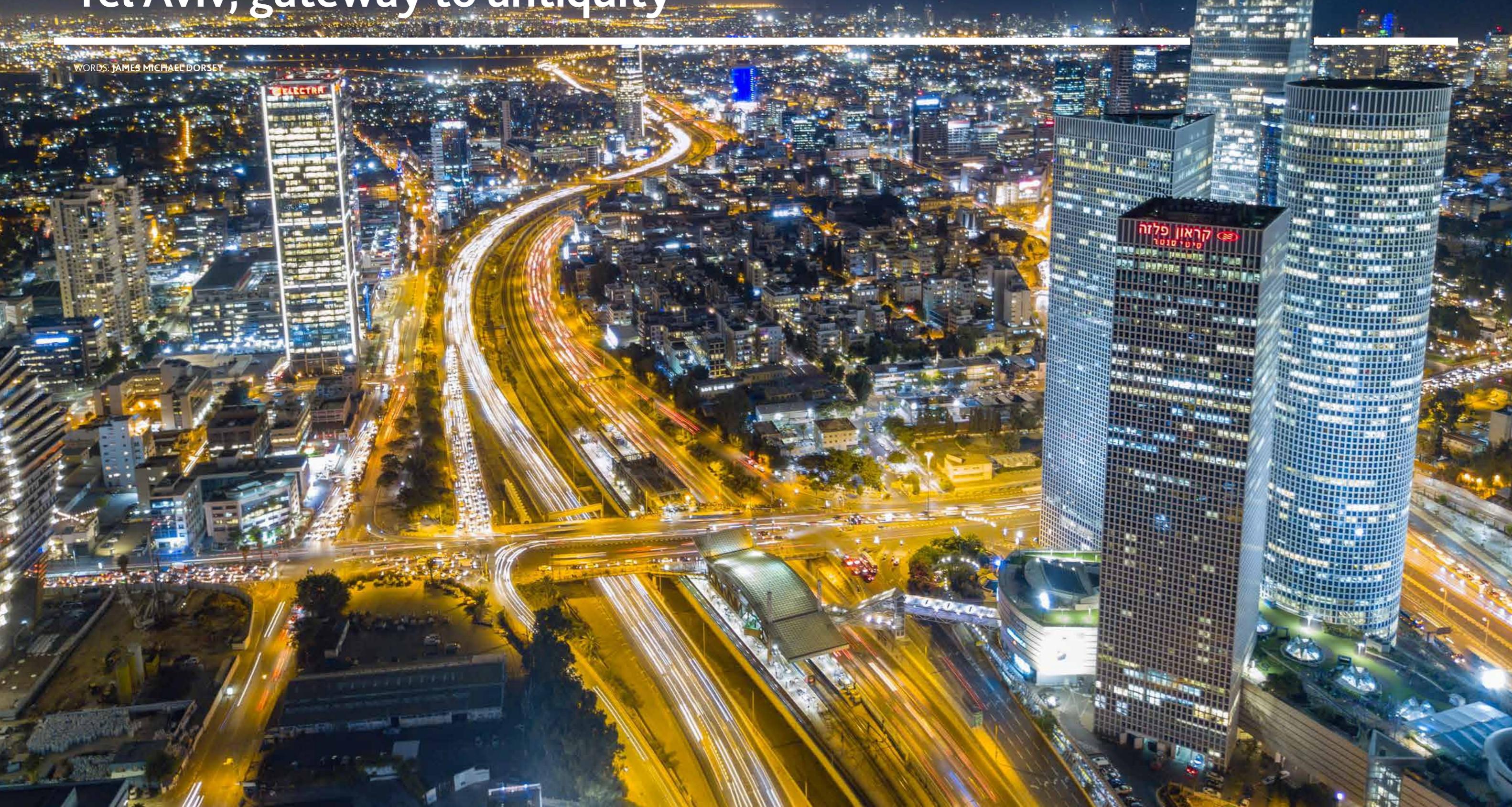


# Tel Aviv, gateway to antiquity

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1. Modern steel and concrete skyline of Tel Aviv at night.
2. The fortified city of Acre, known to the locals as Akko.
3. Tel Aviv's sprawling waterfront along the Shlomo Lahat Promenade.
4. Monument at the Rabin Square in the centre of Tel Aviv.
5. Ganei Yehoshua Park, a green lawn and a peaceful escape from the hectic pace.
6. The iconic Tel Aviv Museum of Art.
7. Habima (Stage Square) is the city's most beautiful square.
8. The Sarona, the first culinary centre in Israel.

Tel Aviv. The name conjures at once both Biblical images and those of ancient ongoing conflicts. It has long been a land in transition.

The city was founded in 1909 as a garden suburb of the nearby port of Jaffa. Its name comes from a 1902 German novel by Theodor Herzl called, *Altneuland*, or Old New World. At that time it was part of Palestine.

The country of Israel has been a siren call for pilgrims, tourists and the simply curious since its modern inception in 1948. To Jews, Christians, and Muslims it is the 'Holy Land,' where Jesus lived and died, and Tel Aviv is the portal that takes travellers back into history.

The first-time visitor to Israel will find Tel Aviv the perfect centre. It is one of the youngest new world capitals and its modern steel and concrete skyline allows the visitor a gradual transition from the new world to the ancient in as little as a day.

Here is how a day should be spent:

Make the pristine sand beaches the first stop and a respite from the heat that defines this part of the world. Its promenade runs along miles of the coastline and offers countless cafes but it is the spectacular sunsets that bring the



largest crowds. Then, after one's fill of sun and cappuccino, head for Neve Tzedek, the city's oldest neighbourhood. Today it is a cultural hodge-podge of fashion shops and restaurants where wanderers in *gallabiyahs* mingle with tourists in shorts and T-shirts. Make a short stop at one of the most popular watering holes, Grannie's Ice Cream, found in the Dallal Art Center.

The very soul of the city is the ancient port of Jaffa. Begin with the palm tree filled Summit Garden where you can see the steel spires of downtown Tel Aviv in the distance. Visit the Statue of Faith and take in the view from Andromeda's Rock. Further on, visit St. Peter's Church and all of its wonderful artifacts, then wander through a maze of alleys called the Twelve Signs to find the cave-like private home whose front door sign declares it to have once been the home of Saint Peter himself. Looking out at the city from this beautiful park, the visitor will immediately get a sense of history.

Walk past artisan and craft shops on the well-worn cobblestones of Zodiac Alley and visit the local fishing boats in the harbour where octopus hang on lines drying in the sun and pipe smoking fishermen mend their nets while trading adventurous sea stories. Find yourself drawn to the Clock Tower, the heart of Jaffa, and stop at the Abulafia Bakery for coffee and a pastry before losing a few hours in the flea market. Fleas are probably the only thing you will not find there.



Before moving on, a must-see is the new virtual train ride, the Jaffa Express on 9th Beit Eshel St. Seated in a comfortable chair and wearing a virtual helmet you will travel through time to see life lived long ago. This train cannot help but invoke a sense of wonder at the technology that now resides in a land where transportation was for centuries, and until relatively recently, either on foot or by camel.

To continue with cultural sites in the main city make sure to take in the Eretz Israel Museum and the Museum of the Jewish People for a compact history of the land. In the heart of the city there is a must-see emotional monument at the Rabin Square where in front of city hall Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin was assassinated in broad daylight in 1995. There is a bronze bust of him and a stone memorial marking the spot where the leader fell. Most tour guides begin their day there as a reminder of just how volatile the entire region has been and remains. The square is beautifully landscaped and offers free lawn chairs near the central fountain for visitors to contemplate what they have seen.

Tel Aviv offers world-class nightlife and an unusual gathering spot is the former Great Synagogue, home of the original Teder that is now the Port Said Restaurant. One of

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the city's most beautiful squares is Habima (Stage Square) where classical music can be heard around the clock, but being in a sunken garden it is only audible to those inside it. The centre of town is known as the 'White City', a UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization) heritage site where Bauhaus architecture brought by German Jews was embraced by locals. One of the more prominent examples of this design school is the Hotel Cinema near Dizengoff Square, and nearby the Bauhaus centre offers books, postcards and artsy shopping. Another fine example of the local eclectic architecture is The Bialik House that once housed Israel's national poet, Hayim Nahman Bialik. It is open to the public and its interior is an artistic gem. A final stop should be Beit Hair, a classically elegant structure that once served as Tel Aviv's original town hall. The White City is one of the more popular walking tours in Tel Aviv.

A hidden gem to those not in the know is Saron. This former colony of the Knights Templar covers some 8,700 square metres and is the first culinary centre in Israel. In it you will find speciality foods from around the world while you can wander around its grassy relaxation areas lined with lily ponds and boutique clothing stores. Finally, not to be missed is Park HaYarkon, Israel's answer to New York's Central Park. Known as Ganei Yehoshua Park, it is the green lawn of the city and a peaceful escape from the hectic pace. Located in the northern part of town and divided by the Yarkon River, it is filled with joggers, dog walkers, or those just taking a stroll. Claim a grassy spot and park for an afternoon to people watch or join the dozens who come to fly their kites. Tel Aviv is among the world's youngest major capital cities and the gateway to the Bible. First time visitors may be surprised at just how tiny this country really is and to realise



that in less than two hours in any direction, one can visit some of the holiest and most revered places on earth. Tel Aviv is not what people remember most about Israel, but it makes the rest of the memories possible.

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