gordonactive.com*

Clockwise from above: biking the Judean desert; view from Masada; Red Sea diving

IMAGES: GETTY

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NATURAL HIGHS

1 Marathons

Join the locals and take part in one of the many marathons taking place in Tel Aviv, Jerusalem and various other destinations in Israel — it's the ideal way to quickly soak up the scenery, keep fit and experience an incredible atmosphere, too. goisrael.com

2 Sail the Med

Like the Phoenician seafarers millennia before, set sail on the Med. Between Akko and Haifa is an armada of marinas with yacht charters and sailing schools. quarterwind.com

3 Gallop through Galilee

Saddle up and gallop for a day or more through Galilee's fertile countryside making sure to ride to the Sirin Heights for commanding views of the Jordan Valley. goisrael.com

4 Art of cooking

Join local chef, Tali Friedman, to explore Jerusalem's Mahane Yehuda market before heading to her atelier to prepare a flavorful kosher meal. talifriedman.co.il

5 Dead Sea delights

After ticking off the must-have photo of yourself floating in the Dead Sea reading a newspaper, head indoors to a hotel spa for a treatment using the mineral-rich mud. goisrael.com

6 Masada on foot

Rise early to avoid the heat and attempt the hour-long hike along the steep 'Snake Path' to the majestic hilltop fortress of Masada at sunrise. goisrael.com

7 Sleep under the stars

Spend a night stargazing in the Negev Desert where camping in the mighty Ramon Crater yields incredible starlight horizons. deepdesertisrael.com

8 Tiberias' thermal baths

Let the hot thermal waters perform miracles at Tiberias' historic 3,000 year-old baths, which are said to be the first of their kind in the world and where Jesus healed the sick. gogallilee.org.il

9 Cresting the waves

Perform aerial twists and turns like flying dolphins, kite-surfing off Israel's Mediterranean coastline. Specialist schools are found in Eilat, Haifa, and Bat Yam. kitesurfisrael.com

10 Red Sea reefs

Grab a wet suit and experience world-class diving among coral reefs teeming with tropical fish and shipwrecks. The calm, shallow waters around Eilat are ideal for both beginners and advanced divers. goisrael.com



Matchmaker

Whether you're a return visitor or a first-timer, we suggest a variety of itineraries and attractions to help you plan the perfect trip



FIRST-TIMERS

Days 1 & 2 ● Jerusalem

Take a sherut (shared taxi) from Ben Gurion airport to the city center. See p22 for a sample walking tour. In the evening, don't miss the Tower of David Light Show, a musical and visual presentation of the history of the city.

Day 3 ● Galilee

Rent a car and drive north to tour and taste Israeli wine at some of the region's excellent vineyards, take a dip in the hot springs, and see the beautiful countryside on horseback.

Day 4 ● Haifa & Akko

Drive to Akko and tour the amazing underground crusader city. Next, drive to Haifa and view the beautiful Bahai Gardens, and enjoy the spectacular views from Carmel Mountain.

Day 5 ● Caesarea

Head south along the coast to Caesarea to tour this ancient port, learning about its history and enjoying the scenic views.

Days 6 & 7 ● Tel Aviv

Head to Tel Aviv to explore the shops, restaurants, markets, beaches, and nightlife of this cosmopolitan city — and be sure to stroll around Old Jaffa (p6).

REPEAT VISITORS

Day 1 ● Tel Aviv

Start with a Bauhaus walking tour, then visit the Eretz Israel Museum. If you're there on a Friday, head to the port for a tasty market experience, followed by the 'Kabbalat Shabbat by the Beach' event that takes place at sundown. Enjoy dinner at one of Tel Aviv's top restaurants (p13).

Day 2 ● The Dead Sea

Drive to Masada. Tour the museum at the bottom of the mountain, then take the cable car to the top to view the ruins of King Herod's fortress. Next, drive to the Dead Sea for a mud mask and to float your stress away in the salty water.

Day 3 ● Mitzpe Ramon

Drive through the Negev to the Ramon Crater for jeep safaris, cycling, and camel rides. Tour one of the local wineries such as Carmey Avdat, and enjoy the sky at night on an astronomy tour.

Days 4 & 5 ● Jerusalem

Start at Shiloach Pool, walking up the narrow tunnel that used to be under the Second Temple Road to Temple Mount. After exploring the tunnels, tour New Jerusalem, visiting Yad Vashem (home to the Holocaust Museum), then the Israel Museum to view the Dead Sea Scrolls.

From above:
Beit Guvrin;
caves, Old Jaffa



REGULAR VISITORS

Think you've seen it all? Why not...

Tel Aviv

- Take a ride on the Tel Aviv hot air balloon. tlv-balloon.co.il
- Visit the Illana Goor Museum in Jaffa. ilanagoormuseum.org
- Stroll Nachalat Binyamin Pedestrian Mall, adjacent to Carmel market, on Tuesdays or Fridays, to see its arts and crafts fair. visit-tel-aviv.com

Jerusalem

- Join a free tour of the Knesset, Israeli Parliament. knesset.gov.il
- Volunteer time. funinjerusalem.com/volunteer-activities
- Book a guided Segway tour. jerusalemsegwaytours.com
- Venture outside the city and get your hands dirty digging for archaeological treasures at Beit Guvrin National Park. funinjerusalem.com/dig-4-day

Eilat

- Visit the Musical Fountain... it's free. redseaeilat.com/what-to-do/events
- Shop then skate at the ice rink. icemalleilat.co.il
- Swim and dive with wild dolphins at Dolphin Reef — they're free to come and go as they please. dolphinreef.co.il
- Check out the brand new shark pool at Coral World. coralworld.co.il

TRAVEL ADVICE & CONTACT

Israel Government Tourist Office
Facebook: facebook.com/goisrael
Twitter: twitter.com/israeltourism
Instagram: instagram.com/visit_israel
Website: israel.travel

WHEN TO GO

Northern Israel enjoys a southern Mediterranean climate, and southern Israel a typically Middle Eastern climate. The ideal time to visit is during spring and autumn, when the weather is warm and pleasant. Winter sees light rain and snow at higher altitudes, including in Jerusalem, but southern Eilat, the Dead Sea and the Negev are ideal winter sun destinations, with temperatures hovering around the mid-20Cs.

Currency: New shekel (ILS). \$1 = ILS3.76.

Time: GMT +2.

International dial code: 00 972.

Language: Hebrew and Arabic are the official languages. Hebrew is spoken by approximately 70% of the population and Arabic by around 15%. English is widely spoken.

Red tape: US passport holders need to have six months left on their passport from the date of their return flight. A tourist visa is required, but can be obtained at the port of entry. Flying into Ben Gurion Airport, passports are no longer stamped and a removable entry card is provided. Flying into Ovda Airport, passports will be stamped unless you request for it not to be. In this case, a separate document will be provided at immigration.

GETTING THERE

Continental, Delta, El Al and US Airways operate up to 10 flights per day from Atlanta, Los Angeles, Miami and New

York (JFK and Newark-Liberty). Air Canada also flies direct from New York to Tel Aviv.

Average flight time: 10h from New York to Tel Aviv.

GETTING AROUND

As Israel is small, it's easy to get around the country in a relatively short space of time. Public transport is convenient, reliable, and reasonably priced.

Trains: Israel Railways operates six main train lines and a number of suburban routes, with a regular service from Nahariya to Ben Gurion Airport, stopping at Akko, Haifa, Binyamina, Tel Aviv, and Jerusalem en route. rail.co.il

Buses: Buses are frequent and link even the smallest of communities. The Egged bus company operates most of the intercity bus lines, as well as local services in larger cities and towns. Tickets can be purchased at booths in the central bus station of a town or from bus drivers. egged.co.il

Please note that public transportation does not run from sundown on Friday to sundown on Saturday.

Taxis: Visitors have the option of private taxis (which do operate on the Sabbath) and also sherut (shared taxi). Drivers are required by law to operate a meter.

Car hire: Traffic drives on the right and an excellent road system connects all towns. Car hire is available at most airports and ports, and in all major towns, from international companies Avis, Budget, and Hertz.

IMAGES: AWL IMAGES; GETTY



