

Terrorism in peace era has less effect on tourism

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Abstract:

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MANY Jewish organizations that have booked to come to Israel next year have expressed interest in traveling to Jordan as well, a wholesale tour operator disclosed yesterday.

Udi Goldschmidt, of Jerusalem-and Miami-based Mosaic Tours and Travel, said that one such group, the Hadassah National Board, has arranged for some 2,500 participants to spend three days and two nights in Jordan.

Goldschmidt was speaking at a news conference at the Sheraton Jerusalem Plaza Hotel, at which he announced a joint venture in Holy Land promotion in the US, between his company and National Travel and Tourism Services of Amman.

According to Goldschmidt, terrorism no longer thrusts tourism into a downward spin. The February massacre in the Cave of the Machpela was "devastating to tourism" he said, with reported drops of up to 60 percent in American visitors, but "there were hardly any cancellations" following the recent bus explosion in Tel Aviv and the shooting in downtown Jerusalem, "because the general atmosphere is peace."

(El Al's spokesman confirmed there have been few cancellations, partially because of the peace process, partially because "reactions are not immediate," and primarily because "Israel is an expensive destination and people have invested in down payments.")

Victor Azar, marketing director of the National group of companies, downplayed fears that the lure of Jordan could seriously reduce hotel occupancy here. Conceding that Jerusalem might lose room nights in the short term, Azar, who deals with the Christian pilgrimage market, was optimistic that "in the long term the whole area will experience a boom."

Sheraton general manager Raphy Weiner, who is also chairman of the Jerusalem Hotel Association, pointed out that "the trend today is to see more than one country, more than one city." His hotel will allow guests staying at least five nights to go to Jordan for an overnight stay, and keep their room in Jerusalem free of charge.

Because kosher food is not yet available in Jordan, Azar suggested that visitors can bring their own. Goldschmidt said he was certain the five-star Petra Plaza Hotel, scheduled to open in mid-1995, will be able to set aside a kitchen for kosher catering.

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Personal Names: Goldschmidt, Udi
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