

FAQs

Israel Tour Launch: February 2024

1) Who runs Israel Tour?

Israel Tours have been run successfully for decades through a partnership of UJIA Israel Experience, The Jewish Agency for Israel (JAFI), the Youth Movements/Organisations, and Tour Providers in Israel (the Organisers). When you sign up, you do so through the Youth Movement/Organisation of your choice, but the success of Tour relies on each of the Organisers playing their part.

UJIA Israel Experience (organised by JAFI and supported by UJIA) takes on a number of administrative roles including helping manage the application process, coordinating flights, and being responsible for crisis management. UJIA Israel Experience provides support to Youth Movements / Organisations and Tour Providers in Israel to help ensure Israel Tours run smoothly and to high standards.

The Youth Movement/Organisation will be responsible for the educational content, delivery and ethos of the programme, and all communication with you.

The Tour Provider in Israel is responsible for all the day-to-day arrangements on the ground, for example food, transportation and accommodation.

UJIA supports the project through its support for JAFI and UJIA Israel Experience, but it is not one of the Organisers. UJIA provides financial assistance on a means tested basis to participants to ensure Israel Tour remains accessible for all.

More information about this and all of the topics covered in these FAQs are set out in the UJIA Israel Experience Important Information Booklet, including the UJIA Israel Experience Terms and Conditions. If there is a conflict or inconsistency between the information in these FAQs and the UJIA Israel Experience Important Information Booklet, the terms of the UJIA Israel Experience Important Information Booklet prevail.

2) Why have you decided to launch Israel Tour?

What we have witnessed in Israel since October 7th has been unprecedented. As a community we have mourned for family, friends, and colleagues, and have shared in the grief of the people of Israel. We are united in solidarity and support and pray for the swift return of all hostages and the healing of those injured.

We have been working hard to find a pathway to run Israel Tour this summer, with the safety and security of participants as the utmost priority. We have undergone a detailed risk analysis within UJIA Israel Experience, taking legal advice in the UK, securing travel and medical insurance policies, and liaising with our partners and security officials in Israel. UJIA has continued to support Masa long-term and gap year programmes in Israel, as well as sending many Birthright, volunteering, and solidarity groups to Israel since October 7th. Our global partners in North America and other countries continue to plan and run programming.

We know that the decision to send your child on an Israel Tour this summer may be a difficult one, and whilst we have worked hard to ensure everything is in place to run a safe and secure Israel Tour, we encourage you to discuss this with your child and come to the decision that is right for your family. Our job is to do everything possible to provide a safe and secure environment for those who do wish to participate in Israel Tour, but we know that whilst there are always risks involved in travel to Israel and indeed any overseas travel, these are particularly apparent this year.

UJIA Israel Experience works closely with a wide network of Youth Movements and organisations in the UK, tour providers in Israel, and Israeli security services. This has enabled us to run Israel Tours safely for decades through conflict and unrest, and has ensured that these formative educational experiences will continue to be a rite of passage for countless young people in the British Jewish community.

It is clear that continuing to arrange and support trips to Israel is more important than it has ever been. We continue to have an educational responsibility towards our youth to provide them with meaningful educational Israel experiences, but this summer's Israel programming will also bring a vital and much needed boost to local communities who are deeply appreciative of diaspora Jewry's solidarity at this time.

3) UK Foreign Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO) guidance is currently against all but essential travel to Israel – doesn't this mean we can't go?

At the time of launching Israel Tour and since the October 7th attacks, the FCDO advises against all but essential travel to Israel. We hope this changes before tours depart this summer but there is no guarantee that that will happen. Israel Tour will take place even if the FCDO advice doesn't change. That is because we have risk assessed Israel Tour this year, taken advice, put in place additional risk mitigations and concluded that it can be run successfully, safely and securely with the mitigations and arrangements we are putting in place.

The FCDO publishes guidance on how to interpret its travel advice here: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/about-foreign-commonwealth-development-office-travel-advice>: As they state "FCDO travel advice aims to inform British nationals so they can make decisions about travelling abroad... no foreign travel can be guaranteed as safe. You must take personal responsibility for your own travel. Any decision to travel to, stay in, or leave a country, or to undertake any type of activity in that country, is for you to take on the basis of the best available information from our travel advice and other sources. The government cannot make these decisions for you".

In FCDO's definition of essential travel they state "Whether travel is essential or not is your own decision. You may have urgent family or business commitments which you need to attend to. Only you can make an informed decision based on your own individual circumstances and the risks".

In other words, it's for parents to consider the advice to help make an informed decision. As part of this, we hope you will consider the arrangements we've put in place and the extra measures we're putting in place this year (see below).

We have considered the FCDO's advice and factored it in to our risk analysis, alongside the other sources of professional guidance and advice available to us. We have also put in place extensive measures to ensure the success of Israel Tour. In assessing the professional guidance received from our Israeli partners, and undergoing an extensive risk analysis, we are ready to launch and then deliver Israel Tour.

We understand that each individual Youth Movement and parent will need to analyse their own understanding of the risks and make their own choice regarding travel to Israel and we recognise that parents will want to consider the FCDO guidance as part of their decision-making.

4) In what circumstances would you cancel Tour?

We are constantly assessing advice from Pikud Oref (Home Front Command), Moked Teva (Israeli Government situation room), and speaking with partners at ELAL, The Jewish Agency and Tour Providers on the ground. UJIA Israel Experience does not make its own assessment of the security situation - we rely on our working relationships with close partners and institutions who have vast expertise in this area. Should the Home Front Command, Moked Teva, or Israeli Government advise us against coming to Israel or curtailing Tour, this would be cause for cancellation. Likewise, should ELAL not be able to fly and travel therefore became impossible, this would be a cause for cancellation. We keep the situation under constant review and cancellation is always a last resort.

Before this step is taken there are many other options available which we can utilize to ensure safe passage and experience in Israel. These may include itinerary changes, geographical restrictions, additional security measures, or the possibility of a truncated shortened programme. More information about this is contained in UJIA Israel Experience Terms and Conditions.

5) If I sign up, and Tour is cancelled, will I get my money back?

If Israel Tour has to be cancelled before departure because we have to cancel it, it is likely that almost all of the money you have paid will be able to be returned to you. There may be some incidental costs that cannot be recovered - for example insurance costs, GP certificate costs, some unrecoverable land costs - but the Organisers will endeavour to protect funds and then recover as much as possible for you.

Should Israel Tour have to be curtailed during the programme, the Organisers would endeavour to return as much possible to you, with an adjustment made for how much of the programme had already elapsed, and any additional costs incurred in repatriating participants.

6) What is my financial risk? How much do I have to pay now?

On application there is a deposit payment required (normally £500 unless you are applying for financial assistance). We know this is a big decision for you to make and have sought to reduce the financial risk to you for as long as possible. As such, you will have the right to a full refund if you change your mind for any reason, without deduction of any administrative fees, until Monday March 18th 2024. This will allow you several weeks to begin the application process before you are fully committed to the programme. After this point there are financial commitments made by the Organisers for flights and land costs, some of which may not be recoverable.

Should you be forced to cancel your place after March 18th as a result of an event outside of your control (e.g. injury, family bereavement, travel disruption etc) it is possible this would be covered under the Israel Tour Travel Insurance policy, and you could be able to claim the full cost back. Please read the travel insurance policy carefully when considering your decision to apply.

7) What if I change my mind?

By signing up for Israel Tour you are committing to joining us on this pathway in the same way you would any normal year. If you **choose** to cancel your place there are terms and conditions in place.

After March 18th, if you choose to cancel it would be subject to the normal cancellation policy and you would lose your deposit in addition to an admin fee should you choose to cancel 60 days or more before the programme begins. You can see the full cancellation policy in your Youth Movements Israel Tour literature.

Please note, this financial risk is only in the event that you **choose** to cancel. Should you be forced to cancel as a result of an event outside of your control (e.g. injury, family bereavement, travel disruption etc) it is possible this would be covered under the Israel Tour Travel Insurance policy, and you could be able to claim the full cost back.

8) What extra security measures will be in place?

We have already made steps to ensure there is additional security in place this year, and increased provision to care for the participants on Israel Tour. At the time of writing, it is difficult to predict what may or may not be required in the summer, and these steps are of course subject to change depending on the advice received from Israeli security organisations we work with.

- i. All Israel Tour groups this year will have an armed security guard at all times.
- ii. All Israel Tour groups will have an Israeli Madrich/a trained and responsible for managing emergency/siren situations. It is their responsibility when arriving at any location to know where safe areas/shelters are, and ensure participants get to those places in an emergency.
- iii. All Israel Tour Groups will have knowledge of the location of shelters at each accommodation, and on scheduled routes the buses take. This will be given in advance of arrival. Please note, travel itineraries can change for a variety of reasons.
- iv. All Tour Providers will have an emergency protocol in place for locating all participants immediately in the event of an emergency situation.
- v. There will be increased provision of mental health support on call, should a group or individual be affected by a siren or serious incident. There is provision for this through the Tour Providers, Medical Insurance, UJIA Israel Experience support infrastructure, and often also through your Youth Movement.
- vi. Additional training will be given to UK Madrichim on safety & security best practice.
- vii. Participants' free time will be restricted to those areas approved by the office of the Cheder Matsav/Moked Teva, and there may be no possibility of free time. Participants should be aware that the decision to allow free time is made on a day-to-day basis. If Participants are given free time, it will always be within specific geographical boundaries. They will be split into sub-groups

of no less than three Participants and will have to report to their Israel Tour Madrichim/ot (Leaders) at regular intervals. Participants will have an emergency card that will include all relevant and emergency phone numbers. Travel to and from any potential free time activities will only be on the group bus.

9) What happens if a new war starts, or there's an escalation, whilst the groups are in Israel? Will you bring groups home ?

Israel Tours under UJIA Israel Experience have been run for decades through periods of conflict and unrest. There are a number of local, national, and global, government and non-governmental support systems we are able to call upon in an emergency situation. There is a detailed crisis management protocol that can be enacted at a moment's notice.

In the event that certain areas of the country become unsafe, itineraries and accommodation can be changed immediately, and participants moved to a safe location. This has happened in the past, and we work with partners experienced in this field. Tours ran successfully with geographic restrictions in 2014, during the Intifada, and on other occasions.

In the very unlikely event that circumstances require a curtailment of the programme and participants to return to the UK, our core partnerships would come into play. All Israel Tours are under the auspices of the Jewish Agency for Israel with direct access to Israel Government officials in emergency situations. There is also a long-standing and very close partnership with ELAL backing up Israel Tours that ensures all participants would have a flight home in an emergency. In addition to this, our community infrastructures include close working relationships with both the Israel Embassy in the UK, and the British Embassy in Israel. Whilst participants on Israel Tour enjoy a unique and formative experience with their young leaders and Youth Movements, the UJIA Israel Experience network supporting those groups is vast and provides an extensive level of support in crisis situations.

10) What insurance cover is there for the programme?

Travel and medical insurance policies are included in the cost of Israel Tour. These policies will be made available to you by your Youth Movement. Medical Insurance is taken out on your behalf by the Tour Provider in Israel. Travel Insurance is taken out on your behalf by your Youth Movement in the UK. Please make sure to spend some time reading these policies to know exactly what is and what isn't covered.

There may be some pre-existing medical conditions that are not covered in the general policy, and additional cover may need to be provided. Please speak to your movement about

arranging this cover with the providers in Israel. Medical costs in the event of 'hostile action' are covered by the Israeli State, and include a number of additional benefits, including, transportation costs for families, mental health support, and ongoing grants and support where required.

The travel insurance policy covers you for cancellation, curtailment and disruption in a number of scenarios, as well as covering lost, delayed or damaged luggage. Despite this cover, we encourage all participants not to bring expensive or valuable items with them on Israel Tour to avoid unnecessary upset. The policy does cover you during times of war and even though current FCDO guidance is against travel to Israel. It **does not** cover claims brought about as a direct result of war (see above for medical costs covered by the Israeli State).

11) What will Tour look like? Will it be fun?

Yes!

Israel Tour will look different this year but there will be ample opportunities to engage with a country that is in need of a collective hug, and there will of course be a strong emphasis on volunteering and social action projects with the programmes. However, it is still Israel Tour. The Youth Movements running Israel Tour excel at managing the balance between creating an educational experience that is both meaningful and enjoyable. There will still be opportunities to experience water sports, beaches, coral reefs, culture, deserts, mountains and more. Remember, we will only go to areas approved by Cheder Matzav on the day and itineraries may change even at the last minute, but Israel Tours will continue to strengthen the Jewish identity of our youth and deepen their connection to Israel. Have a chat to your Youth Movement for more details about what they are planning, and their ideological and educational outlook for Tour.