

DESTINATION INSPIRATION

# Akko

Israel



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I defy even the most hardened of hearts not to burst with wonderment as Akko spills into view from the train ferrying arrivals along the coastline. Turquoise domes and copper minarets rise from behind the storied walls of the Old City, while orderly rows of palms line up against the cerulean horizon. There's little hint of modernity save for the cluster of yachts moored in the marina.

An ancient city in Israel's far north, Akko's history stretches back millennia. Today it is marked as one of the most diverse places in the country where myriad faiths and perspectives coexist.

My host is the renowned chef Uri Buri, distinguished by his silver, navel-grazing beard and perpetual grin. He's something of a local fixture and as we wander the shuk stallholders embrace him fervently, offering bountiful handfuls of spices to inhale and syrup-soaked pastries to sample.

His boutique hotel, The Efendi, is one of the city's greatest gems, once an Ottoman palace and now a 12-room retreat. Here the past greets me at every turn, and yet the jewel in its crown is perhaps something as enduring as Akko itself – the astonishing Mediterranean sunset viewed from its rooftop.