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Israeli Homes, Decorated With A Shopping Spree In China

By [EMILY HARRIS](#)

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All Things Considered

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AUDIE CORNISH, HOST:

If you've ever built or remodeled a home, you may have spent a lot of time driving around to showrooms, comparing drawer handles or surfing the Internet for the best prices on bathroom tile. For Israelis, a niche market has emerged, and it takes them a lot further than their local stores. As NPR's Emily Harris reports, Israelis are flying to China.

ADI ASULIN: Hi, nice to meet you. Welcome to my house.

EMILY HARRIS, BYLINE: Adi Asulin opens the door to her recently remodeled apartment in Ra'anana, north of Tel Aviv. We're in a long, light hallway. Windows open onto an enormous balcony.

It's beautiful.

ASULIN: Thank you. It's all made in China.

HARRIS: Two big square ceiling lights in the hall even have Chinese writing showing. Asulin bought almost everything for this house on a ten-day shopping spree in China.



Adi Asulin stands in the kitchen of her family's remodeled apartment north of Tel Aviv. She saved thousands of dollars by flying to China to buy furnishings and flooring directly from manufacturers.

Emily Harris/NPR

ASULIN: The lighting, whatever outside furniture, inside furniture - everything.

HARRIS: The day after she and her husband bought the house, she got on a plane to China. The first shopping stop was a flooring factory bigger than she'd ever imagined.

ASULIN: Like half of my city was the one company of floors. And I can choose whatever I want like different colors, different materials, different prices.

HARRIS: Not only Israelis were shopping. Asulin saw customers from Russia, India, the Gulf States and China. It was a bit overwhelming, she said, and not for everyone. But she'd loved having time to focus and getting all the shopping done at once.

ASULIN: If I was buying everything in Israel, it was after work with kids, afternoon and on the weekend, and it probably will be more than 10 days.

HARRIS: Even though she had to pay part in advance and could not return anything, price remained the big appeal.



Asulin bought everything for the bathrooms on her 10-day shopping trip to China except for the tile, which came from a Palestinian factory.

Emily Harris/NPR



Everything Asulin bought in China, including the lights and flooring in her entryway, had to be partially paid for upfront. There are no refunds and no returns in this niche fly-to-buy industry.

Emily Harris/NPR

ASULIN: Forty - up to 50% off the prices in Israel.

HARRIS: Offsetting even the cost of plane tickets, a hotel and food for her, an architect and her dad to advise. Economics professor Daniel Levy at Israel's Bar-Ilan University says Israel started out socialist, and many practices of centralized control still affect the economy today.

DANIEL LEVY: So we don't have what you are used to in the U.S. competitive markets really where price competition is fierce and everybody is trying to offer the best deal which brings about greater efficiency and lower prices and happy customers. That's not what we have here at all.

HARRIS: This shows up most dramatically in grocery bills. Protests over the cost of food shook up Israel's elections last year. A 2011 parliamentary report showed that just two companies controlled more than 80% of the domestic cheese and yogurt production. But weak competition also affects imports, including nonfood items like flooring and furniture.

SHAI SAFRAN: Right now we're looking at solid surface Corian bathtubs. This kind of product is very high-end product.

HARRIS: Shai Safran flips through catalogs from Chinese companies. He runs Basini, an Israeli company that takes about 10 customers a month to China to buy everything they need for home remodels or building. To save them money, he says he just treats factories in China as if they were his own.

SAFRAN: I don't need to make in Israel a big showroom. I don't need 50 walkers. I don't need inventory. And I can save the cost of the business in Israel. Like, my stores are the factories in China.

HARRIS: Even with his fee for his contacts, logistics and know-how, Safran says he still beats the prices offered in Israel, but that could change. The Israeli government is trying to break high import costs by building two new private ports where labor unions won't be allowed. A contract for the first was signed last month with a construction firm based in Beijing. Emily Harris, NPR News, Jerusalem.

Links to the original broadcast and its transcript:

<http://www.npr.org/blogs/parallels/2014/10/21/353515467/israeli-homes-decorated-with-a-shopping-spree-in-china>

<http://www.npr.org/templates/transcript/transcript.php?storyId=353515467>

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