



Sharon Gonen

AUTUMN IN ROSH PINA

Summer is almost over and the Galilee air is becoming soft, magical and very relaxed, inviting visitors to indulge in the tranquil atmosphere while taking advantage of the region's numerous special attractions / Dan Zeller

The days are getting shorter, the evenings are cooler and in the Galilee sometimes one even needs a sweater. In the fields and vineyards the harvests are being gathered and the skies of the Hula Valley are full of migrating birds. The leaves on the trees are starting to change color from green to various shades of orange-red-brown. Enchanting Rosh Pina is a marvelous place to experience autumn, to combine the ancient and the modern, and to soak up the scenery, nature, history, agriculture and culture. It offers unique places for overnight stays, superb cuisine and excursions within a landscape painting.

One of Rosh Pina's best-known attractions is the beautifully renovated **Restoration Site**, which is now a museum that preserves the atmosphere of the town's early days. It is an open museum which includes the upper street built by the pioneers and the homes of Baron de Rothschild's officials. In the old administrative center, an interesting audio-visual presentation relates the story of Rosh Pina, with many eye-witness accounts and memories of old-timers (20 minutes, in Hebrew, English and Russian).

The synagogue in the complex, standing since 1889, is still used for prayer services on Sabbaths, holidays

and special occasions. It has been through several renovations over the years but basically is the same building as at the start. Alongside the **House of Dignitaries** is the **home of Professor Gideon Mer**, where one can view the permanent tribute to his extraordinary career, as well as temporary exhibitions.

Down an alleyway between two parts of the House of Dignitaries is the **Baron's Garden**, a very special garden first planted in 1887. It was established for the exclusive use of the Baron's officials, and the local pioneers were banned entry. Nowadays it is open for everybody's enjoyment, and during the summer it is the venue for various musical performances.

Three springs for the fall

The pioneers of Rosh Pina who came down from Safed followed the route of the **Rosh Pina Stream**, which descends from Mount Canaan into the valley. It's a beauty spot that combines water, nature, ancient trees, orchards and stories – some of them racy tales from the early time of settlement in the Hula Valley.

The route starts in Kiryat Moshe on Mount Canaan in Safed, which can be reached via the road ascending

from Safed (No. 8900) and passing the turn-off to Nof Kinneret, until reaching the entrance to Safed. After crossing a little bridge, keep your eyes peeled for the sign in black on the right of the path. A road leading to a new neighborhood will bring you to the start of the route, shortly before the turn off to Hagedud Hashlishi Street. It's best to leave one's vehicle in the car park of the Renovation Site in Rosh Pina.

The path leads you southward and spills steeply down to the Rosh Pina Stream. After about 300 meters you'll reach a lookout point to Rosh Pina. Carry on eastward for another kilometer, and you'll come to three springs: the Gei Oni Spring, Pina Spring and Kadan Spring. At the place where the springs erupt, a brook flows. It's several hundred meters long and all along it there is a profusion of rich vegetation with fig and olive trees, blackberry (holy bramble) bushes and mint.

The first spring, under the large fig tree, is called **Gei Oni Spring**, though some refer to it as the "Water of Contention." The story goes back to 1882 when the property, with the rights to the three springs, was purchased. That was the start of many struggles over the water between the new settlers and the local villagers. Today you can see that all the springs are in buildings that the Baron

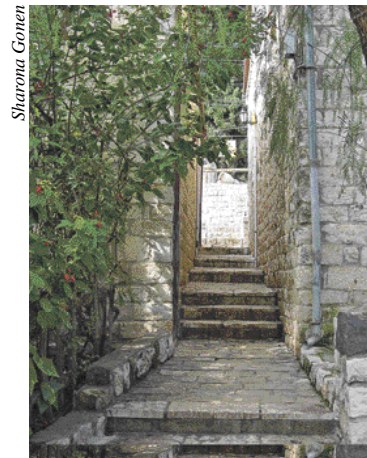
de Rothschild constructed around them at the end of the 19th century in order to protect the water from robbers, evaporation and waste. Enjoy a rest beneath the fig tree and listen to the sound of trickling water, even though it can't be seen. The third name attributed to this spring is Abu Halil Spring. Abu Halil is Abraham and legend relates that because Abraham drank from this spring's water, it has the power that anyone who drinks from it will one day return and drink from it again.

After a short rest from the steep slope, continue walking for several minutes to reach the second spring – **Pina Spring**, whose high-quality water supplies the village of Rosh Pina. It's a good idea to refresh here by splashing water on one's face from the pipe that comes out of the spring. If you look around, you'll see a large rock close by. Locals say that there was a cave of hyenas in this rock that used to hypnotize all those coming to drink from the spring.

Nowadays there are no more hyenas in the area and very few remain in the Galilee and Golan; in fact they are in danger of extinction. Although there are no hyenas, the area is full of life: turtles, rabbits, porcupines, jackals, foxes and birds of prey. So walk quietly and calmly and maybe you'll be lucky enough to meet one



Shari Seldan



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of them en route.

From the Pina Spring, continue down the slope of the stream. On the northern bank you can see the remains of Jauna, an Arab village, as well as many fruit trees: olives, vines, figs, pomegranates and quinces as well as barley. Wild wheat was discovered by Aaron Aaronsohn in Rosh Pina. This is an area of ancient orchards and in the midst of them is the last spring building on the way – **Ein Kadan**, named for the hyacinth (Kadan in Hebrew).

There are many stories about the springs, including one about the meeting of the father and mother of Yigal Allon, the famous soldier and politician who led

The house of Professor Gideon Mer, who devoted himself to eradicating malaria

the operation to liberate the Galilee during the War of Independence. When fall arrives, the route is paved with delicate autumn flowers. On the northern bank of the stream, there are enormous masses of large sternbergia (autumn crocus) that bloom at the end of November and the beginning of December. The route ends at the parking lot of the Restoration Site, close to Rosh Pina's beautiful cemetery.

At the highest spot in the village, in the shade of a fig tree, is **Nimrod's Lookout**, a pastoral memorial site overlooking the Upper Galilee. It was established in memory of the late Nimrod Segev, a fourth-generation son of Rosh Pina, who was killed during army reserve service in the Second Lebanese War, on August 9th, 2006. His father, Hezi Segev, chose to commemorate him at a place that Nimrod particularly cherished, as he loved nature and the Galilee scenery. Nimrod's Lookout is the exit point of the excursions in Rosh Pina that Hezi Segev leads.

Five generations

First and foremost, Rosh Pina is a farming village and that is why it is recommended to visit **Ofer Schwartz**, a fifth-generation descendant of one of the first families who came from Safed in 1878. Rabbi Alter Schwartz was sent to serve as a rabbi in Alexandria. When he returned, there was no more land available for farming, so instead he got a job on the village council as its mailman, bringing the mail from Safed and distributing it. The Baron gave him a loan in order to build a second story to his home and in time his home became the first hotel in the Galilee – what's more, a hotel with running water!

Alter's son, Meir, opened Rosh Pina's first grocery store. Over the years he bought a house and agricultural land for his son, Amihud. Amihud Schwartz became a farmer, but to supplement his income he joined the Notrim – the Jewish police force. When the British left the country, it was Amihud, as a sergeant in the Notrim, who went into the police station in Rosh Pina and took command of it, to prevent it from being taken over by the Arabs.

In the course of time, Amihud, as a representative of the founding families, had the honor of lighting one of the Independence Day beacons at the national ceremony on Mount Herzl in Jerusalem. His son, Avshalom Schwartz, was a true farmer, body and soul. A graduate of the Agricultural School in Pardes Hanna, he was among the first in Israel to use a new agricultural method in which an old plantation is completely uprooted, the ground is disinfected and a new, young orchard is planted. Avshalom's sons are following in his path, continuing to combine farming with tourism services.

The Schwartz family farm specializes in growing deciduous trees – apples, plums, apricots, peaches, nectarines and pears. Rosh Pina is the "pear capital" of Israel, growing 30% of the country's crop. A tour of Rosh Pina's farms with Ofer on an ATV or a cart harnessed to a tractor is a fascinating experience. One sees orchards,

IMMIGRANT PIONEERS

The story of Rosh Pina starts about 130 years ago, in 1878, when several yeshiva students and their families who did not want to continue existing on the charitable Haluka funds from overseas decided to take matters into their own hands. They left Safed and set up a new community, which they called Gei Oni (Valley of Fortitude). They suffered great hardship, poverty and ongoing drought, and most of them quit and returned to Safed.

Three families were not broken and stayed: the Friedman, Keller and Schwartz families, whose descendants still live in Rosh Pina today. In 1882 they were joined by a group of immigrant pioneers from Romania. With fervent belief in settling the Land of Israel, they changed the name of their settlement to Rosh Pina, from the phrase in Psalms 118:22: "the stone which the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone."

They endured many difficulties until the philanthropist Baron Edmond de Rothschild took the community under his wing, helping with the infrastructure and with professional assistance (as he did also in Zichron Yaakov, Rishon Letzion and other towns). The Baron sent administrators, established a synagogue, a vineyard, the House of Dignitaries as the administrative center, and homes for a teacher and a doctor. He was keen on developing agriculture and industry, and for that purpose saplings of mulberry trees arrived in Rosh Pina in 1900. They were planted on 1,500 dunams (375 acres) with the object of developing a silk industry, as silkworms grow on mulberry trees. A large steam-operated factory employing 100 workers was set up for spinning silk thread and fabric. Rosh Pina started becoming prosperous: agriculture thrived, industry flourished and the local school, which was taught in Hebrew, grew.

However, pride and joy went hand-in-hand with differences of opinion and the Baron ceased his patronage. There was a severe crisis, but the firm foundation underlying the community enabled it to continue building and developing with their own resources. In 1929, the local doctor, Gideon Mer, set up a malaria research laboratory in the old administrative center. He devoted himself to eradicating the awful disease which struck down many in the Hula Valley.





The Pina
Balev B&B
in Rosh Pina

Shiri Suddon

with a bottle of good wine sipped while looking out at the magnificent sunset that tints the Golan Mountains in brilliant orange. It is one of the most special places in brilliant orange. It is one of the most special places, with one of the most gorgeous balconies in Israel, and it belongs to one of the longest-established families in the village – the Friedman family – one of Rosh Pina's three original pioneer families.

Pina Barosh is situated in a stone building in the Restoration Site of old Rosh Pina. Yosef "the effendi" Friedman founded this enchanting property where the sixth generation of his family now lives on the upper story. The ground floor, previously the farm's livestock courtyard, was converted into delightful tourist facilities in 1991. It has seven different accommodations, including what was Rosh Pina's first B&B. The quality and distinctiveness are carefully preserved.

Its famed gourmet restaurant, the **Shiri Bistro**, is managed by daughter Shiri Friedman and its professional wine bar that specializes in Israeli boutique wines organizes wine tours in the Galilee and Golan Heights. The atmosphere is of a chef's rural restaurant in France.

The rich wine bar, specializing in wines from the Golan and Galilee, serves as a regional wine culture center. It offers the finest Israeli wine products, mainly from the superb yield of the surrounding area. The unique wine list has about 300 labels from 50 different commercial wineries, some of which are small boutique firms that do not market outside the wineries themselves. The wine bar offers fascinating encounters with the Israeli wine world through guided tasting workshops, meetings with the people behind the wine industry, trips to vineyards, and visits to the wineries in the region.

olive plantations from which Ofer produces extra-virgin olive oil, and the three-generations' plot – the pear plot that grandfather Amihud planted in 1956, an entire saga on its own, and beside it the pear plot planted by his son Avshalom, and adjoining that is the pear plot planted by his grandchildren. Three generations of pears in one place. Throughout the tour one hears enthralling stories.

Art and culture

Side by side with its flourishing agriculture, Rosh Pina is rich in culture. The special atmosphere, the old, restored houses and the pure Galilee air combined with the pastoral tranquility attract people interested in culture and art to Rosh Pina. There are now dozens of galleries, boutiques and different craft shops.

Casa Linda, a gallery of applied art, is tucked away in a small, picturesque street. It serves as a center for artists and offers an amazing variety of useful, artistic objects for home decoration, including handmade works by top artists: decorative jewelry, knits, papier maché, pottery, glass, silk and superb photographs.

The gallery's owner, Linda Schlesinger, makes the artistic dreams come true of those who exhibit in her gallery and also of those looking for original Israeli art works. On the picturesque balcony overlooking a breathtaking Galilee landscape, Linda offers made-in-Galilee refreshments and hosts a wide variety of interesting cultural evenings every Thursday.

While on the topic of culture, it is highly recommended to include Rosh Pina's **Cinematheque** in your itinerary. It is located in a charming old stone building where various cultural events, such as panel discussions, are held, in addition to the screening of quality films.

Galilee-style French cuisine

A tour in Rosh Pina is incomplete without tasting some of the variety of Galilee specialties offered in the many different eateries. One in particular, **Pina Barosh**, has something for every taste at every time of the day, whether a generous pampering breakfast, a special lunch or a dinner in the cool hours of the evening

Luxurious and romantic

There are now over 400 guest rooms scattered throughout Rosh Pina. One of the nicest is the B&B complex of **Pina Balev** which, as its name indicates, is in the heart of old Rosh Pina. It comprises five super-luxury suites constructed in a restored structure from the stones of an old 19th century building. In the Baron de Rothschild's time, the building was a farmhouse and a barn to store crops. Scrupulously restored with great taste by its owner, Kobi, it is itself now a real work of art. All the suites have a wonderfully romantic atmosphere, with stained glass windows, luxurious furnishings and accessories, and equipped with the most modern equipment to cosset and delight the guests.

No less important is the special attention for couples: spa treatments, holistic therapies and pampering massages can all be ordered ahead of time. But the jewel in the crown is its wonderful garden. The entrance is through a "cave" that has been created below a high rock, forming an especially enchanting doorway. The garden boasts nooks with colorful flowers, an exquisite open lounge for special events, orchard areas with ancient trees, a spice garden, dreamy intimate corners, hammocks, a bubbling pool and a spa with a whirlpool bath. 🌿



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The Restoration Site at Rosh Pina: www.hist-roshpina.com, 04-6936913

Rosh Pina tourism: www.come2galilee.org.il

Hezi Segev: 050-5325732

Schwartz Farm: www.1878.co.il, 057-5702000

Casa Linda: 10 Derech Hatahana, Ha'oranim neighborhood, 04-9983666

Rosh Pina Cinematheque: www.roshpinacine.com, 04-6801453

Pina Barosh: 04-6936582, www.pinabarosh.com

Pina Balev: www.pinabalev.co.il, 04-6930970, 054-5590020.



Oded Dayan



The new floating birdwatching observation point

Photos courtesy of Hula Lake

BIRDWATCHING HEAVEN

In the fall and the start of winter, the skies of the Galilee are filled with birds. To be more exact – 500 million of them! They love to stop over at the Hula Lake, treating visitors to an exceptional spectacle / Dan Zeller

The Hula Lake Park (Agmon Hahula) is on the global migratory path and is considered one of the most important sites in the world for birdwatching. Every year, millions of birds pass through the Hula Lake Park, and so far 394 different varieties have been spotted. Some of these are in danger of extinction and some are rare. It's a small wonder that this site has become a mecca for birdwatchers from all over the world.

Not only birds are attracted to water; people are too. Several years ago, the government of Israel decided to restore a section of the Hula Lake in order to preserve the peat in the Hula Valley. After the Hula Swamp had been intentionally drained in the early 20th century, the soil became exhausted, leading to pollution of the local water sources. The Jewish National Fund was put in charge of the restoration project, and it has been developing the site in cooperation with local farmers for several years.

Hidden Wagon

Those entering the Hula Lake Park can select from several methods of transportation: bicycles, golf carts or a guided tour in the Hidden Wagon – an inimitable

experience. The Hula Lake Park is an agro-ecological site, combining environmental preservation principles with local agriculture. That is why, for instance, the noise of a tractor sounds natural to the birds and the Hidden Wagon, which is camouflaged and hitched to the tractor, doesn't disturb them. The Hidden Wagon tour gives clear views of several of the animals at the site: for example a nutria (river rat) sunbathing and cleaning its fur, a pelican that has decided to stay a bit longer than one night and a donkey braying at the sight of storks. At the acclimatization section you may see a mother buffalo grooming her offspring.

Going around on these paths is very exciting. Everything is green, on the sides farmers are plowing their fields and, except for some background noises from the birds, there is total silence. Three birdwatching points have been set up along the route to observe the feeding area of the cranes. The newest birdwatching point is the floating "water birds" point, which is the first of its kind in Israel and different from the others in that it is built to float on top of an enormous raft, enabling close-up observation of the water birds. Its construction took the lake's environment and unique scenery into full account. Also, it was especially planned to allow the observer a variety of perspectives, down toward the water and up toward the sky line, giving visitors the unique feeling of blending in with the environment and nature – together with the thousands of water birds swimming around and occasionally flying overhead.

The structure's planning was based on innovative, complex elements and is reminiscent in its form of a bird spreading its wings in its natural environment.

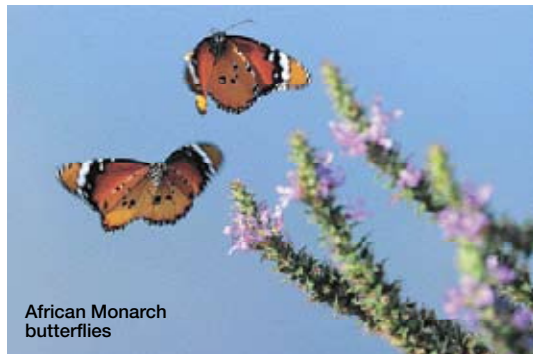
For more information about
Hula Lake Park: 04-6817137,
www.agamon-hula.co.il

Galilee Tourism Association:
www.galiland.co.il, 04-6817152.

International Bird Festival:
www.hulabirdfestival.org.



A bluebird at the ringing station on 'Birds Island'



African Monarch butterflies

Great emphasis was placed on making the observation point fully accessible so that everyone in the general public can share in the experience.

Nature's choreography

Another place that is well worth visiting (and requires a prior appointment) is the ringing station, which combines research with education. It is situated on 'Birds Island' in the center of the lake and can be reached only by a raft over a canal. It was designed to suit local conditions, with a mixed habitat and attracts different varieties of birds.

The ringing station rings about 10,000 birds every year, of 100 different kinds, most of which are elusive and difficult to observe by other means. The explanations given to visitors, the ringing and then the birds' release into freedom, is a tremendously exciting experience.

Every year, approximately 80,000 cranes stop here. The local farmers got organized together with KKL-JNF and the Nature Protection Society to feed them, in order to prevent them from eating everything growing in the fields around. On some days, one can see 30,000 cranes all together (the noise they make reaches sky high).

Every day, in the afternoon, the cranes arrive to rest overnight on their long, exhausting journey from the Black Sea. They seek food and a chance to sleep and gather energy for the next day's flight to Africa. The hour they descend, when evening falls, is one of the most amazing occurrences at the Hula Lake Park. It's been called "nature's own choreography" and that says it all. The birds land and get organized for their night's sleep, with tremendous twittering and loud singing as the masses of birds fly around and around just a few meters from you. It's an overwhelming display. The skies are colored bright red as the birds dance opposite you while settling down for the night.

But it's not just the migrating birds that are worth seeing; there are also butterflies. During the fall, the Hula witnesses an amazing sight: the migration of African Monarch butterflies. They arrive every summer because they particularly enjoy the nectar of purple loosestrife (*lythrum salicaria*) and turtle grass (*phyla nodiflora*) that grow in the botanical garden and all over the lake park. You can see thousands of them fluttering around.

The African Monarch is conspicuous for its orange-black colors, an indication that it is poisonous. Indeed, it does not have many enemies in nature.

Now is definitely the time to come visit the Hula Lake Park and enjoy nature at its best. 🐦

INTERNATIONAL BIRD FESTIVAL

The week-long Hula Valley International Bird Festival, which is part of the five-week "Winter of Birds," will take place from November 20th to 27th, 2011 in the Hula Valley – one of the most important birdwatching regions in the world. Its location in the heart of the African-Syrian Rift Valley is extraordinarily important for the millions of migrating birds as they travel on their winter migration. The sites in the valley and its moist agricultural and natural landscapes provide a critical "filling station" on the journey for hundreds of types of birds migrating from Europe and Asia to Africa, then back.

During the fall and winter months, the valley becomes filled with birds. The most famous of these winter visitors are the cranes. Around 30,000 gray cranes spend the winter months in the valley and most of them are concentrated in the area of the Hula Lake Park, providing a birdwatching experience that is unequalled anywhere in the world.

The cranes started appearing in the Hula Lake Park at the start of the 1990's, turning the site in recent years into one of the most popular tourist attractions in Israel, with over 300,000 visitors in 2010.

Last year, the Galilee Development Authority, the Jewish National Fund, the National Parks Authority and the Nature and National Parks Protection Authority initiated the Winter of Birds Festival, during which many special events were organized throughout the Galilee. This year it was decided to expand the festival and to open it also to birdwatchers from abroad (there are some 100 million active birdwatchers around the world).

Throughout the five weeks of the festival, a great variety of events for the general public will take place at the following sites: The Ein Afek Nature Reserve, the Stork Center at Kfar Ruppin, Lake Kinneret, the Gamla Nature Reserve, the Hula Nature Reserve and the Hula Park Reserve.

The main events are:

- The festive **opening event** on November 24th, with the opening of an exhibition of top international nature artists who have created works in the Hula Valley. It will be on display in a special tent in the Hula Valley for a month. After the official opening ceremony and a gala event at the Hula Lake Park, there will be a festive concert by Paul Winter, winner of seven Emmy awards, who has composed a special work about bird migration in Israel.
- The **Bird-a-Thon**, an international bird watching race that has been held in many locations in the world and always receives considerable media coverage. A group of skilled birdwatchers from different countries competes over 24 hours in a certain region. The winner is whoever spots the greatest number of bird species.
- The first **Crane Race** will be held on December 16th at the Hula Lake Park, over three routes: 10 km. for professional runners, 5 km. for soldiers in pre-military institutes, and 2.5 km for children.
- An **international conference** of researchers and directors of organizations from around the globe will take place at the conference center of the Pastoral Hotel in Kfar Blum on November 24th-27th.
- Other events will be announced.