



# ISRAEL'S TOP 100 ETHNIC RESTAURANTS

Forward by renowned food critic GIL HOVAV



In the beginning, we were Polish. Had aliens landed in the very young Israel of the late 1940's, they would have probably thought that they were in Krakow: Tons of gefilte in restaurants, an abundance of knishes and oceans of chicken soup everywhere. Then, in the mid-50's, we became Yemenite. The big wave of immigration from Yemen and North Africa brought with it immense challenges to the young state and a lot of poverty. Yemenites, the poorest of the poor, became street food vendors. So prominent were they in our food scene, that, until today, many Israelis believe that falafel is a Yemenite dish. (it is not. It is totally Egyptian.)

Then we evolved: we became Arab. This isn't Europe, you know, nor is it America. We live in a pretty rough neighborhood in the Middle East, and, little by little, we have become a part of it. So, while terroir may be too big a word to apply to Israeli street food, we are definitely loyal to whatever grows in our sun-drenched part of the world, where everything seems to be in season all year round. We love tahini. We use it in cakes and as a sauce for fish and we drown our falafel in it. We live for kebab. There is not one single day where we do not consume huge quantities of finely chopped, fresh vegetable salad and, when flying back home with El Al, even before we start clapping at Ben Gurion, we devour airplane hummus because it reminds us of home. The last four dishes mentioned are completely Arab.



Let's go back to the aliens from the first paragraph: had they come back, say, on their granddaughter's Bat Mitzvah trip, what would they have said to one another after a short trip on a street? Would they recognize Israel? Would they think it was Krakow or Sanaa or Beirut? Would they see a melting pot of traditions, a pastiche of cultures? In all honesty, I guess they would look at one another and say: "honey, we landed in a safari".

Because at least gastronomically, that is what we are: colorful, sunny, enticing, shameless and direct. We have been here for the past 66 years and we have not even started to create what will eventually become a local cuisine. We are people from more than 60 ethnicities, living in this tiny country and each and every one of us is certain that his or her grandma's cholent is far better (and more authentic!) than everyone else's. And you know what? This is what makes us unique. And delicious.

Gil Hovav, **Food Critic**

# Introduction

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Welcome to the World Jewish Heritage (WJH)'s first e-book: The Top 100 Ethnic Restaurants in Israel! This e-book is the first of many planned e-books, each painting a different picture of the Jewish heritage experience.

Why start with restaurants? First, the book answers the oft-asked question, "where can I get something authentic to eat?" Second, more importantly, it showcases the culinary paradise that Gil Hovav so aptly describes of 60 different ethnicities, each with its own unique culinary traditions, in such a small country. Until recently, this fact has been one of Israel's hidden gems.

Well, it is not much of a secret anymore. The selection of Tel Aviv as the second best restaurant city in the world, the recent victory of Recanati Cabernet as one of the 100 best vintages of the year, and the election by Saveur Magazine of Michael Solomon, an Israeli-American chef, as "chef of the year" are all testaments to the expanding influence and recognition of the Israeli Kitchen-both old and new.

However, this rich culinary heritage is in danger of disappearing. Culinary tourism in Israel certainly is big business for a few large restaurants and even larger restaurant chains. But there are a lot of smaller, ethnic heritage restaurants in jeopardy of failing because they do not get the attention and recognition they deserve. Our e-book addresses that problem. It directs readers to these not so well known restaurants that still cook cholent and mafrum the way our grandmothers did.



Addressing problems such as these is the goal of our new organization, [The WJH Fund](#). It is a new non-profit organization dedicated to preserving both tangible Jewish heritage (museums, monuments, etc.) and intangible Jewish heritage (culture and traditions, etc.). Yes, finally there is a Jewish UNESCO! But it is a UNESCO with a Jewish Trip Advisor embedded into it. Got a craving for one of Gabso Bino's shakshukas after reading about it in our eBook? Fire up the [WJHtravel app](#) to find it! Share your pictures with others of the restaurant in our [WJHpedia](#). And finally, you can write about your experience of meeting Gabso (a.k.a. [Dr. Shakshuka](#)) in the [WJH website](#).

What do you get from patronizing these restaurants-aside from a delicious meal? Most importantly, satisfaction and pride. Satisfaction from knowing that you helped save these valuable heritage restaurants from extinction. Pride from getting in touch with either your or someone else's heritage. The acclaimed food writer and culinary historian Gil Marks once said that to understand Jewish food is to understand Judaism itself. What this book shows is that it is equally true that to understand Israeli food is to understand Israel itself!

Jack Gottlieb, **Founder.**