



WOMEN'S MISSION TO ISRAEL

Food & Flavours
of Israel

UJA WOMEN'S
PHILANTHROPY



WHAT TO EAT IN ISRAEL

One of the best ways to discover a new country or culture is through their cuisine, and Israel is no exception. While traditionally the flavours of Israel were more Middle Eastern and Levantine in nature, over the years the culinary scene has grown exponentially, with influence from Jewish immigrants and refugees. Now staples in Israel include dishes and flavours from Eastern Europe, Ethiopia, Morocco, Yemen, and Iran.

In addition to being diverse in flavour, Israeli produce is notoriously fresh despite the desert climate. Perhaps that's why Israel is considered a vegetarian paradise, constantly listed as one of the most vegetarian-friendly countries in the world.

Below are some of Israel's most famous and flavourful dishes, from street food staples to gastronomic treasures.

Helpful Hint: In Israel, you will find some traditionally British/European names for certain foods, like Aubergine (Eggplant) and Chips (Fries).

BABKA

While babka originated in Eastern Europe, becoming commonplace in North America with Ashkenazi Jewish immigrants, Israel has made this dessert loaf a staple in its cuisine. However, though similar in style and look, in Israel babka is often topped with a honey flavoured syrup and/or has local spices and flavours added to it, like zaatar. If looking for something sweet to enjoy with your coffee, try a slice of Israeli babka—it's both familiar and unique at the same time.

BAMBA AND BISSLI (OSEM COMPANY SNACKS)

Just like the United States has Hershey's and Kraft, and the United Kingdom has Cadbury, Israel also has its own popular manufacturing company, responsible for some of the most famous and beloved snacks throughout the country. When visiting, don't just try fresh flavours, but consider trying popular Israeli snack foods if you haven't had them already, to get a proper taste of Israel culture.

Bamba are peanut butter puffs, made from corn grits and without preservatives or food colours. They are pressure popped into little bite sized puffs and air baked before being coated in liquid peanut butter. This snack is both sweet and salty and a must when snacking in Israel. You can also find Bamba available in a strawberry flavour, and a chocolate nougat flavour, though peanut butter remains the beloved choice.

Bissli is another popular snack from Osem, made from deep fried pasta. Translating to "my little bites" in English, these crunchy bite-sized snacks are available in a variety of flavours, including "grill" spirals, onion rings, BBQ cylinders, pizza squares, and falafel sticks.

ISRAELI BREAKFAST

Israeli breakfast may not seem heavy at first glance but be prepared for big meals that are very filling. Typically Israeli breakfast includes an omelette, an Israeli salad, a selection of breads, small bowls containing different cheeses, tuna, and olives, fresh squeezed orange juice, and a cappuccino. So if you have a leisurely morning to spare, indulge in this hearty and healthy breakfast.

CHOLENT/HAMIN

Cholent is a traditional Ashkenazi stew, usually made with beef, potatoes, beans, vegetables, and barley, left to simmer overnight. Hamin is the Sephardic version of this dish, which uses rice instead of beans and barley, and substitutes chicken for beef.

FALAFEL

Considered the national dish of Israel, Falafel are deep-fried ball-shaped patties, made from ground chickpeas and/or fava beans, and a variety of Middle Eastern spices. It is typically served in pita or laffa, with hummus, Israeli salad, fried eggplant/aubergine, and local sauces. Sometimes you'll find fries (or "chips") stuffed in your falafel pita as well.

The origin of falafel has roots dating back to ancient Egypt, where this dish was allegedly made from fava beans. However, now it's a popular staple throughout the Middle East – suitable to carnivores and vegans alike.

FUL

While similar to hummus, ful is a chunkier spread, made with fava beans instead of chickpeas. It also has a more earthy flavour than hummus, using more cumin in addition to fresh herbs, chili, and onions. If looking to get adventurous with your falafel or shawarma, try swapping your hummus for ful.

HALVA

Halva is a sweet dessert made from tahini sauce blended with nut butter and sugar. Though typically quite dense, you can sometimes find softer crumblier textures, and even spreadable forms. If you're a fan of tahini, this is the perfect treat for snacking.

HUMMUS

Hummus is a popular dish around the world, and a beloved Middle Eastern staple. While the origins of this dish are disputed with many countries and cultures laying claim to it, including Israel, you will undoubtedly find some of the best in the world here.

Creamy in texture and rich in flavour, hummus is made from boiled chickpeas, tahini, lemon, and spices – often a dash of paprika and/or parsley. Perfect for sharing, an appetizer, or meal onto itself, hummus can be enjoyed as a dip, spread, and/or topping. As a meal, it is typically served with pita bread, Israeli salad, and falafel.

If you're looking for a fun variation, try masabacha hummus—chickpeas are left whole to create a different texture, and is served hot.



JACHNUN

Originally from Yemen and brought to Israel through immigration, Jachnun is a slow cooked dough. Typically eaten on Saturday mornings for Shabbat, the dough is rolled the day before and slow baked overnight, producing a sweet, dark golden-coloured pastry bread. It is traditionally served with a tomato dip, boiled eggs and *zhug* (Israeli hot sauce).

KHACHAPURI

Originally Georgian, Khachapuri has become a popular breakfast and brunch staple in Israel, while also a perfect option for an on-the-go breakfast. It's made from a simple pastry, often shaped like a boat, and stuffed with various fillings. Classic khachapuri is stuffed with cheese and topped with a fried egg, but vendors offer various versions, some which may be vegan friendly and stuffed with beans, or some that are more gourmet, using garlic butter, squid, and/or prawns. Relatively inexpensive, this is a delicious start to the day.

KNAFEH

A popular pastry in Israel, Knafeh is a sweet dessert, made from unripe cheese baked in a special noodle/dough (similar to phyllo dough) and soaked in sugar syrup. It is often flavoured with orange blossom or rose water, with nuts sprinkled on top. While the classic version remains most popular, contemporary chefs and trendy bakers are finding ways to innovate this dish. The origins of this Arabic dish are often disputed, with many Middle Eastern countries fighting to lay claim.

KUBBEH

A popular dish in Jerusalem, kubbeh are dumplings served in soup, made from bulgur and/or semolina, and stuffed with ground red meat, minced onions and herbs/spices. Introduced to Israeli cuisine through Iraqi and Kurdish-Jewish immigrants, this soup and dumpling dish tends to range in colour, from red to yellow, depending whether an Iraqi or Kurdish recipe.



LAFFA

Also known as Iraqi pita, this fluffy flatbread became popular after a mass immigration of Iraqi Jews moved to Israel in the 19th century. Baked in coal or wood-fired ovens, this yeast-based dough is left to slowly rise and then baked until it starts to puff and turn golden brown, resulting in a light fluffy pita bread, perfect for dipping or stuffing with falafel and shawarma.

MALAWACH

Malawach is the Yemenite-Jewish answer to a pancake, made from thin layers of puff pastry. Often referred to as a flatbread, with similarities to a croissant in texture, this popular dish can be enjoyed with savoury or sweet toppings. Go more more traditional, with hard boiled eggs, a tomato sauce and *zhug*, or try a sweet malawach, topped with honey.

SABICH

Another popular Iraqi-Jewish import, Sabich is an eggplant sandwich, brought to Israel in the 1940s and 50s. Served in pita, this sandwich is traditionally filled with eggplant (called aubergine in Israel), hard boiled eggs, hummus, tahini, Israel salad and pickles.

You can also try a cheese sabich, which will swap out hummus for goat cheese and feta, providing a different flavour to this popular sandwich.

SALATIM

Salatim is an assortment of salads, dips, and pickled vegetables that you will find laid out on a table, both at homes and in restaurants, in Israel. Often served as an appetizer at a restaurant, you'll typically find dishes including roasted beet salad, a Moroccan carrot salad, olives, roasted peppers, tahina, *matbucha* (roasted tomato and pepper dip), *chatzilim* (fried eggplant), and some coleslaw.

SCHNITZEL

Though a German-Austrian dish originally, schnitzel has become a staple in Israeli cuisine. While typically made with pork, in Israel you will find delicious chicken or turkey schnitzel, served with Israeli salad, mashed potato and/or fries/chips. You can even have a schnitzel baguette sandwich, bringing various European influences together.

SFENJ

One of the most popular street foods in Israel, Sfenj is Israel's answer to the doughnut. Originally from Morocco and Northwest Africa, this Maghreb dish is made from an unsweetened dough that is deep-fried before being dusted with sugar. Best consumed right after cooking so it doesn't lose its infamous texture, sample this dish fresh in a market, where you'll find huge barrels of oil with crisp sfenj sizzling inside, waiting to be sprinkled with sugar.

SHAKSHUKA

A hearty breakfast and brunch staple, Shakshuka is one of the most famous dishes in Israel. Originally from North Africa, it is believed to have been adopted by Jews and Arabs during the Ottoman Empire.

While there are multiple ways to get creative with this dish, traditionally Shakshuka is made with savoury stewed tomato sauce, peppers, onion, garlic, and an array of middle eastern spices and herbs, with poached eggs on top. It is served hot and in a cast iron pan, with bread for dipping.

Popular variations on the classic recipe include adding cheese, minced meat, hot peppers, pickled lemon and vegetables, tahini, and/or yogurt. You can even find hummus-shakshuka, which blends two of Israel's most famous dishes into one.





SHAWARMA

A popular street food in Israel, throughout the Middle East, and around the world, shawarma is a must try when in Israel. It is typically made from chicken or turkey that has been slow-roasted on a skewer, rotisserie style, before being shaved off with an electric carving knife. Once shaved, the meat is lightly grilled before being served in a pita or with salad and rice.

The most common way to enjoy shawarma is in a pita or laffa, with hummus, tahini, pickles, cabbage, and some Israeli salad thrown in. Sometimes you'll even find French fries stuffed in there. Of course, if you're looking for something lighter, you can ask for it served with salad and rice. Take your shawarma to the next level by adding Amba sauce—a thick and spicy mango-based sauce that comes from Iraq.

TABOULEH

A popular Israeli salad that can be enjoyed as an appetizer, side dish, or on its own. Made from soft whole grain wheat (bulgur), and packed with chopped vegetables, parsley, and mint, dressed in lemon and olive oil.

TAHINI

Tahini is a popular ingredient in Israeli cooking, found in staples like hummus, and added to classics, like babka, to spice them up. It's made from sesame paste, lemon juice, olive oil and other herbs and spices. You will typically find tahini served on its own as a dipping sauce, as a topping for pita bread, or alongside an Israeli breakfast.

ISRAELI WINE

Often overlooked on the global stage, Israel is actually a large producer of wine, especially given its size. The practice of winemaking and viticulture in Israel dates back to the biblical times, with five main regions throughout the country, including: Shomron, Shimshon, Judean Hills, the Negev, and Galilee. Visit local vineyards or hit up a wine bar in Tel Aviv, to taste the local wines.

DRUZE CUISINE

When in Israel, try some local Druze dishes; an ethnic minority and religious group in Israel, whose cuisine is a mix of Israeli, Middle Eastern and Mediterranean influences. The flavours blend together seamlessly to create unique dishes with sweet and savoury tastes. Try siniya with tahini—a ground meat mixed with cardamom and rice—or the Druze version of maqluba, which is a savoury meat dish, made with vegetables and rice, all cooked in a pot and then flipped upside down.



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