

UPDATE

In Tel Aviv, a Port Is Reborn



Customers at Kitchen Market restaurant in Tel Aviv's transformed Namal port. Michael Luongo

By Michael T. Luongo

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Tel Aviv, a seaside city, has no shortage of waterfront space. It has so much that when its port, Namal, began to fall into disuse four decades ago, overshadowed by a port to the south that became Israel's main nexus of sea trade, it was shuttered. No one thought to rehabilitate it. There were plenty of other places to take advantage of the sea.

But in the last decade, Namal has been reborn, this time as a waterfront playground. A boardwalk now lines the seafront, and shops, restaurants, a lighthouse and a farmers' market have made it a destination for pleasure more than business.

Last year it drew nearly 4.3 million visitors, making it the second-most-visited site in Israel after Jerusalem's Kotel, or Western Wall, according to a spokeswoman for Tel Aviv.

The wooden boardwalk, opened in 2007, is part of the reason. Designed by the husband-and-wife architecture team of Udi Kassif and Ganit Maislits Kassif, the wide walkway dips and rises, mimicking sand dunes. Lampposts seem scattered, and amorphous concrete seats overlook the waterfront and a sand pit in the midst of the boardwalk. The unique design won it the award for outstanding landscape architecture at the European Biennial of Landscape Architecture in 2010.

Tourists who veer off the boardwalk will find that in the place of the former warehouses and hangars of the port are stores, restaurants and even a concert hall where Zubin Mehta's Israel Philharmonic Orchestra performs.

Among the largest stores is Comme Il Faut, which has sold clothing, artwork, books and other items in the Bayit BaNamal complex since it opened in 2005. After a storm in 2011, the entire complex and adjacent parts of the Namal were rebuilt, allowing the store to expand into new space. "When something bad happens, something good can happen," said Sybil Goldfainer, its owner.

The Namal also has a Friday farmers' market that specializes in organic, locally grown produce from 40 vendors. It opened in 2008, drawing vendors of produce and goods from all over Israel and attracting people like the Labor Party Knesset member Avishay Braverman. "At the farmers' market, we have the beauty of Israel, people from all over, getting along," he said. "It's a lesson we can learn, to make the Knesset as peaceful as this place."

The success of the market inspired the opening two years ago of the Namal's indoor market in Hangar 12, which is open every day except Sunday.

Among the restaurants is the expansive second-floor Kitchen Market, a hot spot whose dining room overlooks the Mediterranean. Its owner, Alonso Fridman, a former investment banker, said he also offers cooking classes for locals and tourists.

"Ingredients are purchased in the market, that is part of the class," he said, adding that the food is prepared in a room with large windows overlooking the market. The market has also drawn another shop, Pasta Fiori, which offers fresh pasta and homemade chocolate. Its owner, Oren Goldvasser, set up shop in 2010.

"I heard about the market, and I sensed Tel Aviv needed a place like this," he said. "I don't think I would have opened it without the market. There is something about all the traffic that is here, more than any street or place. This is better than any other location in Israel I could be in."

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