



# Middle East Spotlight

## Visiting the Jewish state

June is one of America's favorite months for vacationing, and it is also one of the best months to visit Israel. It's not *too* hot yet still nice enough to enjoy Israel's beautiful beaches and enviable weather.

From north to south, east to west, Israel is filled with historic treasures and modern marvels. At only roughly the size of New Jersey, the Jewish state's diverse array of spectacles is truly unique.

There's something for everyone to love in Israel—from the forests, mountains and lakes of the Galilee in the north, to the ancient holy city of Jerusalem in the east, to the natural beauty of the Negev desert and the Red Sea beaches of Eilat in the south, to the high-tech, modern city of Tel Aviv along the Mediterranean Sea in the west. These are only a few of the many destinations in Israel.

It appears more and more people are coming to appreciate Israel's beauty and allure. Last year was a record-breaking year for Israeli tourism: Some 3.6 million people visited the Jewish state in 2017, according to Israeli Ministry of Tourism statistics. This is a 25 percent increase from 2016.

Interestingly, 59 percent of the tourists who visited Israel in 2017 were doing so for the first time.

By far, the largest proportion of these tourists, around 700,000, came from the United States—a 21 percent increase from the previous year. Many more also came from Russia (307,000), France (284,000) and the United Kingdom (185,000).

In 2017, most of these tourists visited Jerusalem (78 percent) and Tel Aviv-Jaffa (67 percent), while large numbers also visited the Dead Sea (49 percent) and Tiberias and the Galilee region (35 percent).

The Ministry's report also noted that tourism last year added more than \$5.6 billion (NIS 20 billion) to the Israeli economy.

Israeli tourism also achieved a historic milestone on March 22, when Air India Flight 139 traveled from New Delhi to Tel Aviv through the airspace of Oman and Saudi Arabia. This unprecedented event—which is now a regular flight route—illustrates some benefits of the increasing cooperation between Israel and the Gulf countries.

There is no doubt that Israel is experiencing a tourism boom, despite all the threats to the Jewish state—from an increasingly aggressive Iran, to the terrorist group Hezbollah's 150,000 rockets and missiles on Israel's northern border. But with Israeli ingenuity and the support of the U.S.-Israel relationship, Israel's successes—in tourism and elsewhere—are only likely to grow.