

The Renaissance of the Tel Aviv Port

Till not long ago the Tel Aviv Port lay unused and abandoned - as it had since 1965, when the Port of Ashdod was inaugurated and there was no use any longer for this outdated facility. However, matters have changed. Widespread renovation and modernization efforts have granted the port area a renewed lease on life and now, from morning to night, it is one of Tel Aviv's most dynamic centers for tourism and entertainment.





In many seaside cities all over the world, antiquated port facilities have been transformed into leading tourism centers, blessed with attractions such as shops, open-air restaurants with their sea views, and docking areas that have been turned into promenades. This same transformation has happened in Tel Aviv, too, and its old port. The Tel Aviv Port was built in 1936 following violent, bloody Arab riots and a general strike that included closure of the port in Jaffa. The British Mandate authorities could no longer refuse the demands of the Jewish settlers in the Land of Israel, for their own port, and approved construction of the new facility in Tel Aviv.

On April 26, 1936, the Tel Aviv Port was inaugurated, and less than one month later, the Yugoslav freighter *Chatworthy* docked at the temporary wooden wharf there and its cargo of cement was unloaded. In February 1938, the first new immigrants to arrive by sea landed at Tel Aviv Port, inspiring the port's new name, "The Gate of Zion" - the entrance to the Jewish homeland.

The Port Today

After major renovations and reconstructions efforts that began in 2002 and are continuing still, with no new buildings constructed, as a matter of principal, but many renovated, refurbished and renewed, the port offers visitors a choice of restaurants, coffee shops, fashion stores and commerce, in an ambience that is unique. Morning to night, nearly 24 hours a day, there's something to do at the Tel Aviv Port. Early on in the day, joggers and walkers enliven the promenade, which runs all the way from Jaffa's Fishermen's Port, exercising while they take in the sea breezes and the slap of the waves that break on the pier - a much, much better way to





prepare for the day than at even the most sophisticated indoor workout facility. Bicycle riders also join in the fun, since they've discovered the joys of a six-kilometer route running from Jaffa to north Tel Aviv, unhampered by traffic lights and traffic policemen. Nowadays, the port has become one of Tel Aviv's finest gifts to its residents, those who swarm into the city from the neighboring suburbs and tourists, too, lucky enough to have learned of its charms.

After the morning rush has worn off, and all that's left are the fishermen, many of whom have been casting their lines here for decades, and those lingering over their breakfasts, slowly but surely other begin to arrive. The entire facility, nearly 25 acres in size, has been outfitted with wi-fi, free of charge to all who bring their laptops, and so this is one place where the restaurants in particular, all of which sport outdoor seating, have become very attractive for late morning business meetings that often last into lunch. Joining this crowd are the afternoon diners, enjoying a host of lunchtime menus, including seafood, French cuisine and the culinary creations of a growing roster of resto-pubs. Lunchtime flows into dinner, with diners - both tourists and locals - interspersed with shoppers, meanderers and the like, and by lovers who come to hold hands as they watch the sun sink into the sea. On weekends especially, the area is often filled with life and excitement well into the wee hours of the night.

Aside from enjoying the air, the salt spray and the blue sky over the bluish waters of the Mediterranean Sea, aside from sitting

outside and basking in the delight of an excellent meal in a setting that is no less pleasing, or taking in entertainment, such as last summer's free jazz performances, visitors to the Tel Aviv Port are offered a growing assortment of fun, entertainment, relaxation and commercial options. There's a large hardware/DIY shop on the premises, a wine and tobacco boutique, a jeweler, a sports equipment shop, a diving club, where lectures are held (as are underwater diving lessons and courses), and more. A banquet hall is now under construction, and there are plans for additional outlets as well. There's also a small shipping mall with a feminist touch, and aside from the shops and boutiques that are housed in this small complex, a new spa for women exclusively is scheduled to open there early in 2006. (Men, not to worry: there's also a second spa at the port, where all sexes are welcome). If you'd like to go fishing, there's equipment for rental, and also, Tel Aviv's only bicycle rental outlet opened recently at the port. Evenings, Saturday-Monday, a New York-style jazz club is open and on Saturday mornings from 10 am, there's even an antiques fair. And then there's the ramp....

Marine Trust Ltd., the public company that has been managing the Tel Aviv Port for nearly 70 years - even during the days it had lapsed into virtual desuetude - has invested well over \$2 million, from rental and parking fees only, a spokesperson for the port is quick to point out, and not from the public coffers, in the construction of an in-line skating and bicycle ramp comprised of 12000m² of wood. Now being run in, it has been designed to reflect the shape of the sand dunes - now lost forever - upon which Tel Aviv stands.

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