



Facing Haifa

The 'Holiday of Holidays' festival in Haifa every December is a celebration of the arts, culture, tourism, and cuisine and is a great chance to go up north and see what the city has to offer

/Yulia Prilik-Niv



Photo: Shutterstock

Haifa's image as a sleepy, aging city couldn't be farther from the reality. The city has a vibrant young scene, including students, entrepreneurs, and artists who've transformed Haifa into a fascinating city, one with a distinct international flair.

Cultural happening

Haifa is a cosmopolitan city, with tolerance and coexistence part of its DNA. During December, as well

as before and afterwards, Haifa exemplifies living and celebrating together. The high point of that togetherness is the Holiday of Holidays, this year taking place for the 25th consecutive time at the initiative of the Arab-Jewish cultural center Beit Hagefen and the Haifa Municipality. It marks the holiday trifecta of Hanukkah, Christmas, and Id al-Fitr. Scheduled to take place this year December 6-30, the festival fills Beit Hagefen, the Wadi Nisnas area, and the German Colony with events and light in an atmosphere that's just as exciting as Christmas time in other countries. This year's selected theme is 'The Third Sector,' with festivities encompassing elements of tolerance, art, culture, tourism and, of course, food. haifahag.com

An invitation to dine

Above all, Haifa is a city of initiators with warm welcomes for guests. One of them is Erez Golko, the Haifa-born son of an



An invitation to dine with Erez Golko Photo: PR



Villa Carmel Photo: Alonis

▶▶▶ established Haifa family, who prepares meals in his home that are a special experience and runs tours focusing on Christian-Arab cuisine in Wadi Nisnas. Golko's tour stops off at several culinary and cultural stations. He has many stories to tell along the way, including how Wadi Nisnas got its name, where you can buy Haifa's famous laffa pita, where the sweets capital of the Middle East is, and a generous portion of oddities which will interest foodies, cooks, and all those who enjoy food. inmykitchen.co.il

Shopping the shuk

Chef Vered Feren conducts tours of the Talpiot Market and runs food workshops at her market studio. The Haifa native is the only woman running a business in the shuk, knows all about culinary Haifa, about the proprietors of eateries, the merchants, and purveyors, and about the unique flavors and aromas they each offers.

The story of the market in Wadi Salib presents another example showing that Haifa as a city of markets and people. It was active

in the 1950s when the area housed a ma'abara transit camp for some of the new immigrants who arrived in Israel during the early years of the state. With the camp's closing, the shuk turned into a flea market (considered by many to be more accessible and authentic than Jaffa's Flea Market, which has turned upscale). It is pure heaven for the avid flea market goer in search of antiques, designer items, and vintage pieces.

veredferen.com

Where to sleep

Though the action is centered in the Lower City and the Port area, there are those who prefer staying in the quieter, pastoral part of Haifa. The Villa Carmel, an intimate place with only 15 rooms, is one of the city's most charming hotels. Located on a quiet street, it is sandwiched between gardens – one of its own and one public. The spa-hotel is soaked in history, has an elegant European feel, and is really a place apart from the rush of urban life.

Built in the 1940s as a guest house for Israeli elite of those bygone days, its clientele included such luminaries as David Ben-Gurion and his wife, Paula. It's gone by various names over the years, including the Vechtel Hotel and, later, Vered HaCarmel.

The new name came with its new look following extensive renovations by the Shitrit family. Sitting in your room's terrace, whether facing treetops or rooftop where there's a great Jacuzzi, it is a true getaway for a couple or family enjoying an urban escape, or a welcome place at the end of a busy day touring Haifa or Israel's beautiful north country.

villacarmel.co.il



Libira Photo: David Silverman



Lux Photo: Afik Gabai

Where to eat

In addition to the city's veteran culinary establishments, Haifa has experienced a stunning culinary reawakening all over town, especially in the Lower City and around the revived Port. The students' campuses, the galleries and the local appetite for good food and nightlife are all available in spades.

Lux

One of the most talked-about and delicious places in town is Lux, opened by chef Alaa Musa (from Elmarsa in Akko) and his partner Ahmad Assad. Located in busy complex with at young vibe in the Port, Musa has assembled a menu featuring everything that's fresh from the sea and the fields. Among the dishes: ceviche of sea fish with labane, hot peppers and pistachio, a pan of seafood in sherry butter and preserved lemon, fish fillet on freekeh risotto, wild spinach alongside green beans, and other surprising delights. A culinary-cultural experience in a trendy, designer space.
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Libira

This youthful culinary institution, dating back to 2015, has an interesting story. Libira is a restaurant with a brewery, or perhaps the other way around. If you arrive with a small enough group you can sit at the bar and watch the beer being brewed. The owners' vision was of a large place with a happy atmosphere serving its customers local home-made beers, guest beers, and foods that couple well with beer and other alcoholic drinks. The menu is composed of palate-pleasing items like a beer roll with anchovy

butter, charcuterie platters, roasted cauliflower, carpaccio, country pâtés, juicy hamburgers, spare ribs, chubby sausages, steak, pastries, and desserts.
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Fattoush Bar & Gallery

The new Fattoush complex in the port offers food, a bar, live music, and more. The massive space is two floors and offers an eclectic patio – ushering in completely new blood to the Port. You can feel the lavish attention paid to the design, down to the smallest detail.
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Market Tour with Vered Feren Photo: PR