



Catholic Travel

Touring Israel's Mediterranean Riviera

A journey off the traditional pilgrimage trail

ous, cosmopolitan and recognized as the nation's commercial and cultural capital. Unfortunately, for most pilgrims it is little more than a jumping off point for their tour. This is a mistake for any traveler interested in discovering the dynamic realities of present-day Israel.

Attractions of note include: Tel Aviv Museum of Art, with an impressive collection of Israeli, Russian and European Impressionist works; tree-lined, historic Rothschild Boulevard, lined by elegant Bauhaus-style homes; the bustling Carmel Market; and a dozen major avenues—including Dizengoff, Ben Yehuda and Shenkin—buzzing with hundreds of outdoor cafes, elegant restaurants, trendy boutiques and art galleries.

Jaffa, recently incorporated into the municipality of Tel Aviv, is an ancient port city dating back 4,000 years to the seafaring Phoenicians. Legend has it that here Jonah was swallowed by the whale, and Mark Anthony gave Cleopatra the city as a token of his love. It has retained its historic character while developing a contemporary lifestyle where Jews, Christians and Moslems live in genuine peace and prosperity. Old Jaffa is safe to stroll through any hour of the day or night.

A visit to Old Jaffa should include a short hike to the hilltop for stunning views of Tel Aviv's coastal skyline. Nearby is the Franciscan Monastery of St. Peter, which commemorates his visit to the port. Wander through a labyrinth of cobblestone streets and alleyways and rummage through the Jaffa Flea Market where vendors at hundreds of small stalls and shops hawk everything from antique jewelry and Oriental rugs to second-hand books and Bedouin desert garb

Jaffa's diversity is reflected in the richness of its dining options. My favorites include: Abulafia Bakery, founded in 1880, where long lines regularly form to purchase oven-baked Arabic breads and boreks stuffed with sheep's cheese,



Ein Hod Artist Village overlooking the Mediterranean Sea is home to visual and performing artists and their families

A view of the Tel Aviv coastal skyline from a hilltop in Old Jaffa

By Aaron Leventhal

Mention a trip to Israel and the Catholic faithful will envision the sacred sites of the Holy Land. Bethlehem's Church of the Nativity, the Sea of Galilee, the Mount of Beatitudes, and, of course, Jerusalem with the Mount of Olives, Garden of Gethsemane and the Via Dolorosa with its 12 stations of the cross leading to the Church of the Holy Sepulcher all provide unforgettable opportunities for contemplation and spiritual renewal.

I strongly suggest adding a few days to the pilgrimage tour to explore contemporary Israel. For more than half a century I have

traveled across the length and breadth of this fascinating land. My favorite region is Israel's northern Mediterranean coastline, stretching about 100 miles north

from Tel Aviv through archeological sites, small towns and villages to Akko near the Lebanese border. This trip provides an extraordinary glimpse of both ancient and modern Israel.

Tel Aviv, Israel's first modern Jewish city along the shores of the Medi-



Columbus-based travel writer Aaron Leventhal and his German Village neighbor Bruce Ley visit the Western Wall in Jerusalem's Old City

terranean recently celebrated its 100th anniversary. Exuding a Middle Eastern appearance and European ambiance, unlike Jerusalem it is secular, boister-

potatoes and vegetables; Teomim, a Bulgarian family restaurant serving homemade soups, eggplant and kebabs; Abu Hassan, for Arabic hummus and pita; and the incomparable Bino Gubso's Dr. Shakshuka Libyan restaurant, where guests dine at long tables on his renowned, spicy tomato and egg shakshuka, couscous and schwarma.

Caesarea National Park, about an hour's drive north of Tel Aviv, is recognized as Israel's foremost archeological site. Built by Herod the Great (22-10 BCE) to honor Roman emperor Augustus Caesar, Caesarea reached a population of 250,000 and rivaled Alexandria as the greatest metropolis in the eastern Mediterranean. By the 3rd century, Caesarea was the center of Christianity and then a Crusader stronghold in the 12th century until it was captured by Salah ad-Din and left in ruins for the next six centuries. Excavations stretch for 3.5 kilometers along the beachfront and include the Roman amphitheater that held 10,000



Roman excavations in Caesarea National Park along the Mediterranean Sea

spectators, promenades and aqueducts, 8th century synagogue and Crusader fortress. There are several snack bars on the grounds and a lovely sandy beach for bathing.

In the nearby modern city of Caesarea is the beautifully designed Rolli Museum, with an impressive Spanish and Latin American collection; the Caesarea Golf Club, the country's only 18-hole course; and excellent restaurants.

Zikron Yaakov is perched on a ridge in the Carmel Mountains ridge overlooking the Mediterranean Sea. It was established as an agricultural settlement in 1882 through the generosity of Baron Edmond de Rothschild of the prominent French-Jewish banking family. His foresight and pioneering spirit has led to a thriving world-class wine industry in the region.

Today, Zikron Yaakov is a prosperous bedroom community of Tel Aviv and Haifa, as well as a very popular tourism destination for both Israelis and interna-

tional travelers. Stroll down the beautifully preserved 19th century HaMeyasdim Street, lined with the original stone houses, many converted into art galleries, chic boutiques, gift shops, cafes and restaurants. There are a number of renowned wineries in what is known as "wine country." Carmel and Tishbi wineries offer guided tours and wine tastings for a small fee. The best time to visit the wineries is from August until October when the vineyards are heavy with grapes, and "the crush" brings visitors to Zikron in droves.

Ein Hod Artist Village was founded in 1950 by Dadaist painter Marcel Jaco. Previously a small Arab village on a hillside overlooking the sea, it was abandoned when residents fled during the 1948 conflict. Jaco and his friends rebuilt the village and turned it into a unique "co-op" for visual and performing artists and their families. Today, about 200 persons reside in charming stone homes surrounded by beautiful

wooded areas, gardens and outdoor sculptures. Many of the houses have studios, galleries and lovely boutiques. Most studios are closed weekdays and open to a flood of visitors on Saturdays.

The Jaco Dadaist Museum displays his colorful drawings and paintings, and Ein Hod Gallery shows resident artists' works. I particularly enjoy visiting with Batia and Claude Jancourt in their Village Antiques shop and studio. They also are the innkeepers of two lovely furnished apartments. Several cafes



Tel Aviv's popular Carmel Market is packed with vendors hawking everything from fresh fruits and vegetables to jewelry and clothing

and excellent restaurants are in the village square. Village resident Shali Yarkony, PhD offers guided walking tours through the village with stops at artists' studios that rarely are open. (shaliyarkony@gmail.com)

Akko, near the Lebanese border, has a rich, 4,000-year history from its origins

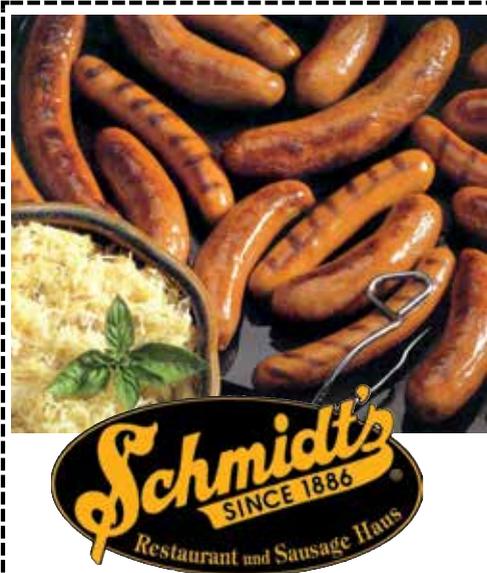
as home to the Biblical tribe of Asher and later an important Phoenician seaport and part of David's kingdom. It came under the rule of Romans, Crusaders, Ottomans and English and is now a vibrant, peaceful community of Jews, Christians and Arabs. It has retained its Middle Eastern character with high stone walls, narrow alleyways, colorful bazaars and towering minarets that call the faithful to prayer.

Put aside the better part of a day to explore a host of intriguing attractions in Old Akko, including: Ahmed al Jazzar Pasha's Mosque, built in 1781 on a former Crusader cathedral; the Subterranean Crusader City, built on a labyrinth of Crusader buildings excavated under Ottoman structures and Roman ruins; and the Arab Bazaar, with dozens of vendors. For lunch, Hummus Said is reputed to have the best hummus in all of Israel; and the Arab restaurant Galileo, along the city walls on Pisan Harbor, serves fresh-caught fish and seafood daily.

Where to Stay: Dan Hotels Israel operates 14 outstanding hotels throughout Israel, including the Dan Boutique Jerusalem, Dan Tel Aviv, Dan Panorama Tel Aviv and Dan Caesarea, all centrally located near attractions, dining and shopping. www.danhotels.com

For More Information: www.goisrael.com

Columbus-based travel writer Aaron Leventhal recently led a 10-day small group senior tour to Israel with a professional Israeli guide and driver. Plans are underway for another senior tour in November 2019. Check it out at www.leventhaltravel.com



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