

What's New in 2017: Israel Thrives as Tourism Hot-Spot with New Hotels, Restaurants, Cruises, Attractions and more

New York, New York, January X, 2017 – Israel has long drawn travelers for its historical significance, cultural attractions and iconic landmarks, but this year, the bucket-list destination will also beckon tourists with brand new hotels, restaurants, markets, museum attractions, cruises, flights, and more! A country where travelers have a chance to experience an unparalleled combination of new and old, it's easy to see why Israel is garnering much-deserved praise in 2017.

Hotel Openings:

- **W Tel Aviv** – Slated to open in in Tel Aviv's ancient district of Jaffa in May 2017, the W is the first full-service high-design hotel of its size in Tel Aviv that will offer guests the best in luxury. The eclectic hotel will be located less than 10 minutes by foot from Jaffa Port and legendary beaches on the Mediterranean Sea.
- **The Setai Tel Aviv** – An ancient stone structure, which has stood the test of time since the Crusader era, will become home to the most exclusive hotel in Tel Aviv. The 7-star hotel balances the desire to give each guest the ultimate pampering sensation with the need to respect every aspect of its historic building. Located just steps from Jaffa's famous Clock Square as well as the beach, the prestigious hotel will feature 115 rooms and suites, a luxury lounge bar, Jaffa-style chef restaurant and magnificent spa.
- **The Setai Sea of Galilee** – Also opening later this year, the luxury hotel will overlook magnificent panoramas of the Golan Heights, Sea of Galilee and Galilee region. Guests can relax in the 110 spacious suites, and enjoy complete privacy in their own suite-adjacent pool or heated jacuzzi. The property will boast Israel's largest spa complex, including indoor pools, massage rooms, pampering Turkish baths and a well-equipped gym. The hotel will also feature a special Galilean restaurant with a rich, extensive menu.
- **Bezalel, Jerusalem** – The new boutique hotel, Bezalel is situated in the heart of Jerusalem, in a restored landmark building. With 37 rooms and plenty of character, the hotel will also feature a restaurant with a menu comprised of traditional Jerusalem styles, with all ingredients sourced from the nearby Mahane Yehudah Market.

Restaurants/Markets:

- **Agamon Market** – Slated to open in Israel's Upper Galilee in April 2017, the spacious shopping center, the market will offer a variety of shops, restaurants, coffee shops and a wide-ranging authentic Galilean farmer's market.

Attractions:

- **New Exhibits at Israel Museum** – Beginning in June 2017, The Israel Museum will exhibit installations by Chinese dissident artist Ai Weiwei. The exhibition, titled "Ai Weiwei: One and the Multitude" will feature four works by the artist. Running through April 2017, the Israel Museum will also feature "Francisco Goya: Daydreams and Nightmares," which showcases the paintings and prints of Francisco Goya, examining the development of the artist's subject matter and technique. The exhibition displays works that have never before been displayed in Israel and marks the most extensive collaboration to date between the Israel Museum and the Prado Museum as well as celebrates Spanish-Israeli diplomatic ties.
- **The Tel Aviv White City Heritage Center** – Tel Aviv is a UNESCO World Heritage Site for its unique architecture, home to the largest amount of International 'Bauhaus' style buildings in the world (4,000). The city of Tel Aviv has decided to open a center dedicated to this architecture, in partnership with the German Federal Government.
- **Tel Aviv's New Beach Boardwalk** – Tel Aviv will complete the renovation of the beach promenade that was originally built in the 1970's. The renovations commenced in 2013 and include a massive refurbishment and upgrade along the coastline, creating a bridge between the city and the sea. The entire underground infrastructure is being replaced, upgraded, and made suitable for people with disabilities.

Cruises:

- **Crystal Cruises** – The cruise line will return to the Holy Land for the first time since 2012 as part of the 2017 annual President's Cruise aboard the Crystal Symphony ship, sailing from Rome to Dubai on November 4, 2017. The trip, hosted by Crystal Cruises Chairman, President and CEO Edie Rodrigues, will feature calls Haifa and Ashdod, Israel.

Flight News:

- **United Airlines** – Beginning March 30, 2016, United will fly nonstop between Tel Aviv, Israel and San Francisco, CA (SFO). This is in addition to our current nonstop service between New York, NY (EWR) and Tel Aviv, Israel. These routes connect the Bay Area, Silicon Valley, and New York City directly to the high-tech market in Israel.
- **Air Transat** – This year, Air Transat will be offering direct flights from Montreal to Tel Aviv. Also available from Toronto with a connection in Montreal, this nonstop flight between the Montréal-Trudeau airport and the David Ben-Gurion international airport of Tel Aviv will operate twice weekly, on Wednesdays and Sundays, from June 18 until late October. Transat will also be offering an array of packages, guided tours and hotels for discovering Tel Aviv and Jerusalem, as well as the region's many tourist attractions.

This material is distributed by MWWPR on behalf of Israel Ministry of Tourism. Additional information is available at the Department of Justice, Washington, DC.



**JAMES BEARD FOUNDATION "OUTSTANDING CHEF" MICHAEL SOLOMONOV
AND ISRAEL MINISTRY OF TOURISM FORGE ULTIMATE CULINARY PARTNERSHIP**

Events, Festivals, Experiential Trips to Israel and More –
Partnership Aims to Raise Awareness of Israel's Vibrant Global Cuisine

(New York, NY, July 19, 2017) – The 2017 James Beard Foundation "Outstanding Chef" Michael Solomonov and the Israel Ministry of Tourism (IMOT) have created a partnership to champion Israel's extraordinarily diverse and vibrant culinary landscape.

The action-packed collaboration will promote and expand Israel's culinary scene on a global scale with trips to Israel guided by Chef Solomonov to experience Israel's mouthwatering restaurants, markets and other culinary destinations; an ongoing culinary event series; and visits to Philadelphia during which food enthusiasts will dine at Zahav as well as Solomonov's five restaurants located steps from one another in the heart of downtown.

To kick off the official partnership, Solomonov will prepare an intimate, traditional Israeli breakfast for Israel's Minister of Tourism, Yariv Levin in New York on July 21.

"With a 26% increase in incoming tourists compared to last year, and heightened global attention on Israel's remarkable culinary landscape – thanks in part to Michael Solomonov's passion for the country and cuisine – there is no doubt that Israel's food scene is a driving force for tourism," said Uri Steinberg, Consul and Israel Tourism Commissioner, North America. "We're elated to be teaming up with Michael to continue to elevate awareness of Israel's unparalleled gastronomic offerings."

At the center of this initiative is the mission to highlight the incredible strides Israel's food scene has made in recent years – from a place known primarily for its humus and falafel, to a cuisine that is world-renowned – this evolution is strengthened by Chef Michael Solomonov blazing the path for his home country.

"It is my life's work to help people in the United States and around the world to experience the depth and distinct beauty of Israeli cuisine," said Solomonov. "Israel is a nation, a culture, a people, and a cuisine that I believe in deeply. I am incredibly honored to work with the Israel Ministry of Tourism on this mission of furthering the exposure and understanding of Israeli food culture on an international stage."

In the United States, Chef Solomonov has been instrumental in raising awareness for Israel's burgeoning cuisine. This partnership will bring American journalists to Israel for a firsthand look – and taste – of the country's impressive fare over two exclusive culinary-focused media trips guided by Solomonov. The trips will provide members of the media a behind-the-scenes look at the many avenues through which Solomonov draws inspiration from the destination, by touring and tasting through a selection of his

favorite local haunts that bring to light the historic ways Israel's food culture has transformed in recent years.

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ABOUT ISRAEL

Israel appeals to a diverse range of visitors as a world-class tourist destination with an impressive assortment of historical, cultural, culinary and religious attractions – each the perfect blend of tradition and contemporary. As a young country but with history dating back thousands of years, Israel is unique in that it offers the best of both worlds: unrivaled historical significance in some areas and vibrant, hip, stylish experiences in others. From awe-inspiring ancient city ruins, artifacts and diversity in Jerusalem and Akko, to world-class shopping, museums and a buzzing beach scene in Tel Aviv, to adrenaline inducing adventure opportunities in the Negev Desert and of course, a burgeoning culinary scene throughout, Israel has something for everyone to enjoy. A destination where travelers have the chance to experience an unparalleled combination of old and new, Israel is a must-see in 2017.

ABOUT MICHAEL SOLOMONOV

Michael Solomonov is the executive chef and co-owner of Philadelphia's pioneering Israeli restaurant, Zahav. He is the 2011 James Beard Award winner for "Best Chef, Mid-Atlantic", a 2016 James Beard Award winner for "Best International Cookbook" and "Book of the Year" for his and business partner/co-author Steven Cook's first cookbook, *Zahav: A World of Israeli Cooking*, and the newly awarded 2017 James Beard Award winner for "Outstanding Chef." In 2015, *EATER* restaurant editor/critic, Bill Addison, named Chef Solomonov the "Genius of Modern Jewish Cooking" and in 2014, asserted that "Zahav defines Israeli cuisine in America" as part of two excellent reviews. Food Critic Craig LaBan of the *Philadelphia Inquirer* has twice-rated Zahav the coveted "Four Bells", and rated both Abe Fisher and Dizengoff "Three Bells" in his review. In addition to his duties at Zahav, Chef Solomonov co-owns Philadelphia's Federal Donuts, Dizengoff, Abe Fisher, Goldie, and the philanthropic Rooster Soup Company, which donates 100% of its profits to Broad Street Ministry Hospitality Collaborative that provides meals and essential services to individuals experiencing homelessness and hunger in Philadelphia. Solomonov is also co-owner of Dizengoff NYC inside the storied Chelsea Market, Dizengoff Miami, which is slated to open in summer 2017, as well as Federal Donuts in Miami, which opened in June 2017. Born in Israel and raised in Pittsburgh, Solomonov frequently travels back to Israel.

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Israel Sets Tourism Records in 2016 with Almost 4% Increase in Incoming Tourists Over the Previous Year

2016 Marketing Initiatives Leads to all-time Record for Incoming Tourism in last Four Months of the Year

Tourism Minister Yariv Levin: "The increase in tourist entries to Israel is the result of significant budgets that were allocated for marketing and attractive campaigns, investment in new markets and the development of relevant sub-brands for different target markets."

Jerusalem, January 10, 2017 – Despite the drop in incoming tourism in many countries in the region, Israel registered an almost 4% increase in incoming tourism for 2016, with 2.9 million tourist entries. In addition, the United States continued to represent the largest country of origin for incoming tourism to Israel, with 648,310 tourist entries in 2016, 5% more than 2015 and 8% more than in 2014. The Tourism Ministry is not surprised by these statistics and attributes the increase to a strategic shift in marketing and an increase in the marketing budget.

The marketing program adopted by the Tourism Minister Yariv Levin and implemented under the direction of Tourism Ministry Director-General Amir Halevi focused on creating demand in Israel tourism by building sub-brands suited to different target markets, supported by wide-ranging campaigns and including new markets such as India and China which have each registered increases of tens of percent in incoming tourism. The Tourism Ministry also promoted collaborations with the largest international online travel agents such as Expedia and TripAdvisor. In addition, the ministry worked with international airlines to expose them to the economic potential of opening routes to Israel and, among others, by giving incentives for every passenger flying into Ovda and for opening new routes into Ben Gurion airport.

Tourism Minister Yariv Levin: "The increase does not come from thin air. The increase in tourist entries to Israel is the result of significant budgets that were allocated for marketing and attractive campaigns, investment in new markets and the development of relevant sub-brands for different target markets. The strategic plans are adapted to fluctuations and changes in the tourism industry worldwide. I will continue to advance the activities of the ministry with strategic international partners so that the tourism market in Israel will continue to develop and flourish."

With a budget of nearly half a billion shekels - the highest ever for tourism marketing – the focus was placed on campaigns in key markets with the highest numbers of incoming tourism and the largest potential for additional growth, such as USA, Russia, Germany, France, England and others. This, alongside investment in new and significant markets with high potential for increased tourism, particularly India and China.

In addition to the marketing campaigns, Hainan Airlines, the largest private airline in China, opened a new route into Israel and one can see an increase of tens of percent in tourism traffic. The expenditure of the Chinese tourist in Israel is the largest of all countries, injecting revenue into the local economy. For the first time this year, a tourism campaign ran in India, gaining millions of views. According to Google, the exposure to the campaign promoting tourism to Israel came close to the exposure of the campaign for the Pepsi drinks brand.

Increase in tourism from countries with new air routes and advertising campaigns:

The period September through December 2016 saw a record in the number of incoming tourists. The countries which registered the most significant increase in the number of tourist entries as opposed to the previous year were: China (+69%); Croatia (+62%); Belarus, Latvia and Georgia (+41%), Malaysia (+35%) and the Philippines (+27%). The USA and Russia continue to lead in the numbers of incoming tourists, followed by France, UK, Germany and Ukraine (see below).

Tourism to Eilat doubles:

- Flights to Eilat from 9 European cities – because of the ministry directive that offers a 45 Euro subsidy to every passenger flying into Ovda in the current winter season, with a total budget of NIS 18 million.
- Anticipated doubling of tourist entries arriving on direct flights into Ovda this winter season, as opposed to 42,000 in the winter season 2015/2016.
- NIS 10 million advertising campaigns promoting the new Eilat brand in UK, Finland, Russia, France and Poland, with a dedicated website in English, Russian, Finnish and French : www.traveleilat.com
- Because of the ministry's activities, Eilat was ranked seventh by TripAdvisor in a list of destinations on the rise.

New Markets

India

- For the first time, an advertising campaign in India to encourage tourism to Israel – the video had tens of millions of hits for minimal promotional cost. The [YouTube video](#) has over 11.7 million views
- The marketing budget stood at NIS15m in 2016
- Israel won a prize from the Indian Travel + Leisure Magazine as the best destination for history and heritage
- According to Google and YouTube, as a result of the campaign, the brand Israel competes with other leading brands in India such as Pepsi

China

- Israel won the 2016 Best Destination in Chinese media awards.
- Hainan Airlines, the largest private airline in China, opened its route from Beijing-Tel Aviv in April 2016
- Hainan recently added another weekly flight and is planning to open a route from Shanghai
- The marketing budget rose dramatically in 2016 to about NIS 20m.
- The increased tourism traffic from China and India injected tens of millions of shekel into the Israeli economy in 2016 and this is expected to significantly increase in the future.

Renewing Existing Markets

Campaigns in Europe

- After many years of hiatus, advertising campaigns ran in Holland, Scandinavia and Spain.
- **Two Cities One Break** – a new and comprehensive campaign with a budget of NIS 80 million that ran simultaneously in 8 European countries, promoting the city break concept in Tel Aviv and Jerusalem. The campaign, which starred Israeli model Shir Elmaliach, ran on TV, billboards and in print, with a focus on digital media. The concept offers Europeans two destinations on one ticket, Jerusalem and Tel Aviv. From data based on the first round of the campaign, there were 1.9 million unique visitors and 4.5 million clicks from 9 countries. More than 24.5 million views were recorded for the campaign video. Example: <https://youtu.be/dBNXPfdePs>

Campaigns in USA

- The NIS 50 million USA campaign targets Evangelical, Catholic and Jewish audiences in New York, LA, Atlanta and Florida, with a particularly high budget for online promotion.

Aviation

- New Hainan Airlines route from Beijing
- New Wizzair route from Warsaw
- New Ryanair route from Bratislava
- New EasyJet route from Amsterdam
- New United Airlines route from San Francisco
- New Ryanair route from Paphos
- Declaration by Cathay Pacific to open new route from Hong Kong in two more months

Tourism Minister Yariv Levin defined the increase of seat capacity on flights into Israel as a significant target for the ministry. In 2017, significant budgets will be allocated to promoting new routes from Europe into Ovda and Ben Gurion airports.

Collaboration with online travel agents

- TripAdvisor, Expedia, Odigeo
- Payment to agents based on sales results
- Adjusting to the market reversal – 60% of tourists arrive independently and not in organized groups

There have been marked changes in incoming tourism in recent years, with most tourists today arriving independently (FITs), about 60%, as opposed to arriving as part of a group. In addition, they purchase their own land and air arrangements through online travel agencies. The ministry adapted itself to this trend, with a NIS 18.5 million investment in collaboration with the largest companies such as Expedia, TripAdvisor, Edreams and Odigeo. Payment is based on results and not on advertising.

Promoting sports events as a tourism engine

- Campaigns on Eurosport during the Tour de France
- About 3,000 tourists participated in the Jerusalem Marathon
- Hosting journalists from around the world to cover sporting events
- Hosting journalists who cycle to cover new cycling routes

Hostings in 2016

The Ministry hosted more than 2000 opinion-formers, decision-makers, celebrities and travel agents, of whom 70% were journalists.

- Among the most well-known: Bollywood producers, Roseanne Barr, Bollywood star Sunam Kapoor, stars of the youth series The Green House, American Jazz ensembles for Winter Jam, 2016 Eurovision participants and more
- Hosting of production of popular reality shows from Europe and USA
- Hosting cyclists to ride the new cycling routes in the desert
- Hosting chefs and journalists for the Round Tables event
- Hosting the conference for Indian travel agents (TAFI)
- Hosting the Romanian travel agents conference
- Hosting journalists for a variety of events, such as Tel Aviv Pride Parade, the Opera Festival in Jerusalem and Acre, Midburn Festival, Bird Festival in Eilat, Israel Trail, Open Houses in Jerusalem, Yoga in the Arava and more
- Hosting large conferences of travel agents and tour operators from India, China, Philippines, Russia, Ukraine, Japan and more

Tourism by Source Country

As in previous years, tourism from the USA continued to represent the largest country of origin for incoming tourism to Israel, with 648,310 tourist entries in 2016, 5% more than 2015 and 8% more than in 2014. In second place is tourism from Russia with 440,358 visitors, a decrease of 1% on 2015 and 21% on 2014. Tourism from France takes third place, with 287,450 tourist entries, 2% less than last year and 1% down on 2014, followed by the United Kingdom with 181,346 (4% up on 2015 and 10% up on 2014) and Germany with 164,076 tourist entries, 3% more than 2015 and 1% more than 2014.

Statistics on other countries available on request.

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What's Happening in Israel: A Wide Variety of Events, Festivals and Brand-New Attractions Bring in Record-Breaking Tourism Numbers

New York, New York, June 28, 2017 – Hot off a record-breaking first half of the year, Israel boasted world-renowned festivals, visits from celebrity fans and exciting new hot spots. From January-May 2017, 1.43 million tourist entries were recorded, a 25% increase on the same period last year. Israel is gearing up for an even busier summer season with new air routes, attractions and a lineup of highly anticipated events planned.

Recent Happenings

Airport and Flight News – The sky's the limit at Ben Gurion Airport, which just inaugurated its revamped Terminal 1 in June, to accommodate low-cost airlines. According to Transportation Ministry officials, an estimated 1.4 million departing passengers are expected to pass through annually. In addition, on June 18, 2017, Air Transat launched direct flights from Montreal to Tel Aviv. The nonstop flights, operating between the Montréal-Trudeau airport and the David Ben-Gurion international airport of Tel Aviv will operate twice weekly, on Wednesdays and Sundays, through late October. Transat will also be offering an array of packages, guided tours and hotels for discovering Tel Aviv and Jerusalem, as well as the region's many tourist attractions. Further, starting in September, WOW air will begin nonstop service to Tel Aviv from New York, Boston, Chicago, San Francisco, Los Angeles, Toronto and Montreal. Beginning in November, EL AL Israel Airlines will be offering three weekly roundtrip flights between Miami and Tel Aviv. The nonstop service will be the first EL AL destination in Florida and the airline's fifth route in the USA.

Tel Aviv Pride 2017 – Over 200,000 people from Israel and around the world participated in the Tel Aviv Pride Parade on June 9. The largest ever pride parade in Asia and the Middle East, it was also the first large-scale pride parade in the world to ever celebrate the theme of bisexuality. Tel Aviv Pride Parade is widely recognized as one of the leading parades in the world, with The Boston Globe dubbing Tel Aviv "the World's Gayest City," and Out Magazine calling it "the Gay Capital of the Middle East." Celebrity blogger, television personality and LGBT activist Perez Hilton attended the week's events as a guest of the Israel Tourism Ministry, serving as this year's International Ambassador for Tel Aviv Pride. "I'm thrilled to be in this city with my children and to show them a place that I truly love. With all the awful things happening to Gay, Lesbian and Transgender people all over the world, I am so happy to be in a place that is so welcoming." Tel Aviv Pride Week 2018 is scheduled for June 3, 2018, with the parade scheduled for Friday, June 8, 2018.

NFL Legend Visit – In celebration of the brand-new Kraft Family Sports Campus in Jerusalem, opened by NFL Patriots owner Robert Kraft, 18 members of the NFL Hall of Fame visited Israel in June. While

visiting the destination, the football icons checked out the local sports scene, toured the country and had a fan meet-and-greet at the Kraft Family Stadium. Legends on the trip included Jim Brown, Lem Barney, Jerome Bettis, Cris Carter, Dave Casper, Eric Dickerson, Marshall Faulk, Joe Greene, Willie Lanier, Joe Montana, Andre Reed, Mike Singletary, Bruce Smith, John Stallworth, Roger Staubach, Andre Tippett, Aeneas Williams and Ron Yary.

New Attractions:

Sea Israel: Gottesman Aquarium – In June, the Sea Israel: Gottesman Aquarium, the first aquarium of its type in Israel, was inaugurated at the Tisch Family Zoological Gardens. The 6,000 square-meter aquarium is comprised of 30 tanks of varying sizes, showcasing thousands of Israel's fish and marine creatures from the Mediterranean, the Red Sea and the Sea of Galilee. The Sea Israel: Gottesman Aquarium will open to the general public as of July 4th by advanced registration and ticket purchase.

JerusaLENS – The Jubilee Exhibition at Ammunition Hill opens this week in Jerusalem where the top 100 photographs from the international photography competition JerusaLENS will be exhibited until August 6th, 2017. Some 14,500 photographs from 84 countries were uploaded within six weeks and received 2.4 million votes – a record number for World Cities challenges on the Gurushots site – more photos and votes than Paris, New York and London. The International Photography Challenge JerusaLENS was held in honor of the Jubilee Year of the Six Days War and has become the largest collection of Jerusalem photographs on the web.

Terra Sancta Museum – Visitors and pilgrims to the Old City of Jerusalem are invited to visit the new multimedia wing of the Terra Sancta Museum, dedicated to the roots of Christianity and preservation of The Holy Places. Visitors to the Terra Sancta Museum's multimedia exhibition are transported to the time of King Herod, with vivid lights, sounds, narrative storytelling and animations depicting the dramatic events where the passion, death and resurrection of Jesus took place.

Upcoming Events/Festivals:

The 9th International Festival of Light – The 9th International Festival of Light will take place this year in Jerusalem's Old City from June 28 to July 6. The festival is free for all to enjoy as the alleyways of the Old City become illuminated in breathtaking colors, shapes and movement. The Old City is transformed with innovative and challenging installations into a map of enchanted illuminated trails suitable for visitors, locals, families, artists and creative enthusiasts.

Tel Aviv White Night – The all-night celebration of Tel Aviv's unique culture, "Tel Aviv White Night" will take place on June 29 with over 100 free and low-cost events throughout the city from dusk till dawn!

The Akko Opera Festival – The Akko Opera Festival will take place for the fourth consecutive year in the Old City's Crusader Fortress, a UNESCO World Heritage site, over the weekend August 3-5, 2017. Tourists and visitors attending the festival can enjoy an exceptional cultural experience, thanks to the unique combination of enchanting music, productions created especially for the festival and the spectacular setting of the Crusader Fortress.

Open Restaurants – Open Restaurants is a four-day culinary festival that explores the city's unique food landscape. Returning to Jerusalem for the second time from November 14-18, 2017, the incredible line-

up will feature top chefs, restaurants, workshops and industry leaders. Open Restaurants invites participants to discover Jerusalem's unique history through food and to dine with some of its finest chefs.

Passage to Israel – Passage to Israel, a 210-page book comprised of images of Israel that depict the country's diverse nature, culture, sites and individuals by more than 35 photographers, has been unveiled during a special exhibition, entitled Soul of the Land, at the Jerusalem Theater, on display June 21 through July 18, 2017. Originally released by Skyhorse Publishing in 2016, Passage to Israel was curated by Kara Meyer and Karen Lehrman Bloch, and features captivating, original photography from more than 35 photographers from Israel. From the Golan Heights and Galilee in the north, to Jerusalem, Tel Aviv, the Dead Sea, and the Judea and Negev Deserts in the south, the visual book examines how the small strip of land between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea became a unique bridge between Africa, Asia, and Europe and boasts a profusion of cultures, customs, and traditions. Passage to Israel reveals how the people of Israel transformed a desert land of ancient ruins into a breathtaking composition of the natural and man-made, a gorgeous montage of cobblestone streets and wineries, sculpture gardens and Bauhaus architecture, innovative interiors and verdant olive plantations.

20th Maccabiah Games Start in Israel – On July 6, Israel will host the 20th Maccabiah with an expected 10,000 athletes from 80 countries competing in the "Jewish Olympics." Occurring every four years, this year's "Jewish Olympics" is set to be the largest in history with over 32,000 people expected to attend.

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About Israel:

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Tourism Minister Yariv Levin Visits United States in March to Attract Hispanic Market

Tourism Ministry Takes Steps to Continue to Build Relationships with Communities Worldwide

Tourism Minister Yariv Levin: "As tourism increases in Israel, we're keen on taking a global approach to attract more tourists to Israel. It remains priority that we visit the United States to sustain the many conversations taking place with various communities in hopes of attracting them to Israel."

Jerusalem, February XX, 2017 – Israel's Tourism Minister Yariv Levin announced a much-anticipated visit to the United States from March 14-16, with the aim of strengthening relations with the Hispanic community. Minister Levin will be meeting with influential leaders in Miami and New York to gauge current opinions on Israel and to encourage Hispanic travelers to visit.

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- Hosting of production of popular reality shows from Europe and USA
- Hosting cyclists to ride the new cycling routes in the desert
- Hosting chefs and journalists for the Round Tables event
- Hosting the conference for Indian travel agents (TAFI)
- Hosting the Romanian travel agents conference
- Hosting journalists for a variety of events, such as Tel Aviv Pride Parade, the Opera Festival in Jerusalem and Acre, Midburn Festival, Bird Festival in Eilat, Israel Trail, Open Houses in Jerusalem, Yoga in the Arava and more
- Hosting large conferences of travel agents and tour operators from India, China, Philippines, Russia, Ukraine, Japan and more

Tourism by Source Country

As in previous years, tourism from the **USA** continued to represent the largest country of origin for incoming tourism to Israel, with 648,310 tourist entries in 2016, 5% more than 2015 and 8% more than in 2014. In second place is tourism from **Russia** with 440,358 visitors, a decrease of 1% on 2015 and 21% on 2014. Tourism from **France** takes third place, with 287,450 tourist entries, 2% less than last year and 1% down on 2014, followed by the **United Kingdom** with 181,346 (4% up on 2015 and 10% up on 2014) and **Germany** with 164,076 tourist entries, 3% more than 2015 and 1% more than 2014.

Statistics on other countries available on request.

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Calling All Adventure Addicts! Israel is a Thrill-Seeker's Paradise with Hot Air Balloon Rides, Desert Surfing, Dead Sea Stand Up Paddle Boarding and more!

Travelers can take to the water, land and sky with action-packed experiences ranging from soft adventure to extreme sports

New York, New York, August 9, 2017 – With endless options for thrill-seekers ranging from soft adventure to heart-racing happenings for the most daring, Israel is an adventure traveler's playground. The destination has a multitude of activities sure to impress adrenaline junkies, including hot air balloon rides, desert surfing, breathtaking hikes, abseiling, stand up paddle boarding and more. Israel beckons visitors to the sea, sand and sky, where an unforgettable journey awaits.

The sky's the limit



Sky Diving – Looking for a more adrenaline-packed adventure in Israel's clear blue skies? For brave travelers, there are a variety of Skydiving outfitters sure to get the blood pumping. **Israel Extreme** (the name says all you need to know!) offers tandem jumps in the western Galilee with intoxicating views that include the Mediterranean Sea, the Sea of Galilee, the Hermon Mountain (the highest mountain in Israel, which is covered by snow most of the year) Haifa and Tzfata, and more. For travelers looking for an aerial adventure without the free fall, paragliding is a perfect option. Rides are customized based on personal preference,

ranging from a calm and tantalizing glide, to a more extreme nail biter.

Hot Air Ballooning – Take your travels in Israel to new heights with a breathtaking hot air balloon ride above the picturesque Jezreel Valley. Check out **Rize Up**, the first and largest company to offer hot air balloon rides to the public in Israel. Each balloon ride can hold between 4 and up to 16 passengers and lasts between 40 and 90 minutes. **Skytrek** is another option, providing riders a stunning view of the snowy peak of Mount Hermon, Mount Carmel and the city of Haifa, and to the east, views of mountains of the kingdom of Jordan. Check out the newest hot air balloon rides in Israel with a stay at the **Galilion Hotel**, located in the heart of the Upper Galilee. Launched earlier this year, guests at the hotel can now enjoy the hot air balloon observatory, which soars to 150 meters and overlooks the spectacular view of the valley and surrounding mountains.

Whatever floats your boat

Stand Up Paddle Boarding – If stand up paddle boarding (SUP) at the lowest point on earth isn't on a traveler's bucket list, it should be! Even if visitors have done their fair share of SUP, they haven't experienced it quite like they will at the Dead Sea. Head to Supaway for the chance to row through the turquoise water taking in the salt crystals protruding from the water and spreading to the edge of the beach. Don't forget to hop into the warm, mineral-rich waters for the traditional Dead Sea float! Tel Aviv's award-winning beaches are also home to must-try stand up paddle boarding and surfing. Israel Surf Club, located on the beautiful Dolfinarium Beach offers lessons and rentals of surfboards, boogie boards, life jackets, wetsuits and more. Guests can rent the equipment for an hour or a full day, and if they get tired and need a break, there is an on-site restaurant serving up authentic Israeli food and refreshing drinks.



Kayaking and Rafting – Head to the Kfar Blum Kayaks in the Upper Galilee for a rafting and kayaking experience! Hop in a two-person kayak or raft that fits up to six and opt for the challenging route, which passes through dense vegetation and a wild northern nature. The route begins with a fast-flowing river section, with small coves, pebble-beaches and pools to rest in and explore. The 2.5-hour ride later relaxes into a leisurely cruise.

Take a walk on the wild side

Hiking – Israel is the place to be for hiking and rock climbing. For something central, head to the biblical oasis of Ein Gedi in the heart of the Judean Desert for a hike in the David Stream Nature Reserve. The reserve is home to abundant flora, fauna and wildlife, and refreshing springs, waterfalls and flowing brooks at the foot of the cliffs. Here, visitors can spend a few hours or a full day exploring the serene and diverse landscapes, thanks to the vast differences in elevation over relatively short distances within the reserve. For a leisurely hike lasting about an hour, try the Ancient Synagogue trail or the lower section of Wadi David, or for a more strenuous and challenging adventure, try the Wadi Arugot or the upper section of the Wadi David, both of which take about 3-4 hours to complete. Entrance to the park is around \$8 for adults and \$4 for children.



Sand Surfing – Israel is known for its more than 124 miles of gorgeous beaches, drawing in travelers in droves for world class surfing. But now, visitors can put their skills to the test with another kind of surfing – down the stunning Negev dunes. Book a tour with Dror BaMidbar for a once-in-a-lifetime experience of sand surfing, ideal for family vacations, bachelor parties and more. Unlike surfing in the ocean, there is no need for previous experience; rides down the dunes can be done standing, sitting, lying on your stomach, in pairs and even backwards. After a day full of fun in the sun, sit down for a

unique desert picnic, complete with pita bread on a fire, desert tea and an assortment of snacks and cakes.



Ramon crater – While enjoying the vastness of the Negev Desert, a visit to the Ramon Crater, the world's largest erosion crater is a must. Enjoy awe-inspiring views from the top of the crater as far as the eye can see, and then gear up and get ready to abseil or rappel down the cliffs of Mitzpe Ramon. Take your experience a step further by camping out under the stars. **Deep Desert Israel** offers a stargazing experience that will transport visitors from the sandy plateaus of the desert straight into outer space with a private star gazing observatory. Peer up with a naked eye or through the company's powerful telescopes as guides share mind-blowing facts about the universe alongside mythological stories about the constellations.

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About Israel:

Israel appeals to a diverse range of visitors as a world-class tourist destination with an impressive assortment of historical, cultural, culinary and religious attractions – each the perfect blend of tradition and contemporary. As a young country but with history dating back thousands of years, Israel is unique in that it offers the best of both worlds: unrivaled historical significance in some areas and vibrant, hip, stylish experiences in others. From awe-inspiring ancient city ruins, artifacts and diversity in Jerusalem and Akko, to world-class shopping, museums and a buzzing beach scene in Tel Aviv, to adrenaline inducing adventure opportunities in the Negev Desert and, (how could we not mention) a burgeoning (or ever expanding) culinary scene throughout, Israel has something for everyone to enjoy. A destination where travelers have the chance to experience an unparalleled combination of old and new, Israel is a must-see in 2017.

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What's New: Israel's Record Breaking Tourism Year Continues with New Hotels, Whiskey Developments, Events & Festivals and More

New York, New York, October 9, 2017 – Tourism to Israel continues to thrive following another record breaking month, with a more than 21% increase in U.S. visitors from January – August 2017 compared to the same time in 2016. With recent celebrity visits, numerous new hotel openings and the hottest fall events and festivals worth traveling for, Israel continues to solidify its place at the top of travelers' bucket lists.

Recent Happenings:

- **Conan O'Brien** – In September, Conan O'Brien touched down in Israel to film for his show 'Conan Without Borders: Israel,' taking viewers along for his adventures in Tel Aviv and Jerusalem. The funnyman explored places like the sunny beaches, the Western Wall, The Dead Sea – and even 'Wonder Woman' actress Gal Gadot's apartment. The full episode and short clips from his visit to the destination can be viewed [online](#).
- **Association des Agents de Voyages du Québec** – Tourism to Israel from Canada is also continuing to break records, with an increase of 26% in incoming visitors so far this year. It's easy to see why Israel is in the running for the Destination of the Year accolade from [Association des Agents de Voyages du Québec](#). Voted for by consumers, the winner will be announced at the 5th edition of the Uni-Vers Gala, taking place on October 19, 2017 at the Rialto Theater in Montreal.

Hot New Hotels:

- **The Orient Jerusalem** – Isrotel, one of Israel's leading hotel chains, just debuted a new member within its impressive portfolio of hotels: [The Orient Jerusalem](#). Positioned in Western-Jerusalem's storied German Colony, one of the city's most vibrant, upscale, and sought-after neighborhoods, The Orient Jerusalem sits at a crossroads of culture, entertainment, and leisure. The property is a mere 20 minute walk from the heart of Jerusalem's prized Old City and is just steps away from HaTachana, the city's first-ever train station (built in 1892) which has since transformed into a lively district of designer boutiques, trendy cafes, chef-driven restaurants, and unique galleries. An amalgamation of old and new and a junction of East and West, the hotel itself comprises of 243 beautifully-appointed guestrooms and suites in its newly constructed central building, as well as a selection of opulent accommodations inside two expertly preserved Templar Buildings from 1882 and 1883.
- **Villa Brown Jerusalem** – The [Villa Brown Jerusalem](#), officially opened in August, is the newest addition to the Brown Hotels group. The 24-room boutique hotel property redefines contemporary hospitality in the holy city of Jerusalem. Just a five-minute walk to Jerusalem's Old City sites and situated in the heart of the bustling city center. Known as the 'Grande Dame' of the Brown Hotels collection, the Villa Brown Jerusalem is exquisitely draped in jewel-toned fineries. The hotel's distinct aesthetic is a multilayered interpretation of the East-Meets-West.



social and cultural pinnacle of Jerusalem during the British Mandate period, merging Neoclassical, Ottoman and Eclectic-design-styles with contemporary interior influences, exemplified through velvety pigments of red, emerald and mauve that adorn the public and private spaces throughout the property.

- **Ibis Jerusalem City Center** – Located on Zion Square, in the heart of Jerusalem's city center, the Ibis Red Hotel opened in August 2017, offering visitors and tourists another accommodation option in the capital. The new hotel has 124 rooms and is an Ibis Red, one of three Ibis categories, meaning all the furnishings are imported from Europe in adherence to the hotel's international design standard. This is the first Ibis hotel in central Jerusalem. The comfortable and stylish rooms are furnished with the Ibis Sweet Bed which has specially designed bed and bedding. The bedrooms include a large double bed or single beds, ensuite bathroom, hair dryer, desk, internet and LED flat TV. Guests can enjoy a rich Israeli buffet breakfast and the hotel's stylish lobby bar offers a wide selection of drinks, light meals and hosts a complimentary happy hour for its guests every evening.
- **Setai Sea of Galilee** – The recently opened Setai Sea of Galilee, located by Kursi Beach, is now taking reservations. The Setai Sea of Galilee is a 5-star deluxe hotel that provides an exceptional hospitality and vacation experience, together with unmatched, breathtaking views of the Golan Heights and the Sea of Galilee. The hotel features 110 spacious suites and rooms, including 88 suites where guests will enjoy adjacent private pools or hot tubs, as well as 22 luxurious Garden Deluxe rooms.
- **Setai Tel Aviv** – Set to open in the coming months, Setai Tel Aviv will be housed in the historic Kishle Building in Jaffa's Clock Tower Square. The historic building is being converted into 120 lavish suites and rooms. The Setai Tel Aviv will also include a world class restaurant, a lounge bar in a 1000-year-old room, state of the art Spa and health complex, with 7 treatments rooms, Turkish Hamam and well-equipped fitness center.

Whiskey Business:

- **The Milk & Honey Distillery** – Israel's first whisky distillery, The Milk & Honey Distillery officially launched 'Israel's First Single Malt Whisky.' Made in Israel from start to finish, this is the first release of a single malt spirit that was matured for 3 years. Israel's First Single Malt Whisky is a refreshing non-filtered single cask whisky, bottled at 46% abv. The whisky is mature and complex for its young age, thanks to Israel's hot climate conditions. The spirit officially went on international sale on August 11.
- **Whiskey Bar Museum** – The popular hot spot, Whiskey Bar & Museum, expanded this month, taking over the rest of its formerly shared space. One of the largest establishments of its kind in the world. It combines a bar and a whiskey museum, located in the Templar tunnel in Sarona, where a 19th century winery used to operate, and until a decade ago was used by the Mossad. With more than 1,002 different kinds of whiskey on hand, and a contemporary kitchen cooking up dishes specifically designed to accentuate whiskey, the establishment is an unparalleled stop for refreshments in Israel.



Can't-Miss Events:

- **Tel Aviv Night Run** - More than 25,000 people are expected to take to the streets and participate in the 11th Tel Aviv Night Run on October 31, 2017. The route will pass through some of the nonstop city's major sites and attractions. Thousands of spectators are expected to line the route, which will include DJs playing music. The run will end with a party in the Ganei Yehoshua Park.
- **Yoga Arava Festival** – From November 2-4, 2017, the floor of the Arava Desert will serve as the mats for the Seventh Yoga Arava Festival, the biggest yoga meeting in Israel. Throughout the weekend, the villages of the Arava will host deep yoga workshops with the best teachers in Israel and special guest teachers from abroad, and participants will be embraced by the exhilarating desert landscape.
- **Open Restaurants Jerusalem** –The urban culinary festival, Open Restaurants Jerusalem, began five years ago in Tel Aviv-Jaffa, and is in its second year in Jerusalem. Providing a behind the scenes look at the city's hot and exciting culinary scene, the festival will include a wide array of cultural and multidisciplinary events, showcasing the capital's multitude of cultural institutions, chefs, manufacturers, restaurants and local culinary personalities. During the Open Restaurants events, many of Jerusalem's finest restaurants will open their kitchens for special workshops and dinners, among them Machneyuda, Hamotzi, Adom, and Azura. Tickets go on sale on October 15 and can be purchased online.
- **Giro d'Italia** – In May 2018, the world-famous Giro d'Italia, a major event in the global sporting calendar, will begin in Jerusalem. It will be the first time in history that a Grand-Tour (cycling's three major races) has taken place outside of Europe, and will be the most prestigious sporting event ever held in Israel. Commencing on May 4, this event will see 176 of the world's top cyclists begin the competition against the backdrop of Jerusalem's Old City. Over the following two days, the competitors will ride from the North of Israel to the tip of the Red Sea, taking in breathtaking views from start to finish. The Giro will finish three weeks later in Italy on May 22. As a result, the 2018 Giro will carry a strong message of peace and coexistence, with its journey representing the ability of sport to build bridges between people, religions and nations.

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