



TRAVEL

## Notes from Tel Aviv



Revellers at the Gay Pride march on the streets of Tel Aviv.

Charukesi Ramadurai

June 24, 2017 18:02 IST

MORE-IN

It is early on Friday morning and the urban beaches of Tel Aviv are heaving with hundreds of local families out to make the best of the beautiful summer morning, also the beginning of Shabbat.

For orthodox Jews in Jerusalem, an hour's drive away, Shabbat (the seventh day of the Jewish week) might mean the time to stop all work, allow the body to rest, and devote time to thoughts of god and religion.

Updated: June 24, 2017 17:03 IST

## A centenary ago

But for Tel Aviv, a city created just over a 100 years ago with the aim of being liberal and progressive, it is about putting on miniscule bathing suits, packing picnic baskets and heading out to the seaside for a splash, and barbecues by the beach.

There are open showers every few hundred metres, dozens of cafés and restaurants by the water, and even a mobile library for those so inclined. But it is not as if everyone is being slothful and laidback here; there are more purposeful walkers and joggers than I care to think about, even as I huff and puff in the heat on a Segway.

As I watch in disbelief, a young woman—in clothes that show off her remarkable level of fitness—jogs by briskly, pushing a pram with a baby sleeping peacefully under the hood. Elsewhere, locals of all ages are pumping weights and stretching muscles at the small open-air gyms on the promenade. Those not on foot are on bright green bicycles that are part of the popular Tel Aviv public bike share programme.

## Energy spill

If this is one kind of energy, then there is entirely another kind on display through Friday night, spilling well into the early hours of Saturday, as I discover on a night tour of the city. Rothschild Boulevard, the Silicon Alley of Tel Aviv and home to some of the world's biggest corporate names and headiest startup ideas, turns into a wild party zone just before midnight.

I recognise nothing at all from earlier in the day, when I had walked up and down this very street, admiring the Eclectic and Bauhaus architecture styles on buildings. Where were all these trendy pubs, clubs and bars hiding then?

True, I had spotted Benedict, a café that serves (only) breakfast from all over the world, all through the day—but I didn't appreciate it then for what it was, a nod to the Tel Avivian lifestyle.

In many ways, this broad and leafy avenue is the heart of the city, the place where contemporary Tel Aviv was born.

From the Independence Hall where the country's first Prime Minister Ben-Gurion had officially declared Israel a country in 1948, to the impressive Levin House that once served as the Russian Embassy, Rothschild Boulevard carries the weight of Israel's recent history with ease and style.

## Pride of place

The Gay Pride March had gotten over a couple of weeks ago but June is Pride month, and so shops and hotels all over the city have the multihued flag fluttering in the breeze, with signboards that say: "We are proud to welcome you here."

From all accounts, there is no better indication that Tel Aviv embraces tolerance and diversity in a way that the rest of the country does not.

I had spent the previous two days in Jerusalem, which takes its whole 'melting pot of cultures' spiel very seriously. This translates into a sense of gravitas that pervades every aspect of the city, from the conservative attire of its residents to the subdued vibe on its streets. After that, Tel Aviv comes as a bit of a shock, despite everything I have read and heard about it.

My guide, Ofer Moghadam (a Jerusalem local), says that it is now becoming a sort of dirty weekend break for young Europeans, in the manner of Tallinn and Prague. "They fly into Tel Aviv on a Friday morning and just let it rip," he says sardonically.

It is not for nothing that it is said, while Jerusalem prays, Tel Aviv plays.

*Charukesi Ramadurai's life mantra goes: travel, write, drink filter kapi. Rinse and repeat.*

Post a Comment

More In

Travel

<< Previous Story  
Next Story >>

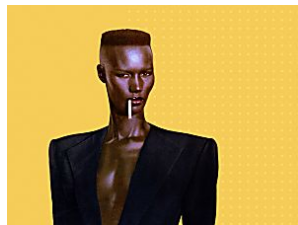
Contemporary form, traditional technique: architect Rooshad Shroff's show is about moving beyond craft fetishism

### SPONSORED CONTENT

Recommended by  
Outbrain



Why Mount Everest is so dangerous  
*The Economist*



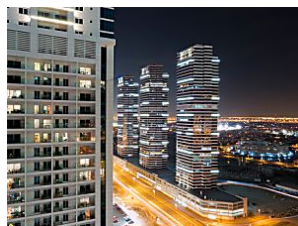
Bizarre, beautiful, feminine, masculine. There is only...  
*M2M*



As you've never seen her, Hailey Baldwin reimagines...  
*M2M*



Pierce Brosnan and His Wife Show Off Their Beach...  
*Us Weekly*



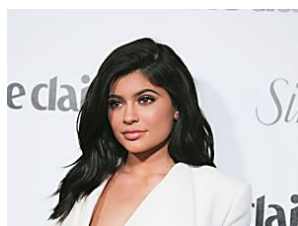
Dubai is Disneyland for Luxury Homebuyers - Find...  
*Mansion Global*



Duchess Kate's Trousers Are The Ultimate Summer Style  
*Us Weekly*



Michelle Obama's Style After The White House...  
*Us Weekly*



At Just 19, Kylie Jenner Buys Third Home  
*Mansion Global*



Looking to Buy Luxury Property in the U.S.?...  
*Mansion Global by Dow Jones*