

CHINESE TOURISTS EXPLORE ISRAEL IN GREATER NUMBERS



Chinese tourists are becoming increasingly more interested in trips in Israel. According to data from Israel's tourism ministry, this year Chinese inflow has increased by 50%. It is estimated that by 2020 the Chinese will be among top five nationalities visiting Israel.

The Chinese government aims to increase tourism to Israel, with a new 10-year multiple entry visa policy introduced. Other than **that airlines are providing direct flights from Beijing to Tel Aviv that fly six times per week**. Moreover, top Chinese chefs are traveling to Israel to teach local chefs Chinese cuisine principles.

The impact on Israel's tourism is already noticeable. "Almost everybody can say 'Nee How' - 'hello' in Chinese. Some receptionists ask me to teach them more in Chinese," Su, a tour guide from Beijing, said.

However, there is an issue connected to this. Israel does not provide enough Chinese language tour guides. Thus with the current Chinese tourists boom, Israel is taking necessary measures by paying local Mandarin speakers to obtain tour guide licenses. The first of these guides are meant to begin working this autumn.

Israel's Tourism Minister Yariv Levin ensures that the situation is under control. "In the field of tour guides we are nearing the limit of our current capacity. I can certainly say that there will not be any situation where a group wants to come and there is no guide. This is something that won't happen."

Israel aims to break the Chinese trend of outflow to neighboring Asian countries and wants to put itself in the spotlight when it comes to holiday planning. Other than boosting its prestige and basic income from tourism it has another obvious reason - one of Chinese tourists' main strengths is their spending power. Chinese tourists are among top spenders in the whole world and in Israel this applies twice as much. Only Ultra-Orthodox Jews spend more while staying in this country of great historical heritage.

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