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A stew will do

Warm up with a hearty pot of meat and vegetables

out and about Catch the Aussie film festival at the Cinematheque ■ **tour Israel** Take the roundabout route from Jerusalem to Tel Aviv ■ **in season** Pair American pears with Asian steamed buns ■ **time out** Enjoy elegance at Jerusalem's Inbal Hotel ■ **lookin' good** Love the new looks for Valentine's Day

weekend

Making the most of your leisure time



Elegant and opulent

The Inbal Hotel in Jerusalem has the look and feel of cutting-edge comfort

By SHAWN RODGERS

Jerusalem's Inbal Hotel is a home away from home. The hotel has an elegant yet very approachable ambience, and the location is terrific – within walking distance of the Old City and the Western Wall.

The lobby is spacious and cozy, with a lot of plush seating. Everything feels opulent and sophisticated without being stuffy or pretentious.

When we arrived, the clerk at the reception desk was very friendly and checked us in quickly. However, since our room was not yet ready, we were invited to go up to the Executive Lounge on the ninth floor. It was one of the more impressive lounges I have frequented. There was a variety of couches and tables, as well as outdoor seating with panoramic views of Jerusalem and the Old City. Guests can unwind in the lounge and enjoy the delicious selection of snacks and beverages that includes wine, beer, sodas, fresh

fruit, cookies, salads and a selection of cheeses. The lounge is open from early in the morning to 10:30 p.m.

Over the past two years, the hotel has undergone considerable renovation of its rooms, suites and public areas by renowned Israeli architect Michael Schwartz. These include the upgraded La Romme Executive Suites on the top floors, with new carpeting, lighting and wallpaper adorning the corridors.

"The Inbal is a bespoke hotel, so it is important to make sure that our 'look' is always contemporary and that our renovations keep the Inbal cutting edge in luxury and comfort," says Alex Herman, vice president sales & marketing for the Inbal.

The hotel also took advantage of the upgrades to add a new room category, the Old City Suite, a spacious three-bedroom suite overlooking Old Jerusalem. Another renovated suite is the Corner Suite, with a stylish living room and bedroom and views of the Old City from three

perspectives. The Presidential Suite, the hotel's largest and most luxurious suite, has been fully redesigned, with three spacious rooms and a balcony. These suites are "an island of privacy and relaxation in the hotel," says Herman.

There are also the Family Suites, which accommodate two adults and two children. They include two interconnecting rooms with an outside door, as well as a master bath and a separate bathroom for the children.

We had the pleasure of experiencing one of the Executive Suites. Upon entering, there was an instant switching of gears from "wound up" to "unwound" before we even stopped to take a sip of the complimentary bottle of red wine that awaited us on the table. The suite is divided into two rooms, separated by a sliding door. One is the bedroom with an en-suite bathroom; the other is a small living room with a desk, sofa, table and chairs.

Spacious, clean, light, airy and comfortably furnished, the suite was more

than satisfactory, complete with complimentary fruit, macaroons and chocolate. There is also an electric kettle with tea and coffee and an espresso machine. And, of course, there is a plasma LED TV in every room.

As for the bathroom, I was delighted to discover all the Sabon amenities for hair and skin, as well as a separate shower and bath and plush white towels. The shower was by far my favorite thing about the remodel. The beautiful glass-enclosed marble shower was equipped with an overhead waterfall shower and a hand-held nozzle. It has been some time since I have savored a 30-minute shower, but I literally had to wrinkle like a raisin before finally getting out!

Fully satisfied but totally famished, we got dressed and went downstairs to have dinner at the hotel's restaurant. Located in the lobby, Sofia is a kosher Italian chef restaurant. The service was first class. We were immediately greeted by our waiter, who animatedly talked us through the wine list and the menu. The enticing dairy menu ranges from salads and soups to pasta and fish dishes. After we had a slew of delicious appetizers, our waiter recommended his two personal favorites – the sea bass fillet and the seared tuna steak. Both were done to perfection, tender and full of flavor, with the side dishes providing excellent accompaniment.

After the meal, we decided to call it a night and returned to our delightful suite. It is often difficult to fall asleep in a bed that is not your own, but these beds and, most importantly, the pillows, were extremely comfortable, and we slept soundly.

Our breakfast the next morning was also a treat. The buffet included designated areas for omelets and eggs, salads, smoked fish, shakshuka, cheese, freshly made waffles and a coffee station where waiters made cappuccinos and espressos to order.

All in all, it was a wonderful stay. We could not have been more pleased with the location or the services provided. The Inbal caters to guests with an appreciation for the finer things, and its prices reflect its target audience. It is the perfect place to relax, indulge and rejuvenate. ■

The writer was a guest of the Inbal Hotel. For more information about the Inbal, visit www.inbalhotel.com or call (02) 675-6666.

