



SITES AND INSIGHTS

אתרים וסיפורים

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WESTERN WALL

הַכּוֹתֵל הַמַּעֲרָבִי



The Western Wall, known as the Kotel, is revered as the holiest site for the Jewish people. A part of the outer retaining wall of the Second Temple that was destroyed by the Romans in 70 CE, it is the place closest to the ancient Holy of Holies, where only the Kohanim—כֹּהֲנִים—Jewish priests were allowed access. When Israel gained independence in 1948, Jordan controlled the Western Wall and all of the Old City of Jerusalem; the city was reunified in the 1967 Six-Day War. The Western Wall is considered an Orthodox synagogue by Israeli authorities, with separate prayer spaces for men and women. A mixed egalitarian prayer area operates along a nearby section of the Temple's retaining wall, raising to the forefront contemporary ideas of religious expression—a prime example of how Israel navigates between past and present.



Every Israeli city has an open-air market, or shuk, where vendors sell everything from fresh fruits and vegetables to clothing, appliances, and souvenirs. There's no other place that feels more authentically Israeli than a shuk on Friday afternoon, as seemingly everyone shops for Shabbat. Drawn by the freshness and variety of produce, Israelis and tourists alike flock to the shuk, turning it into a microcosm of the country. Shuks in smaller cities and towns operate just one day per week, while larger markets often play a key role in the city's cultural life. At night, after the vendors go home, Machaneh Yehuda—מַחֲנֵה יְהוּדָה—Jerusalem's shuk, turns into the city's nightlife hub. Artists have painted the shutters of shops with portraits of heroes of Israel and the Jewish people, turning the alleyways into an outdoor after-hours museum.



SECURITY BARRIER

גֵּזֶר הַבְּטָחוֹן



In 2002, in response to terror attacks from the West Bank, Israel built a barrier separating Israeli and Palestinian populations, dramatically decreasing the number of attacks. About 95% of the barrier is barbed-wire fencing with a dirt path on each side; in highly populated areas, the barrier is a solid concrete wall. Many Palestinians say the barrier causes great hardship, cutting people off from school, work, or family. In response to multiple petitions, Israel's High Court ordered the government to alter the route of the barrier in many locations to ease the burden on the Palestinians. The Security Barrier encapsulates one of the ever-present tensions that exist in Israel.



MOUNT HERZL

הַר הַרְצֵל



Mount Herzl provides a moving example of how a young country creates national monuments. Established in 1951, Mt. Herzl is Israel's national cemetery and the final resting place of many of the country's leaders, heroes, and fallen soldiers. Here you'll find the graves of Golda Meir, Yitzhak Rabin, Shimon Peres, and others including Theodor Herzl, the father of Modern Zionism. Other monuments and memorials pay tribute to victims of terror, and to all who gave their lives for the State. Also known as Har HaZikaron—הַר הַזִּיקָרוֹן—Mount of Memory, Mt. Herzl is adjacent to Yad Vashem, the National Holocaust Memorial, at the western edge of Jerusalem, and a footpath connects the two sites. Mt. Herzl is one of many military cemeteries that exist throughout the country, reflecting a reality unique to Israel and an integral part of the Israeli experience.



YAD VASHEM

יָד וָשֵׁם



Yad Vashem, Israel's National Holocaust Memorial, derives its name from the Book of Isaiah, that vows not to forget the dead. Renowned for its research and ongoing effort to compile the names of victims of the Holocaust, Yad Vashem tells an unabashedly Jewish story of the collective tragedy that befell the Jewish people. Established in 1953 and rebuilt in 2005, the museum overlooks the Jerusalem Hills, which play a central role in preserving Jewish memory. Yad Vashem places an emphasis on sharing the stories of aging survivors and provides a narrative that is filled with hope for the future, signifying the will of the Jews to survive and thrive.



INDEPENDENCE HALL

בֵּית הָעִצְמָאוּת



Originally the home of Tel Aviv's first mayor, Meir Dizengoff, this building served as Tel Aviv's art museum when the government-in-the-making needed a place for the declaration of statehood. Four hundred invited dignitaries crammed into the central hall to listen to David Ben-Gurion read the declaration and the Palestine Orchestra play Hatikvah. Though this event, which took place on May 14th, 1948, hours before the British Mandate ended, was kept "secret," Rothschild Blvd. was packed with thousands of people who had heard rumors and wanted to witness history in the making. Today, visitors can hear a recording of Ben-Gurion reading the Declaration of Independence, which sets forth the aspirational goals upon which the Jewish State was founded.



MASADA

מצדה



Masada offers a compelling place to consider notions of Jewish sovereignty, self determination, and the sanctity of human life. A large fortress overlooking the Dead Sea in Southern Israel, Masada was built by King Herod in the 30s BCE. Approximately 100 years later, Jewish zealots fled to Masada after the Romans destroyed the Second Temple. They lived there until the Roman siege in 73 CE, when, according to the account of Josephus Flavius, their lives ended in a mass suicide. Today, Masada is the third most visited site in Israel, and it has been designated a UNESCO World Heritage Site. You can hike up the Snake Path or the Roman Path, or ride a cable car to the top to watch the sunrise and view the remains of the ancient fortress, complete with a bathhouse—remarkable when you consider its location atop a mountain in the middle of the desert!



KNESSET

תּוֹכְנֵן



Israel's parliament, the Knesset, has 120 members and is located in Jerusalem. Modeled on the ancient governing body, HaKnesset HaGedolah, the modern Knesset operates as a parliamentary democracy similar to those found in many European countries. Knesset debates tackle the issues and ideas that matter most to the public, often reflecting the tension involved in finding the balance between being a Jewish and a democratic state. Knesset members are chosen through democratic elections open to all citizens of Israel over the age of 18. Any party that passes a minimum threshold of votes gains representation in the Knesset. No party has ever won a majority 61 seats out of 120, so multiple parties must form a coalition to create a majority government. This system gives disproportionate power to small parties.



THE OLD CITY OF JERUSALEM

הָעִיר הָעִתִּיקָה



Measuring just a third of a square mile, the area inside the walls of the Old City of Jerusalem is divided into four quarters: Jewish, Muslim, Christian, and Armenian. The Old City is also home to some of the most sacred sites in the world for Jews, Christians, and Muslims, including the Western Wall, the Temple Mount/Haram el Sharif, Al Aksa Mosque, Church of the Holy Sepulchre, the Stations of the Cross, and more. The majority of the nearly 40,000 people who live in the Old City are Muslims, followed by about 7,000 Christians, 4,500 Jews, and less than 1,000 Armenians. Living in—and often beyond—their quarters, replete with so much history on constant display, the intertwined lives of the residents seem to embody the layers of history on which today's neighborhoods are built.



NEVE TZEDEK

נְוֵה צְדֵק



Today it's a trendy neighborhood in the southern part of Tel Aviv, but Neve Tzedek has a storied past. In 1887, a few Jewish families of Middle Eastern and North African descent established this community after leaving the overcrowded conditions in nearby Jaffa. Early on, Neve Tzedek was home to artists and writers, including S.Y. Agnon and Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook. In 1909, after Tel Aviv was established to the north, those who could afford to relocate to the “big city” did so, and Neve Tzedek fell into a state of urban decay. Faced with the choice of demolishing or renovating in the 1960s, the Tel Aviv municipality opted to rehabilitate the area. Today, a mix of charming old restored buildings and ultra-modern high-rises make it one of the most sought after neighborhoods in the city, and residents include international financiers like Roman Abramovich and film star Gal Gadot.



RABIN SQUARE

פְּנַר רַבִּין



The central plaza outside of Tel Aviv City Hall is named in honor of former Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, who was assassinated after a peace rally that took place there on November 4th, 1995. Formerly known as פְּנַר מַלְכֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל—Kikar Malchei Yisrael—Kings of Israel Square, many gatherings, events, concerts, and rallies take place there throughout the year, notably a main exhibit of Israel's National Hebrew Book Week. In recent years, the facade of City Hall, prominently visible from nearly anywhere in the square, has turned into a screen for large projected images that show solidarity with other countries in times of need, or highlight whimsical themes like giant Tetris games. The large, stark stone plaza embodies Israel's commitment to democracy and free speech, as well as the ongoing challenge a young nation faces in balancing these core values.



ROTHSCHILD BOULEVARD

שְׂדֵרוֹת רוֹטְשְׁוִילְד



Originally named רְחוֹב הָעָם—Rehov Ha'am (Street of the People), Rothschild Boulevard is one of the oldest streets in Tel Aviv, dating back to the city's founding in 1909. The tree-lined center of the wide boulevard has walking and bike paths, as well as kiosks that sell some of the best coffee around. The street, renamed in honor of Baron Edmond James de Rothschild, has some of the city's most beautiful Bauhaus-style architecture, and has been the scene of seminal moments in Israel's history, from the establishment of the State at Independence Hall to the growth of Israel's financial and high-tech sectors, both of which are represented in preserved old buildings and modern skyscrapers. At the heart of the social protest movement, when Israelis pitched tents along the street and demanded lower housing prices, Rothschild Blvd. continues to bear witness to monumental moments in Israel's journey.



ISRAEL NATIONAL TRAIL

שְׁבִיל יִשְׂרָאֵל



The Israel National Trail, which winds 600 miles from Kibbutz Dan in the north to the southernmost city of Eilat, offers a challenging and refreshing way to encounter Biblical sites, modern scenes, and nature in all its glory. The trail traverses mountains, plains, and multiple climatic zones, and many Israelis set out to hike its entirety over a period of weeks, months, or even years. From the earliest days of building the State, Israelis have loved the land and strived to engage with it in tangible ways. The chalutzim—חֲלוּצִים—pioneers stressed the importance of farming the land, and today, hundreds of thousands of people take advantage of holidays and long weekends to hike and sightsee in nature.