

Southern Belle

Welcome to Eilat, Israel's number one holiday resort. Hot and sexy, one-of-a-kind, pampering and exciting. Summer or winter, Eilat offers a large selection of hotels, great restaurants and entertainment, tourist attractions and, of course, duty-free shopping.

By Daphna Faines-Shaar

A Room with a Sea View

There are some 12,000 hotel rooms in Eilat, from the leading national and international hotel chains such as Hilton, Sheraton, Holiday Inn, Dan Hotels, Isrotel, Fattal, Club Hotel and Rimonim, to the more modest hotels, hostels and even rooms to rent in private homes – something to suit your budget.

Eilat is renowned for its prestige and luxury hotels, with their high standards of service, expansive swimming pools open all year, gourmet restaurants, fitness rooms, spas, children's clubs and first-rate entertainment teams. The shopping arcades that can be found in most hotels have virtually everything the guest might want.



Attractions for every Age

There are endless entertainment options in the city, from sunbathing on the beach to a host of water sports activities, wind surfing, snorkeling and diving. Just choose the type of vacation you fancy...

Sports activities on the Eilat beaches include beach games; desert tractor hire; pedal boat hire; clinging onto rubber tires or inflatable bananas pulled along by motor boats; parasailing and more.

Nature lovers who prefer snorkeling or deep sea diving enjoy the beauty of the **Coral Reef Reserve**, with its well-maintained beach (entrance fee), many shaded areas, changing rooms and other beach services. Here, in one of the world's best-known coral reefs, you can hire diving equipment or just snorkel and observe the fascinating underwater marine life. Young people head to the South Beach, between the Princess Hotel and the inter-university institute on the Migdalar Beach, to chill out and snorkel (no entrance fee). You can pitch a tent along the shoreline of the Village beach, with its stunning views of the Bay of Eilat and Akaba. Further north, the Papaya and Nikki Beaches offer shade, chairs and sunloungers, as well as a wooden deck and lively background music.

The Dolphin Reef, where man and mammal meet in a natural habitat, is another beachside attraction unique to Eilat. For an entrance fee, you can swim, dive and even be photographed with the friendly dolphins. Here, you can dive with the dolphins in an introductory dive that allows you to experience not just a dive, but also the company of these amazing mammals. Full diving equipment is provided and the dive is accompanied by an experienced instructor.

The Underwater Observatory Marine Park includes the largest aquarium and collection of pools in the Middle East. The site, six meters beneath the sea, is accessed via a 100m bridge. A tunnel joins two underground observation halls, the first featuring the corals of the underwater reef known as "The Japanese Gardens", and the second hall offering views across the fish and coral living in the sea's depths. An incredible panoramic view of the four countries in the area spreads out before you from the observation terrace in the upper section of the white tower. Many species of the Amazon's exciting wildlife are displayed in the Observatory Marine Park's aquaria: the carnivorous Piranha fish, the constricting

Anaconda snake, young alligators and more. As an alternative, you can choose a trip in the Coral glass-bottomed boat or visit the Oceanarium – a scuba diving simulator.

A “dry” attraction in Eilat (well, not including the thrilling finale...) is **Kings City**, an adventure park with a biblical theme, based on bible stories, particularly the life of King Solomon. Kings City is located at the end of the promenade, next to the eastern lagoon, inside an impressive, seemingly ancient and mysterious palace that looks as if it's been plucked from ancient legends. Biblical stories are presented here using state-of-the-art technology; 3-D screenings; an illusions cave with 65 interactive elements; a biblical-theme cave carved out of rock; and a boat trip along King Solomon's Waterfalls that ends with a heart-stopping plunge down two huge water-slides!

Kings City recently launched the David's Spiral – two dry slides that reach dizzying speeds of 40 kilometers per hour. You start the experience when you receive a “carpet” to place under your body, as you set off in the space of the building, ending up in the Cave of Illusions. The large slide is 54 meters long and 19.3 meters high, reaching speeds of up to 40kph, whereas the smaller slide is 31 meters long and 9.75 meters high, reaching speeds of about 34 kph.

A new museum has recently opened to the public in Eilat. Called “**Eilat My City**”, the museum focuses on the city's growth and development, featuring exhibits and information from the area's liberation in the 1949 Ovda campaign through to the present day, including water issues, the salt and electricity companies, the Eilat port, Arkia, the underwater observatory and more. One section of the museum is devoted to matters relating to the natural environment surrounding the city, with another section devoted to the development of the city's economy and tourism. The museum, which is centrally located at the junction of Derech Arava and Derech Yotam, opposite the airport and adjacent to the I-Max movie theater, promises a fascinating and informative visit to both parents and children, who can learn about the story of this unique southern city.

The North Pole comes to Eilat this summer... **Ice Attraction**, a stunning edifice hewn by ice sculptors from transparent ice, will be located next to the Eilat marina, transporting visitors from the blistering summer heat to temperatures of minus 7 degrees! This attraction, suitable for all the family, offers a games and entertainment

Accessible Eilat

In recent years, Eilat has made many sites accessible to the handicapped, enabling this sector of the population to gain entry to nearly every beach, and if not right up to the water's edge, then at least to the beach bar! Recently the Eilat municipality opened the beach opposite the Neptune Hotel to people in wheelchairs, offering them wheelchair access right up to the water's edge by way of a special path from the promenade right down to the sea. This path passes between two official bathing beaches: the Papaya and the Nikki Beach, with chairs and sunloungers for rent, a drinks bar, toilet and shower facilities and very close to the lifeguard and first-aid stations.

Accessibility for the handicapped is also available at the IMAX theater and all the attractions at Kings City. The elevator in the tower allows for access to the Underwater Observatory, and at the Dolphin Reef, the handicapped are also invited to swim and dive with the dolphins, accompanied by an instructor. Other attractions in Eilat are being refurbished to allow for wheelchair accessibility.

About a year ago, the Sea Bell was launched in Eilat, a 32 sq. meter boat fully equipped for the handicapped. Originally a Ukrainian fishing vessel, the wood-clad Sea Bell was completely renovated, with three levels of wide decks, hot showers, a bar, and an onboard speedboat for fun activities at sea. A special elevator installed in the vessel enables passengers to pass from deck to deck and down to the water and back. The Sea Bell offers both long and short cruises, night anchorage in the marina and more.

area that includes giant sculptures, ice slides and even a movie screening that documents the building of the ice structure. At night, the site will transform into a unique ice bar, with another bar on the terrace overlooking the sea (at normal temperatures).

Your worst nightmares will become reality in the fear and horror attraction “Nightmare” – 160 sqm of a terrifying dark maze, in which you will feel how fear takes hold of you. Demons and monsters, witches, knives and axes being drawn in front of you and shrieks that make your skin crawl... “Nightmare” is located in the tourist center, between IMAX and Club Hotel. We ➤



The Bird Watching Park

dare you to come in and survive...

IMAX 3D Eilat, a 3-D cinematic experience is located in the pyramid-shaped building opposite the airport, with giant screen movies that seem to leap straight out of the screen and into the audience, and one film that simulates spectacular underwater diving in the Coral Reef.

Bird lovers can also flock to the **Bird Watching Park**, a nature site in easy reach of Eilat. At the northern entrance to Eilat, turn left and follow the signs toward the border with Jordan. Just before the border, turn right to the Park, which has become a major crossroads for over a billion birds migrating between Asia-Europe and Africa, as well as one of the most important breeding grounds in the world. Here you can observe the birds from special hiding places and learn about migration habits.

On the way to the Rabin terminal north of the Eilat-Aqabqa border, the **Spice Route Farm** has developed its unique aquaculture, with a spacious shop for hundreds of spice mixtures and medicinal herbs. See also the Sea Route – salt water aquaculture pools that use a special ecology system. Groups arriving by prior arrangement will enjoy a free infusion of fruits and a lecture, after which guests can visit the shop, bask in its colours and fragrances and enjoy the spectacular view of the Edom Mountains.

At the northern entrance to Eilat you can also find the **Eilat Diamonds Mines**, a jewellery showroom and visitor's centre. The fascinating guided tour includes a "sight & sound" show and an opportunity to learn about the crafts of beading and jewellery making and to observe the stonecutting process for the unique Eilat stone. The showroom displays a wide selection of jewellery - gold set with diamonds, gems and Eilat stone. Another hall displays artefacts and souvenirs from Eilat and other parts of Israel.

Twenty minutes' drive north of Eilat, you'll

discover the breathtaking landscape and history of **Timna Park** in the southern Arava desert. Here, you'll find incredibly beautiful natural phenomena: King Solomon's Pillars; the Mushroom; the Arches and the Copper Lake. There are also the remains of ancient cultures: archaeological remains; rock paintings; the Shrine of the goddess Hathor and ancient copper-smelting furnaces. The recently introduced multimedia display called Mines of Time offers a journey back through time to the site where the ancient Egyptians used to mine copper ore.

Sand, Sand Everywhere

Eilat Bay is spectacularly beautiful, but the wide-open desert spaces of the Eilat mountains and their surroundings are no less impressive. The absolute silence of the desert provides an extraordinary experience and the opportunity to observe both animals and plants as they struggle to survive in such an extreme environment. Several companies in Eilat organize desert trips on foot, by cross-country bike, jeep, horse or camel, with many trips including authentic desert Bedouin hospitality. Extreme sport enthusiasts can enjoy rappelling, with various levels of difficulty. At the Texas Ranch, themed as a small Wild-West gunners' town, you can wander around between the buildings, ride horses and be photographed in hilarious postures. Worth every moment!

Nightlife

Most of the pubs in Eilat are concentrated in the Tourist Center, from small and intimate pubs to dance-bars with hundreds of guests each night. In the same area, there are restaurants of all types and cuisines, and some of the pubs have live performances by local groups presenting cover versions of known hits. More nightclubs, dance-bars and restaurants are located next to the municipal marina, at Kol Bridge, with its promenade teeming with life, as well as in the heart of the tranquil Ophira Park.

Many bathing beaches turn into pubs at night, attracting the young and the young-at-heart, with their combination of music, intoxicating sea air and holiday atmosphere that generates a real sense of freedom and fun.

The tourist area and the main hotels also feature large pubs and clubs where entry is usually charged. The best show in town, in ➤

the style of Paris revues and Las Vegas cabaret, includes heart-stopping acrobatics, stirring performances by dancers adorned with colored feathers, circus performances, magicians – in short, just wow! The flamboyant WOW show is staged at the Isrotel Theater in the Royal Garden Hotel, and tickets may be purchased at the theater box office and at all Isrotel hotels in Eilat.



The Underwater Observatory

The Eilat Cinema in the Edom Shopping Mall, Eilat's only cinema, has three theaters that screen the latest movies from the afternoon hours until the midnight show on Friday and Saturday evenings.

Shop till you drop

According to tourists, duty-free shopping is the phrase that's synonymous with Eilat. Many people come to Eilat once a year for concentrated shopping expeditions, purchasing clothes, electrical equipment and electronic products because of the cheap prices. In the Sea Mall, next to the Prinat Eilat Center, you'll find a unique mix of shops and cafés and a large food court.

The Big Center is a spacious shopping center easily accessible from the main road into town, Route 90. With easy access into Eilat on the Arava Road, this is the first complex built into the desert landscape, welcoming visitors as they enter the city.

The Big Center, which is located in the city's industrial area, includes a rich and varied mix of national chain stores with large shop fronts, spacious interiors and a vast free parking lot. At Big, you'll find well-known fashion brands such as Fox, Onot, Jump, Tamnoon and

others; shoe stores (Gazit Shoes); opticians; lingerie (Intima); toys (Kfar Hasha'shuim); Disc Club; Steimatzky Books; camping equipment (Rikushet); houseware; electrical equipment (Machsanei Te'urah) and the list goes on. You'll also find an inviting indoor café and a branch of Superpharm that is open for emergencies not just on weekdays but also on Friday and Shabbat.

The resort's Northern Beach is essentially Eilat's Riviera – the hottest entertainment and leisure strip in the town. At the heart of the promenade, on the shores of the marina and close to the hotels area lies the Queen of Sheba Mall. Following its purchase by the Reit Group who invested millions of dollars in renovations, the mall has become a model of the new generation of malls. Its central location and its convenient access by foot from all the hotels have made this one of the tourist and shopping attractions in the resort.

The Queen of Sheba Mall offers leading national and international brands and quality activities for all the community. The renovated mall is small and prestigious – a prestige venue for shopping, cafes and children's activities. Here, aside from meeting the Queen of Sheba, you can find leading and well known fashion brands such as Castro, Lee Cooper, Nike, Emanuel Shoes, Teva Naot shoes, Glik swimwear, Golf and Co, Body Shop and more, and, among the shops, the southernmost branch of Café Hillel.

The prestigious Boulevard in the Isrotel Royal Garden Hotel promises a walk through the leading brands of the world. Here the exceptional interior design and the quality brands suggest a romantic boulevard in Paris, with elegant, spacious and varied shops. From the cobbled "street" and the stylish wooden benches, to the street lighting and greenery, the French chic, fashionable cafes, the mouthwatering aroma emanating from the Boulangerie and the stunning window displays along the boulevard – all this adds up to a sophisticated, elegant, quiet shopping experience for visitors, with exclusive brands on sale in about forty interior designed stores.

In between shopping, you can relax at the café or restaurant in a shaded and air-conditioned environment. Some of the well known national and international brands include Tommy Hilfiger, GRAS jewelry, Ella swimwear, Dorin Frankfurt, Mr. Joe, Swarovsky, O'Neill, Vendome, Sakal Sport, Nine West, Sigal Dekel and more and, of course, the WOW show at the Isrotel Theater ▶

You'll also find large national chains in Eilat such as Home Center, Toys 'R Us, Mega Sport and others. There is also a pleasant shopping arcade at the Isrotel Royal Beach Hotel, with the special ambiance of the hotel.

The city market is held Mondays and Thursdays on Eilat's main street, Shderot Ha'Tmarim. There you'll find fruit and vegetables, clothes and jewelry, pictures, handicraft items and aromatic spices.

An artists' fair can also be found in the city, at the Jubilee Park area near the Eilat Court House. The fair is open on Fridays, between 10:00 and 16:00 in the Sculpture Garden adjoining the Park. Local artists' original handicrafts and artwork are displayed there, such as jewelry and clothing, accessories, sculptures, paintings, leather-goods, stained glass etc.

Where Shall We Eat?

As you would expect from a tourist resort, Eilat is bursting with dozens of restaurants offering cuisine from all over the world with prices to suit every budget. Along the promenade, you'll find exclusive restaurants alongside more reasonably priced eateries and in the city itself, you can find hidden restaurants, some of them in the old neighborhoods and the industrial area. They'll serve you genuine delicacies and offer authentic Eilat entertainment that you'll never forget!

Eilat for the Religious

Eilat isn't only an enjoyable recreation city that's exclusively for the secular: the city also enables the religious sector to continue their regular way-of-life keeping the religious laws while on holiday. The list of Eilat synagogues is respectable: Eliyahu Ha'Navi in Shderot Ha'Tmarim; Ohel Moshe in Shchunat Ha'Dekel; Heichal Shlomo at 6, Atad Street; A'ira Ha'Shachar next to the Clalit Health Clinic; Ge'ulei Teiman opposite the Razin Center; Ha'Rambam at Mish'ol Ha'Petel; Beit Chabad in Roded Street, Shchunat Ha'Dekel; Chessed L'Avraham in Shchuna Daled; Yahalom Synagogue in Shchunat Ha'Dekel; Yamin Herzog at the Yamin Herzog School in Shchunat Ha'Dekel; Yeshurun in Shchuna Aleph; Ma'or Ha'Chayim in Shderot Ha'Tmarim; the Central Synagogue Magen Avraham in Shchuna Aleph; Netzach Yisrael in Shchunat Shachmon; Etz

Ha'Chayim opposite the Fire Station, Shchuna Aleph; Pachad Yitzchak in Shchunat Ha'Dekel; the Tze'elim Synagogue at the Tze'elim School at Ma'arav 6; Siyach Yisrael at Ma'arav 1; Simchat Yisrael in Shchuna Gimmel; Sha'arei Tzedek in Shchunat Yed'a Ve'Noy; Ha'Rashbi in Shchunat Shachmon; Club Hotel at the Club Hotel; Chazon Ovadia at the Einat Center, Ma'arav 7.

An 80-meter long beach for the religious public has recently opened, east of the Mifratz Ha'Shemesh Beach, at a distance from the water's edge of about 30 meters. The beach is fenced and includes separate entrances for men and women. In the water, a screen has been built reaching 25 meters out to sea and a bamboo fence has also been erected delineating the area in order to conceal the bathers and safeguard their modesty. Although open to bathers, there is no lifeguard at the beach.

A little history

Archaeological remains discovered around Eilat testify that the Egyptians, Edomites, Nabataeans, Romans, Byzantines, Crusaders, Mamlukes, Ottomans and the British ruled here at various different periods. Situated at the northern tip of the Red Sea Gulf, Eilat controlled both land and sea routes – a fact that sparked many power struggles for control of the area in ancient times and right through to modern times.

Modern day Eilat was born on 10 March 1949, when Israel conquered her after only minor clashes with the Jordanian forces. Eilat was the last point of conquest in the War of Independence. During the Ovda campaign, divisions of the Negev Brigade-Palmach and soldiers of the Golani Brigade reached this southernmost point that then served as a British Police post. Marking the conclusion of the conquest and the inclusion of Eilat in the map of Israel, the Israeli flag was hoisted in the courtyard of the British Police post. This famous flag had been created out of a white sheet and a bottle of ink.

As time passed, Eilat began to develop. The Timna Mines enterprise has been overtaken by tourism as the city's main source of employment. Today there are nearly 60,000 residents in Eilat and the city grows from year to year. ■

www.welcomeeilat.com