

Caesarea (Keysarya)



Caesarea is a city of the past and the future, the new opposite the ancient. While new Caesarea is graced with magnificent modern homes, ancient Caesarea offers tourists the ruins of unique, impressive buildings. While golfers enjoy lush fairways, horse races are reenacted in the huge hippodrome in the national park. While modern Caesarea's neighborhoods are quiet and serene in the glory of contemporary architecture, ancient Caesarea is bustling with tourists who come to see the wonders of the past that were built by one of the greatest builders of the ancient world - King Herod.

Caesarea's antiquities park is one of Israel's most impressive parks, housing unique buildings from various periods, bearing silent witness to the upheavals that have visited Caesarea over the past 2,300 years. Standing side by side over an area of 500 dunams (125 acres), there are architectural remains from the Hellenistic period (the 3rd century BCE) to the Crusader period (the 12th century), when Caesarea was a port city and spent many years as Israel's capital. Caesarea was given to King Herod as a present by Augustus Caesar and is named after him. Herod built a massive port there alongside entertainment facilities, bathhouses and temples. In the Byzantine period, Caesarea was an important Christian center. The early fathers of Christianity (Origen and Eusebius) lived there and according to Christian tradition it was here that the first idol worshiper was converted - the Roman centurion Cornelius. In the Crusader period the city was fortified with walls and gates, which were eventually destroyed by the Mamluk Conquest in the 13th century.

A tour of the national park is like walking through a story, and wandering between the ancient buildings one can both sense how people lived here thousands of years ago and enjoy modern, contemporary experiences, such as the enthralling musical performances held in the beautiful Roman Theater. One can walk along the city walls and around the towers, wander through the ruins of the castle and the various temples, watch the horse races in the hippodrome, visit the ancient port and the tiny artists' square and view the interactive 3-dimensional computer simulations of the city's past. The port hosts cultural festivals year round and offers a wide range of activities: historic riddles, jeep tours, target practice with a variety of weapons, paintball, Tai Chi on the beach, toga workshops and treasure hunts. Caesarea's beach offers the beauty of nature and diving enthusiasts can explore the underwater ruins in the archeological park beside the port.

Alongside all the ruins are modern cafes, quaint restaurants, romantic corners and a sandy beach, and not far away is the ancient aqueduct that brought water to the ancient city of Caesarea, 9 kilometers away. Next to the national park is the rural town of Caesarea, which took its name from the ancient city. The town is full of activities, including golf courses, a pampering spa, fancy hotels, the Ralli Art Museum and a historic site that houses the remains of a magnificent palace with a mosaic floor of amazing birds and a rare and unique table top inlaid with glass and gold.