

ISRAELI TOURISM BOOMING WITH MORE TO COME



Israel has been experiencing a record year in terms of tourism. In the last 12 months, 4 million visitors arrived to Israel. 3.9 million of them stayed at least for one night. This figure represents a 20% increase over the previous year. Moreover, revenues from tourism increased to about \$5.7 billion.

"This year was the best year for tourism in Israel since the establishment of the State of Israel. The steady increase of visitors has continued for 22 consecutive months in unprecedented numbers. **The Israeli tourism industry continues to establish itself as a major growth engine for the country's economy.** We will continue our marketing activities and the steps we are taking to strengthen the country's tourism infrastructure and continue the successes," Tourism Minister Yariv Levin said.

Besides organizing the 2019 Eurovision Song Contest in the city of Tel Aviv, Israel is also realizing big developments in terms of tourism infrastructure, with several major projects standing out.

Railway between Tel Aviv and Jerusalem

The first notable project is a new railway between Tel Aviv and Jerusalem. This will serve as a huge boost of travel between the two biggest cities in the country and will shorten trips from 60 to less than 30 minutes for a 60-kilometre journey.

The whole project's estimated cost is about \$1.9 billion and as a part of it nine bridges and four tunnels are being built. The rail will have four double-decker trains that will travel in both directions every hour. The capacity of each will be about a thousand passengers.

The railway is set to partially open in September after numerous delays. It will service four stations in Tel Aviv, a transportation hub close to the Central Bus Station in Jerusalem and the Ben-Gurion International Airport.

Temporarily, the train will only travel as far as the Ben Gurion Airport which should help greatly with the increasing traffic. According to authorities, 2.7 million passengers travelled through Tel Aviv's airport in the month of August. This represents an increase of 10% compared to the same month last year. Meanwhile in September a 17% increase to 2.2 million is expected. It is estimated that another three or four months will be necessary for the trains to reach the stations in Tel Aviv.

New Airport in Eilat

Another significant project set to be inaugurated in the coming months is the Eilat Ramon Airport located several kilometers far from the port city. It will replace the Eilat J. Hozman Airport as well as the Ovda Airport further from the city.

The numbers from the Ovda Airport were promising. From October last year to April this year, 145,841 passengers went through the airport. This is an increase of 56% over the previous winter

season. With the new airport, which is set to open in early 2019, even bigger growth is expected in the region.

Crusader Wall Promenade

Opened in June this year at the Caesarea Harbour National Park, the Crusader Wall promenade includes walls, towers and the Crusader Market. The project was funded by the Caesarea Edmond Benjamin de Rothschild Foundation as a part of an initiative in the city to promote archaeological ruins which attract roughly half a million visitors per annum.

Other tourism infrastructure projects in the country include a cable car route in the city of Jerusalem. The purpose is to improve transport within the city and its main attractions. It is expected to be opened in 2021 and will stop at several places, for example the Mount of Olives, Mount Zion or the City of David.

Another interesting project developed is the Jewish theme park in Dimona, designed by ITEC Entertainment of Florida, which has international experience in this matter. It is expected to open in 2023. Moreover, the country has approved the construction of the world's first hotel in a Bedouin village, which will stand at the foot of Mount Tabor in the Shibli-Umm al-Ghanam village.

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