



PICTURE: Shutterstock/Jose Hernandez

Dancing in the street

There ain't no party like a Purim party, **Ellie Fazan** discovers at Israel's raucous 24-hour celebration

"Most Jewish holidays are based around the idea that someone tried to kill us, we escaped, let's eat," says our host, Ken, his voice raised above the music. **"Purim is the same, but instead we drink."**

Celebrating a story from the Book of Esther, in which Esther and her cousin Mordechai help the Jews of ancient Persia triumph over a murderous plot, Purim is 24 hours of raucous parties and parades, with everyone in fancy dress. The date varies, but in 2023 it falls on March 6-7.

On my visit during last year's Purim, after two years of Covid and quiet time, Tel Aviv is pulsing with partygoers. "There's a custom of 'ad lo yada' – that people should drink until they don't know the difference between the good guys and the bad guys in the Purim story," Ken continues.

PARTY TIME

But with an action-packed party schedule ahead, I'm taking it slow with my juicy Israeli red wine at Romano, a restaurant focusing on seasonal sharing food. A feast of fish shawarma with green leaves on whipped tomatoes, garlic white bean salad, the most gorgeous garden veggies and delicately spiced whole roasted cauliflower, a speciality here, is laid before us.

Below us, within the same 1930s shopping centre, a crowd gathers to watch an Israeli techno DJ.

They are dressed as princesses, Disney characters, superheroes and villains.

Overnight parties have exploded all over Tel Aviv, with each neighbourhood hosting its own, while the main Purim event happens at Charles Clore Park, along the seafront, where two stages feature electronic and mainstream music, with plenty of food and drink stalls.

"We head to up-and-coming Florentin – where a hipster vibe spills onto the streets from its bohemian cafes and bars

An Israeli breakfast is the best way to dust off our hangovers the following morning. It's a delicious *shakshuka* (poached eggs in a tomato sauce) served alongside a mountain of homemade breads, Turkish *burekas* (pastry) and Mediterranean dips, before our guide, Sergey, arrives to take us costume shopping. He's adopted a Union Jack hat, moustache and cane for the day – you simply can't not dress up, and once suitably adorned with flower headdresses we join the parade.

We head to up-and-coming Florentin – where a hipster vibe spills onto the streets from its bohemian cafes and bars, and eclectic galleries complement the street art and graffiti. Young families gather to join ➤

DESTINATIONS

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Where TO STAY

Brown's Beach House is an easy walk from Tel Aviv's hotspots and a minute from the sparkling seafront. This stylish hotel (pictured) also serves the best breakfasts in town. Rooms from £220 per night in March. brownhotels.com/beach



Villa Brown is set inside a respectfully restored 19th-century Ottoman villa, with a pretty sunlit garden and rooftop terrace. Rooms start at £157 per night. brownhotels.com/villa

CONTINUE THE PARTY

🌟 In June, Tel Aviv hosts one of the world's largest Pride celebrations, with parties around the city for a whole week. **June 5-11**

🌟 *Laila Lavan* (meaning White Night) is one of the biggest nights of the year. It's a dusk-until-dawn affair, with exhibitions, beach concerts and parties. **Late June – date TBC**

BOOK IT

Cyplon Holidays offers three nights at Grand Beach Hotel, on a B&B basis, from £698 per person, based on two sharing, including flights from Gatwick. cyplon.co.uk



CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: Cosplay dress at a Purim street party; all ages enjoy the celebration; Tel Aviv seafront; performers entertain the crowds

PICTURES: Shutterstock/Joseph Gleyzer; Flickr; Dana Friedlander; Assaf Pinchuk



the parade led by giant puppets inspired by the work of the famous Israeli painter, sculptor and author Nahum Gutma. Among the crowd are samba bands, men on silts, acrobats, jugglers and dancers. The streets positively thrum. But it's not all partying. Peer down side streets and you can see children gathered around their elders reading the story that started the festival: Megillat Esther.

FESTIVAL OF FOOD

As the parade winds its way around the neighbourhood, it's worth ducking into Levviski Market. It's next-level fusion here, packed with Greek, Turkish, Persian and Mediterranean flavours, the market is a visual representation of the cultural layering that makes food here such a delight. There are countless types of *halva*, spices, teas, legumes, nuts and fruits piled high outside shopfronts. It's also where locals come to buy trays of *hamantaschen* – sweets given as gifts for Purim – filled with poppy seeds, dates and chocolate spread.

While Tel Aviv is steeped in culture and custom, it's also a modern secular city known for its Bauhaus architecture and the highest concentration of start-ups outside Silicone Valley.

And one hour away is Jerusalem, where the party continues on ancient streets. Here, you can feel and see the history around you. An old Arabic saying goes: "I enjoy walking on the streets that kings have walked on." And tonight we are quite literally

“At the centre of the world for Judaism, Christianity and Islam, you descend into cave-like cathedrals shared by many denominations

dancing on them. There's a Purim party happening in the 3,000-year-old Tower of David. It's an extraordinary cultural destination on an average day, but tonight is another level: masked revellers dance under ancient city fortifications as a light installation flashes over the walls, telling the 5,000-year-old story of the city. It also feels like a timeless celebration in a place that has been hosting festivities for millennia.

A visit to Jerusalem shows you layer upon layer and streets upon streets of history and culture. At the centre of the world for Judaism, Christianity and Islam, you descend into cave-like cathedrals shared by many denominations. The tomb of King David glows below the room where the Last Supper was held. A door from the Wailing Wall leads to the Arabic quarter of the old city, which bursts with another kind of life. And being here at Purim heightens the magic of the place.

At the annual street party in the Nachlaot neighbourhood, thousands of people in wild costumes take to the streets and DJs blare music into Gezer Square. The revellers party late into the night. The city crackles and pops. *Ad lo yada* truly is in full swing. **TW**