

Jerusalem Post [www.jpost.com](http://www.jpost.com) Hotel Yehuda and spa review

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In Jerusalem

## Relaxation and pampering in the Jerusalem hills

By Miriam Kresh

**The magic starts when you roll up to the entrance.**



The magic starts when you roll up to the entrance... and continues in the Y Spa, 'the hotel's temple of peace and bodily luxury.' (photo credit: Courtesy)

Once the Nine Days are over, fancy disconnecting from the stressful day-to-day and enjoying hours of peace in beautiful surroundings? What would you choose if offered the opportunity to detox in a sauna, enjoy an expert massage in a cloud of deliciously perfumed oils, or splash in a semi-Olympic pool surrounded by vistas of Jerusalem hillsides? Hard choice.

But you don't have to choose when you book at the Yehuda Spa Hotel in Jerusalem's Givat Masua neighborhood.

All of those options are open, and many others as well.

The magic starts when you roll up to the entrance.

Your first impression is of natural green and silver beauty, as the breeze sways olive, pine and palm trees on the terraced hills a little distance away. In the lobby, you see that all the windows open to a panorama of Jerusalem glimmering in the “wine-transparent air” of Naomi Shemer’s poem. It seems incredible that this exquisite small hotel in semi-rural surroundings is only a 10-minute drive away from the hustle and noise of Jerusalem’s central bus station.

I sat down with Hila Atari, deputy manager, to hear the hotel’s history.



“The building was originally an upscale hostel for Young Judea groups, under the auspices of the Hadassah organization,” she explained. “In 2010, a Canadian couple acquired the property, and renovated every room from scratch. The result was this hotel. We are actually the first hotel in Israel to have received accreditation under the European “Hotelstars” system, via Israel’s Tourism Ministry. Up until recently, Israeli hotels rated themselves as they pleased. To gain accreditation, we registered with the Hotelstars organization and began the process of upgrading in order to earn four stars. This requires 380 points. We had 543 points by the time we were ready to be investigated and rated. As of a year and a half ago, we now proudly claim a “4-star plus” rating.

“With the addition of our spa, we could apply for a five-star rating, but a superior four stars is enough. We don’t compete with the big hotels, and we don’t share their character. We have an intimate, boutique atmosphere, catering to discriminating customers at rates considered moderate.”

Atari enjoyed describing the hotel’s inter-personnel relationships. “We’re very involved with our employees.

For example, when three of our managers had babies during the last two months, we set aside an area as a nursery with a babysitter, to make their returning to work easier after maternity leave. We’re very much a family here.”

The human nature of the hotel is seen in other arenas as well, such as the management’s charitable activity.

“We invite 25 lone soldiers for the Friday night meal, every week. On holidays, we host 60 soldiers. We bring prepared food to needy people in the nearby Kiryat Menahem neighborhood, as well as

blankets and other essentials in winter. Local organizations for kids at risk, single parents and mentally challenged people receive a yearly free day of fun on the grounds and the pool, with lunch. On Passover night, we host a number of needy families for the Seder. The Council for a Beautiful Israel gave us an award for the hotel most active in the community. We didn't plan on it," Atari emphasizes. "It just happened."



The hotel also shows a high regard when it comes to the comfort of its disabled customers. The grounds and interior are wheelchair accessible, all showers have grip bars and anti-slip flooring, and there are four special rooms for people with mobility challenges as well as for the hearing and visually impaired.

Atari gave me a tour of the rooms, the facilities and the grounds. In midsummer, the fragrant garden and the pool area look particularly inviting. There are state-of-the-art conference rooms, a gym for grownups and a children's playground.

An amphitheater and an outdoor platform boast a spectacular view, and is a popular venue for outdoor weddings. The synagogue is home to four Torah scrolls and can hold 500 people.

The hotel also boasts a bar and shady outdoor patio for just lounging. All that and more can be viewed on the hotel's website.

But the most fascinating facility is the Y-Spa; the hotel's temple of peace and bodily luxury, which is located on the bottom floor.

The lighting is dim and the sound system plays soft music. A woman dressed in white clothes and turban appears like a genie and smiles a greeting. She's Nitzchiya, the masseuse. She directs me to the lockers, where a fluffy bathrobe and spa slippers, fragrant soap and a towel wait inside each one. I pass the dry and humid saunas and return to the treatment area, where there are four rooms with transparent walls. At the touch of a button, curtains slide across the walls and enclose those inside in complete privacy. One of the rooms contains a Jacuzzi and is described as the romantic room for couples' massage.



Nitzchiya offers me a choice of three fragrances, especially made by the Sabon company for the hotel. I choose a ginger/orange scent. About a dozen varieties of treatments are on offer, including one with hot rocks, but reporters are given the Swedish massage. I stretch out on the massage table, and give in to the gentle pummeling, pushing and pulling of Nitzchiya's capable hands. The trick is to stop thinking and simply let the body breathe. Soon enough, I drift off to a peaceful never-never land, emerging sometimes when Nitzchiya applies a hot towel to my head or to my normally aching back. After 50 minutes' treatment, I feel absolutely disembodied. Nitzchiya hands me a small goblet of icy mango sorbet, just the thing to bring me back to the real world.

I dress, rubbing the fragrant oil into my skin, and spend a while in the recuperation room. It's set up like a comfortable living room, with fruit and hot drinks. On my way upstairs for lunch in the restaurant, I notice there's an exit to the pool, where a couple of teenage girls are romping. Lunch was abundant and of standard hotel quality. Breakfasts are said to be especially good.

On being offered the use of a room until the evening, I promptly went upstairs and took a nap. The bed was firm and comfortable, with sheets extraordinarily fresh and inviting.

The Yehuda Spa Hotel offers many options. Favorites are a day of indulgence at the pool and spa, rooms for a family vacation, or an overnight couple's getaway. The hotel is minutes away from the Malha shopping mall, the Israel Museum and Bible Lands Museum, the Biblical Zoo, Yad VaShem, the Knesset and downtown Jerusalem. A tourist can walk her feet off all day, knowing that on her return, the friendliest, most solicitous service awaits her at the boutique Yehuda Spa Hotel.

*The Yehuda Spa Hotel  
1 Haim Kohniz Road  
Giv'at Masua, Jerusalem.  
(02) 632-2777, info@tyh.co.il, www.tyh.co.il*

*To reserve spa time: (02) 632-2906 or spa@tyh.co.il*