



Adventures in

Akko

Time travel to an ancient city
/ Jennifer Greenberg

Nestled on Israel's northern coast, Akko is an up-and-coming port city rich with Jewish history, attractions, and fantastic food. A UNESCO World Heritage Site, this Israeli treasure is a unique cross between east and west, modern and ancient, gardens and ruins. Its rich history is palpable in its alleyways, underground passages, and picturesque architecture, whose character reflects the legacy left behind by the Greeks, Romans, Crusaders, and Arabs. But what has transformed this hidden gem from a pit stop to a destination is its recent emergence as a culinary force in the north, with some of the best hummus on the Mediterranean and even better seafood





Sight Sea-ing

An insider's guide to Akko's must-visit attractions

Enveloped by the architecture of the historic city, Akko's **Old City Market** has a wonderful selection of authentic Middle Eastern goods: freshly caught fish, jute sack upon jute sack of spices, and desserts that satisfy all sweet tooth. As you explore the colorful range of stalls, be on the lookout for the quaint cafés and hummus joints tucked away in the market's charming side alleyways. After a hummus overload, head to the **Akko Marina**, which served as a bustling docking point from the classical to medieval era. Today, as one of the oldest preserved ports in the world, it remains a strategic trading post for the Eastern Mediterranean. Walk through history as you stroll down the tranquil fishing harbor lined with old fishing boats, and enjoy the vibrant view of Akko's Old City. Plus, at ten shekels a person, you can hop on a boat tour. Ride out into the deeper waters of the Mediterranean for a fantastic view of the city walls and an aesthetic taste of Akko's history.

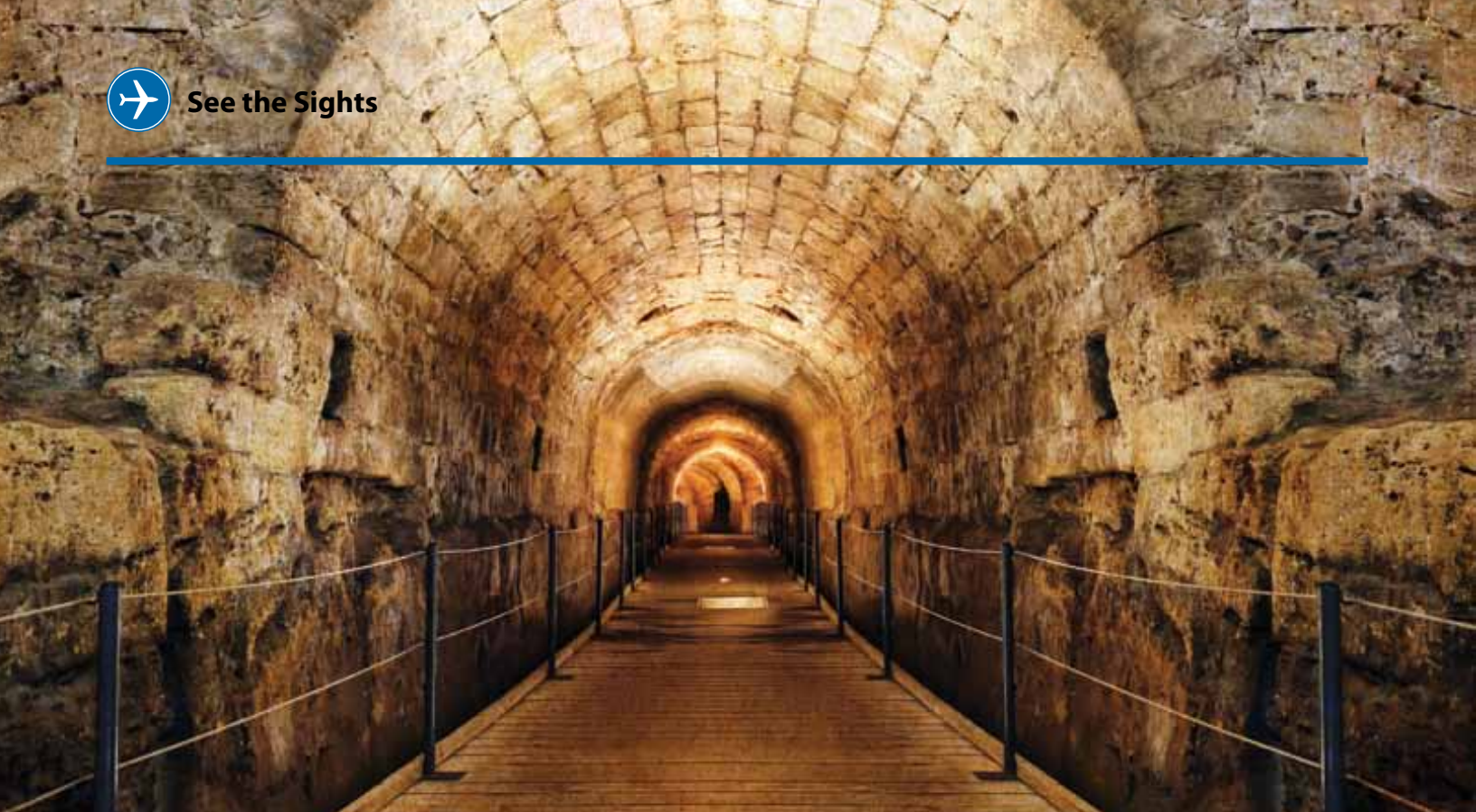


Photo: Erik Sahlin

Looking for an true blue adrenaline rush? Skip the boring, "one-size-fits-all" boat tours and hop on a speedboat instead for a 15-minute thrill of a lifetime – complete with donuts, high tides, and near-death experiences. Don't forget your poncho because things are about to get wet.

While Haifa's Bahá'í Gardens receive more international recognition, they're not the only ones boasting a garden more beautiful than Eden. The **Bahji Bahá'í Centre** (4 National Rd, ganbahai.org.il) in Akko is not only comprised of meticulously groomed gardens, but also the historic mansion of the founder of the Bahá'í faith, Baha U'llah. Within the historical building lies Baha Ullah's shrine constructed

of spectacular ornamental gold, where he is currently laid to rest. Its surrounding gardens are a majestic site of tranquility, with a stunning geometric cascade of hanging gardens, natural elements, and terraces. If you are visiting on Friday-Sunday from 09:00-12:00, you can enter the inner garden and visit the shrine. Otherwise, explore the outer garden and take in the majestic view of the heart of the site. After a long day of sightseeing, there's nothing more rewarding than a good, long steam in a Turkish bath. And Akko has got one of the finest and oldest hammams in the country. **Ghatts Turkish Bath** (ghattasbath.com) is an ancient bathhouse that combines a heady mix of humidity and heat - waking up all your senses. Not many of these bathhouses have survived throughout the centuries, especially not in Israel, but Akko's 'hot topic' has stood the test of time. This traditional hammam offers relaxation and sensuality, without being too tacky. If you're traveling with a group, might as well rent out the whole place for a party of your own.



Tunnel Vision

Discover a treasure trove beneath the city's infrastructure

Residing within Akko's Citadel, the fantastic **Museum of the Underground Prisoners** (10 HaHagana St) was a prison during the British mandate period. Now, it traces the history of the Jewish resistance fighters who were imprisoned or executed in this very spot. Run by the Ministry of Defense, the museum features an interactive display with original and reconstructed exhibits, a tour of the prison cells and an account of the prison's rich history. Learn about those who fought to establish a national home in the State of Israel, the circumstances of their imprisonment, and the enthralling story behind the 1947 Akko Prison break. Uncover the mystery that lies beneath Akko's old city streets in the mysterious

Templars' Tunnel (Eastern entrance near Khan Al-Umdan, Western entrance near the modern lighthouse). Hidden for 500 years, this well-preserved site was discovered by a local plumber in 1994. It spans from the fortress to the old city harbor, and was previously the Templars' secret escape route in case of attack. Now, it's a staple of an Akko Old City adventure, and perfectly accompanies a visit to the **Crusader Fortress**. Enter at one end of the city and exit at the other, just as the Templars did. In between, discover a glimpse into Crusader architecture and history, informed by descriptive plaques and images. Steps away from the Haifa Bay lies an ancient stone building, which has served as a citadel, hospital, and gathering space throughout history. **Knights' Hall** (1 Weizmann St), a complex within the Old City of Akko maintains its Hellenistic facade, while also serving as a venue space for concerts and tours today. There's nothing like visiting a spot within a UNESCO World Heritage Site, so if you're in Akko, stop by Knights' Hall to explore during the day or see a performance at night.

Where to Stay

Arabesque Located in the heart of the Old City, a two-minute walk from the marina, this hotel is as authentic as it gets. The building maintains its original stone walls, though rooms have been spruced up with flat-screen TVs and free Wifi, plus concierge service.

The Efendi Hotel It does not get more luxurious than the Efendi, the brainchild of local legend, Uri Yirmias (of restaurant Uri Buri). The hotel features an awe-inspiring terrace with picture perfect views of the Mediterranean. El-Jezzar Mosque is only 200 meters away, and the Efendi's restaurant serves up the freshest seafood in town – best enjoyed after a relaxing session at their Turkish bath.

Akkotel Built into Akko's city walls, this boutique hotel is just a five minute walk from the Marina, 50 meters from the seafront. It features a rooftop terrace with views of both the turquoise seas and turquoise rooftops of Akko. Much like the Arabesque, rooms are uniquely furnished, yet maintain their original stone walls.



Seafood, Eat it!

The boundless waters promise a bounty of fresh fish – any day, any time

Calling all fish fanatics: while visiting Akko, a trip to **Uri Buri** (Hahagana St) is an absolute must. Uri Buri's name is synonymous with excellent seafood; a destination for anybody looking to indulge in the treasures of the sea. Every seasonal item on the menu is guaranteed to make your taste buds dance, from the scrumptious seafood soup to the sashimi salmon with wasabi sorbet. But the restaurant's true secret ingredient is Uri Yirmias, the award-winning head chef who often serves the dishes himself. For the utmost experience, order the tasting menu. **Savida Seafood Bar** (14 Salah A-Din St) is an exceptional spot, serving exclusively locally caught fish for the true ocean-to-table experience. The menu changes daily in order to include the fresh catch of the day, brought in by the restaurant's select fishermen. One of the principals of Savida is to develop a close relationship with the locals; all of its vegetables and other raw ingredients

are purchased from the Akko market. Even the drink menu contains local alcohol, with Masada arak and wine from Ashkar Winery. The fixed menu has sides such as roasted potatoes, ceviche, and a seasonal market salad, to compliment the catch of the day. Residing on Akko's port, **El Marsa** (13 Namal Hadayagim) is reflective of the city's character: a unique blend of old and new where modern decor is juxtaposed against the ancient architecture of this converted 13th century home. Its Arabic dishes take an east-meets-west approach to traditional Middle Eastern cuisine, and its diversified menu offers fresh-from-the-water seafood. Savor calamari rings, the latest catch, or creative desserts such as the halva mousse, as you peer out into the Med's tranquil abyss.

Hummus Haven

Hummus fanatics dream of diving into a huge pot of Hummus Said's secret recipe. One of the hottest debates within the Israeli foodie scene is – you guessed it – where to get the best hummus in Israel. For many, Hummus Said (Old City Market) takes the cake. Their hand-mashed hummus is in a league of its own. It boasts a tangy flavor and a soft, creamy texture that seamlessly melt in your mouth. Expect long lines and a chaotic scene ('balagan' as we Israelis call it) – hummus fanatics come from far and wide to sample Said's secret recipe. Best of all, the Akko establishment sticks to the KISS mentality; they 'keep it simple' with a limited menu, keeping both your mouth and the long line constantly moving. It only takes one bite of fluffy, homemade pita, classic, soul-warming hummus, or 'makhkouta' (a hearty Middle Eastern stew) to see what the hype is all about. ➔

A TIP FOR PITA PROS:
When it's super crowded, go through the back door in order to be seated more quickly

