

enter a virtual one with the help of special virtual-reality glasses. The gadgets you will see and the worlds you will enter will astonish you.

The Makers Area: Everyday people show off their inventions and ideas. Your kids will definitely be inspired to take their dreams and develop them.

Now you can see why it is worth spending six hours at the Geek PicNic with your family this Passover.

Wurtman was excited to describe the extra benefits of hosting this amazing event in Israel. "I have seen relationships between the international presenters and the local Israeli companies and academics grow into productive networking opportunities," he says.

A family festival that can encourage the Russian Space Program to speak to Space IL is pretty incredible. Wurtman is very thankful to have major strategic partners such as the Jerusalem Development Authority, the Jerusalem Municipality, The Hebrew University and Moscow University working together with him on this project. He hopes it will become an annual event as the hi-tech ecosystem in Jerusalem continues to expand.

The founders of Geek PicNic have a long-term strategic development plan for the Geek PicNic to spread across the world. As the Start-Up Nation, Israel was the clear choice for the growth of the Geek PicNic concept, and Jerusalem Mayor Nir Barkat was thrilled to host it.

Wurtman expects 15,000 people to come each day, and he has already sold more than 40 percent of the tickets.

Do you or one of your kids want to volunteer at this event? Teens and students are invited to get in touch with Wurtman to join the event in the fields of

technology, art or science. This will be a great opportunity to interact with some of the smartest minds in Israel. Go to info@geekpicnic.co.il.

The Jerusalem Geek PicNic is a festival that mixes technology, tourism and academia in Israel. It is an event for everyone – secular, religious, Jerusalemites, Israelis from outside Jerusalem and tourists.

Dates: April 25, 26, 27
PicNic times: 9 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. and 4 p.m. to 10 p.m.

Special FJJ ticket prices: Go to www.funinjerusalem.com/geekpicnic

Family ticket: NIS 374 (two adults, two kids). Extra child NIS 54

Adult: NIS 124

Child: NIS 104

Regular ticket prices:

Family ticket: NIS 444 (two adults, two kids)

Adult: NIS 144

Child: NIS 114 (ages 5+)

The writer is the founder of Fun In Jerusalem (www.funinjerusalem.com). She lives in the capital with her husband and three kids and loves to inspire family fun. joanna@funinjerusalem.com

Geeky facts about the Jerusalem Geek PicNic:

- 40,000 square meters
- 25 robots from overseas
- 150 performances
- 150 superheroes
- 50 international speakers and presentations (Russia, US, UK, France)
- 40 VR/AR experiences
- 30 3D printers
- 25 international gadget start-ups
- 20 labs
- 4 stages
- 45,000 visitors in three intensive days



Hand of Man: The 'car crusher' can be controlled by a special glove worn by human hands.

Battle of the Apples

A new faux 'Apple' store pledges to bring cheaper prices and better service to Tel Aviv

• By ORIT ARFA

A new faux "Apple" store, iShare, inspired by the friendly and chic style and purported quality customer service of official Apple Stores, has opened up in the high-end Reviyat compound in Florentin – the second in a chain that aspires to go nationwide (the first being in Petah Tikva).

The store is slated to increase options for those who have caught the Apple bug in a country that has no official Apple Stores.

While the level of customer satisfaction remains to be determined at this new branch, it already mimics some of the features of the famed Apple Stores, which follow the design of Apple products: sleek, aesthetic, and easy to use and access. This retail compound in south Tel Aviv was chosen for the ample space it offers, leaving room for high-table displays and a cushioned seating corner.

"We still don't have an Apple Store in Israel, but we're coming to bring the Apple consumer experience here," said Yoav Bar Maoz, the Tel Aviv store manager, at the press conference ahead of the March 20 opening. He has noticed that the popularity of the iPhone has triggered more interest in Apple computers as well, with Macbooks more ubiquitous in Tel Aviv cafes.

iShare pledges to offer the most competitive local prices for Apple products, and a cursory comparison shows that, so far, it lives up to that pledge.

Take the iPhone 6s, offered in 16, 64, and 128 MB of memory. iShare's prices are as follows, respectively: NIS 3,299, NIS 3,699, and NIS 4,849. At iDigital, the official Apple reseller in Israel, costs are: NIS 3,799, NIS 4,399, and NIS 4,959. As for an 11-inch Macbook air, the iShare price starts at NIS 4,799 compared to iDigital's NIS 5,155. That's an approximate NIS 400 difference across most of these products.

But nothing beats American Apple retailers. The online Apple store offers the iPhone 6s versions for \$649 (NIS 2,500), \$749 (NIS 2,900), and \$849 (NIS 3,270) and the Macbook Air for \$899 (NIS 3,470) (not including sales tax). That's savings of about NIS 1,300 to NIS 1,700 per product over the iDigital prices.

Why are Apple products so much more expensive in Israel? According to Aaron Goldhammer, a former consumer electronics trader in Israel who dabbles in fixing Macbooks, Israel charges 17 percent VAT for computers, and cellphones are taxed an additional 15 percent import duty. Add to that the retail mark-up, which iShare said it has kept to a minimum to ensure its competitive prices. Goldhammer recommends that purchases be made in duty-free zones to knock out the VAT, such as in Eilat or at Ben-Gurion Airport.

As for service, iShare honors warranties only for products purchased directly from its store. That means people who purchased Apple products anywhere in the world will have to opt for iDigital for warranty service, which, according to one die-hard Apple fan and user, lacks efficient customer responsiveness.

Brian Thomas, an immigrant from the UK who now lives in Tel Aviv, felt so frustrated with his ex-



Checking out the new iShare store in Florentin. (Orit Arfa)

perience getting his Macbook fixed at iDigital that he penned an article on the Israelicallycool blog titled "Israel's Apple Users Deserve Better than iDigital." His goal was to spur improvements in Apple customer care in Israel. (The piece elicited a courtesy call from an Apple company representative.)

In the article, he explained how his 2013 MacBook's graphic card experienced a known issue that made the model subject to a recall. Since the machine was no longer under a warranty (and even though it was subject to a recall), it would have cost him \$500 to fix and an additional NIS 150 diagnostic fee (which he refused to pay, since he wasn't told about it up front). Thomas instead opted to send his MacBook to his sister in New York where it was fixed free of charge in just two days at the Apple Store in Grand Central Station.

Given that Apple has invested more than \$1 billion in R&D in Israel, with a fancy Apple office built in Herzliya last year, Thomas wondered why servicing an Apple product in Israel was such a hassle. Some talkbackers on his article sympathized with his experience.

But an immigrant from New York who responded to a crowdsourcing call on Facebook regarding Apple Israel experiences was pleased with her experience with iDigital.

"I bought my iMac in the USA and brought it on the Nefesh b'Nefesh charter plane," said Bracha. "I purchased the three-year warranty. It came in handy entering the third year. iDigital serviced the computer professionally and effectively."

iDigital wasn't available to answer questions at press time but confirmed that iDigital is the only authorized Apple reseller in Israel bound to Apple standards. All other stores that add an "i" to their name to reflect an Apple association are unofficial distributors.

A sales rep at the spacious iDigital store in Dizengoff Center, speaking to this reporter as a consumer, said that cell phones are subject to regulations by the Ministry of Tourism and that the store cannot honor warranties for American iPhones, since they are made from different parts than their European counterparts.

According to Israeli Apple users interviewed, for "once-you-go-Mac-you-never-go-back" people, waiting for a trip abroad is probably the most cost-effective option, even if the machine cannot always get serviced locally. In fact, the savings on an iPhone pretty much amounts to a flight to Europe.