

## The Brand of Tel Aviv

An Interview with Hila Oren,  
Founder and Chief Executive Officer, Tel Aviv Global & Tourism

**EDITORS' NOTE** *Hila Oren is an expert in urban development and focuses on the identification of economic strengths while incorporating the financial, digital, tourism, and creative forces in Tel Aviv. While leading the Global & Tourism administration, the Startup City vision was formed, which is a municipal strategic plan for investors, entrepreneurs, tourists, and students coupling a city platform with a private initiative. The global positioning of Tel Aviv as an innovative and desired metropolis is one of Oren's achievements and is the strategic goal that has been set for the next decade.*



Hila Oren

**COMPANY BRIEF** *Tel Aviv Global (tel-aviv.gov.il) is a city-owned company of the Municipality of Tel Aviv concerned with the global development of the city. Tel Aviv is mentioned in the same vein as global cities like Berlin, Barcelona, London, Tokyo, Paris, and New York, and is destined to become one of the leading 20 cities in the world.*

### What is the mission for Tel Aviv Global & Tourism?

We started it in order to broaden the global awareness of Tel Aviv today. We have come to understand that the city is an economic business center and gateway to Israel. It has the potential to be a start-up engine for the whole country going forward.

### Is there a strong emphasis today on the entrepreneurial culture within Israel?

It has always been part of the society, but now we are enhancing it. The innovation in Tel Aviv is so amazing that the globe is looking at us with all of the great start-ups that we have launched.

### How critical is it to retain the entrepreneurial talent in Tel Aviv?

We refer to ourselves as a community. Of the 700 start-ups, I know 350 personally; it's like rooting for your family. We want them all to succeed and, of course, there is competition among them. It's our mission to take any barriers away so they can succeed. It's okay for all of

our "children" to start here, go out with all of their knowledge into the world, learn and innovate, and come back stronger – this is how the ecosystem will grow.

The classic investor in Israel today is an entrepreneur that had a start-up, sold it, and is now interested in reinvesting back into the start-up community. These people create the start-ups, go abroad, grow them, and come back, so it's actually very fruitful for the community.

### Are there opportunities for women in Tel Aviv to raise the capital needed to grow their businesses?

Absolutely, the capital is here, but I don't want to be overly optimistic and say there are no barriers. As a woman involved with start-ups, I'm really working hard on this issue. If we really want to make a quantum leap, we have to continuously focus on enhancing the opportunities for women.

I don't think a bank in Israel would give me any more or less were I a man. If I bring them a good business plan, I will get the funds needed. But this issue is about more than capital; it concerns the state of mind of an entire society.

I see a business community that still has more men than women, even though it has been proven that the best results occur when women are part of the discussion. In Tel Aviv, 10 percent of the start-ups are by women – this is a better number than the worldwide average, but it's still not good enough. If we want to improve, we need to continue to talk about it.

As leaders, we are responsible for getting this message out, because I see myself as a nonstop woman in a nonstop city. I'm part of the DNA of this great city, but I want more women to get into the ecosystem because this is what we're all interested in at the end of the day.

### How much can entrepreneurship be taught?

A bit is part of your nature, but in Tel Aviv, when we're looking at the DNA of the city, we're all immigrants that came here, and we had to reinvent ourselves.

If you look worldwide, immigrants are always the best start-up candidates because

it's the smartest way for them to make the leap.

In Tel Aviv, we are not afraid of failure. If you fear failure, you won't want to start your own business.

If you do fail but consider it an experience you can learn from, then you will recognize it is a part of the process and that it's not something to be ashamed of.

### Is what Tel Aviv offers understood globally and is the Tel Aviv brand positioned as it should be?

Most of the world is still not aware of the Tel Aviv brand. For those that visit us, within 24 hours after they are here, they say they are shocked – they hadn't known that it was so great. The food is good, the women are beautiful, the beaches are wonderful, and it's truly secure.

When great trendsetters who have never been here or haven't been here for a long time come to Tel Aviv, they are all very surprised. This surprise element is what we're using to open the world to Tel Aviv.

We're rising in the global rankings. We're seeing more flights coming to the city and more tourism. The foreign press is also discovering us – but all these things are still not enough. We need to do more.

### How do you measure success in these efforts?

At day's end, the measure is by numbers: the occupancy of hotels, the number of international students that are coming here, the foreign press coverage, the GDP of the city – all of these numbers have benchmarks from the past and goals for where we want to be. As an entrepreneur, I always set higher goals than I think I can reach.

### How critical is the city's public/private partnership for spurring entrepreneurship?

It's crucial. Without an effective public/private partnership, you cannot build a strong city brand. No matter what the city does, if there isn't a private partnership with it, no one wants to listen. But if the private sector talks about how great the Tel Aviv brand is, everyone believes it, because it is understood that they have no ulterior motive.

This partnership is what provides the energy and I understand that it's a real coming together – this truly builds the Tel Aviv brand. ●