



Preservation, Renovation and Accessibility project of the Tower of David in Jerusalem

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Background

The Tower of David Museum is housed in the ancient and beautifully preserved Jerusalem Citadel named 'Tower of David'. The citadel is located near the Jaffa Gate, at the main entrance to the Old City and its four quarters, at the meeting point between the Old City and modern Jerusalem.

The Jerusalem citadel is an architectural and archeological gem that presents a sequence of testimonies to the city's fortifications from the biblical period to the present day. The earliest remains in the citadel are from the eighth century BC, the

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reign of King Hezekiah. The Hasmoneans then built fortified watchtowers on site and King Herod built his magnificent palace here. Evidence from the Byzantine period tells of residence of monks in the area, and during the early Muslim period an impressive fortress was built, which was upgraded during the Middle Ages by the Crusaders and Mamluks. The last to build the walls of the citadel and glorify it were the Ottomans who ruled the city from the 16th century.

history of Jerusalem

The entry of General Allenby into the city in 1917 marked a new era for the citadel as well. Like the city itself, it underwent a process of preservation and restoration prior to its opening as a museum and center for cultural events from 1921 until the 1940s. Between the War of Independence and the Six Day War, the Jordanians ruled the Old City and the Legion soldiers occupied the citadel, on the 'urban line' - the border line that crossed the city.

After the unification of the city in 1967, the then mayor, Teddy Kollek, decided to turn the citadel into the home of a historical museum for the city of Jerusalem. To this end, archeological excavations were carried out at the site and in its vicinity, as well as extensive preservation and restoration operations. The castle's guard rooms have been restored and adapted to serve as exhibition spaces of the museum's permanent exhibition ; along the walls of the citadel, two promenades were set up that allow spectacular views of the city ; in the archeological garden in the courtyard of the citadel, walking trails were prepared for the visitors' enjoyment. All of this was done while adhering to preservation procedures and the development of a local architectural preservation language designed to ensure the unique character of the Jerusalem citadel. The planning team was headed by architect Ari Avrahami, whose work served as an example and role model for the preservation of other heritage buildings in Israel and abroad.

Simultaneously with the restoration of the structure, a professional team led by the museum's director Uri Abramson and the archaeologist curator Rene Sivan worked on preparing the permanent exhibit of the history of Jerusalem as an interpretive exhibition, not based on a collection of authentic exhibits but rather presenting the story of the city using a variety of media and illustration means. In April 1989, the museum was opened to the public and gained great success and popularity among Israeli and tourist visitors alike.

From its opening to the public until today, for over three decades, the Tower of David has been visited by millions of visitors from all over the world, children, teenagers and adults alike. In addition to the permanent exhibition, the museum has hosted changing exhibitions, groundbreaking cultural and art events, festivals and concerts, educational activities and guided tours, and spectacular night performances projected every evening on the citadel's walls, providing an extraordinary multi-sensory experience.

Accessibility of the Tower of David Museum

Being a structure intended for protection, the Jerusalem Citadel is built of five high guard towers, inter-connected by colossal walls.

In the best tradition of building forts, the fortress has winding and narrow secret passages, a deep moat surrounds it, entrance bridges, a system of gates and vaults. It was built from the start to prevent the possibility of access and intrusion. At the underground level are the original cisterns of the fortress for collecting runoff

water and ancient underground halls that were exposed during the excavations. All of these create a spectacular and impressive multi-level complex, built of hewn stones from different periods and is very challenging for its visitors. A tour in the Tower of David requires climbing high and narrow stairs, walking on arched stones, passing through sloping and narrow tunnels and descending into dark cisterns. A special experience that is undoubtedly fascinating, but very far from being accessible to many audiences.

During the restoration project, when the citadel was being prepared to serve as a museum, only partial solutions were implemented for the visitors with disabilities. It is likely that public awareness of the issue of accessibility was then only in its infancy, the technological solutions were also few and it is possible that the tensions between the conservation constraints and the required development needs were quite complex and therefore most of the citadel complexes remained inaccessible.



Photo: Ariel Manor, Pikiwiki

Few wheelchair or platform lifts, which have been installed on the stairs, have constituted for a long time a single solution for those who had difficulty moving around or walking.

However, the museum's display, designed by London designer James Gardner and considered innovative and groundbreaking for its time, contained three-dimensional models, stylish reliefs and replicas of archeological finds, which allowed people with disabilities, unlike the customary in most museums, free touch and the experience of hand feeling and illustration that have turned the Tower of David into a sought-after museum for audiences with special needs.

The Tower of David opens its gates - to everyone

In recent years, and especially since the Accessibility Law came into force, the museum has sought to expand its activities and open its gates to the general public, including populations with special needs.

At the basis of this decision lay the museum's vision, according to which every person has the right to know, enjoy and be moved by the historical heritage, the beauty and uniqueness of the place and the enormous cultural richness that lies between the citadel stones and the story of Jerusalem, and we must make every effort to enable every person whoever he is the experience of visiting the site.



Photo: Riki Rozman

In order to achieve these goals, we first had to learn and get to know in depth the challenges we were facing, which included not only finding solutions for physical accessibility, but adapting the entire activity to a variety of populations with special needs, while training the entire museum staff for the task.

With the help of the museum's accessibility consultant, Dr. Avi Ramot, an accessibility coordinator was appointed for the museum, who built the activity plan and coordinated the relationship with the various organizations.

Consequently, a new activity outline was developed for families – 'Let's meet in the tower' - which allowed families with children with special needs about ten concentrated days of activity a year tailored only for them, in areas of the citadel that were inspected and adjusted as fully accessible. It turned out that the families preferred to spend time together with similar families, when the museum is open only to them and they can arrive without shame, embarrassment or apprehension. In light of the success of these days of activity, other museums in Jerusalem have also initiated special days of activity.

At the same time, the museum established a forum of professionals and Jerusalem institutions for information sharing, consultation and learning, which met about four times a year and dealt with various aspects and promoting accessibility in museums in Jerusalem. In addition, the museum's innovation lab has been

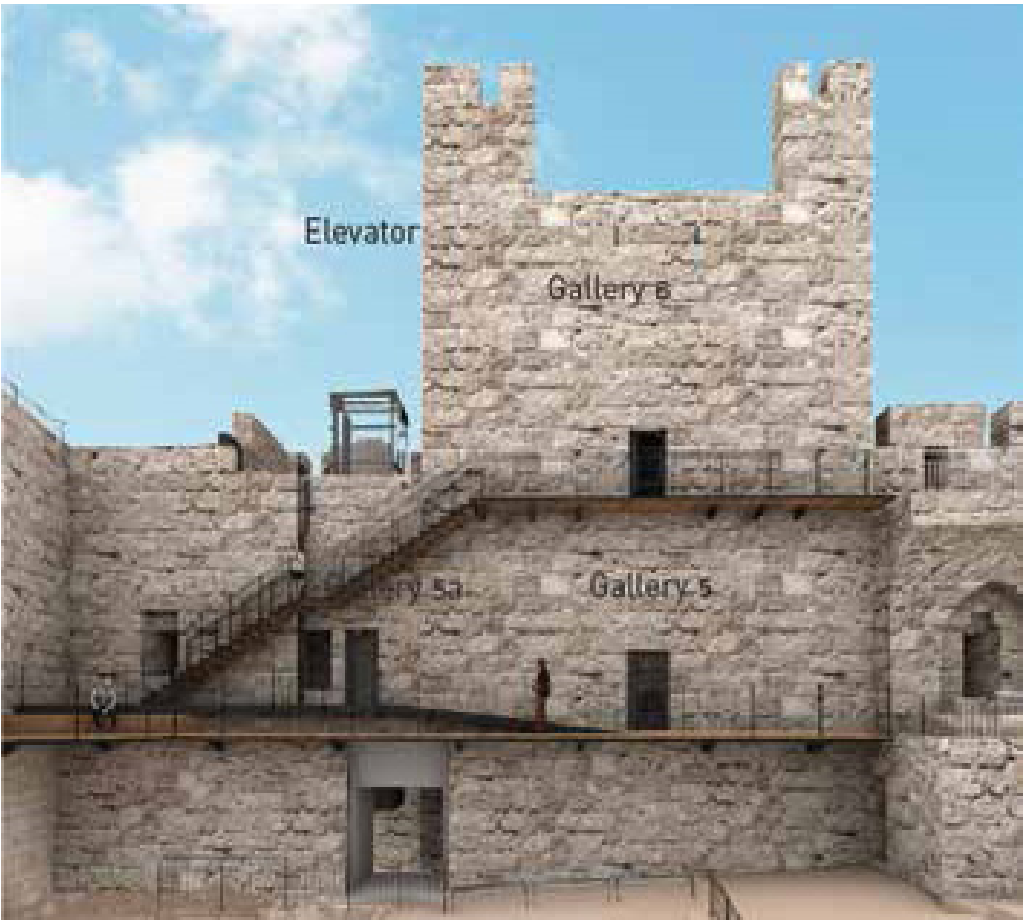
developing audio solutions and audio description solution for people with sensory impairments, as an accessibility solution for the night shows, and other innovative technologies have been tried to improve the visitors' experience. For this activity, the museum received the Israel Accessibility Award for 2018.

Accessibility in the Preservation and Renovation Project of the Tower of David 2022

For the past three years, a preservation and renovation project has been planned at the Tower of David Museum. After more than thirty years of extensive and successful activity, a renovation of the permanent display is required, which has become obsolete over the years. There is a need to renew the physical infrastructure, and of course a significant improvement in the accessibility conditions of the site is required.

Along with the desire and challenge to continue to preserve the uniqueness of Jerusalem Citadel, being one of the most beautiful and important archeological sites in the world, there is a growing understanding that there is need for open-mindedness in finding accessibility solutions also for unique sites of this type, for visitors from Israel and the world.

As mentioned, the need for accessibility is expressed also in adapting the future display and the entire information to the variety of disabilities, and in creative thinking about integrating appropriate technology in the service of display and illustration solutions.



Planned elevator – east. Imaging: Kimmel-Eshkolot Office

The museum's current renovation project is led by the firm of architects – Kimmel - Eshkolot. The display is designed by Hanan and Tal de- Lange and the curator Tal Kubo. Together with the Project's accessibility and preservation consultants and the Israel Antiquities Authority, which has been accompanying the planning since its inception, the proposed solution has been discussed and for the first time the levels of the citadel will be accessed by means of two elevators – the one near the western entrance will lead to the Museum's main display level, and the second, on the eastern wall leading to the galleries on the upper level of the citadel. Another proposed elevator – to the observation point at the top of the Phasael Tower - was not approved for execution by the Israel Antiquities Authority. The planning team is still examining possible alternatives and solutions to make the most beautiful lookout in Jerusalem accessible.



Planned elevator – west. Imaging: Kimmel-Eshkolot Office

Apart from elevators, accessibility will be improved on all paths and passages of the citadel, by lowering and straightening paths and passages, cutting curved and protruding stones, adapting handholds and other means. The challenge facing the planning team is to maintain the uniqueness and character of the site on the one hand, as against the need for accessibility and improvement of the experience for the visitors on the other.

The process of preserving the renovation of the Tower of David in Jerusalem was made possible thanks to the significant contribution of Ms. Vivien Duffield Clore and the Clore Israel Foundation, as well as the support of the Jerusalem Municipality and the Mayor Mr. Moshe Leon, the Ministry of Tourism, Ministry of Jerusalem and Heritage and Jerusalem Development Authority.

These days, in the midst of the corona crisis, the implementation phase of the project has begun, which will last about two years. We hope that with the opening of the renovated museum to the public at the beginning of 2022, visitors and tourists will return to Jerusalem and be able to visit a restored, renovated and accessible site.



Photo: Riki Rozman