

ISRAEL INVESTING MILLIONS IN RELIGIOUS SITES



The pope Benedict XVI is going to visit Israel. In time of the global economic crisis it is a great boost for the tourism industry. Israelis have already decided to invest 6 million shekels in renovations of the religious tourism sites.

Israel is going to receive a **welcomed boost for its tourism industry**. The pope Benedict XVI will visit the country this May. The visit will certainly provide an important boost for the religious tourism. Thus, in preparation for the visit Israelis plan to invest 6 million shekels (\$1.4m) in upgrades and renovations of important religious sites. The money will flow e.g. to **Qasr el Yahud** which is purportedly the place where the baptism of Jesus by John took place. The **Good Samaritan** site and the **Cenacle** (site of the Last Supper) are also on the list.

Christians are quite an important source market for the Israeli tourism industry. From **3 millions** of tourists who visited the country last year two million were Christians and approximately half of them were pilgrims.

The pope's visit is perceived as a wonderful marketing campaign by tourism industry players, e.g. the Israel Hotel Association. The visit is believed to lure additional thousands of Christian tourists to the country. Paul Milwizki, general manager of the Regency Hotel Jerusalem, for instance believes 40,000 Christian pilgrims will travel to Israel during the pope's visit. The manager also predicts the tourism revenues will **increase by \$60 million** thanks to the visit. Israelis need to utilize this opportunity to present themselves to all the possible pilgrims who still have not decided to visit the Holy Land.

This will be Benedict's first visit to Israel since his becoming the pope. He is going to meet both Israeli and Palestinian leaders. The pope will visit Jerusalem, Bethlehem, Haifa, and Nazareth. During his visit he will be guarded by more than 10,000 police officers and border guards.

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