

ISRAEL: CHRISTMAS TOURISM RESUMES IN BETHLEHEM



Travel business is picking up in Bethlehem after a two-year slump caused by the Covid-19 pandemic, boosting morale in the Christian birthplace of Jesus ahead of the Christmas holidays.

Tourists are back on the streets, and hotels are sold out. Elias Arja, director of the Bethlehem Hotel Association, said tourists are eager to visit religious sites in the area after being prevented from doing so for the past two years. Christmas tourism is flourishing. **"We expect business to be excellent in 2023, especially with Christian tourists," he said.**

Tourists from around the world are posing in front of the Church of the Nativity and the giant Christmas tree glittering in the Manger Square, and crowd into religious souvenir shops. "Bethlehem had become a ghost town," said Saliba Nissan, the co-owner of an olive wood factory, outside his shop filled with American pilgrims.

The Israeli Ministry of Tourism expects about 120,000 Christian tourists during Christmas week, with most pilgrims passing through Israel so they can reach the West Bank. That figure will come close to 2019's record of 150,000 Christian visitors to the Holy Land. The ministry plans to offer special shuttle buses between Jerusalem and Bethlehem on Christmas Eve to enable tourists to make the round trip.

"God willing, this year we will return to the situation before the coronavirus," Bethlehem Mayor Hanna Hanania announced. He said that **about 15,000 people attended the lighting of Bethlehem's Christmas tree and that international delegations, artists and singers are expected to participate in the celebrations this year.** On the other hand, most officials and residents believe that tensions between Israel and the Palestinians in the West Bank have a limited impact on tourism.

Date: 2022-12-19

Article link:

<https://www.tourism-review.com/israel-announced-recovering-christmas-tourism-in-bethlehem-news-12862>