

= Zion Square =

Zion Square ( Hebrew : תּוֹרֵן תְּצִיּוֹן , Kikar Tziyon ) is a public square in West Jerusalem , Israel , located at the intersection of Jaffa Road , Ben Yehuda Street , Herbert Samuel Street , and Yoel Moshe Salomon Street .

The square is one of the vertices of the Downtown Triangle commercial district . Since the British Mandate era , Zion Square has been the focal point of the cultural life of downtown Jerusalem . The square is busy day and night with tourists , elderly immigrants , overseas students , local youth , street performers , and religious activists . In recent decades , the square has become a hangout for disaffected and homeless youth .

From the 1930s to 2011 , the square was a popular site for mass protests and demonstrations . Zion Square was also the site of several Palestinian terrorist attacks and a 2012 assault on Palestinian youths by a group of Jewish youths .

= = Name = =

The square , originally called Zion Circus , was named for the Zion Cinema ( also called Zion Hall ) , a 400 @-@ seat silent movie house which occupied a hut on the site from 1912 to 1920 . After the hut collapsed under a heavy snowfall , the cinema was reconstructed as a 600 @-@ seat theater for film screenings and live opera performances .

= = History = =

The land on which Zion Square and the Downtown Triangle lies was purchased by the Jewish Colonization Association from the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate , which began selling off some of its holdings in Jerusalem after World War I. Mandate officials developed the field into a triangular district bordered by Jaffa Road , Ben Yehuda Street ( constructed by the British in 1922 ) and King George Street ( constructed by the British in 1924 ) . Zion Square was also designed by the British as a roundabout .

The popularity of the films , operas , plays , concerts and lectures presented at the Zion Cinema turned Zion Square into the ? center of cultural life in Jerusalem ? in the 1920s and 1930s . Movie- and theater @-@ goers gravitated between the cinema and the many cafes and coffee houses in the Downtown Triangle ; two of the popular cafes were located in Zion Square itself : the Vienna Cafe and the Europa Cafe .

= = = Political demonstrations = = =

Zion Square became a rallying point for political demonstrations and social protests beginning in the 1930s , when young Zionists held rallies here . From the 1950s to the 2000s , primarily right @-@ wing demonstrations were staged here . Several demonstrations turned violent , such as a 1971 protest by the Israeli Black Panthers in which Prime Minister Golda Meir was burned in effigy , and a 1995 protest against Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin and the signing of the Taba Agreement ( Oslo II ) , after which thousands of protesters continued on to the Knesset , destroying property en route . The largest demonstrations in the square included a May 2000 protest decrying the handover of Arab settlements adjacent to the Mount of Olives , a November 2000 protest against Ehud Barak 's " policy of restraint " at the beginning of the Second Intifada , and a 2006 protest against the policies of acting prime minister Ehud Olmert , each of which drew around an estimated 100 @,@ 000 people .

With the opening of the Jerusalem Light Rail on Jaffa Road in August 2011 , Jerusalem police stopped issuing permits for demonstrations in Zion Square to avoid the disruption of light @-@ rail operations .

= = = Terrorist attacks = = =

The Zion Cinema was the site of two attempted bombings , one in 1951 and the other in 1967 . In both cases , an incendiary device was planted under the theater seats and was discovered before it detonated .

On July 4 , 1975 , a refrigerator loaded with 5 kilograms ( 11 lb ) of explosives detonated in Zion Square , killing 15 and wounding 77 . At the time , the attack was the deadliest ever against Israeli citizens by a booby @-@ trapped bomb . On March 24 , 1979 , a bomb exploded in a garbage can in Zion Square , killing one and wounding 13 .

On the night of August 16 ? 17 , 2012 , dozens of Jewish teens chased four Palestinian teens in Zion Square and beat one of them unconscious , in what Israeli police and witnesses described as an attempted lynching .

= = = Decline and redevelopment = = =

Following the reunification of Jerusalem in 1967 , the city embarked on significant expansion . Large commercial centers were opened in the new , outlying neighborhoods of Talpiot , Givat Shaul , and Malha , weaning customers away from the city center . Government offices began moving out as well , precipitating the economic decline of the Downtown Triangle in the 1970s . The advent of television precipitated the closure of most of the Triangle 's cinemas . The Zion Cinema closed in 1972 and was demolished . In its place , a high @-@ rise building containing the Kikar Zion Hotel ( on the upper floors ) and a branch of Bank Hapoalim ( on the lower floors ) was erected .

In 1983 Zion Square was converted into a pedestrian promenade along with Ben Yehuda Street and other streets in the Downtown Triangle in a successful effort to revitalize the downtown district .

In 2006 the Jerusalem Foundation floated a secret proposal to rename the square Rapaport Plaza , after a Waco , Texas philanthropist who pledged \$ 2 million toward the square 's renovation . Architect Ron Arad of London was hired and presented a plan to install a towering , red , reflective steel sculpture as a focal point for the square . The plan , which was not reported to the public , was spotted on the Jerusalem Foundation website and brought to public attention by Lemallah , a grassroots citizens watch group , which launched a successful public protest against the name change and the sculpture . At the same time , Lemallah produced its own counterproposal for a round , six @-@ sided , steel " peace dome " to span the square and Jaffa Road . That idea , too , did not come to fruition .

= = Street scene = =

Zion Square is busy day and night as a meeting place and hangout for people from all walks of life , including tourists , elderly immigrants , seminary students , street performers , and Chabad and Breslov activists . Zion Square has been described as " always crowded , always crazy " .

The square is a hangout for drug users . An estimated 70 percent of teenagers who hang out in the square take drugs . The open , street @-@ level basement of the Kikar Zion Hotel is a well @-@ known haunt for both drug dealers and prostitutes .

School dropouts , disaffected religious immigrant teens , and homeless youth are also fixtures in the square . Street workers have identified large groups of Russian immigrant youth hanging out in the square and drinking vodka purchased with money panhandled off tourists . The square also attracts sizable numbers of settlement youth uprooted by the 2005 Israeli disengagement from Gaza . To reach out to at @-@ risk and disaffected " square dwellers " , several drop @-@ in centers operate in the vicinity of Zion Square , including Crossroads , Hameshulash , Hezroni 's Squat , and The Zone . The ELEM ? Youth Distress in Israel organization brings a mobile unit to Zion Square on weeknights to engage street youth in art projects .

= = Landmarks = =

Zion Cinema was the central landmark of Zion Square from the 1920s until its closure in 1972 .

Located on the south side of Zion Square , it was originally a 400 @-@ seat silent @-@ movie hut and , after snowfall destroyed the structure , was rebuilt into a 600 @-@ seat theatre that staged plays , concerts , lectures , and films . In the 1920s and 1930s the Zion Cinema was the cultural center of Jerusalem . After its closure , the building was demolished and a high @-@ rise containing the Kikar Zion Hotel and a branch of Bank HaPoalim was erected in its place . In 2013 the 117 @-@ room hotel was purchased by Orchid Hotel Management Ltd . , which is renovating the property for reopening as the Herbert Samuel Hotel . The hotel will have 137 rooms and suites , and a kosher rooftop restaurant with a 360 @-@ degree panoramic view .

Hamashbir Lazarchan , a seven @-@ story , 5 @,@ 000 square metres ( 54 @,@ 000 sq ft ) department store that opened on the east side of Zion Square in 2011 , is the largest department store in Israel and the flagship store of the 38 @-@ store chain . The store was originally established in 1947 on the opposite side of Jaffa Road , and moved to a location near King George and Ben Yehuda Streets from 1970 to 2010 .

On the north side of Zion Square stands the Jerusalem Hostel . This lodging opened as the Tel Aviv Hotel in 1926 and later became known as the Ron Hotel . Menachem Begin stood on one of the hotel 's balconies on August 3 , 1948 , to announce the dissolution of the Irgun and the sign @-@ up of his soldiers with the Israel Defense Forces .

On the west side of Zion Square stands the Sansur Building , erected in 1929 . This three @-@ story office and commercial building sports an " eclectic " , neo @-@ Renaissance and classical design . The building was commissioned by and named for a Christian Arab merchant from Bethlehem and originally housed Cafe Europe , a popular coffeehouse patronized by Jews , Arabs , and British in the 1930s and 1940s . In 1947 @-@ 48 it housed the Jerusalem Emergency Committee .