



Embassy of Israel  
Washington, D.C.

# Did You Know? Israeli Cuisine

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Spice vendor at the  
Acre market

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An Israeli table filled with  
salads and side dishes

Israeli culinary culture is diverse and unique. The wide variety of dishes and delicacies enjoyed within the country are a result of Israel's diverse population.

Particularly popular in Israel are Mediterranean foods influenced by neighboring Arab countries and citizens of Middle Eastern origin. Falafel, pita bread stuffed with chopped salad and deep fried balls of ground chickpeas, is considered to be the national food of Israel. Falafel stands are found throughout every city in Israel. Shwarma, fine slices of grilled meat served in a pita or a lafa, a large, flat bread, is also very popular.

True to their Mediterranean origins, Israeli dishes tend to be spiced with a wide variety of local herbs and spices, most notably za'tar (wild oregano).

No Israeli meal is complete without a complement of dips and salads. Hummus (pureed chickpeas and olive oil) and tehina (ground sesame seeds) are standard; matbuha (cooked red peppers and tomatoes) and baba ganoush (made of eggplant) are other Israeli favorites.

Western flavors have also become a part of the Israeli palate. Schnitzel, breaded turkey cutlets of Austrian origin, is a favored entrée in Israeli meals. Also popular are restaurants that serve Italian, Chinese, Japanese and French food. Israeli chefs are innovators in fusion cuisine, often incorporating Middle Eastern flavors and dishes with more traditional western dishes.

Israel enjoys the presence of thousands of eateries, from sidewalk cafes and falafel joints to pubs and world-class restaurants.



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The rotating  
skewer of  
shwarma is  
often placed  
at the front of  
a fast-food  
stand for  
patrons to  
view



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An afternoon food market  
in Nachlat Shiva, Jerusalem

Israel's soil and climate, particularly in the northern Golan region, are ideal for growing grapes, leading to a burgeoning Israeli wine industry. Israel's wine exports total \$13 million a year with \$7.5 million of those exports going directly to the United States.

Israel is a world leader in the dairy industry, often holding the world record for yearly milk production. This great milk production helps the Israeli dairy industry produce delicious and healthy Israeli cheeses as well as yogurt and ice cream. Israel's dairy industry also works with scientists to help engineer more vitamin rich foods, known as neutraceuticals.

Israelis are also known for their sweet tooth. Dessert often consists of Middle Eastern delicacies like baklava as well as rugelach, a rolled-up chocolate or cinnamon pastry of European origin.

In the winter months, Israelis enjoy snacking on Krembos, a round biscuit topped by sweetened egg foam and coated with chocolate. Israelis consume an average of 50 million Krembos each year – an impressive number for a country of seven million! In the summer months colorful kartivim (popsicles) are a summer favorite, one of the most popular being lemon ice.



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Robotic milking system at the Parobot  
cattle shed in the Jezreel Valley

## Culinary Customs and the Role of Food in Israeli Communal Life



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Tishbi Estate Winery. Wine  
plays an important part in many  
Jewish religious ceremonies.



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Coffee house on Tel Aviv's  
trendy Sheinkin Street.  
Sidewalk cafés are popular  
throughout the country.

In Israel, food plays a key role in the many cultures, communities, and religious observances.

Arabs, Bedouins, and the Druze have a very rich and diverse culture, part of which includes an emphasis on hospitality. Traditional foods to serve guests include sweet nana (mint) tea, black coffee, and lavish meat meals.

For one month each year, Muslims fast for the month of Ramadan. During Ramadan, Muslims abstain from eating from sunrise to sunset. The Islamic holiday of Eid ul-Fitr marks the end of Ramadan with a joyous celebratory feast.

Muslims observe the laws of Halal, a series of laws that determine what foods are permissible according to Islam. One main prohibition includes any substance with pork.

The Jewish laws of kashrut (kosher) are observed by many Israeli restaurants and food manufacturers and all branches of government, including the military. Kosher laws prohibit the combination of meat and dairy as well as the prohibition against eating of certain types of animals, including pork and shellfish.

There are many special foods associated with Jewish holidays, which are also Israeli national holidays.

Rosh HaShanah, the Jewish New Year, is marked by dipping apples in honey and eating honey-sweetened foods to celebrate the hope for a sweet new year.

The holiday of Hanukkah is marked by the consumption of foods cooked in oil to commemorate the miracle of a small quantity of oil lasting eight days during the Second Temple Period. Levivot (potato pancakes, also known by the Yiddish 'latkes') and sufganiyot (jelly doughnuts) are traditionally eaten.

Matzah, unleavened bread, is one of the symbols of Passover, a holiday which commemorates the Israelites Exodus from Egypt as recorded in the Bible. Other Passover foods include charoset, a sweet mixture of crushed nuts, apples, and cinnamon.

In the late spring, the Jewish harvest festival of Shavuot is celebrated. Shavuot marks the peak of the new grain harvest and the ripening of the first fruits. To celebrate this holiday, dairy foods, including many types of cheese and yogurts, are enjoyed throughout the country.