

Gaza onslaught takes heavy toll on Israel tourism industry

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A souvenir shop owner sits on a nearly empty street in the Israeli-occupied Old City of al-Quds, amid the ongoing conflict between Israel and the Palestinian Hamas resistance movement, on November 6, 2023. (Photo via social media)

Tel Aviv, February 27 (RHC)-- A trade association of major receptive tour operator companies and suppliers says the ongoing military onslaught against Gaza has plunged Israel's tourism industry into a serious crisis, and many airlines are reluctant to fly to the occupied territories after the outbreak of the war.

"Before the crisis, there were 250 airline companies operating in Israel, and now only 45 companies are operating," Director General of the Chamber of Inbound Tourism Organizers, Yossi Fattal, told the Hebrew-language daily newspaper Maariv earlier this week.

"Israel is currently completely isolated from the world. Eighty percent of flights today are operated by aircraft from Israel belonging to the [Israeli] El Al company." He added that Israel has become isolated, like North Korea, with regard to aviation.

Fattal emphasized that "the war is harming Israel's [so-called] strategic image. Israel should have created a situation in which it found a way to facilitate and encourage tourists to come here despite the war."

"Jordan and Egypt, which are also affected, finance the airlines that bring tourists to them. Today, Israel does not fund insurance for foreign airlines, only Israeli ones." "The insurance premiums required to travel to Israel are enormous," he noted.

Fattal also noted that it will take at least half a year to restore Israel's image and the return of airlines from the day the Gaza war winds down. "It will take two or three years for the tourism sector in Israel to recover," he stated.

Amid the Israeli war on Gaza, headlines in the Western media have deliberately sought to distort and manipulate facts about the gory events unfolding in the besieged territory.

Tourism accounts for about three percent of Israel's economy and employs around 200,000 people directly, according to the regime's tourism ministry. It had been projected to draw 5.5 million visitors in 2023, a million more than 2019's record high, it added.

However, Operation Al-Aqsa Storm by the Palestinian resistance movement Hamas and other Gaza-based groups changed all that.

Israel began the brutal campaign in Gaza on October 7, 2023, after it was caught off-guard by the surprise Palestinian operation, which was in retaliation for the regime's incessant crimes against the Palestinians.

Since the start of the aggression, Israel has killed more than 29,000 people in Gaza, mostly women and children, according to the Gaza Health Ministry. The campaign has devastated Gaza, destroyed hospitals and displaced half of its population of 2.4 million.

Israel has also imposed a "complete siege" on Gaza, cutting off fuel, electricity, food and water to the Palestinians living there.

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