

ISRAEL'S TOURISM INDUSTRY ATTRACTING VISITORS WITH BARGAINS



Since the October Hamas' terror attack on Israel, tourism of the country has plummeted. Around 90 percent fewer people visited the country. Israel's tourism industry hopes for a return to normality soon and is courting travelers with attractions and discounts.

For many travelers, Israel is an exciting destination with a mix of culture, history, and nature. **With a population of just 9.4 million, the country counted 4.55 million travelers in 2019.**

But as soon as tourism started to pick up a little after Corona, one of the worst terrorist attacks in history hit the nation.

Tourists Stay Away

While many Israelis are burying relatives and acquaintances or fearing for the lives of the hostages, normality is out of the question. This also applies to Israel's tourism. Although many hotels, guest rooms, restaurants, and tourist attractions remained open, the journey was more difficult as many airlines, including Lufthansa, suspended flights to the Jewish state. In addition, many travel providers and states expressed safety concerns.

The situation remains highly volatile. An escalation of the conflict cannot be ruled out. Tourists, just like locals, have to follow the authorities' instructions.

Israel's Tourism Drops by 90 Percent

As a result, the number of travelers to Israel fell by 90 percent in November compared to 2022. While 369,800 tourists came to Israel in the same month last year, there were only 38,300 in the month after the terrorist attack, according to data from the Ministry of Tourism.

The slump is massive for people who make a living from tourism, although there are government subsidies for the industry to support tour operators and service providers throughout the war. For Israel, tourism is not the economy's most important sector, but it is important. It contributes almost 3 percent to the gross domestic product, and around 6 percent of the workforce works directly or indirectly in tourism, a total of 230,000 people.

Direct Flight for 80 Euros

"Of course, we understand the hesitation of tourists, especially since Israel is currently portrayed in the foreign media as a country that is not ideal for travel," says Ben Julius, founder of Tourist Israel, the country's largest tour operator. Nevertheless, towards the end of the year, there was already a slight all-clear. City trips to Jerusalem and Tel Aviv have increased again, and tours to Masada and the Dead Sea are also more in demand, Julius reports. In addition, some airlines, including Lufthansa, resumed their routes to Tel Aviv in January.

It is hoped to lure travelers with bargain deals as well. Tours are advertised locally at a discount, and due to the low level of interest, direct flights from Germany to Israel and back are currently

available for 80 euros. After all, more travelers returned in December, with a year-on-year decline of only 80 percent (52,800 travelers in December 2023, 266,200 in December 2022).

Postponing Instead of Canceling Planned Trips

However, they do not want to do business with the war; so-called "dark tourism" is currently unresolved. We remember: About a year and a half ago, a tour operator caused a stir in Ukraine by offering a trip to the "brave cities"—to cities like Bucha and Irpin, which stand for the worst massacres of the Russian army against the Ukrainian civilian population.

The Israeli Ministry of Tourism advises tour operators worldwide to postpone their programs instead of canceling them. After all, there is still much interest in Israel as a travel destination.

Mainly since most travelers would focus on cities and tourist centers and would be less likely to visit areas in the conflict zone, and in those cities, as the war in the Middle East continues, some normality will return. By spring at the latest, experts hope for a large-scale return of tourism.

Israel's Tourism Focuses on Easter

Spring is important for the Israel's tourism. **Especially over the Easter holidays, the country experiences a tourism boom again and again.** 18.8 percent of travelers who visit Israel cite religious reasons, the vast majority of whom are Christians. They want to be in Jerusalem on the anniversary of Jesus' death and the day of the resurrection to follow Jesus' way.

With crosses on their backs, many set out on the path that was Jesus' last and bid farewell in the Church of the Holy Sepulcher. Jerusalem is by far the most important tourist center in the country, with around 80 percent of all travelers to Israel visiting the historic site. In addition to the climatically favorable months of May, October, and November, March and April are the most popular among tourists.

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