

TOURISM SECTOR IN ISRAEL SHUT DOWN



Israel had high hopes for tourism this year, not only as an economic driver but also as a tool for promoting peace with the rest of the world. However, those hopes have crashed following last weekend's attack by Hamas. A few weeks ago, tourism was seen as the olive branch that could improve relations between Israel and the rest of the Middle East. Unfortunately, Saturday's surprise attack on Hamas resulted in a confirmed death toll of more than 1,000, which has halted Israel's tourism sector and further delayed any hopes of stability in the region.

Israel's Source Markets

Israel's tourism industry heavily relies on visitors from the Americas and Europe. These visitors contributed significantly to the country's tourism numbers until August 2019 and are expected to continue in 2023. However, carriers' suspension of flights from these regions is expected to cause a significant decline in travel numbers for the upcoming fall and winter seasons.

Until August 2023, Israel received 1.28 million visits from Europe and 921,000 from America. America has shown a nine percent increase compared to the same period in August 2019, making it one of the few regions to have surpassed pre-pandemic tourism levels.

Recognizing the importance of the Chinese market, Israel has been trying to attract Chinese tourists. The tourism ministry has taken proactive steps, including partnering with Weibo, China's equivalent of Facebook, and launching a targeted campaign on this platform. Israel had allocated significant resources to attract Chinese tourists before the pandemic, leading to a record-breaking year in 2019, with over 150,000 Chinese visitors, most of whom came with tour groups. However, the pandemic caused Chinese tourism to come to a halt. Nevertheless, Israel's inclusion on China's approved list for group travel gives hope for a potential resurgence in this vital tourism sector.

Israel Tourism Hopes

According to the Central Bureau of Statistics data, Israeli tourism in August 2023 was 4%-7% lower than pre-COVID levels in 2019. That month, Israel received 311,200 foreign visitors, of which 284,200 were tourists who stayed at least one night in the country. There were 247,100 foreign visitors in August 2022 and 324,200 in August 2019. In August 2022, 234,400 tourists stayed at least one night; in August 2019, the number was 304,600.

Until August of this year, Israel had 2.52 million visitors, 13% lower than the same period in 2019 when there were 2.9 million visitors.

Israel's tourism minister recently presented a plan to attract over seven million tourists by 2030, focusing on Asian markets to increase the number of visitors.

Global Airlines' Reaction to the Situation in Israel

The largest carriers in the industry have stopped routes to Israel, and the US government has issued travel advisories for Gaza, Israel, and the West Bank due to civil unrest and terrorist attacks. Similar advisories have been issued by Canada and the UK, which were updated for their citizens over the weekend. Australia's foreign minister also warned citizens to exercise caution when traveling to these areas during a press conference held at Melbourne Airport over the weekend.

Here is what some of the world's leading airlines say:

American Airlines has announced that it has temporarily suspended all Tel Aviv flights (TLV) due to the ongoing situation. In light of this, the airline has issued a travel alert which offers additional flexibility to customers affected by the suspension. American Airlines assures its customers that their safety and security remain top priorities and will adjust its operations accordingly. Passengers are strongly advised to check the situation of their flights by visiting aa.com or using the American Airlines mobile app.

United Airlines has announced that its flights to Tel Aviv will remain suspended until favorable conditions exist for their resumption.

We closely monitor the situation and will adjust our plans as needed. Air Canada will resume Tel Aviv operations once the situation stabilizes.

Due to the ongoing security situation in Israel, **Lufthansa, SWISS & Austrian** have decided to cancel all flights to and from Tel Aviv until Monday, October 9, 2023. Our top priority is the safety of our guests and crew members, and we remain in constant communication with the authorities while closely monitoring the situation.

British Airways is closely monitoring the situation in Israel and has introduced a flexible booking policy allowing customers to change their travel dates without additional charge. The flight scheduled for today to Tel Aviv has been canceled. However, flights will operate over the next few days with adjusted departure times.

Air France, which normally operates 2 flights per day between Roissy - Charles-de-Gaulle airport and Tel Aviv, has suspended its service until further notice in coordination with the French DGAC and the Israeli authorities.

Air India has suspended flights to and from Tel Aviv until October 14, 2023, citing passenger and crew safety concerns.

Hainan Airlines, the only Chinese carrier connecting China and Israel, has announced the cancellation of its Tel Aviv to Shanghai flights scheduled for Monday. The airline operates three direct flight routes between the two countries. In November, it resumed its route between Shenzhen in southern China and Tel Aviv. Additionally, it offers flights between Beijing and Tel Aviv.

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