

# ISRAEL WELCOMES FOREIGN TOURISTS AGAIN



The first foreign tourists are back in Israel! The first pilot test with visitors from abroad after a break of more than a year in international travel started on May 23. 20 groups of vaccinated participants from different countries were admitted. And they have been touring Israel.

"I have worked to ensure that the pilot project for the vaccinated groups is not postponed," Tourism Minister Orit Farkash-Hacohen clearly stated. "Because it is so important." **She stressed that this is only the first phase of re-building international tourism to Israel.** A "much larger one is expected immediately after the pilot project ends," she said. The trial runs from May 23 to June 15.

## Pilot Project

Apparently, foreign tourists from all over can't wait to travel to Israel again after the Corona pandemic - and despite the recent warlike conflict. When the call went out last week, everything was booked up after just nine minutes. Each organizer is allowed to bring 5 to 30 participants per group to Israel. All must be fully vaccinated against the coronavirus with a vaccine approved by the Israeli government.

Travelers must also submit two negative PCR tests, one no later than 72 hours before travel and another after landing. They must also have a serological test performed in Israel. According to the ministry spokeswoman, the guests wait for the result, which is available after a few hours, in the hotel.

The run on the tours had not been entirely surprising, because in recent months the Israeli tour operators had been in permanent contact with the tourist offices of the Israeli government all over the world. The greatest interest came from the USA, Great Britain and Germany.

## Security Situation

Amir Halevy, director-general at the Ministry of Tourism, says, "The great interest of tourists to visit Israel despite this security situation is the best sign of the resilience of our tourism industry. It's a resilience that has been demonstrated again and again over the past decades."

In the past year, he said, the ministry has made efforts to "keep the industry alive whatsoever." This included the "Green Islands," a project that allowed Israelis who tested negative to vacation at the Dead Sea or in Eilat. "We fought permanently to open rooms, hotels, attractions and restaurants," Halevy said. In addition, he said, \$75 million in grants have been distributed to hotels.

In previous years, the Israeli tourism industry had enjoyed exceptionally rapid growth. In 2019, a new record was reported with 4.55 million arriving guests from all over the world. These would have generated more than half a billion euros for the economy, mainly for small and medium-sized businesses. This upward trend was abruptly interrupted by the outbreak of the pandemic in March 2020. Revenues fell by more than 430 million euros as a result of Corona. Despite Israel's title as a "vaccination nation," a third of all hotels are still closed.

Others also wanted to re-enter Israel tourism after Corona, but **consider the security situation currently too dangerous for travel**. The cruise company "Royal Caribbean" canceled all its planned cruises, which were to have started in Haifa on June 2. The luxury liner "Odyssey of the Seas" had planned to organize dozens of trips from Israel to Cyprus as well as Greece and back throughout the summer.

The company stated, "Due to the unrest in Israel and the region, the 'Odyssey' was unable to fulfill preparations as needed. The ship will spend its inaugural season in Florida. But we still have hope of running this popular route in the future."

Date: 2021-05-31

Article link:

<https://www.tourism-review.com/foreign-tourists-are-back-in-israel-under-a-pilot-project-news12048>