

# A City *For a Perfect Vacation*

An amazing 12 km strip of coast, promenades with sports and recreation facilities along it, a beautiful international marina, vibrant night life, a huge National Park, archaeological sites, as well as top-rated hotels and restaurants: Ashkelon is without doubt the city you would want to visit all year round.



**A**t a distance of just an hour's drive from the Dan Region, a deep blue sea awaits you, a strip of coast 12 km in length, cliffs, promenades, archaeological sites testifying to an expanse of history, the oldest National Park in Israel, a boardwalk that integrates old and new, an international marina with hundreds of sailing vessels, an abundance of restaurants in addition to a vibrant night life. All of this is happening in Ashkelon, one of the most beautiful and interesting coastal cities in Israel.

"Ashkelon is a classic seaside city, devoting itself to, and carrying on a constant dialog with that sea, a city of fascinating history and growth and renewal in the present. And as such it offers all the good things for anyone on vacation, or who is looking for a holiday destination not too far from the center of the country", says the Mayor, Itamar Shimoni, who is working hard to upgrade the city, particularly its tourist sites. To this end, Shimoni had instructed the Director General of the Economic Company for Ashkelon to establish a division dedicated to promoting tourism to the city. The division has been operating for the

past few months to implement the Mayor's policy and to transform Ashkelon into a leading tourist city.

## Between the Sea and the Marina

The sea in Ashkelon is noticeable everywhere you go. Its pristine well-kept beaches, many of which are wild and virgin, are perfect not only for a refreshing swim, but also for a twilight stroll along the white sands, or to wander along the beautiful promenade, decorated with trees and broad expanses of lawns, located at the foot of a sandstone cliff reaching down to the sea. Along the lengthy strip of beach there are facilities for sporting activities and recreational facilities for children.

**Ashkelon National Park Beach (Shimshon):** Known also as the "Park Beach", where the lifeguard station operates only during the summer season. This is the only beach in Ashkelon that does not have a breakwater and thus offers an amazing, adrenaline-filled experience for those who love waves and the open sea. This beach is decorated with huge rocks bestowing a sense of complete freedom.

**Delilah Beach:** A proclaimed and organized beach where

the lifeguard stations operate all year round. This lengthy and spacious beach includes a breakwater and is regarded as comfortable and swimmer friendly.

**Bar Kochba Beach:** A proclaimed beach with a breathtaking view.

**The Segregated (Separate Gender) Beach:** This beach is regarded by many as one of the most beautiful beaches in the country and includes sports and recreational attrac-



tions. The beach is especially clean and has newly installed changing rooms.

**The Rock Beach:** This beach, which is not proclaimed and where swimming is prohibited, is located south of the National Park Beach and represents an attraction for those who love walking and wandering on the beach. With its wild virgin sands, this is the classic place for a sunset or sunrise stroll.

And how can we not mention the international marina of Ashkelon, one of the most picturesque in Israel. A pleas-

ant breeze, a morning cup of good coffee or cold beer as evening draws near, the masts of the yachts swaying gently in the water, an enjoyable stroll with the family and enchanted romantic encounters- the sea seems to draw everyone closer and serves as a backdrop to any type of pastime that you could possibly imagine.

The marina, which includes a tourist complex with vacation apartments and hotels, commercial center, gardens and a sizeable promenade, attracts both regular and casual visitors and sea and sailing devotees at all hours of the day and night. You can eat and drink at a variety of excellent restaurants, be pampered on a private yacht cruise, dive under the guidance of a Diving School or simply contemplate the enchanted sunset and imagine that you are in a postcard.

### Evidence from the Past

Since its founding more than 4,000 years ago, Ashkelon has been situated on a strategic crossroads, on the ancient maritime route. As such, it has attracted numerous conquerors and from its port fine wines, agricultural produce and merchandise of various types were dispatched to all corners of the ancient world. These diverse cultures left in their wake significant archaeological remains, which continue to be discovered to this day.

At the Ashkelon National Park, which is located on a tall sandstone cliff and includes beaches on one side and golden dunes on the other, you can find the clear footprints of the exciting history of the city. Among other things you can find the ancient Tel Ashkelon in this immense area, bordered by ruins of a wall and the arched gateway to the Canaanite city, the most ancient of its type in the world, which was built sometime in the year 1800 BCE.





Other findings in the area include: An expansive Roman basilica and an abundance of marble columns with stylized capitals, which are the relics of the Byzantine Santa Maria Viridis Church, a system of dozens of water wells of various types testifying to the advanced agricultural endeavors of the residents of the ancient city, and many more. It simply



remains for you to let yourself be captivated by the green lung that incorporates an enthralling historical richness. Additional testimonies from the past can be found in the sarcophagus courtyard within the Afridar Center, with

an impressive collection of archaeological findings, the crowning glory of which are the two sarcophagi (stone coffins), among the most splendid of all those discovered in Israel. These sarcophagi, which were probably brought to the city from Greece or Asia Minor, are among the most significant findings from the Roman Era. The sarcophagi are made of marble and decorated with carvings depicting mythological scenes including various animals and plants. At the grave of Sheikh Awad on the Bar Cochba Promenade, there is a large burial structure from the Mamluke Period, surrounded by an impressive estate. It was established as part of the policy of that regime to concentrate the Muslim population of pilgrims near the seashore, in their visits to the graves of their revered ones and thereby prevent a Crusader invasion.

The archaeological gallery at the Ashkelon Academic College also provides a glimpse into the rich past of the city. Within a well-designed space you can find ancient clay and stone sculptures, coins from various periods, jars and urns, an ancient sarcophagus, decorative marble panels, as well as other items discovered in diggings in the region.

### Museums, Pedestrian Mall and Restaurants

The Ashkelon National Park: In this spacious park, which has already been mentioned in connection with the historical context of the city, covering an area of 2,000 dunams, there is an abundance of cultivated lawns and contempo-



Mayor Itamar Shimoni

rary recreational facilities for children alongside archaeological findings. There is also an organized well-equipped camping ground located at the top of the sandstone cliff. Towards evening you can enjoy a magnificent sunset and fall asleep to the sounds of the waves. In the morning you can tour the park or enjoy a refreshing swim at the proclaimed beach.

"Migdal Compound": The pedestrian mall in the Migdal neighborhood provides a glimpse at the place where modern Ashkelon was born – the place where past and present intermingle and merge with one another. This is not a glamorous and prestigious tourist area but an authentic, colorful and lively location with old houses and courtyards, narrow alleys and surprising shops.

Tourists who appreciate good food will take pleasure in the diverse eateries populating the area. For example, "The Victory Restaurant" – a Rumanian restaurant founded half a century ago and which constitutes a place of pilgrimage from all parts of the country; "Rosa Café" – the city's mythological café; "The Bukharian Restaurant" – a wonderful Bukharian restaurant near the market, which offers home-style cooking and stuffed delicacies whose reputation has spread afar; "Istanbul" – a meat restaurant in an authentic atmosphere, and "El Afia" – a bakery that has become a must-visit institution.

The Beer Temple: At the impressive visitors' center of the Carlsberg International Beer Breweries fascinating tours are conducted demonstrating all stages of production at the factory. In the local History of Beer Museum, rare archaeological findings discovered in the region are on display, and a Museum Pub, the only one of its kind in the country, describing the culture of beer drinking, as well as ancient implements, age-old carvings and more. At the conclusion of the tour you can taste some of the factory's products and purchase souvenirs.

Ashkelon offers its visitors an infinite variety of pastimes and tours – from a relaxed couple of hours to full days, nature hikes, visitors' centers, history, restaurants, a green, sprawling National Park with the seashore on one side and golden sand dunes on the other. Here, in Ashkelon 4,000 years of history are interwoven into the modern vibrant city, which offers an abundance of activities for all ages.

So why don't you too come and discover Ashkelon, because [something new has begun here.](#)

