

'ISRAEL UNDER FIRE' SLOGAN HARMED ISRAELI TOURISM



Israel's head of Tourism Ministry's marketing team stated that the term "Israel Under Fire", which was coined and frequently used by Israeli government officials during "Operation Pillar of Defense" in November 2012, has had disastrous consequences on Israeli tourism, effects that are still being felt today.

Oren Drori publicly addressed the widespread use and propagation of the term "Israel Under Fire" at a recent conference on public diplomacy at Haifa University in Israel. **He stated that the term had caused serious and potentially long lasting damage to Israeli Tourism, effects that may continue to be felt for many months to come.**

Between the months of November and December 2012, tourism in Israel fell almost 20 percent, a significant and dramatic decrease for a once strong draw, for thousands of international visitors.

This dramatic decline in visitors was linked to the military campaign and widespread media coverage of the conflict, which frequently propagated the slogan "Israel Under Fire", as an attempt to crush Hamas and its infrastructure, militarily and in the media.

Drori stated that only now, 6 months later, tourism is showing some signs of improvement. Drori went on to state that the media coverage and government proliferation of the troubles held an inherent conflict between what he, as an Israeli national, would want to see, and what he, as the man in charge of marketing Israel, would want to see.

Yarden Vatikai, director of the National Information Directorate, echoed Drori's statements. He publicly concluded that while having some militaristic value, the term served the country and its citizens very little in the long run, particularly in relation to the already unpredictable (and steadily declining) tourism industry in Israel.

The slogan was coined by the Israeli Defense Force and Foreign Ministry and received widespread coverage on the world stage via social media networks, such as; Facebook, Twitter, MySpace and Youtube.

The aim of the controversial slogan was to detract from the public perception of Israel as an opposing force and to promote Israel and its citizens as victims of Hamas and their violent rocket attacks.

The Israeli tourism crisis is expected to improve. **The tourism industry has been declining last four years, from 36th position on the World Economic Forum global ranking in 2009, to a lowly 53rd position in 2013.**

The WEF noted that the decline in tourism was likely down to a few major issues, notably; terrorism, an increase in travel costs, and the announcement of the coming VAT charges, all playing a part in the general decline of a once strong tourist economy.

Despite these recent setbacks, it may not be all bad news for Israel, as it will almost certainly

continue to benefit from its numerous cultural and World Heritage sites, which continue to draw many thousands of visitors to the region each year.

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