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Israel Travel: Current State of the Field **Opportunities for 2025-2026**

March 2025



**Jewish
Federations**
of North America



Current State of the Field

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- Israel educational travel saw a decline in 2023-2024 (~35,500 participants) **but is projected to rebound to ~58,000 in 2025.**
- Shifts in core audiences: decline in young adult participation, **resurgence in family and teen programs.**
- 2023-2024 trips focused on shorter durations and war-affected regions; **2025 will see expanded geographic diversity and longer itineraries.**



Educational Content & Itineraries



Trips are **struggling to balance trauma, resilience, and joy in their narratives**. Some concern that trips are overly focused on October 7-related content, leaving less space for participants to engage with Israel's creativity, innovation, and daily life.



Itineraries have become more insular, with visits to Arab towns, Palestinian communities, and mixed cities reduced due to political sensitivities and security concerns.



Many **trips lack cohesion between pre-trip preparation, on-trip learning, and post-trip engagement**.



Marketing & Recruitment



Traditional marketing strategies **no longer reflect post-October 7 realities.**



Israel travel programs find themselves **seeking to engage a more hesitant audience.**



The Israel travel market has become **more fragmented and competitive.** Without a coordinated approach to outreach and a clearer understanding of participant motivations, **organizations risk operating in silos** rather than advancing a shared vision.



Mifgashim

Some North American **participants are hesitant to engage in complex conversations; some Israelis feel emotionally exhausted, less receptive to perspectives** that challenge their own.

Many mifgashim still rely on a “show-and-tell” model, where **Israelis share their experiences**, but **North American participants have little opportunity to contribute**.

Mifgashim continue to **feature a narrow range of voices**, often overlooking non-Jewish communities and underrepresenting certain segments of Israeli society.

- Absence of **Jewish-Arab** encounters and limited exposure to **Mizrahi, Ethiopian, Haredi, LGBTQ+, and Druze** perspectives means that participants leave with an incomplete understanding of Israel’s diversity.



Staff Training & Professional Development



Many **staff are unprepared** to handle the emotional and geopolitical realities of post-October 7 travel.



Cultural differences between Israeli and North American staff **create barriers** in facilitation



Lack of a standardized training framework across the field: without clear professional development pathways or certification standards, **organizations struggle to retain experienced educators.**



Advocacy & Field-Wide Collaboration

Israel travel is a decentralized field without a shared vision or field-wide strategy - some emphasize Jewish identity-building, while others prioritize advocacy, solidarity, or leadership development.

Data collection and assessment practices vary significantly across organizations, limiting the field's ability to track trends, evaluate long-term outcomes, or identify emerging needs.

Israel travel providers operate independently, weakening their ability to advocate for policy changes, secure funding, and negotiate better logistical solutions.

- Without a **coordinated approach** to issues such as travel costs, security funding, and visa policies, smaller and mid-sized organizations remain at a disadvantage.





Opportunities for 2025-2026

Educational Content & Itineraries

- **Balance Trauma, Resilience, and Joy in Post-October 7 Narratives** – Integrate themes of bearing witness, resilience, and Jewish life; reflect Israel as it is; inspire long-term engagement with Israel and Jewish life.
- **Expand & Diversifying the Voices and Regions Represented in Itineraries** – Reintroduce Arab-Israeli and interfaith encounters; feature a wider range of political, cultural, and social perspectives.
- **Strengthen the Connection Between Pre-Trip, On-Trip, and Post-Trip Learning** – Create a field-wide pre-trip curriculum, establish daily reflection sessions, and implement stronger alumni engagement strategies.
- **Leverage Partnerships to Strengthen Educational Content** – Share educational resources to facilitate content-sharing between trip providers.



Marketing & Recruitment

- **Shift Messaging to Reflect Post-October 7 Realities** – Balance narratives of solidarity and resilience with empowerment, cultural engagement, and joy.
- **Personalize Recruitment Strategies to Engage a More Hesitant Audience** – Leverage personal outreach, alumni-driven recruitment, and targeted engagement with parents and families.
- **Improve Coordination & Market Positioning Across Israel Travel Organizations** – Develop shared recruitment initiatives, shared marketing resources, and clearer program differentiation to funnel participants into the right program for them.
- **Strengthen Follow-Up & Retention Strategies for Alumni Engagement** – Create structured post-trip action plans, volunteer opportunities, and leadership development programs to sustain participant connections.



Mifgashim

- **Reframe Mifgashim to Prioritize Meaningful, Balanced Dialogue** – Move beyond “show-and-tell” models, fostering equal exchanges between Israeli and Diaspora participants.
- **Improve Structure, Preparation & Follow-Up for Mifgashim** – Extend encounter durations, provide pre-trip orientation, and integrate post-trip reunions.
- **Develop Training for Mifgash Facilitators & Trip Staff** – Equip staff with cross-cultural facilitation skills to ensure that mifgashim remain engaging and constructive.
- **Expand & Diversify Mifgashim to Reflect the Full Spectrum of Israeli Society** – Include encounters with Arab Israelis, Mizrahi, Ethiopian, Haredi, LGBTQ+, and Russian-speaking communities to present a more complete picture of Israel.



Staff Training & Professional Development

- **Reframe the Role of Staff as Educators** – Provide tools (e.g. art or discussion cards) or training for staff to facilitate discussions, integrate storytelling, and create reflective spaces for participants.
- **Expand Emotional & Trauma-Sensitive Training** – Require mandatory mental health and resilience training to support both participants and staff, and address crises.
- **Strengthen Pre-Trip Preparation for North American & Israeli Staff** – Implement cross-cultural training programs to bridge different cultural understandings.
- **Develop a Standardized Staff Training Framework** – Disseminate field-wide resources sharing staff training best practices covering trauma sensitivity, crisis management, and mifgashim facilitation for all staff.
- **Increase Incentives for Staff Recruitment & Retention** – Offer competitive stipends, professional growth opportunities, and mentorship programs to ensure staff retention.



Advocacy & Field-Wide Collaboration

- **Strengthen Data Collection & Impact Assessment** – Normalize IETA’s provision of field-wide research initiatives to track post-October 7 travel trends.
- **Increase IETA’s Collective Advocacy & Policy Influence** – Continue creation of logistics task forces to negotiate airline efficiencies and rates; security response network; explore hiring a dedicated policy representative in Israel.
- **Establish a Unified Vision & Strategy for the Field** – Convene stakeholders in IETA’s Steering Committee to continue to align on IETA’s core purpose, advocacy role, and long-term objectives.
- **Coordinate a Field-Wide Fundraising Strategy** – In the long-term, work with major Jewish foundations to secure multi-year funding for Israel travel innovation, security, and expanded programming.

