



Lisa Homburger on a visit to Tel Aviv. (Courtesy)

Tel Avivians have made headlines for flocking to Berlin, but are Berliners equally attracted to Tel Aviv?



Julia Papushado in Tel Aviv. (Courtesy)

Berliners in the Land of Milky and Honey

• By ORIT ARFA

Lisa Homburger, a 25-year-old dancer from Berlin, noticed her favorite German beverage, Club Mate, on the shelf of Berlin Salon, a Berlin-inspired pub off Allenby Street in Tel Aviv. Germans, she said, either love or hate this energy drink. “They don’t have it in many cities outside of Berlin,” she remarked, glad to have discovered another venue that served it. It is served only at the more hip bars. Homburger had not been to Berlin Salon before, nor had the two other Berliners, Eva (last name withheld), 32, and Julia Papushado, 30, who met with *Metro* at the Salon to talk about the attraction of Berliners to Tel Aviv. Upon entering the bar, Eva remarked how the joint was classic Berlin, with its

second-hand furniture, eclectic design and vintage decorative items. “Everything is a little old school because Berliners love nostalgia,” said Eva, who moved to Israel two years ago after first “falling in love” with the country in 2007. But she would have never sought out Berlin Salon. “I’m in Israel, so I want to mingle with Israelis. My husband is Israeli, most of my friends are Israeli, and I’m not keen on places that are like back home,” she said. The bar was founded by Nissim Malach, an Israeli of Greek and Hungarian descent who’s never been to Berlin but who foresaw eight years ago that the German metropolis would be the hippest – and one of the least expensive – European cities to be in. He wanted to open a place that captured that Berlin vibe and the low prices. The crowd that evening was visibly

Israeli, except for a German couple who discovered it because their vacation rental was nearby. Tel Avivian attraction to Berlin made headlines during last year’s Milky controversy when Israeli expats in Berlin bragged about Berlin’s low cost of living, infamously comparing the cost of chocolate pudding in Berlin (approximately NIS 1) to Israel’s Milky product (approximately NIS 4). In solidarity, Malach offered Milky at Berlin Salon for NIS 1.70. Milky has triggered a lot of talk about Tel Avivans flocking to Berlin, but are Berliners flocking to Tel Aviv? Is the attraction mutual? If so, what is the draw? The first place to check for answers was the 1,200-member Facebook group Germans in Israel. Judging from an informal survey, Berlin and Tel Aviv are indeed kindred cities. At the interview at the Berlin Salon, Eva, Homburger and Papushado offered the oft-cited reasons: the

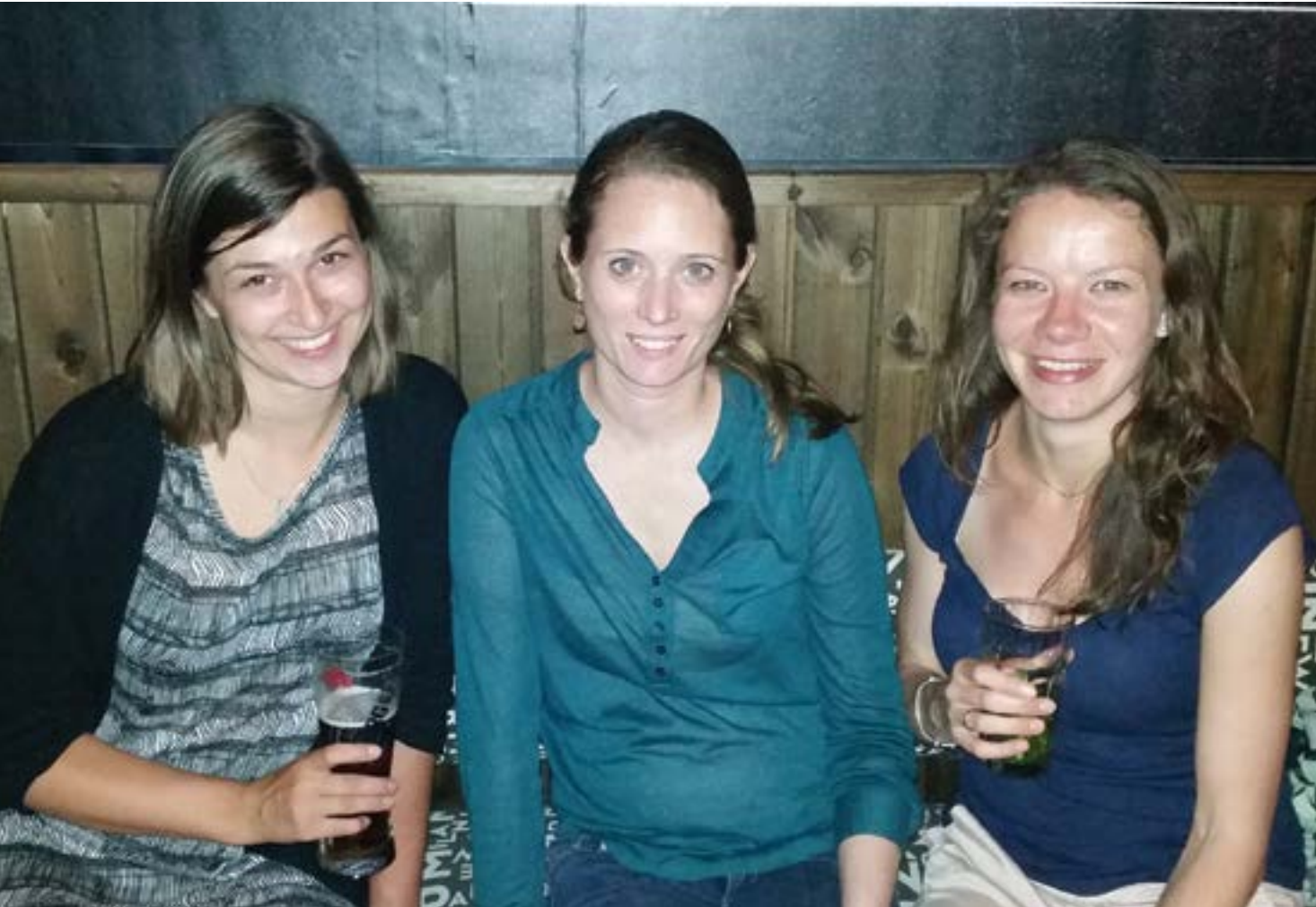
nightlife and party scene; the vanguard art and culture; the LGBT community; and the diversity. This month, the German gay lifestyle magazine *Mate* awarded Tel Aviv with the accolade “Place to Be.” But Tel Aviv has something Berlin doesn’t: the sea and sun, leading Homburger to dub Tel Aviv “Berlin by the sea.” Aesthetically, Israel’s “Hebrew City” has a distinctly German influence, with early Zionists having imported the German Bauhaus architecture style for which Tel Aviv is famous. The number of Berlin tourists and residents in Tel Aviv is hard to come by, especially since there is no organized Berliner community. Aside from Berlin Salon and the Bayern restaurant on Frishman Street, there’s no real hang-out for Germans who may want a taste of home, despite there being about 100,000 dual German-Israeli citizens and some 2,000

to 3,000 German expats living in Israel. According to the Tourism Ministry, Germany is the fourth-largest source country for incoming tourism to Israel, and the ministry is capitalizing on the Tel Aviv-Berlin connection. “Tel Aviv has become a well-known brand for Berliners and is seen as a very trendy destination,” said Uri Sharon, director of the Israeli Government Tourism office in Berlin. “The Tourism Ministry invests significant resources in promoting city breaks in Tel Aviv.” He added that Israeli vacations are more accessible thanks to the Open Skies policy, which has increased the frequency as well as reduced the cost of round-trip tickets, with more than 90 weekly flights through eight airports in Germany.

But Eva, Homburger and Papushado each first came to Israel at the invitation of an Israeli they met outside Israel, making “peer diplomacy” one of the most effective marketing campaigns. The summary of the story of Berliners who choose to live here is largely the same: “I came and fell in love.” HOMBURGER LEARNED about Israel through Israeli dance teachers in Berlin. She studied dance at the Hebrew University for her junior year abroad and then decided to move to Tel Aviv to advance her career in modern dance. “There are actually more jobs here than there are in Germany for the kind of dance I do,” she said. “Added to that, I fell in love with the country.” Papushado, who teaches German in Israel, came to live here with her Israeli husband. They met in Budapest while he was studying medicine. Israel always interested her, and it was their relationship and her desire to meet his family that triggered her first trip to the Jewish

homeland five years ago. “If I would be alone, it wouldn’t be my first choice, but I’m okay with it,” she said. “Tel Aviv started to grow on me a lot more. I see why people like it so much. I can see why it’s interesting, full of life – that life takes place on the street, for example.” Eva was first invited by her Israeli roommate from when she lived in Italy. “Tel Aviv’s very European,” said Eva. “It’s very Mediterranean. I lived in Brazil and Italy, but I didn’t see myself there because I always felt like a stranger. Here, people were very open, very warm, very embracing. It’s a very young city, very vibrant, and I also found the culture very interesting – the mix of different cultures coming together and forming a new society.” A similar sentiment was made by Thore Schröder, a journalist studying in ulpan who has returned many times to

Tel Aviv since being introduced to Israel by an Israeli friend of a friend. *Metro* met with him at a café on Pinsker Street. “A society that had to absorb people from all corners of the world works, and in spite of the difficulties and dangers it always faces, it works well. That’s what I would call the Israeli miracle,” he said. “That never ceases to amaze me.” German-Israeli marriages have brought both Schröder and Eva’s friends to Tel Aviv for weddings, some of whom also fell in love with the city and kept coming back. But Schröder and Eva said that reactions back home to their decision were mixed, from those who “understood” to those concerned about the periodic wars and violence in Israel. There are more practical reasons why more Israelis flock to Berlin than vice versa. Papushado’s husband has a European passport thanks to his German roots; his grandfather fled Germany in 1933. The option of dual citizenship among Jews with German roots makes it easier for Israelis to live and work in Germany, while Germans are subject to Israel’s strict visa laws (which some of the interviewees complained about; they’d love to stay here indefinitely). But for the Berliners who chose to live here, the attraction – the love – is multi-layered, and it persists through the notorious daily frustrations that have triggered the opposite migration: the high cost of living relative to the Israeli salary, the long work hours and the political turmoil. As for the mentality, Israeli chutzpah is actually a draw, as Berliners share that directness and assertiveness. “It’s not so much that we want to get away from something – apart from the winter probably – but we’re actually drawn to something,” Schröder said. He understands why Israelis might leave due to the high cost of living, offering the “beer index” by way of comparison. In Tel Aviv, beer alone is double the price. All agreed that day to day living is more expensive. Papushado and Homburger put groceries at about double the cost. For Homburger, rent and going out is double, Papushado puts rent at 50 percent more. “Friends from Germany who came to visit – and they have good paid jobs in Germany – were surprised how expensive the simple living costs are, meaning bread, milk, water and so on,” Papushado said. For now, Homburger supplements her work as a nanny with her savings. “It bothers me mostly when I want to meet with friends outside,” Homburger said. “In Berlin I’ll meet friends for a coffee in the afternoon or a drink at night almost every day. Here, I can’t afford to do that sadly, at least not as often.” But this doesn’t want to make her go back. “I still hope I’ll earn a little more once I get a job as a dancer so I’ll also be able to afford more coffee,” she joked. Rarely was Germany’s turbulent history with the Jewish people – including its better days when Jewish life thrived in Germany – initially cited as a reason for the draw. “It’s one of the layers,” said Schröder,



Lisa Homburger, Eva, and Julia Papushado at the Berlin Salon bar. (Orit Arfa)

“When you first come to Israel as a German, you’re very worried about the past and how you’re perceived. But of course it didn’t play a role. I was received very warmly
– Thore Schröder”

who participated in a German-Israeli exchange program for journalists before deciding to leave his full-time job at a newspaper in Berlin to live here. “It makes the relationship interesting, maybe subconsciously. It’s not like I come here because I want to make up for the mistakes of my forefathers. It’s something I discussed with a German woman who’s been here for decades. She says it’s part of it, and I believe it’s so.”

In German schools, Holocaust studies make up a core part of the history curriculum, although, according to Eva, they don’t systematically study about Zionism and modern Israel.

“I try to see the new Israel and have a fresh view on things, even though it’s always in the back of our mind and I’m very aware of it. And, of course, I went to Yad Vashem at a certain point, but it wasn’t the main issue,” she said.

She believes that the majority of young Germans deeply recognize and regret Nazi atrocities while eschewing personal blame for what happened before they were even born. Still, as Eva and Papushado related, sometimes during encounters with Israelis, the dark German past is an “elephant in the room.”

“Sometimes this topic of history and especially German history is a huge baggage, and you feel this responsibility,” Papushado said. “It’s there, and it’s also there for our generation. But I think the question is how to deal with this responsibility. It’s not a responsibility of apologizing and going around saying, ‘I’m

sorry.’ That’s not the idea. But what I see as my responsibility is of remembering that this should not happen again.”

THE HOLOCAUST sometimes played a role in their decision to visit – but for a different reason. Eva and Schröder, for example, were concerned that they’d be stigmatized for being Germans.

“When I came to Israel for the first time, I thought I was not supposed to say I was from Germany because people would react in a negative way,” Eva said. “I tried to hide it at first until I un-

derstood that nowadays it’s something completely normal. Their first thought isn’t the Holocaust. Their first thought is ‘Oh, Berlin, Milky.’”

Schröder’s concerns, too, were unfounded.

“When you first come to Israel as a German, you’re very worried about the past and how you’re perceived. But of course it didn’t play a role. I was received very warmly, I guess,” he said.

Papushado recalled a very uncomfortable encounter when a stand-up comedian made jokes about Jews and Hitler, to audience laughter, after she revealed in an audience Q&A that she was from Germany.

“I didn’t know whether to laugh or cry,” she said. “We’re not allowed to laugh about it. We can’t. But here, the culture of remembering and dealing with it is completely weird.”

Speaking via Skype, Kristina Frick, 35, a photographer and journalist who lives in Berlin, said she first came to Tel Aviv three years ago at the invitation of an Israeli she met in Berlin.

“I love Tel Aviv,” she said, citing the usual Tel Aviv virtues (or seductive vices): the parties, the sea and sun, the youthful vibe, the open-mindedness.

German-Jewish history did not play a conscious role in her attraction, although she was pleasantly surprised when, on her first night in Tel Aviv, she saw a multilingual play called *Third Generation* about the “Gordian knot” among young Israelis, Germans and Palestinians.

“It was fascinating to be in Israel for

the first time to hear a play in German and to have that topic discussed the first night I was here,” she said.

One moment made very tangible the tragedy of her country’s past treatment of the Jews. One day, she said, she overheard Yiddish being spoken at a Tel Aviv café, which made her wonder about and mourn over the Jewish life that could have been in Germany.

“I’m seeing what maybe once was before the war and what is missing now and what the Germans killed, really,” said Frick.

This year, Israel and Germany will be celebrating 50 years of German-Israel diplomatic relations, which have been marked by exchange programs in education, commerce and culture. Tel Aviv as a city stands on its own as a tourist attraction for Berliners – as does New York or London – but the unique German-Israeli relationship, cognizant of the past, has made the option of traveling to Israel – and Tel Aviv – more accessible.

“I think it partly has something to do with the history we have with the Jews, not in the way of guilt, but that Israel is even on the radar of Germans,” Homburger said. “Germans like to travel and explore. I feel that Israel is a great place to do that.”

For Frick, it wouldn’t necessarily matter that Tel Aviv was founded by Jews. Asked if she’d still love Tel Aviv if it were composed of, say, Buddhists, she answered, “I think so. Yes.”

For Eva, the higher cost of living is well worth it all. “I feel more at home here than in Berlin, and that is priceless.”



Advertising Tel Aviv to German speakers. (Courtesy Tourism Ministry)

דאָס איז אַ פּאַט
פאַר אַ פּאַט

Love
between two
and four

Dozens of cats and dogs
are waiting for you to take them home
Come to adoption days at SOS Pets!
Every Friday in Ramat Aviv from 11:00-15:00
Every Saturday in Kfar Shmaryahu from 10:00-14:00
It is also possible to adopt by phone during the week.
Visit our website to view dogs and cats available for adoption.
Look us up on F - and -
office@sospets.co.il | sospets.co.il | Tel: 03-7441010