


Executive Pastry Chef Nick Malgieri Article



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Nick Malgieri is the national spokesperson for the Switzerland Tourism Gastronomy and Wine program. After culinary school in the United States, he apprenticed in Switzerland and has maintained close ties with the country ever since through frequent visits. A frequent traveler to other destinations, he collects recipes everywhere. Below is a sample of some of the recipes from his book, *A Baker's Tour: Nick Malgieri's Favorite Baking Recipes from Around the World* (HarperCollins, October 2005). Additional information on Nick Malgieri: www.nickmalgieri.com 

Tel Aviv



Tel Aviv, which means Hill of Spring in Hebrew, grew out of the ancient port city of Jaffa at the beginning of the twentieth century. In the intervening years its population has grown to close to 400,000 and it has totally swallowed up Jaffa, creating a new municipality called Tel Aviv-Yafo. Israel's most cosmopolitan and prosperous city, Tel Aviv was once briefly the capital during the early days of the state of Israel, and all but a couple of foreign embassies are still located there, especially since it's just an hour or so from Jerusalem, the capital.

Israeli food encompasses so many different styles of cooking it's not easy to give a blanket description of it. Since its establishment as an independent state in 1948, Israel has become home to Jews from all over the world, all of whom have brought their own culinary traditions along with them. Eastern European or Ashkenazi Jews brought the matzo balls, gefilte fish, and braised brisket so familiar to Americans, while Southern European Sephardic Jews added many Mediterranean dishes. Yemenite Jews, who are also Sephardic, many of whom are native to the lands close to Israel, contributed the dishes we recognize as typically Middle Eastern: meze, grilled meats, and pita. Israeli falafel, made with chickpeas rather than fava beans, has become world famous and came about because of a rare and sometimes fatal nutritional deficiency caused by eating favas. Add all the national cuisines you can muster, including French, Italian, American, Thai, Japanese, and Mexican, and you begin to get a picture of the lively fare available in Tel Aviv. Night owls will feel right at home – there are quite a few good restaurants that stay open 24 hours, and cafés, bars, and pubs, both traditional and imported (British, American, French, and many others) are grouped in nightlife neighborhoods that are home to dozens of different establishments.

What's kosher and what's not: Foreign and upscale restaurants serve every type of food you can imagine, though pork and pork products are not to be found in abundance since they're forbidden by both Jewish and Muslim dietary laws. On the contrary, shellfish, also considered treyf or unclean by kosher law, is readily available in many restaurants. Casual restaurants, especially those serving Middle Eastern style food, are kosher by default since most of the meat available in Israel conforms to the rules of ritual slaughter. Eating meat and milk products in the same meal or preparing them in the same cooking vessels are also considered treyf, so you might not find cheesecake on the dessert menu at a steakhouse or a yogurt sauce offered with grilled meats at a Yemenite place. Bear in mind that the Jewish Sabbath begins at sundown on Friday, so many restaurants close between 3:30 and 5PM and don't reopen until Sunday. Cafés and many casual places remain open on Friday evening and all day Saturday, but check with your hotel's concierge if you're planning a special meal during that timeframe to make sure the restaurant you've chosen is going to be open.

A word about safety and security: Israel has strict and efficient systems of security to protect residents and visitors alike, especially in large cities such as Tel Aviv. Travelers shouldn't be unduly concerned about their safety, though if you see something suspicious, don't hesitate to point it out to the closest police officer or security guard, most of whom speak passable English. Be prepared for a security screening whenever you are about to enter a crowded area such as a mall,

department store, large restaurant, or office building. Always carry your passport and try to keep any handbags, backpacks, or other totes to a minimum since they'll be opened and examined. The good news is that security guards who conduct these screenings are trained to be pleasant and cheerful about it, especially so that visitors won't feel unduly inconvenienced.

Restaurants and Cafés

Most of the places except for the few fancy French restaurants in Tel Aviv are quite casual and fairly inexpensive. If you love Middle Eastern food you're in luck because some of the best food available is in that style. But if you crave sushi or lasagna, you'll also find exactly what you want. The concierge in your hotel can usually supply good suggestions or check the website www.telaviv4fun.com which lists Italian, Asian, fast food, and other specialty restaurants.

Please be sure to double check all addresses with your concierge before heading out. There doesn't seem to be a standard way of rendering Hebrew into Roman characters and in scanning restaurant listings I've noticed the same street name spelled in a variety of different ways. It might be a good idea to have the concierge write out the address of your destination in Hebrew to show to a cab driver just to be on the safe side.

A few of the restaurants below have websites in Hebrew only but they're virtually impossible to locate without searching the restaurant names in Hebrew.

Mul Yam (opposite the sea) is Israel's most upscale and priciest restaurant. Its fish and seafood are the best in town and the setting, food, and service might make you think you're in a 3-star restaurant in France, especially since many of the raw materials are flown in from the Atlantic. Chef Yoram Nitzan is a veteran of the Auberge de l'Ill in Alsace, Spain's uber-famous and iconoclastic El Bulli, and Le Bernardin in New York. Lunch is a practical choice if you're not a millionaire.

Mul Yam

Tel Aviv Port

Phone: 03 546 9930

www.mulyam.com 

Carmela Benachala and the adjacent Carmel market are both worth a visit. Chef Daniel Zach prepares eclectic food that ranges from cured sirloin carpaccio to potato gnocchi in a light cream sauce with porcini and hazelnuts. Everyone raves about the soft baguette-shaped pretzels. Moderately expensive for Tel Aviv but everyone says it's worth the price and more. Closed after 6PM, after 5PM Friday and all day Saturday.

Carmela Benachala

26 Hatavor

Phone: 03 516 1417

Raphael is considered by locals to be one of the city's top restaurants and its mix of different styles of cooking is dominated by a Moroccan influence. On the expensive side, there are prix fixe lunches priced at under \$25.00, a big hit with local business people.

Raphael

87 Hayarkon Street

Phone: 03 522 6464

Brasserie M&R is a well liked bistro decorated in authentic Paris style that's open 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. A casual menu highlights French bistro favorites and informal dishes such as burgers and eggs benedict. Great for those who suffer from jet lag's hunger pangs at 3AM.

Brasserie

70 Ibn Gavirol Street

Phone: 03 696 7111

Etzel Pini Behatzer is a casual spot for Israeli and Mediterranean food, a great choice if you like it spicy. Outside the center of the city nearer to Jaffa, you can sit outdoors facing the sea.

Etzel Pini Behatzer

6 Nachum Goldman Street

Phone: 03 683 9198

Suzanna specializes in Iraqi Jewish food and serves ethereal stuffed vegetables, kibbe, and thick, pocketless Iraqi pita. Open for breakfast; don't miss the eggs cooked in a spicy tomato sauce. Outdoor and roof terraces.

Suzanna

9 Shabazi Street

Phone: 03 517 7580

Whitehall is reputed to be Tel Aviv's best steak house and serves steaks, roast prime rib, kabobs, and a great accompanying salad. This is the place to indulge if you love foie gras, an Israeli specialty. Sunday to Friday, noon to 6PM.

Whitehall

6 Mendele Street

Phone: 03 524 9282

Papagaio is a Brazilian/Argentine-style churrascaria – waiters atop at your table with skewers of various grilled meats and carve you a portion. Salads, vegetable dishes and appetizers are available from a buffet. Service is unlimited, so meat lovers should take a note of this one.

Papagaio

14 Haarbaa Street

Phone: 03 582 6888

Jacko is a popular seafood restaurant with appetizers and side dishes included in the price of the main course. All sorts of grilled fish, calamari, and shrimp are cooked in a variety of ways from simply grilled to more elaborate sautéed preparations. The blackboard menu is in Hebrew but waiters can translate into English. Sunday to Thursday, noon to 6PM

Jacko

2 Herzel Street

Phone: 03 516 9325

Orca is another upscale and popular seafood restaurant. Chef Eric Stroitman prepares such creative dishes as scallop carpaccio with pistachio crumble, crab and goat cheese ravioli, and fried mussel salad. Late night bar menu available. Closed Sunday.

Orca

57 Nahalat Binyamin

Phone: 03 566 5505

Frida is Tel Aviv's best choice for old-fashioned Jewish dishes like your Russian or Polish grandmother used to make. Cholent, a slow-cooked stew with meat, beans, and potatoes is one of the specialties. Don't miss the chopped liver.

Frida

20 Ben Yehuda Street

Phone: 03 620 0470

Benedict is a popular café that serves breakfast of all types 24 hours a day. Great for the jet lagged and famished traveler.

Benedict

171 Ben Yehuda Street

Phone: 03 544 0345

Comme Il Faut recently moved to spacious premises at the port and is one of the most popular place in Tel Aviv for breakfast, brunch, and light meals.

Comme Il Faut

Hangar 26, Tel Aviv Port

Phone: 03 544 9211

Israeli Wines

Although Israel was producing wine for several millennia before Europe, centuries of Muslim rule called a complete halt to wine production there. The modern Israeli wine business was born in 1882 when Baron Edmond James de Rothschild, of Chateau Lafite-Rothschild in the Bordeaux wine-growing area, built 2 wineries. Setbacks because of the high temperatures at which the wines were stored forced the wineries to excavate deeply and at great expense to build cellars that would maintain appropriately low temperatures.

Baron Edmond James' son established the first wine grower's society in Israel and allowed them to manage his vineyards themselves. In 1957 James de Rothschild, grandson of the Israeli vineyards' founder, signed over the ownership of the vineyards to the growers' society.

Already by 1900 Israel was producing prize winning wines, but the first modern varietals, Cabernet Sauvignon and Sauvignon Blanc, were not produced until the 1970s.

Today there are 6 distinct wine growing areas in Israel: Galilee, Judean Hills, Shimson, Negev, Sharon Plain, and Golan Heights. Today the most common varietals are Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, Sauvignon Blanc, and Chardonnay. Lesser production of the varietals Pinot Noir, Cabernet Franc, Johannisberg Riesling, Gewurtztraminer, Syrah, Viongier, and Zinfandel is of no lesser quality.

Today Israeli wines are sold alongside other fine European and American wines the world over.

Recipe: Hummus

This recipe is adapted from Paula Wolfert's brilliant book, *The Cooking of the Eastern Mediterranean* (HarperCollins, 1994). Whenever I look for a definitive recipe for a Middle Eastern dish, I find it in this book. Once you try this, you'll never make hummus with canned chickpeas again.

Makes about 5 cups (recipe may be halved)

1 1/2 cups (about 3/4 pound) dried chickpeas
1 medium onion, peeled and halved
1/2 cup tahini paste
4 small cloves garlic, peeled and mashed with a teaspoon of Kosher salt
1/3 cup fresh lemon juice
1/4 cup extra-virgin olive oil
Ground cumin and more olive oil for serving

Soak the chickpeas in water to cover overnight. When you are ready to cook the chickpeas, drain and rinse them. Cover with fresh water and add onion. Cook over low heat until very soft – about an hour or so.

After the chickpeas are cooked, reserve 1/2 cup each of the cooking liquid and cooked chickpeas. Drain the remaining chickpeas.

Combine the tahini (stir it up if it has separated), garlic, and lemon juice in a blender jar or the bowl of a food processor; process until the mixture whitens. With the machine running, drizzle in the reserved cooking liquid and oil. Add all the chickpeas but the reserved ones and process again until very smooth. Taste and season with more salt and lemon juice if necessary. Reserve the hummus covered with plastic wrap at a cool room temperature until serving time.

To serve, spread the hummus on a shallow platter. Make a shallow well in the center and garnish with olive oil, ground cumin, and the reserved chickpeas. Serve with warm pita triangles.