



Condé Nast
Traveller

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THE DNA
ADVENTURE
TREND

**FRESH EYES
ON BALI**

WHY WE AREN'T JADED YET

+
HOW WACKY
DESIGN AROUND
THE WORLD IS
LIFTING OUR SPIRITS

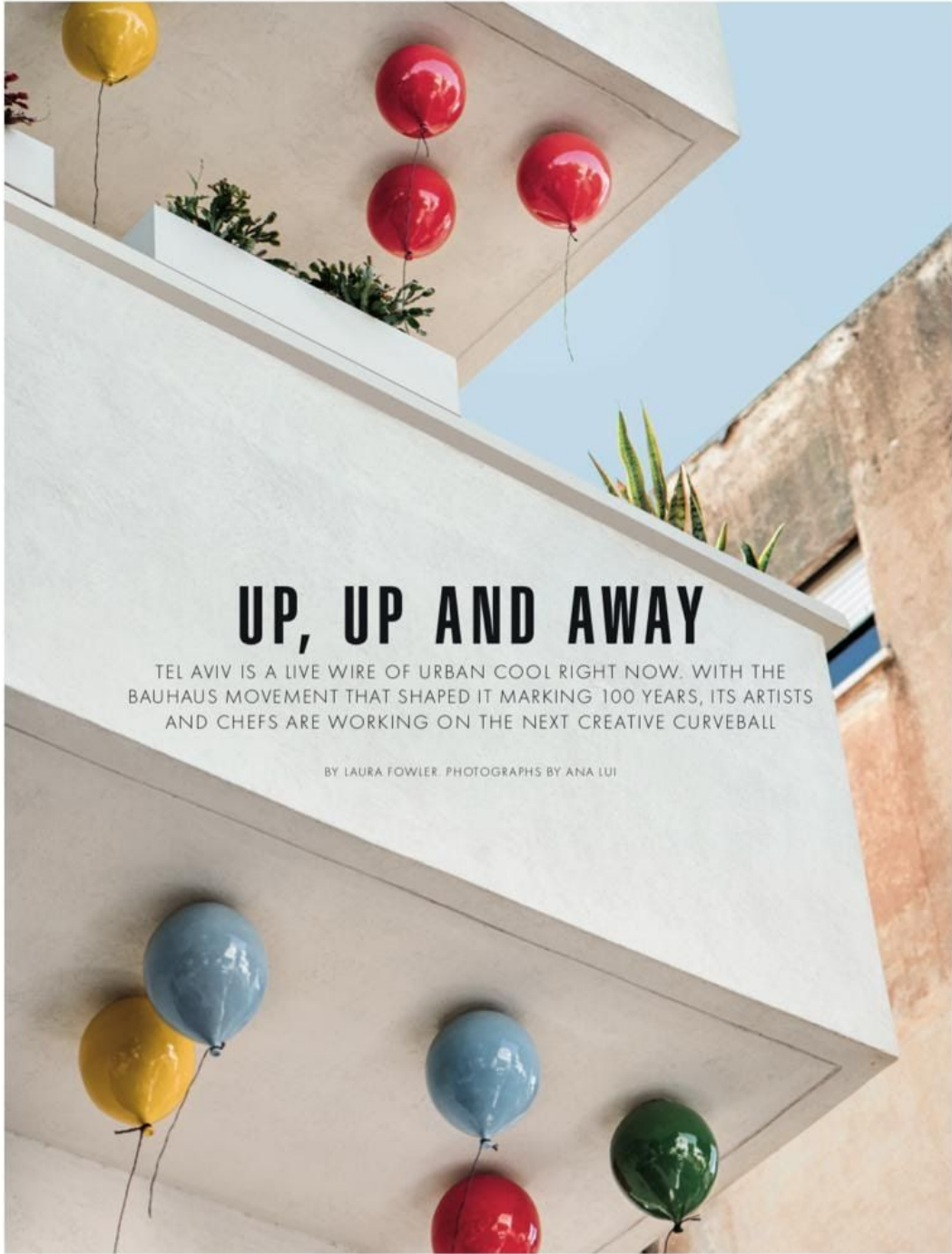
EPIC TRAIN BRAGGING IN THE USA

LONGBOARDING LADIES:
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UP, UP AND AWAY

TEL AVIV IS A LIVE WIRE OF URBAN COOL RIGHT NOW. WITH THE BAUHAUS MOVEMENT THAT SHAPED IT MARKING 100 YEARS, ITS ARTISTS AND CHEFS ARE WORKING ON THE NEXT CREATIVE CURVEBALL

BY LAURA FOWLER. PHOTOGRAPHS BY ANA LUI

A COLOUR SNAPSHOT OF TEL AVIV: MODERNIST BLOCKS curving white against cloudless, sky-blue skies. Star of David flags strung like festival bunting between balconies. Street art and grubbiness and coral-bright bougainvillea, and everywhere, everywhere the scent of jasmine, washing the streets. Sensational girls and slow-smiling long-lashed boys, honey-limbed on the beaches in the sunshine or at café tables, barking at one another – because this is how they speak, gloriously direct – over coffee and cigarettes. All the shrugging sexiness of Paris under a desert sun.

These are the things I loved about Tel Aviv when I first came, 15 years ago, and stayed for a while. In the evenings I sat out on rooftops with new friends who talked wide-eyed about ideas and dreams – of becoming fashion designers or chefs, of practising alternative medicine or inventing fruit with no pips – the tiles still warm beneath our legs, weeds growing through the cracks in the Thirties concrete.

There were the things I missed: decent wine and the kind of star-quality on-demand culture of my home city that even the sun couldn't outshine. In a suburban gym I took a dance class, and at least learned to count in Hebrew. 'Where are you from?' asked the whip-thin teacher with a lollipop-mop of blonde curls. 'London,' I said. 'Then what the hell are you doing here?' she said, and everybody laughed. Nobody would ask that now. All

alongside Middle Eastern flavours – and now the whole world wants a taste. At Shani's North Abraxas restaurant on Lilienblum, regulars rave about his one-ingredient dishes such as beetroot or cauliflower, cooked whole on the fire and slapped down smoking on brown paper from the all-go open kitchen.

'Our food is kind of a mix of everything. We are such a young country that there are no rules. You can do anything you want,' says Shuli Wimer, who recently completed a stint at L28 Culinary Platform, where every six months a different emerging chef presents their interpretation of Israeli cooking. Wimer's is a farm-to-table approach, her daily menu based on what she finds that morning, heaped in bright, ripe piles at HaCarmel Market. 'We have such amazing produce from all these artisan producers just outside the city.' It's the quality of the ingredients, she says, which makes the food so good, and Tel Aviv the vegan capital of the world. Her punchy butternut-squash risotto is a case in point. 'It's not me, it's the butternut squash!' laughs Wimer, who after six years at London's River Café has honed her cooking skills and a sense of English false modesty. 'They're in season right now!'

I could take a full day over my breakfast at The Norman hotel. It is like all Israel on a sideboard: labneh, za'atar, strudel and boureka, smoked herring and smoky shakshuka – a microcosm

IT HAS ALL THE SHRUGGING SEXINESS OF PARIS UNDER A DESERT SUN, WITH SENSATIONAL GIRLS AND SLOW-SMILING HONEY-LIMBED BOYS

these things remain, and yet everything has changed. Tel Aviv has found its feet and is dancing to its own rhythm.

The idea of this place first came about in the early 20th century when Jews from across Europe fleeing the rise of Nazism arrived to make their home in Palestine's ancient city of Jaffa. The number of refugees swelled from 2,000 in 1920 to 34,000 five years later, overflowing tiny Jaffa and leading to poor living conditions. With tension rising between the Palestinians and the new inhabitants, plans were made to build a garden suburb outside the town to house the burgeoning population of Jews.

This was Tel Aviv: a crucible of Jewish cultures and heritages from not just Europe but the entire world – and yet it has become a city resolutely not bogged down with the weight of history. For there's a certain freedom that comes from leaving everything behind and starting afresh. Now just over three generations old, it has transformed into a hotpot of richly layered European cultures with Arab influences. In the past few years it has grown up, too, and rather than looking to the West for guidance, has started focusing instead on its own unique aesthetic and flavour.

Israeli cooking is blazing a trail across the world, and even the wines – once a punchline in *Friends* – from the Golan Heights and Jerusalem Hills are winning awards. Pioneering chefs such as Eyal Shani have developed the concept of a quintessential food identity – a combination of all the different Jewish cuisines

of the country, a diaspora of cultures slow-simmered in a Le Creuset. At the next table, New York and Israeli entrepreneurs break off from talking billion-dollar deals to rhapsodise about the home-baked bread, because in Israel there is no bigger deal than food.

Similarly, the city's creatives have developed a distinct style that fuses Western modernity with Eastern motifs and local influences, across art, architecture, interiors and fashion. Neighbourhoods thrive with galleries and bars, pop-ups and start-ups. Business is booming, tech stratospheric. No better place to be a young entrepreneur than the fast-beating heart of the Start-up Nation, as this powerhouse of ingenuity has become known. Israel has always been a place of inventors, and today it is pioneering driverless cars, lab-grown meat and 3D-printed fashion. The modern miracle in the Holy Land is turning air into water (literally – google WaterGen).

There's a strong sense that anything is possible. The very air crackles; I feel it keenly one morning, stork-legged during a rooftop yoga session as the sun rises overhead and the city's construction sites rumble into life. On top of the new Vera hotel in Florentin – fitted out from top to toe by the neighbourhood's artisans and designers – I spread my toes across the reclaimed wood laid by local carpenter Ofer and inhale the sage and thyme in the living wall of green. It's not so much

Opposite, clockwise from top left: a building near Lilienblum Street; kitchen and seating at L28 Culinary Platform; gazoz fruit drink at Café Levinsky in Levinsky Market; football players at Jerusalem Beach; nuts for sale at Levinsky Market; café at HaCarmel Market; Neve Tzedek district; brunch at L28 Culinary Platform; flowers in Neve Tzedek. *Previous pages, from left:* The Levee; Tel Aviv architecture, with ceramic balloons by artist Sivan Sternbach

a place to switch off as switch on. Start-up Nation Central HQ is right across the street. How these rooftops have been transformed! Whole days can be squandered up here. At the Norman, I slide between sleek white daybeds and an infinity pool, and look out across the buildings where giant menorahs spike up among the satellite dishes and potted palms, towards the sea and the fast-changing skyline.

In the year that Bauhaus turns 100, the pace of construction is feverish. Architects are busy as bees, fixing up the dilapidated residences of Tel Aviv's UNESCO-listed White City, the world's most exceptional collection of Bauhaus buildings, 4,000-strong. In the 1920s and 1930s, European architects who had been studying at modernist schools – most notably Walter Gropius's the Bauhaus – were among those Jews escaping oppression. They transported their cold northern European design principles to the heat of the Levant and built a city of concrete castles in the sand, adapting their forward-looking styles for the Middle Eastern climate or mixing them with Eastern forms to become Eclecticism. The new homes were designed for living, characterised by clean lines and functionality over unnecessary detail: curved like ocean liners, or boxy as cubist paintings. They had rooftops for socialising in the evening cool and windows were set back behind wraparound terraces to let the sea breeze in and keep the heat out.

THROUGH AN OPENING IN TATTY HOARDING I FIND THE WELL-HIDDEN SECRET EVERYONE'S NOT KEEPING. AND INSIDE IT'S JOYFUL

But in the intervening conflict-troubled decades, cash-strapped owners left their Bauhaus blocks to crumble. Now, fuelled by the buoyant economy, they are undergoing multi-million-dollar renovations. Suddenly everyone wants to live in them, or stay in knockout hotels such as The Norman, set in two restored Twenties buildings, and the brand-new Levee. Affluent young couples are starting families here instead of moving to the suburbs. Dizengoff Circus, the bleached-out Bauhaus epicentre, has been restored to its mid-century heyday. Along the spruced-up streets radiating outwards, where the sunbaked concrete smells like oven-fresh biscuits, well-groomed mothers in floaty skirts push Bugaboos and drink coffee in the shade of acacia trees along Rothschild Boulevard, lined with the grandest of historic buildings. Below it, Neve Tzedek is the city's prettiest neighbourhood, a 19th-century enclave you enter beneath bowers of bougainvillea the colours of a sunset cocktail. Here you find cafés with courtyard gardens and workshop-boutiques of handmade gold jewellery and earthy homewares priced for the new rich. Head instead to neighbouring Noga, the current cool-kid favourite, just as cute but less well-known, its designer-makers' studios more offbeat and affordable.

But don't get the impression that Tel Aviv is all spiffed up with nowhere gritty to go. Turn a corner and you very suddenly find yourself in all the chaos and tat of a Middle Eastern backstreet:

honking traffic and clothes lines of old-lady pants drying outside, and walls of air-conditioning units juddering in some heatstricken dystopia. Beside every super-slick remodelling there's a tumble-down heap, balconies literally falling off, piles of dereliction, hoarding and graffiti. Hard to know whether it's obscene or politically profound – most of it is stencilled Hebrew script. On one street corner, a mural of mirror and ceramic shards – a collaboration between the city's African women asylum seekers and artist Mia Schon – reminds us that 'We were all once refugees.'

As the manicured hand of gentrification ushers the creatives out, the city's cultural centre of gravity shifts ever southwards to older, shabbier neighbourhoods. Florentin is a work in progress, retaining its edge of scruffiness in the close-knit streets around edgy Levinsky Market, shared by artisan workshops and garment wholesalers alongside the hipster ventures. There are cafés on every corner, and suddenly brilliant restaurants, such as Burek, so hot it only opens one night a week. Hidden behind a wall of white concrete, the plant-based restaurant Opa rewrites the established vegan rules, both its interior and chef Shirel Berger's minimal and sophisticated dishes. There's a lively soundtrack, and even at 10pm on a Monday night (Tel Avivians eat late), the only seats left are up at the sociable bar, beside brown-eyed girls who ask where I'm from. London, I tell them. And this time they cannot wait to tell me

about the hottest joints in town – which remain those that are hard to find and rough around the edges.

Beit Romano is the well-hidden secret everyone's not keeping. It takes me three nights – I'm so easily sidetracked – but eventually, eventually, I find it; an *Alice in Wonderland* moment, if Alice had had Google Maps and had tumbled, after several Yarden Sauvignon Blancs, through an opening in the hoarding of a tatty wholesale unit. Inside, it's joyful: beneath festoon bulbs strung across a galleried courtyard is a mix of bars and restaurants (Eyal Shani's Romano among them, as much about music as food), and Teder FM, which broadcasts live outdoor performances. For all Tel Aviv's recent spit and polish, Beit Romano remains deliciously lo-fi: thrown-together roughness, a piano ready to be played and the whole place rocking with life and youth.

Ancient Jaffa, the original old city of Palestine, is a kind of Levantine Shoreditch which the artists made madly popular when they started moving in 10 years ago. In its ancient stone vaults and rickety market units, artisans and makers set up multi-purpose ventures: shops, galleries, music venues and ramshackle bars like the cellars of antiques dealers, alongside generations-old hardware stores and vendors selling dusty trinkets and lighting and rugs from the east, second-hand books and sheet music and bohemian glassware for a handful of shekels, whole sets miraculously intact after their journey from

Opposite, clockwise from top left: Burek restaurant; staircase at The Vera Hotel; The Levee; Neve Tzedek; dessert table at Burek; palm trees at Jerusalem Beach; The Norman hotel; Levinsky Market; private balcony near Dizengoff Circus.
Previous pages, from left: brunch at L28 Culinary Platform; Opa restaurant

northern Europe. Whatever could be saved – but not used – washes up here. Jaffa market is where to come for the best hummus – in brightly lit street-food joints with paper-napkin dispensers on the tables. At night it's a different story. Fairylights are strung across the narrow streets, the tables packed with extended groups, the smell of the grill in the air.

Where art goes, the money follows. Last year saw the opening of The Setai Jaffa and The Jaffa Hotel – John Pawson's dramatic reimagining of a 19th-century hospital and monastery for Marriott. And so the artists move on again, to Kiryat Hamelacha, Tel Aviv's new art district with studios in brutalist industrial blocks still occupied by motorcycle maintenance lock-ups and overalled men busy with welding torches. **Fixers Sarah Peguine and Michal Freedman** can unlock the doors to these studios, for those who are interested. 'The art scene feels very fresh. There's so much happening, so much potential,' a pregnant Freedman tells me, full of second-trimester glow and passion for the country's young creative set, as we sip *limonana* from jam jars on the sunny terrace of Ala Rampa vegan café overlooking the factory units. 'The artists here are very driven. They don't know what will happen tomorrow so they live to the maximum every day.'

Tsibi Geva is painting when we arrive. Up a dirty flight of stairs, past peeling walls, his studio is all warmth and linseed oil, paint pots covering the spattered floor. Kibbutz-born Geva – whose

work has been shown from MoMA to Venice, where he created the Israeli Pavilion at the 2015 Biennale – lives between Tel Aviv and New York, but it is life in Israel that inspires him. 'I need this tension, the electricity here. That's the energy that comes from outside into my work,' he says. Geva is dressed in paint-dashed black: gentle-mannered, almost diffident as he shows us his great canvases stacked against the walls, both abstract and sometimes wildly geometric, with human figures emerging from the pattern. His large-scale works and installations are inspired by motifs of daily life: terrazzo flooring, Mondrian-esque apartment window grilles, found junk dumped on balconies (there's an Israeli tendency, he says, to hang on to useless things; 'a post-Holocaust trauma, collecting and not throwing anything away'). Then there are elements of the political situation: GAZA slashed out in expressive black capitals, the lines of a watchtower. This is what gets talked about. 'People always speak about the politics of my work, not looking at how I use the language of painting. Colour, composition, materials, surface.'

And isn't this just like Tel Aviv? So often it's not about the news story. Sometimes what resonates, what remains, is just colour, an impression. On that rooftop 15 years ago, all those ideas had seemed like naivety, twentysomething chutzpah. Now those wide-eyed thinkers are driving the Start-up Nation forward into the future, swept along in Tel Aviv's life-force. Not falling, but flying. 🦸

THE LOWDOWN

WHERE TO STAY

The Norman introduced unprecedented levels of splendour to Tel Aviv when it opened in 2014. It feels like a members' club, at once grand and personal. Staff greet everyone immediately by name; there are 50 elegant rooms with echoes from the original Twenties buildings, such as the Mediterranean tiles, alongside the contemporary in David d'Almada's divine interiors. At top-floor Dinings, chefs sliver jewel-red tuna and blow-torch prawns; Alena restaurant's Barak Aharoni, one of the new stars of the Israeli food scene, delights with unfussy, full-power dishes such as spicy Holy Land octopus and aromatic Middle Eastern lamb pasta. While the buzzy Library Bar has intuitive bartenders who mix punchy, herb-stuffed cocktails. Drink them here, or up beside the rooftop pool. thenorman.com; doubles from about £410

Smack-bang where it's all happening in Lilienblum-Herzl, **The Vera** is a new hotel concept for Tel Aviv; small, stylish and affordable, decorated from terrazzo floor to pressed-tin ceiling by local craftspeople working in Florentin. Polished-concrete rooms are minimal and restful; switched-on staff, led by handsome and enthusiastic young owner Danny Tamari, love to give the greatest insider tips on where to eat, drink and play. theverahotel.com; doubles from about £155

The Levee opened in April after a nine-year transformation project by Bar Orian Architects from an Eclectic 1913 villa into a super-slick apartment-only hotel. The industrial-chic vibe prevails here with statement furniture and a striking contemporary cube on the top. Every surface gleams, even the raw concrete. leveetv.com; apartments from about £465

WHERE TO EAT AND DRINK

Pioneering chef Eyal Shani is behind many of the city's most talked-about hotspots. Zinging with atmosphere, **Abraxas North** on Lilienblum is eternally popular for quintessential Israeli cooking. **Port Sa'id** is Shani's unassuming pub on Har Sinai, the street beside the Great Synagogue that has become a destination for outdoor eating and drinking. The chef's magic is at work, too, in **Beit Romano**, a speakeasy late-night venue set in a garment wholesalers' block and accessed through a fly-stickered door. Romano is his experimental restaurant, with old vinyl and vintage film posters on the walls. There are regular performances, parties and events outside until 3am. **Abraxas North** (+972 3516 6660); **Port Sa'id** (+972 36207436); **Beit Romano** (+972 7727 59605)

At **Opa** the refined vegan cooking focuses on one-plant dishes – a ladder of asparagus is presented like a still life – in Scandi-meets-Israeli-cool surroundings, hidden away near Levinsky Market. Around the corner, **Burek** is one of the hardest-to-get tables in town, so book well ahead. Start-up Nation Central's extended pop-up **L28 Culinary Platform** showcases a different chef every six months. opatv.co.il; burektlv.com; l28.co.il

WHERE TO SEE ART AND ARCHITECTURE

The **Bauhaus Center**'s tours open up the White City to anyone with even a passing interest in its architecture style and history, which is key to understanding Tel Aviv; or go for the 90-minute self-guided walks of the streets around Dizengoff. **ArtSource** insider tours plug you straight into the Israeli art scene, most exciting is access to studios and private galleries, whether you're looking or buying. bauhaus-center.com; artsource.online

Opposite, clockwise from top left: The Levee; The Norman; Levinsky Market; graffiti on HaShomer Street near HaCarmel Market; The Norman; Bauhaus architecture; pickles at Levinsky Market, bar at The Norman; bedroom at The Vera Hotel

