

Bar Shuka: A Taste of Israe

An unexpected restaurant find had writer Sandy Bornstein and her husband, Ira, coming back for more when they found two brothers making Israeli cuisine at Bar Shuka, within a lively hotel in Frankfurt.



Inside Bar Shuka on a busy evening.

Israel is home to a multitude of foreign-born nationalities. Jews from dozens of countries have mixed their native ingredients into the indigenous foods of the region resulting in an eclectic combination of flavors. Israeli born chefs have transported this delicious assortment of flavors to major cities around the world. In Frankfurt, I dined in an Israeli inspired restaurant owned by two Jewish brothers.

Bar Shuka is [located](#) on the ground level of **The Trip**, a [25Hours Hotel Company](#) location situated near the Central Train Station. The hotel opened in the summer of 2008. Ten years later, the structure was renovated, additional space was added including 76 rooms and, with the expansion, an innovative restaurant was opened by the Ardinast brothers.

About one-third of the hotel guests include breakfast with their hotel stay. The morning buffet is presented spanning several countertops and is sure to please the pickiest eater.

Bread lovers can ponder over an assortment of freshly baked items served with a variety of spreads. Containers of cereals along with a selection of nuts and fruits may appeal to others.



The plentiful bread selection at the breakfast buffet.

Protein lovers can choose from a handful of cheeses, smoked salmon, herring, and a few meat options. A barista prepares specialty coffees and oranges can be squeezed by hand to make a sweet, natural drink.

Behind the open cooking area, a chef customizes eggs or creates a taste of Israel with an order of **Shakshuka**. Instead of following the traditional skillet presentation, this version was served in a small covered container on a wooden board. This dish is sure to bring praises from anyone who loves a combination of eggs and a savory tomato-based sauce infused with vegetables and spices. If you want to avoid runny eggs, be sure to order your Shakshuka well done.



The classic egg dish, Shakshuka.

BAR SHUKA: ISRAELI CUISINE BY EVENING

The restaurant takes on a different character in the evening hours. An influx of locals gravitates to this trendy part of the city to indulge on Israeli cuisine. When the Ardinast brothers chose to open a restaurant with a Middle Eastern cuisine, they sought out one of Israel's elite chefs.

With an inherent love of Mediterranean cuisine, it didn't take much to sell me on a menu filled with fresh vegetables, Middle Eastern seasonings, olive oil, home baked bread, and several types of hummus. My husband, who sometimes prefers a meat-based diet, had plenty to choose from as well.

Not having had any time to eat on our first day in town, we were famished. Before ordering, we took time to review the English version of the menu on green paper that was conveniently divided into categories —appetizers/starters, meat entrees, fish entrees, vegetarian selections, and desserts inspired by a grandmother. Each item had a catchy name followed by a brief description. Within no time, we were chowing down on our starter, homemade **Tel Aviv focaccia with three dips**.



Focaccia and three dips at Bar Shuka.

Our charming waiter suggested that we try arak, a Middle Eastern version of ouzo, a strong, Greek alcoholic drink. As soon as the clear liquid touched the tip of my tongue, I tasted the recognizable licorice flavor. Gulps of water helped to equalize the burning sensation from this heavy-duty drink.

For the main course, I followed our waiter's recommendation and ordered **The Fish that Swims in the Red Sea Better Known as Chraime**. Only a handful of words described this delicious entrée—butter mackerel, red pepper, tomatoes, and sourdough bread. The entrée was infused with multiple layers of spices.



The Fish that Swims in the Red Sea Better Known as Chraime .

My husband, Ira, selected **This Dish is as Holy as its Name**. This Mediterranean specialty presented a Jerusalem kabob, tahini, grilled tomatoes, eggplant, pepperoncino, and a thick slice of sourdough bread, all on one plate.



The dish called "This Dish is as Holy as its Name."

With a bit of room left, we had to have our chocolate fix for the week. The **Triple Penetration Chocolate Massacre** satisfied our cravings. The white chocolate cake was enhanced with a combination of chocolate pudding, chocolate mousse, caramel sauce, and a few raspberries. A last minute order of a cappuccino became the finishing touch for a busy day.



With a name like “The Triple Penetration Chocolate Massacre,” it has to be intense.

BACK FOR MORE ISRAELI CUISINE AT BAR SHUKA

Our first experience was so favorable that we chose to return on our last evening in Frankfurt. After going non-stop for a few days, I didn’t have the energy to traipse out on a damp, cold evening to another place. It had been our initial plan to eat at a different restaurant, but we were hooked. Having a quality restaurant inside our hotel was a huge incentive to return.

But we didn’t anticipate a packed dining room in the middle of the week. We had to wait before we could be seated. Above the crowd, two neon signs displayed the word “friends” in both Hebrew and Arabic. The diverse groups sitting at the boisterous tables exemplified the commingling of different cultures.

This time, Ira tried what I had raved about two nights earlier. I ordered another vegetarian option, **Sabih Yourself in One Million Ways**. This potpourri of

Mediterranean flavors included the basics — crispy eggplant, mango puree, sliced hard-boiled egg, roasted baby potatoes, and sourdough bread. Once again, we were pleased with our choices. The dishes were perfectly seasoned and arrived right from the oven.

We took a gamble on **Kadaif** for dessert and had no complaints with this creative dessert. A busy dining room didn't affect our attentive service.



It's Kadaif for dessert on our last night in Frankfurt.

BONUS: GETTING TO KNOW THE OWNERS OF BAR SHUKA

After spending three days learning about the history of Frankfurt's Jewish community, I was interested in finding out more about two Jewish brothers who chose to open an

Israeli inspired restaurant in Germany. While waiting for our table, we had a brief conversation with one of the owners. The crowded restaurant made it difficult to hear everything. I followed up with a few written questions.

The Ardinast brothers' maternal and paternal grandparents were raised in Poland. During the Holocaust, both sets of grandparents were sent to different concentration camps. Their maternal grandfather met his wife in the Displaced Persons Camp at Straubing. Their paternal grandparents were in the Displaced Persons Camp at Bergen Belsen, where their father was born in 1947.

Their paternal grandparents relocated to the Jewish state in Palestine (now known as the modern State of Israel), while their maternal grandparents chose to stay in Germany. After the war, Germany was considered safer than Poland. The couple only spoke Yiddish and Polish. Shortly after that, they moved to the United States but eventually returned to Germany for health issues.

James and David were born and raised in Frankfurt. Neither brother recalls experiencing any anti-Semitism while growing up in Frankfurt. James stated, "It wasn't really an issue. Not more than it is today everywhere in the world."

Since their father is an Israeli, they have always felt connected to Israel even though they have never resided there.

Both James and David attended college abroad. James didn't want a long distance relationship, so he chose to return to Frankfurt to be with his girlfriend and ended up staying. David studied and worked in London until he accepted a job offer in Berlin. When James reflected on their respective moves back to Germany, he remarked, "I think it might be just as simple as Germany is part of our roots, it is home."

The brothers opened their first restaurant in 2003. They wanted to do their "own thing" by being self-employed. "Back then the restaurant scene in Frankfurt was pretty boring and we had the feeling that we could change something. We wanted to create our own world."

Today, they own three restaurants, two bars, and one espresso bar. All of these entities are located in Frankfurt. They are the type of owners who like to maintain a personal touch and not spread themselves too thin. To help others achieve their

dreams, they also manage a consultancy agency that creates useful concepts for people who live in other cities and countries.

Bar Shuka opened less than a year ago in the Fall of 2018, about a decade after the brothers were first approached by the 25Hour Hotel group. When asked about this arrangement, Sophia Reul, the Sales and Marketing Coordinator for The Trip hotel said, “25Hours wanted cooperation with the Ardinast brothers as they had established a name and a reputation for themselves in Frankfurt. Their concept fit both to the concept of the hotel and the NENI restaurants which are found in a few of our other hotels.”

James and David accepted the challenge of creating an international spot where people from all over the world could mingle with the locals. They chose an Israeli cuisine for Bar Shuka because it is “part of their roots and identity.” By working with an Israeli chef, they could guarantee an authentic cuisine. Yossi Elad, one of the founders of the restaurant Machneyuda in Jerusalem and the Palomar in London, was a perfect match. They met him during a mutual Pop Up project during the Jewish Cultural Days in October of 2017. Elad is someone who defines the new Tel Aviv cuisine.

Some of the menu items derived from family recipes. At lunch, their grandmother’s recipes for chicken liver and chicken schnitzel are a big hit. They also use their sous chef’s grandmother’s recipe for Knafe, also known as Straight Out of Nazareth.

While most of the Bar Shuka ingredients are locally sourced, some spices are imported from Israel. In May, a new sous chef will be joining them from Israel. There is a good chance that the chef will add a few items to the menu.

When looking back to 2003, just two years after his grandfather’s death, James recalled his grandfather’s words, “as long as I live nobody else in the family should go back into the restaurant business.” Now with several successful restaurant endeavors, James said, “I guess it runs in the blood.”

— Story by Sandy Bornstein. Photos by The Traveling Bornsteins

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Disclosure: Sandy and Ira Bornstein received a complimentary 3-night stay with breakfast at the 25Hours Hotel's The Trip hotel and a complimentary dinner at Bar Shuka restaurant. As with all professional writers, this did not influence their opinion about the hotel or the restaurant.



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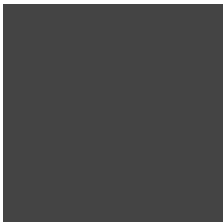
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