

ISRAEL ARRIVALS: 61% OF TOURISTS ARE CHRISTIANS

In only a year, the number of arrivals in the Jewish state grew by one million, exceeding four million visitors: “A historic record”, according to Minister of Tourism, Yariv Levin.

In 1978, Israel managed to reach for the first time 1 million tourists, 30 years after it officially became the State of Israel. Then, it took the country 16 years to reach 2 million (in 1994). **To reach the third million, it had to wait another 23 years (2017), but their next milestone, 4 million visitors, only took another year (2018).**

During this past year, the number of Israel arrivals rose to surpass 4 million tourists, showing a sustained increase in comparison to previous years. The figure almost doubled in two years (2.9 million in 2016, and 3.6 million in 2017).

To encourage this change, the Ministry of Tourism of Israel carried out a series of strategic steps: launching direct flights from big cities worldwide, development and maintenance of infrastructure, closer relations with the largest travel agencies in the world. “Inbound tourism is a great contribution to both Israel's economy and its image,” Levin adds.

In 2016, a 4% increase was reported in Israel arrivals, and the rebound began after the 25% increase of 2017, maintaining an interesting and important upward curve, according to data provided by authorities of the Ministry of Tourism of Israel and backed by its Director General, Amir Halevi.

In his statement, Halevi highlights the fruit of a revolutionary promotional work of Israel that managed to make the figures surpass, for the first time, the four million arrivals. He is also very optimistic about innovations, such as the opening of the international airport in Timna, which will benefit another important location: the tourist town of Eilat.

The impact of tourism on Israel's economy is evident. In 2018, tourism revenues were 5.8 billion USD; and having 40% of the tourists who contributed to this amount be repeated visitors is a desirable circumstance for any other destination.

The promotional campaign uses the slogan “Israel, land of creation”, while Jerusalem is referred to as a “magical and radiant city”. These slogans suggest more of a promise for the traveler, since the tourism market research firm, Euromonitor, named the golden city as the fastest-growing urban tourist destination of all the cities in the world.

Among the main visitors of Israel is the United States, with almost 20% of travelers in 2018, followed by France, Russia, Germany, UK and Italy, in order of tourists who contributed to the figure. In addition, due

to the recent opening of air routes between Latin America and Israel, the number of South American visitors is expected to rise significantly.

Over 3.6 million travelers to Israel preferred flights, while almost 500,000 entered by land, and only over 40,000 did so on cruise ships. Of these, about 4.1 million had overnight stays of more than one day in the country, while 268,000 were one-day visitors.

After the investment made by the State, numbers of visitors became consistent. **This past year, almost 50 million USD were assigned to subsidies for the construction of nearly 4 million new accommodations across the country.**

In the present year, anyone would think that most visitors to Israel practice Judaism, but as it turns out, 61% of Christian tourists refute this idea, while Jewish visitors only represented 22% of a total that also included 12%, who did not specify any religious affiliation. The remaining 5% was comprised of Muslims, as well as Buddhists, Hindus and Bahá'ís, among other religious beliefs.

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