

ISRAEL WELCOMED 2.7 MILLION TOURISTS IN 2009



The Israeli minister of tourism revealed the latest tourism statistics as well as the Middle Eastern country's plans for the next three years. A drop of 11% in tourist arrivals was recorded in 2009.

Israel reaps advantages and disadvantages from its geographical location in terms of its tourism industry. The biggest advantage is that it is one of the richest and very attractive countries for Western tourists in the Middle East. However, it is indeed the surrounding chaos and turmoil reported daily in the media, which affects the image of the country among tourists.

The latest statistics show that in total 2.7 million tourists visited Israel in 2009, which is a drop of 11 percent compared with 2008, but higher than for any other year. Of those arriving last year, 2.3 million were visitors spending at least one night in Israel while 417,000 were one-day visitors.

According to Stas Misezhnikov, Israel's minister of tourism, the largest group of tourists came from the U.S., with 550,000 visiting Israel (21% of all foreign tourists). Russia with 400,000 visitors (15% of all foreign tourists) and France 260,000 visitors were the other biggest source markets.

The minister also announced the marketing plan for the next three years highlighting the need to increase visits and overnight stays in Israel. A target of 1 million extra tourists has been set per year. An important element is to improve the image of Israel as a safe tourism destination. The ministry expects that especially religious and historical tourism should soar in the coming years.

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