

Will walk for food

Proving that sitting in a posh restaurant isn't the only way to experience Israel's amazing cuisine, **Cindy Katz** joins a food walking tour of Tel Aviv and Jaffa and discovers that eating while sightseeing equals great fun



Marching on your stomach the delicious tastes, sights and smells of a food walking tour

Some people say that the way to a person's heart is through their stomach, and those same people will tell you that a way to discover a nation's heart is through its food. In a place like Israel, where fresh is an obsession and the national cuisine pulls from all corners of the earth, a food tour is a great chance to soak up not only the local flavors, but also some local culture and history. So when I had the opportunity to join Inbal Baum, the CEO of Israel Food Tours, on a food quest through Tel Aviv and Jaffa, you'd better believe I jumped at the chance.

FROM ORANGES TO HUMMUS

Our tour started off with a brief history lesson (plus tasting) of Jaffa's most famous export: the Jaffa orange. Interestingly, this thick-rinded citrus fruit actually originated in Asia and was brought to the Holy Land on boats by sailors hoping its vitamin

C would ward off the dreaded scurvy. Once here, the fruit's potential was realized and it was developed further, creating the delicious Jaffa orange with which we are all so familiar.

Next, we made our way to one of Jaffa's (and perhaps Israel's) most famous, and arguably best

(I'll never tell).

Following a tasting in a local boutique selling specialty foods and wines from the Galilee, we continued our stroll toward Tel Aviv. Emerging from Jaffa's Old City, the guide took us to two ancient Egyptian obelisks from which we admired the vista of

charming (and now high-end) first neighborhood, we found ourselves at the beating heart of the city's food center: the Carmel Market. Like little kids on an excursion with mom, we explored the colorful *shuk*, and couldn't stop inquiring, "What's that?" at every unfamiliar fruit, veggie, nut or spice, which she'd then buy for us to sample. After trying *knafeh* (a dessert made with sweet cheese), tasting some of Israel's soft cheeses, sniffing various spices, and haggling over a carton of figs, we emerged and headed down a part of the market I'd never before ventured to: the meat section. Strangely reminiscent of Harry Potter's stumbling through the sketchy part of Diagon Alley, I'll just say that for vegetarians, it's best to skip this part of the tour and wait outside.

Inbal soon led us down a small street to the kitchen of a tiny, ageless and darling Yemenite woman named Irit

hummus eateries (*Abu Hassan, 1 Dolphin St.*). Over plates of the house specialties, hummus *masabacha* (hummus with whole chickpeas) and hummus *ful* (hummus with fava beans), we discussed food's role in Israeli society (everyone is obsessed with it!) and the secret method of cooking the chickpeas just right

Tel Aviv's high-rise-dominated "golden coast." The blending of the old/ancient with the new/modern was not lost upon us, and was a theme that Inbal returned to throughout the day.

TRIP TO THE SHUK

After an informative walk through Neve Tzedek, Tel Aviv's

HOME-COOKED FEAST

Perhaps as a reward for keeping down our hummus during the stroll through animal-parts alley, Inbal

soon led us down a small street to the kitchen of a tiny, ageless and absolutely darling Yemenite woman named Irit (*Carmel Alley, Kerem Hateimanim*). I say "kitchen" because I'm not sure what else to call it – it's not exactly a restaurant, there's no name and no visible menus, although there are tables and she does serve food. Whatever it is, it is clearly popular among the locals, who dropped in for a bite or to say hello and catch up on gossip. Here we were treated to an overview of Jewish Yemenite/North African cooking while Irit laid out a home-cooked feast consisting of white wine, fresh almonds, watermelon, salad, *shakshuka* (eggs cooked in a spicy tomato based stew), tahini and her specialty – two pieces of a Yemenite bread called *lahoh*, sweetened by fenugreek and reminiscent of the Ethiopian bread *ingera*, served with a egg in the middle – sort of like a Yemenite quesadilla.

BAUHAUS AND DESSERT

Beyond stuffed, we entered the final segment of our food adventure. Inbal ushered us through the architecturally rich rues around Montefiore Street, explaining the history of Bauhaus design in Tel Aviv, and pointing out prime examples of restored and unrestored classical Bauhaus, mixed Bauhaus and Bauhaus-inspired architecture.

After ohhing and ahhing at many impressive facades, we realized we were in danger of melting away from the heat, and quickly found our way to our last, and sweetest, stop: an ice-cream shop (complete with the added bonus of air conditioning) (*Iceberg, various branches, including 31 Rothschild Blvd, corner of Allenby St*). Despite confessing to us that she makes her own ice cream at home and is therefore biased, Inbal indulged along with us in tasting some of Tel Aviv's most intriguing flavors – from deep, dark chocolate, to halva with pistachio, to passion-fruit sorbet. It comes as no surprise that Tel Aviv, a city known for its heat as well as its enterprising citizens,

knows a thing or two about ice cream.

The tour ended with a complete listing of some of Inbal's most recommended restaurants throughout the country. The magic is that this tour is just so many things all rolled into one: authentic meals, great company, insider information, and a walking tour to boot.

Israel Food Tours runs a number of tours in different cities and locations, including full- and half-day tours in Jerusalem and Tel Aviv. Yemenite and gourmet cooking workshops are also available. Prices vary according to length and location of tours, ranging from \$100-\$300 (about NIS 360-1,070) per person.

CRAVING SOMETHING DIFFERENT?

Here are a few other food and drink tours to whet your appetite.

My Israel Wine Tours offers customizable tours to whichever wineries or regions you're interested in. The tour operator arranges all the logistics for you, and provides transportation and entrance fees, as well as your own personal wine expert. Also available are wine, brewery and dairy tours. (myisraelwinetours.com/052-7386923)

Cook in Israel offers market tours in Tel Aviv and Jerusalem followed by cooking classes utilizing fresh market purchases to make various Israeli and Middle Eastern dishes. Also offered are two-day culinary tours to the Galilee, customizable trips and, for the truly committed, a complete week-long culinary vacation. (cookinrael.com/054-4649706)

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