

ISRAELI TOURISM UNDER HARSH ATTACK



In Israel, inbound tourism, particularly Christian pilgrimage, has come to a standstill due to the ongoing war. Experts are uncertain if Israeli tourism will ever return to its previous levels.

For over 2,000 years, Israel has been a significant destination for pilgrims. In recent times, **this has formed the basis of a thriving tourism industry, generating US\$8.46 billion for Israel and US\$1 billion for Palestine in 2019.**

According to the Tourism Ministry, tourism historically contributes about 3 percent to Israel's economy and directly employs 200,000 Israelis. However, international arrivals have dropped since October due to travel advisories.

Tour operators in Palestine and Israel are used to dealing with fluctuating levels of violence, which often leads to uncertain revenues because of canceled trips. They usually have a financial reserve to help them survive these challenging times. However, the pandemic has depleted these reserves. As a result, many businesses are now in a very precarious position, with tourism at a standstill.

Experts predict the conflict's long-term impact on Israeli tourism. Currently, Israel's most loyal allies have started to weaken in their support for the bombing of Gaza. Across the globe, there are massive demonstrations by students at prestigious universities calling for a ceasefire and even advocating for boycotts and sanctions.

This conflict could have a lasting impact on pilgrims, which darkens the prospects for the Israeli tourism industry. This not only affects its income generation but also its political tool (soft power) in justifying the expansion of Israeli lands.

According to Israeli media, Yossi Fattal, the director of the Association of Inbound Tourism Organizers in Israel, expressed concerns about the conflict's impact on the tourism industry. He stated that **250 airlines operated in Israel before the conflict, but that number has now decreased to 45.** Many airlines have suspended their flights to Israel, including Turkish Airlines by March 2025 and EasyJet by October 2024.

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