

# Modern meets historic at Drisco Tel Aviv



**ROCHELLE LASH**  
*Hotel Intel*

The Drisco Hotel Tel Aviv is a transcendent example of what this exciting Mediterranean capital does best: Marry an ancient setting with modern savoir-faire, all wrapped in a unique heritage of many cultures.

It is a reincarnation of a hotel opened in the 1860s by George and John Drisco, two devout Christians from New England whose mission was to attract pilgrims to the Holy Land. Reflecting a diverse mosaic, this polished little gem was inspired by the Ottoman Empire's ornate architecture and was built in a former American-German colony.

The Drisco is adjacent to Old Jaffa, a fascinating mélange of centuries-old Islamic minarets, stone walls dating to the Crusades and a history cited in the Old and New Testaments.

**Past preserved:** The entire establishment is an objet d'art, the result of an exacting eight-year restoration of intricate tiles, marble, wall detailing and ironwork.

The Mark Twain Lounge is a treasure within the precious hotel. (The author penned part of *The Innocents Abroad* here in the 1860s.) Dimly lit, faded with time and sheathed in dark mahogany panelling, it's a restful salon, with antique velvet settees and arched doorways. A major conversation piece is a mural depicting quirky vintage scenes of Munich's pub life — a throwback to German settlers.

With a colourful past, the Drisco is an elegant boutique hotel appointed with the best of today. To keep its stories alive, the hotel organizes brief tours around the neighbourhood.



Operating in an Ottoman-inspired building from the 1860s, the Drisco Hotel Tel Aviv underwent an eight-year restoration. Some of the Drisco's suites, right, show off the dramatic architecture and multicultural history of the building. PHOTOS: ASSAF PINCHUK



“We have restored the Drisco's glory,” said general manager Hezi Talay, who is a heritage aficionado. “And we have introduced modern comforts and luxurious amenities.”

**Today:** The Drisco has earned a five-star rating from the Israeli Ministry of Tourism for its remarkable revamp, earnest service and stellar cuisine.

Fun factors include bicycles on loan, a nightly wine reception and a rooftop sun terrace with an outdoor shower for cooling off.

The darling Daria Spa has only two treatment rooms, but it's a refreshing, relaxing escape. Massages include deep tissue, aromatherapy and Swedish.

The Drisco's 37 rooms and five suites are modern classics, with creamy walls, sand-hued wooden floors and contrasting ebony furniture. Bronze ceiling lamps shaped like teardrops add a subtle Turkish accent. The accommodations have custom-designed beds, Egyptian cotton

linens, Italian marble bathrooms and fine Israeli toiletries. Many have balconies with views of the Mediterranean in the distance.

The suites are showstoppers. One has an arched ceiling, another has French doors leading to a private terrace and another opens onto the hotel's central piazza.

The six-bedroom Villa Drisco is a separate entity; up to 12 people can seclude in a private rental and enjoy the hotel just next door. The Villa is equally historic, and loaded with Old World character.

Even Noga, the Drisco's neighbourhood of quaint and narrow streets, has evolved. Many of the beautiful old houses have been preserved and refitted, and

condos, bistros, galleries and shops have been built up. Still, religion and tradition survive. The Beit Knesset Zichron Baruch synagogue and the Immanuel Protestant Church continue to minister to many nationalities.

**George & John:** Executive chef Tomer Tal creates seasonal artistic cuisine, popping with fresh Mediterranean and global flavours and strong on vegetarian choices — one of Israel's claims to culinary fame. The servers are outstanding, and guests can choose the beautiful patio, the dining room or the bar. The white porcelain dinnerware is French, and so are many wines.

Among the specialties are octopus on a skewer, beef tartare with bone marrow, and creamy pasta

with crab and brown butter. Tal incorporates old and new, with dishes like sashimi with avocado cream and jalapeño, lime and coriander; okra stuffed with shrimp; sweetbreads; and lamb short ribs.

Even breakfast is a tour de force, with barista coffee and Middle Eastern delicacies. Guests start with fruit, smoked salmon, halvah and pastries like apricot bread pudding. À la carte dishes include green shakshuka (poached eggs with spinach and chard), steak Benedict, and my new Israeli best morning feast, masabach — eggs with eggplant, hummus, tahini and spicy sauce.

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IF YOU GO

**Drisco Hotel Tel Aviv:** 972 (for Israel) 03-741-0000, thedrisco.com; 6 Auerbach St., Tel Aviv, Israel. Member of Leading Hotels of the World.

Prices are approximate and fluctuate. Rooms start at \$650, suites at \$1,500, all including walking tour (in Hebrew/English on request), welcome drink, evening wine reception, bicycles, computer, in-room Nespresso, bathrobes, twice-daily housekeeping, Bluetooth, rooftop sun terrace, Techno gym, bottled water, lounge coffee. Extra: private car, Daria Spa treatments, in-room dining, valet parking. Prices are lower from January to April.

Packages with meals or spa available. A five-night special during the Jewish High Holidays (Sept. 25-Oct. 15) features a 20 per cent discount.

**George & John:** 972-03-726-9309, gandj.co.il. Breakfast and dinner daily. Lunch is in-room. Private dining available.

**Tel Aviv tourism:** visit.tel-aviv.gov.il. Israel tourism: info.goisrael.com.

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