

Jerusalem's Iconic Tower of David Opens Its Doors to Secret Spaces for a Limited Time

The newly refurbished Tower of David Citadel, the most well preserved fortress in Israel and a solid favorite of tourists, will allow visitors on Thursday and Friday this week to peek behind doors usually closed to the public.

In this special tour of the structure which dates back to the third century BCE, the museum promises to uncover secrets and access to areas that are usually off-limits.

"We will pass through the hidden passageway, climb onto the roof of the Ottoman Gate and up to the locked tower and ascend to the famous minaret," the promotion reads, referring to the iconic Jerusalem landmark which was added later in the seventeenth century.

"Along the way, we will search for the stonemasons' marks left by the Crusaders, discover the favorite pastime of the Ottoman guards, and attempt to decipher some of the inscriptions."

Ironically, the Tower of David has nothing to do with King David at all – visiting Christian pilgrims made the mistake many years ago, and the name stuck. It was built long after the time of David in the first century BC and is thought to have been a building project of Herod the Great.

According to Sar-El tours, many biblical scholars and archeologists now believe that the Tower of David may very well have been the site of the Praetorium, the judgment seat where Pontius Pilate tried Jesus and condemned Him to death on a cross.

The outline of the tower, particularly the tall minaret which was added many years later, has become one of the most recognizable parts of the old city skyline, visually representing Jerusalem for generations. Climbing the tower offers spectacular panoramic views of the Old City.

The complex is situated beside the Jaffa Gate of the Old City, and has undergone several rounds of destruction and rebuilding, reflecting a fascinating patchwork of Jerusalem's history. Most recently it has benefitted from a three year renovation project adding exciting interactive displays and a new entrance pavilion just outside the city walls.

In addition to the museum's displays and exhibitions, the Tower of David has drawn crowd after crowd for its nighttime light shows, displaying the history of the city in artistic projections across the ancient walls accompanied by stirring music. The story goes from ancient Israel, through the times of the Romans, the Byzantine Christian era, and the various Muslim conquests and empires up till the present day.

Like other Jerusalem sites, the Tower of David took the opportunity to renovate during the time of Covid when Israel was closed to visitors, with the grand reopening taking place in June, 2023. A team of archaeologists, architects, curators, researchers and designers collaborated on the project to carry out vital conservation and restoration work.

As part of the \$US50 million upgrade, a new visitors complex was added along with ten new galleries, doubling the size of the museum.

"It is very exciting," said museum curator and director Eilat Lieber. "The first moment we opened the gates of the museum and saw the line of people coming in was when we realised that it was really time to show off the results of the huge work of

the team here. More than a hundred people worked on all aspects of the museum – architects, designers, and engineers. We had experts in many fields creating this incredible visitor experience.”

“We have been really excited and happy to witness the reaction of visitors to what we have done, which is a full experience of the site – the archaeology, first, and a new exhibition.”

With multimedia immersive experiences and incredible artifacts to explore from the many years of Jerusalem’s history, the Tower of David is worth a visit at any time of year and it is entirely possible to spend a full day just exploring that one attraction.

Now that the museum is unlocking even more of its secrets for a short time, visitors will have even more fascinating things to see and experience. However, though the new renovations have made the site more accessible to all, the special tours include stairs and comfortable shoes are recommended.

“Behind the Locked Doors of the Citadel” tours will run Feb. 19–20 from 10:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m., beginning at the new Angelina Drahi Entrance Pavilion across from Mamilla Mall.

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