

Inbal hotel goes big with new renovations

Iconic landmark completes major modern upgrade using Jerusalemite touch

The Jerusalem Post · 2 Dec 2018 · The writer was a guest of the hotel. • By BENJAMIN GLATT

Over the past decade, the Inbal Jerusalem in the capital's Talbiyeh neighborhood has been rated as the top hotel in the country. But with more boutique hotels popping up, the Inbal notwithstanding its superior reputation, was aging. Guests were looking for more modernity and luxury.



“The hotel has always improved itself over the years. This has always been of the utmost importance,” said the hotel’s general manager, Rony Timsit. “But we felt now was the time that we needed to go big.”

Timsit, an experienced hotelier who has managed some of the finest hotels in Israel and Western Europe, saw global tourism was changing.

A staple in Israel since its opening in 1982 as the Laromme, and a host to many dignitaries and VIP figures including former US president Bill Clinton, former secretary of state Condoleezza Rice and American megachurch Pastor John Hagee, the Inbal needed to respond to the demands of the fast-paced industry.

The hotel had two options. It could take its existing rooms and make them bigger by knocking down walls and renovating them as much possible within the limitations of architect Ya’acov Rechter’s design. Or it could add 52 new rooms on two

floors on the roof, which it would be able to design and build exactly the way it wanted.

Looking to integrate the ancient city with the present-day metropolis, the hotel hired architects Michael Schwartz and Associates to oversee the remake of the building, while Studio Michael Azoulay was responsible for the redesign of the interiors.

“We were looking for the Jerusalemite touch, and at the same time to give it a contemporary and modern look,” Timsit said.

When deciding how to improve, the hotel’s research showed that more and more of the regular guests were taking suites, and in general there was a higher demand for larger rooms.

“The clientele of these types of hotels are people who live in homes that are 300-400 sq.m. And then they come for Sukkot, and all of a sudden they have to stay in a suite that’s 40 sq.m. or a room that’s 25 sq.m. And this is considered a holiday?”

Before Sukkot, the Inbal completed its two-year, NIS 90 million renovation. It now offers a variety of spacious suites, including the family suite, Old City suite, premium courtyard suite, and royal suite. The most luxurious is the 110 sq.m. presidential suite. All include access to the Executive Lounge, an adults-only area on the top floor with complimentary snacks, a complete breakfast and a complimentary bar in line with the Inbal’s philosophy of giving the guests a luxurious experience.

All the rooms offer a wealth of opulent amenities and chic furnishings, generous spacious living rooms and elegant bedrooms with beautiful balconies offering stunning panoramic views of the Old City, the surrounding neighborhoods and the hotel’s charming courtyard. The hotel installed parquet floors in all rooms, allowing for a punctilious cleaning, and the deluxe, stylish and exceptionally large bathrooms, which feature a “wet area” in which the shower and bathtub are separated from the sink and toilet. The design integrates wooden ceilings, Jerusalem stone and classic Arab architectural elements, such as the mashrabiya window grills, along with Ethiopian artwork and hand-crafted vases.

Our stay there was a mixture of classic and contemporary, luxury and splendor – truly fitting for a city that has been the site of so much history, ancient and present, and yet is so alive and rife with spirit.

While the Inbal began planning the addition three years ago, the changes didn’t end there.

“We figured on the way, if we’re already making bigger rooms, we need to make serious renovations to the rest of the hotel as well,” Timsit said.

Being constantly at about 50% occupancy during the renovation period, the 331-room hotel used green-building methods to bring the building up to the level of a new one. For nine months, the hotel upgraded itself to become an earthquake-re-

sistant structure of the highest standard. Insulation was upgraded to protect against noise and cold, another generator was added, and two touchpad elevators installed for the new all-suite floors.

Many of the Inbal's regular guests, who according to Timsit mostly come from English-speaking countries, were used to the hotel's service and didn't want to go to another hotel. By completing the renovations in phases, guests were able to stay at the hotel during the construction with minimal inconvenience.

"We made sure during all this time to hide all the work so that the guests wouldn't suffer from the renovation," he said. That renovation involved completely gutting the hotel. The lobby was given a contemporary look while incorporating antique fabrics and textiles. The courtyard was rejuvenated, and the patio was given new life. "This is the heart of the hotel, and it was important that we make it more alive, that our guests would go out to use it more," Timsit said.

The hotel also significantly upgraded the bar, reflecting that many guests today are connoisseurs of fine wines and spirits. Similarly, the breakfast area, dining hall, kitchens, semi-Olympic-size swimming pool and one of the conference halls were all given a facelift. Smaller desks were placed in the lobby allowing for greater privacy in the check-in and check-out, and the state-of-the-art spa and massage rooms, which are some of the most active in the city, were also upgraded. Next the Inbal will open its kosher gourmet meat restaurant, called 02 Upbeat Jerusalem Cuisine. The name alludes to the capital's area code. With consultation with the chefs at Jerusalem's popular Mona and Anna restaurants, Timsit said the new establishment will offer classic Jerusalem and Israeli dishes with a twist, along with meat skewers, steaks and tenderloins.

In 1996, the iconic hotel decided to build suites, and it was a visionary move, Timsit said.

"The hotel has constantly proven that it has improved its product for the benefit of its clientele," he said. "We are people of action, not just theorists."