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30 NOV 2015: A “douzan’ is a tuned instrument. When you talk with Fady Najjar, the owner of Haifa’s Douzan Restaurant, he speaks emotionally about people living together harmoniously. Like the mandolin on display in the dining room, society is made up of individual strings that, when

tuned and strummed, produce melodious sounds. Every table in Fady's restaurant is different but he notes that together they make for "a pleasant atmosphere, good food and great memories".



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And in the popular German Colony neighbourhood of Haifa, Fady greets Israeli locals as well as tourists from around the world with the same passion for sharing experiences and promoting friendship. Fady's background is Lebanese and when he works with his French-trained chefs the result is taste bud heaven: Lebanese salad with feta cheese, Halloumi salad, kibbeh, eggplant, tabbouleh, grape leaves with a yoghurt sauce, and Shish Taouk (chicken kebabs with a delicate sesame dip).

And to complement the meal, Fady suggests Ashkar, a delicious Cabernet Sauvignon from Kfar Yasif, an Arab town in the Upper Galilee, or Taybeh, a refreshing Palestinian Beer from Ramallah. We try both.

Douzan - "the tuned instrument" turns into a stellar dining performance, a confirmation of the

diversity of Israeli society, and a great introduction to Israel's continued draw as a destination offering truly unique experiences.



The next day we have a quick visit scheduled in Binyamina, next to Zichron Ya'akov, long regarded as 'the' wine district of the country. But almost as soon as we arrive at Tishbi Winery and meet the 5th generation owner, Golan Tishbi, our schedule is pretty well thrown out the window.

Golan shows us the bakery where we taste freshly made bread and sample sweet macaroons. He explains that a visit to the winery offers more than just wine tasting. The culinary experience includes bread and pastry for sale, a weekend backyard Barbeque, a top-of-line restaurant with an amazing Austrian chef and the new addition: chocolate. Aside from sampling four or five different chocolates, visitors can participate in a chocolate-pairing workshop to perfect chocolate/wine combinations in a tasty 'terroir versus terroir' atmosphere.

When he learns that we haven't eaten yet, Golan invites us to stay for lunch and with the slogan "Friendship is the wine of life" emblazoned on a sign above the door, we are treated to a 2014 Viognier followed by an absolutely incredible Ruby Cabernet. Golan tells us that Tishbi is the only vegan winery in the country. Unlike wineries that use gelatin or albumin as part of the process to

quicken production, Golan says “I have time. I don’t need to rush” And his use of natural ingredients promotes the family philosophy of “farm to bottle; field to bread”.



While Golan seeks to continually enhance the traditional wine-tasting experience, a few hours to the south in Tel Aviv, Roni Saslove has taken a different route. Her dad Barry, originally from Ottawa, immigrated to Israel with the family and started making wine in 2004.

Roni studied wine making at Brock University in St. Catharines, Ontario. When the decision was made to sell the winery two years ago, Roni opened The Tasting Room to celebrate wine: “one of the beautiful things we have in Israel”. The daily menu features upward of 40 wines representing production from the Golan Heights in the north to the Negev Desert in the south”. In this ultra-popular, award winning wine bar, patrons purchase a wine-debit card and then help themselves to the wine dispensers, at the pleasure of their taste buds.

Roni noted that more and more people look at the process of exploring wine as open, warm and comfortable. “Wine is a great way to turn a bad room into a fun room. You don’t have to understand wine to drink it or even know how to pronounce it...just put it in your mouth and your body will tell you whether you like it or not”.

Later that evening, we are exposed to Israel's "Eat With" programme and are greeted at the entrance of their home by Maayan and Moshe Carmel and their wonderfully happy dog, Toffee. "Eat With" is geared to providing visitors with unique dining and 'family' experiences. Moshe is a real estate broker who, in his spare time, reaches back to his Yemenite, Turkish and Iranian background and cooks the most incredible Persian-style food imaginable. Maayan, his wife, a marketing manager for a luxury furniture brand is the perfect host and dessert expert, and Toffee, who loves to have his ears scratched, is the perfect pet.

Our refreshing welcome drink is Arak made with mint, lemon and sugar water and soon after, the dishes start arriving: Tabbouleh salad made with tahini, tomato salad with peppers, parsley and onion, Tzatsiki with cucumber and mint, a specially baked pie of cherry tomatoes, goat and feta cheese with herbs and basil; Gondi, a mouth-watering dish of chicken with fresh pomegranate and, after hours of wine, conversation and laughter, we still have room for the apricot/tahini/honey cake with tea and 'nabat', a special Persian sugar. The evening is easily rated as 200 percent enjoyable.

'Passion' knows no bounds and in the Dead Sea area, it mixes well with adventure. Barak Horwitz of Camel Lot Tours runs jeep excursions into the Judaeen Desert. After we bounce, jostle and climb our way to the summit of one of the Sedom Mountains, Barak tells us that at 200 feet below Sea Level (the Dead Sea is the lowest point on the planet) we are actually on top of the lowest mountain on earth. As the sun sets, the sandy-coloured mountains turn a vibrant red. Barak talks of early morning drives to see the sun rise over the Moab Mountains as they loom on the Jordanian

side of the Dead Sea. He talks of the fresh air, the freedom of being alone in the mountains and his dream to share this with guests looking for unique experiences in Israel.

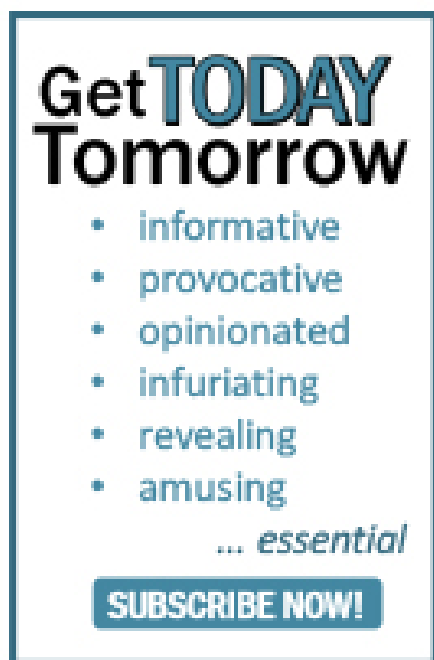


And toward the end of our trip we had the opportunity to chat with Moshe Safdie, the internationally renowned architect, who humbly sat alone in the lobby of Jerusalem's David Citadel (a hotel he designed), while waiting for us to arrive. During our discussion he spoke of his commitment to each project through study and immersion in the culture, music, scriptures, and history of the destination, aside from getting to know the people first hand.

This has resulted in scores of iconic works including Habitat'67, the National Gallery in Ottawa, Lester B. Pearson Airport, Yad Vashem Holocaust History Museum and the Khalsa Heritage Centre in the Punjab. His passion for

melding the contemporary with the traditional, to complement a sight line or landscape and capture a sense of emotion and historicity, and his skill in incorporating disparate elements to create a reflection of society, are not that different from the visions of Fady Najjar, Golan Tishbi, Roni Saslove, Maayan and Moshe Carmel and Barak Horwitz.

All are worthy ambassadors of Israel's invitation to not only visit the country but to fully experience it.



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Fady Najjar at his Haifa Restaurant, Douzan

