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In the shadow of Israel's big museums lie smaller, cozier spaces for the more experienced traveler.

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Tel Aviv — For the experienced tourist to Israel looking for more to quench his cultural thirst than the typical visits to the Tel Aviv Museum of Art and the Israel Museum in Jerusalem (although with its recent multi-million dollar expansion the Israel Museum is certainly worth another visit), Tel Aviv and Jerusalem contain many smaller art spaces that offer a more intimate experience. Often, these collections are devoted primarily to a particular artist's work or to a refined theme.



The Ilana Goor Museum in Old Jaffa.

Fittingly, an unofficial Jerusalem-Tel Aviv culture war is playing out. To Ruth Zadka, director of the Artists House in Jerusalem, hers is the better city in which to create because "Jerusalem is the epitome of pluralism. In contrast, Tel Aviv feels like Manhattan or any large cosmopolitan city. It doesn't have the typically Middle-Eastern extremes that exist in Jerusalem, whether it be the ultra-Orthodox or the Arab population."

In an interview, she stressed that Tel Aviv is Israel's commercial center for both business and art and as a result, "Jerusalem is more disconnected from the art market, which gives artists the freedom to work in a more independent and non-commercial manner." Vered Gani, an art historian and curator of the Tel Aviv Artists' Studio Gallery, not surprisingly, sees things a bit differently: "I think that there is no cultural divide between the two cities. As a matter of fact, many artists who live in Tel Aviv exhibit and work in Jerusalem, as well as the other way around."

Nirith Nelson, an adviser to the Jerusalem Foundation, which funds many Jerusalem-based cultural endeavors, says, "The distance between the two centers is negligible nowadays. In the past Jerusalemites used to have even a different pronunciation of words one could spot immediately. But today everything mingles and many young Israelis have had a period in their life experiencing the magic of this city."

In any case, there is exciting art being produced all over Israel, especially in Tel Aviv and Jerusalem, and visits to these smaller spaces offer a good taste of homegrown Israeli talent.

In Jerusalem, one may want to visit the following spaces:

The nonprofit gallery Barbur is located on a quiet street in the Nachlaot section. Founded in 2005 by graduates of the Bezalel Academy of Art and Design, the gallery hosts film, music and literary events, and serves as an exhibition space with new shows each month. Barbur artists also conduct art workshops for Arab and Israeli children.

The Jerusalem Artists House was begun in 1981 with funding from the Jerusalem Foundation. It provides studio space for 15 Jerusalem-based artists (both Jews and non-Jews) in a renovated building in the industrial zone of the Talpiot neighborhood, as well as nonprofit exhibition space for contemporary art in the Art Cube gallery.

Though it has a similar name, the centrally located Artists' House, Jerusalem places a special focus on Jerusalem artists. It also hosts a wide variety of exhibitions ranging from young and unexposed artists to world-renowned ones both from within Israel and abroad. Its home, the 1906 former home of the Bezalel Academy and the Bezalel National Museum (which would become the Israel Museum), has a beautifully carved exterior.

Mamuta at the Daniela Passal Art and Media Center was founded by Jerusalem-based interdisciplinary artists associated with the Sala Manca Group. It presents installations, experimental films, projects, screenings, and workshops, hosts a residency program for Israeli and international artists and provides space for work in wood, metal, and plastics.

The Museum on the Seam packs a political punch, displaying contemporary art by Israelis and international artists that has to do with sociology and policy such as human rights, the environment, and interactions between people and their governments. The museum was funded by the von Holtzbrinck family of Germany and is located in the same location as a former military outpost that stood on the line — the seam — dividing Jerusalem between Israel and Jordan in the years of 1948-1967.

Owned by Albert Ticho, an ophthalmologist and his artist wife, Anna, the Ticho House is a small Jerusalem museum featuring Anna's distinctively Jerusalem-made work, as well as visiting exhibitions. It was built in the late nineteenth century and was one of the first houses erected outside of Jerusalem's Old City Walls.

The Hadassah Art Gallery is dedicated to providing both "sabras" and "olim" space to exhibit their art. Each month one native-born Israeli and one immigrant are selected to have their art shown in the gallery, which is located in the German Colony neighborhood.

In Tel Aviv I would recommend the following:

The Helena Rubinstein Pavilion, located not far from the Dizengoff Center, is a large, airy space devoted to contemporary art. An offshoot of the Tel Aviv Museum of Art, it offers exhibits free of charge.

The Tel Aviv Artists' Studio complex is comprised of 14 studios and a gallery and was built in 1989. A nonprofit organization, it is funded by the city of Tel Aviv and the Ministry of Culture and Sport. It is located in the South Tel Aviv Florentin district, a locus for avant-garde artists and galleries.

The Rubin Museum is located in the former home of the painter Reuven Rubin, who lived and worked in the space on Bialik Street until his death in 1974. In addition to changing exhibitions, Rubin's own art hangs on the walls and his studio was preserved as he left it. Near the Rubin house, I would also recommend a stop in the Bialik Museum, which is located in the former home of one of Israel's first Hebrew poets.

The Ilana Goor Museum in Old Jaffa is both a museum and Goor's own home. The beautiful space is more than 250 years old and contains not only Goor's art — the eccentric artist works primarily in sculpture — but art and other treasures she has collected from Israel and around the world.

The Gutman Museum, situated in the picturesque neighborhood of Neve Tzedek, displays thematic exhibitions of art by Nahum Gutman and others, as well as temporary exhibits devoted to the work of other artists.

The shiny new Design Museum in Holon is a short bus ride from Tel Aviv center. Housed in a circular building, this museum's exterior is encircled by red-tinted Corten steel bands. Inside, exhibitions range from international to homegrown design talents.

Of course Tel Aviv is best known for its gallery scene. The two main districts are divided between the north of the city on the stately Gordon Street and the south, with trendier galleries hovering around Rothschild Avenue.

Israel Travel

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