



**SPORTS AND LEISURE**

**ספורט ופנאי**

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# BEACH AND WATER SPORTS

## חופים וספורט ימי



The Mediterranean coastline and its beaches play a major role in shaping Israeli life and culture. From Nahariya in the north to Ashkelon in the south, cities that have developed along the coast highlight their connection to the shore, and the salty air seems to seep into every aspect of local life. Many cities boast beautiful beachfront boardwalks that draw crowds of walkers, runners, and bikers all year long. On the action-packed Tel Aviv beaches, sun worshippers and surfers share the sandy expanses with kids building sand castles and people of all ages playing **מטקות**—matkot, a local version of paddleball. Roving vendors hawk **אטיקים**—artikim—popsicles, and cafes and restaurants offer close-up views of the sea. Further north or south, the scene is a bit more subdued, leaving room for surfers, windsurfers, small boats, and other water-sports enthusiasts.



# BASKETBALL

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Israeli kids play basketball on indoor and outdoor courts all over the country, and fans flock to stadiums to watch professional league play. Maccabi Tel Aviv is the acknowledged king of Israeli basketball, winning most of the national championships since the league's founding in 1954, and no one player has been more closely associated with the team than Tal Brody. Brody is an American-born Israeli who walked away from the number 12 draft pick in the NBA in order to compete in Israel. He led Maccabi Tel Aviv to its stunning 1977 victory over the Soviet Red Army team, CSKA Moscow, on the way to winning the EuroLeague championship for the first time. After beating the Soviets, Brody exclaimed, "We are on the map! Not just in sports, but in everything!" That phrase has been popular in Israel ever since, and is the inspiration for the title of the film, *On the Map*, about Maccabi's amazing win.



While most North Americans call it “soccer,” Israelis join the rest of the world in calling this global favorite football. Official competitive play predates the founding of the state—the league was established in 1931, disrupted by the Arab Revolt, and then resumed in 1949. Israeli clubs have competed in European championships since 1991, with two teams making it to the quarter-finals—Maccabi Haifa in 1998-99, and Hapoel Tel Aviv in 2001-02. Two films have been made about the בְּנֵי סַחְנִין—Bnei Sakhnin Football Club, the most successful team fielded by an Arab community in Israel. The team, which—like many teams in Israel—has Arab and Jewish players, seeks to be a “cultural rainbow,” and many of its matches take on deeper symbolism, as they demonstrate that Jews and Arabs can live—and play—together in peace.



Krav Maga—literally Combat-Contact—combines aspects of karate, aikido, boxing, judo, wrestling, and realistic fight training. While Krav Maga trainers will tell you that the best way to win a fight is to avoid fighting in the first place, if you must fight, Krav Maga focuses on making every move efficient, designed to incapacitate your opponent. Hungarian-born Imi Lichtenfeld developed Krav Maga based on his experiences as a street fighter defending the Jewish Quarter of Bratislava, Czechoslovakia, in the 1930s. After moving to Israel, he shared his expertise with the IDF and Israeli security services, which embraced its focus on an aggressive mix of offensive and defensive moves. Its popularity has spread to the civilian sector in Israel and around the world, thanks, in part, to a long list of celebrities who train in it, including Brad Pitt, Tom Cruise, Angelina Jolie, and Jennifer Lopez.



When small forward Omri Casspi was signed by the Sacramento Kings in 2009, he became the first Israeli to be drafted into the NBA in the first round. While he had been popular in Israel before that—his long career started in the youth leagues and culminated in impressive stints with Maccabi Tel Aviv and Hapoel Galil Elyon—becoming the first Israeli to play in the vaunted NBA made him an instant Israeli folk hero. His career has included playing for the Golden State Warriors, the Houston Rockets, and other NBA teams. While basketball legend Tal Brody may have boasted that Israel was “on the map” in 1977, as of 2009, Casspi can now say that Israel was in the NBA. Through his foundation, Casspi has brought delegations of American basketball players and celebrities to Israel, where he encourages them to explore the country for themselves, making personal connections to the land and people.



# AMAR'E STOUDEMIRE

## אַמאַרֶה סְטוּדֶמַיִיר



After a 15-year career in the NBA, primarily playing for the Phoenix Suns, six-time All-Star Amar'e Stoudemire signed in 2016 to play with the Israeli basketball team הפועל ירושלים—Hapoel Yerushalayim. Having recently purchased a partial ownership share in the team, he moved his wife and four kids to the Israeli capital. His first visit to the country was in 2010 as part of a quest to explore what he called his “Hebrew roots.” Stoudemire says that all African Americans have such roots, and he professes a strong connection to Israel. Since settling in to his new life in Israel, Stoudemire has been quick to volunteer in a variety of public-service roles; he’s helped to raise money for emergency medical services, fired the starting shot at the Jerusalem Marathon, and encouraged his team to do more outreach to fans.



# THE WINGATE INSTITUTE

## מכון וינגייט



Located just south of Netanya, the Wingate Institute is Israel's primary sports training center. In addition to training sports educators, Wingate is home to many Olympic teams and athletes, as well as teams that represent Israel at international sporting events in swimming, judo, volleyball, tennis, and others. Sports rehabilitation is a major focus at Wingate, which also houses the International Jewish Sports Hall of Fame and the Israel Sports Hall of Fame. The institute is named in honor of British army officer Orde Wingate, an ardent supporter of the Zionist cause who helped train pre-State fighters. He died in a plane crash while on duty in India in 1944, thirteen years before the founding of the institute. Wingate Institute was awarded the prestigious Israel Prize in 1989, in recognition of extraordinary achievement in education, sports medicine, and research.





# OLYMPIC ACHIEVEMENTS

הַשָּׂגִיחַ אֲוִלִּימְפִיכִים



In 1992, Yael Arad became the first Israeli to bring home an Olympic medal, a silver in judo. A few days later, Oren Smadja claimed Israel's first bronze medal, also in judo. Twelve years later, in 2004, Gal Fridman became the first—and to date only—Israeli gold medalist. His medal in windsurfing is fitting since his first name is גַּל—Gal, which means “wave.” Through the 2016 Summer Games, Israeli athletes have brought home nine medals, but have yet to win one at the Winter Games, as it's not always easy to practice these sports. For instance, there's just one ice rink in all of Israel, forcing athletes to practice abroad. By contrast, Israeli athletes have dominated the Paralympics for decades; for many wounded soldiers, paralympic sports play a huge role in rehabilitation. In total, Israeli paralympic athletes have racked up 375 medals since 1960, 123 of them gold.



The Maccabiah, often called “the Jewish Olympics,” began as the far-fetched fantasy of a young man in pre-State Israel. Inspired by the 1912 Olympics in Stockholm, 15-year-old Joseph Yekutieli dreamed about a global sporting competition for Jews. He lobbied leaders, arguing that bringing Jewish athletes together to compete would yield great benefits for the Zionist movement. Twenty years later, the first Maccabiah took place. A massive undertaking held in Israel every four years, athletes compete in all 28 Summer Olympic sports, as well as a few more including chess and bridge. A separate set of competitions highlights paralympic sports including wheelchair tennis and wheelchair basketball. Named in honor of Judah Maccabee, the hero of the Chanukkah story, the opening ceremony of each Maccabiah takes place in Modi’in, where the Maccabees lived.



# ISRAEL NATIONAL TRAIL

## שביל ישראל



The Israel National Trail, which winds 600 miles from Kibbutz Dan in the north to the southernmost city of Eilat, offers a challenging, 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 entire length 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 halutzim—חלוצים—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.