

ISRAEL LAUNCHES NEW AID PROGRAM FOR THE TOURISM INDUSTRY



Israeli Prime Minister Naftali Bennett last week announced a new aid program for the tourism industry heavily impacted by the new bans on foreigners entering the country, following the spread of the Omicron variant in Europe.

The program, supported by Finance Minister, Tourism Minister and Economy and Industry Minister, will soon be submitted for government approval.

The project includes **a 150 million shekel (€42.7 million) package for hotels, most of which have experienced revenue declines of 40% or more**, a 60 million shekel (€17 million) fund to reimburse some operating costs and salaries, and funding for a retraining program for tourism workers to train them in high-tech and industrial skills.

"I thank the Prime Minister, the Minister of Finance, the Minister of Economy, government ministers and professionals for their hard work and sincere understanding regarding the plight of workers and employees in the tourism industry," said Yoel Razbozov.

For his part, Naftali Bennett said that the government must "help the employees of the tourism industry in difficult times.

"The goal is to protect the health of Israeli citizens from the Omicron variant while keeping the economy open (...) We have formulated an important aid package for the tourism industry and we continue to formulate solutions for all those who need them," he added.

The renewed outbreak of the coronavirus and the Omikron variant led to a change in the entry requirements for Israel, including an entry ban for tourists.

The COVID-19 pandemic has led to **a significant decline in the number of tourists to Israel over the past two years**. While about 4.5 million tourists visited the Holy Land in 2019, there were only 370,000 visitors in 2021 as of November, according to Finance Minister Avigdor Lieberman.

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