

Tourism

Context

Due to its rich history and heritage, Jerusalem is a top tourist destination. Millions of people visit the Holy City every year, especially for religious reasons. According to Israeli statistics, during 2015-2016 Jerusalem saw inbound tourism grow by 47%.¹ Some 78% of the record-breaking 3.6 million tourists who visited “Israel” in 2017 toured Jerusalem².

Nonetheless, most of these tourists rarely get to see all of Jerusalem. This is not because the city is too big, but because one part of it is systematically “hidden” from these visitors by the occupation authorities. This is done through the use of a strategic propaganda that intentionally leaves out the Palestinian existence, history and heritage in Jerusalem, while at the same time marketing it as the “capital of Israel.”

As a part of this strategy, tourists - especially those who come through Israeli tourist agencies - visit religious sites in the eastern part of Jerusalem very quickly, and they rarely are given time to visit Palestinian markets before they are whisked back to the western side to eat, drink and shop.



¹ “Jerusalem - The Global Capital of Tourism Security”, Jerusalem Post, 12.10.18. Accessed online: <https://bit.ly/2pQxK6n>

² Ibid.

Additionally, in order to work as a tour guide in Jerusalem, you must obtain an official license from the Israeli tourism ministry. This license is given out to those who pass a series of courses organized by the ministry covering the religious, cultural and political history of the place. Since the courses are given by the Israeli occupation authorities, the information within in them fits the Zionist narrative, which focuses exclusively on the Jewish ties to the land. The ministry also monitors the tours given by its guides. As a result, Palestinian tour guides -- especially in Jerusalem -- practice a sort of self-censorship, focusing on the religious and cultural histories of Jerusalem while omitting the political story of the Israeli occupation in the city.

Israeli Propaganda

The Israeli tourism industry and propaganda outfits use the Jewish history in Palestine to justify the Zionization of Jerusalem. Naturally, Israeli tourist maps, information pamphlets and projects in Jerusalem highlight Jewish history and hide the Palestinian history and existence.

For example, even though Damascus Gate is the main entrance to the Old City, and its surroundings are considered the “city center,” Israeli propaganda markets Jaffa Gate -- which is closer to the “Israeli city center” near Jaffa Road -- as the entrance to the Old City. At Jaffa Gate, there is an Israeli tourist information center and tourists can take a small train through the allies of the Old City to the Al-Buraq Wall. The infrastructure is designed to show the Jaffa Gate area is a natural extension of the Jaffa Road city center, unlike Damascus Gate, which looks more like a military outpost. The shopping center in Ma’man Allah (renamed Mamilla) just outside of Jaffa Gate is another part of this puzzle.

Furthermore, Israeli tourism propaganda in Jerusalem attracts tourists to projects related directly to settler activities inside the city’s Palestinian neighbourhoods, where a Zionist narrative is provided, connecting the history of Jerusalem exclusively to the Jewish history.

On top of the list of these projects are the touristic and archeological sites south of the Old City near the Al-Buraq Wall and in Silwan’s neighborhood of Wadi Hilweh. After visiting Al-Buraq Wall and the “Davidson Center” (the Jerusalem Archeological Park), where the Jewish history in Jerusalem is the only history told, tourists go on to the “City of David” settler visitor center located in Silwan. This center is managed by the notorious El-Ad settler organization responsible for the eviction of many Palestinian families whose homes are then given to settlers. The narrative provided at the “City of David” not only highlights the Jewish history in the city, but also justifies the ethnic cleansing of the Palestinian residents of Jerusalem in the name of this history.

In order to increase the number of visitors to the “City of David” center, the occupation municipality in Jerusalem, together with the Israeli ministry of tourism, advanced in 2017 a project for a cable car to take tourists from the western side of the city to Dung Gate.³ The economic gain for “Israel” from the NIS214 million project would be little, nonetheless, it was given precedence over other suggested projects as the ministry decided to define it as a “national priority,” a category that is usually reserved for advancing infrastructure projects.⁴

In addition to the development of visitor centers that exclusively tell a Jewish history of the city, the occupation municipality, together with the ministry of tourism and the Jerusalem Affairs ministry, attract tourists to Jerusalem by organizing local and international festivals and sporting events. These activities aim to strengthen Jerusalem’s place on the world’s cultural stage and to counter the stereotype about Jerusalem as a conservative city where there is little happening. There is no doubt that there is a political goal behind these activities, as they encourage the acceptance of the current reality of the Israeli occupation of the city and of it being the “capital of Israel.” Moreover, Israeli official representatives repeat statements that both Israelis and Palestinians from the city participated in these activities to create the impression they have popular support.

First on the list is the “Jerusalem Festival of Light,” held every summer since 2009. The festival features art installations made by Israeli and international artists, screened on the Old City walls and gates, especially Jaffa Gate and Damascus Gate. Sponsored by the Jerusalem occupation municipality and the Prime Minister’s office, the festival in 2018 attracted some 250,000 visitors, both local and international.⁵

Jerusalem has seen a rise in similar events in recent years, which have succeeded in attracting big names. In 2013, Formula One racing staged the “Peace Road Show” in Jerusalem, featuring exhibitions by Mercedes-Benz and Ferrari, and appearances by well-known drivers like Italy’s Giancarlo Fisichella and Venezuela’s Rodolfo Gonzalez. During the event, Israeli mayor Nir Barkat said Jerusalem was the “city for all -- Muslim, Jewish and Christian,” adding that the race contributes to the “international image of Jerusalem.”⁶

³ “The Cable Car to Jerusalem’s Old City: Who Gains and Who Loses?”, Emek Shaveh, January 22, 2018. Accessed online at: [The Cable Car to Jerusalem's Old City: Who Gains and Who Loses?](#)

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Jerusalem Festival of Lights, Tourist Israel: [Jerusalem Festival of Light. June 27 - July 5, 2018](#)

⁶ Formula 1 racing cars cause controversy in Jerusalem, BBC, 14 June 2013. Accessed online at: [Formula 1 racing cars cause controversy in Jerusalem](#)

In May 2018, as a part of the celebrations of “70 years of independence,” Israel became the first host outside of Europe to hold the Giro d’Italia bicycle grand tour.⁷ Jerusalem was a central city in the event.

In addition to their role in attracting more tourists to visit Jerusalem, these festivals and races have another important role: attempting to legitimize the Israeli control over the occupied city. When artists, athletes and other figures agree to participate in such events -- ignoring calls for boycott -- they recognize Israel’s control over the city, and the propaganda that “sells” it as the capital of “Israel.”

International Complicity

The Israeli travel propaganda is commonly adopted by search engines, booking websites and other platforms. Many of these platforms list attractions, businesses, accommodation opportunities in the West Bank in general and in the eastern side of Jerusalem in particular as things to see and do in “Israel.”

You can test that yourself: use Google to search for a business, say a hairdresser, in “East Jerusalem” and notice the results you get. They will all be Israeli businesses in the western side of the city. Another example is the online travel reservation service Booking.com, which had in the past listed the city of Jerusalem as an “Israeli settlement.” It quickly changed the city’s status following a query from a Belgian Jewish newspaper to show Jerusalem in “Israel.”⁸

In November 2018, following a campaign launched by the BDS movement and Palestine solidarity groups, international vacation home rental website AirBnB announced it would remove listings in Israeli colonies in the occupied West Bank. Nonetheless, listings in the eastern side of Jerusalem and the Syrian Golan Heights kept locations listed as in “Israel.”⁹

BDS

What is BDS?

Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions (BDS) is a Palestinian-led movement for freedom and justice. The movement was launched in 2005 by 170 Palestinian unions, political parties, refugee networks, women’s organisations, professional associations, popular resistance committees and other Palestinian civil society bodies.¹⁰

⁷ Big Start, Giro d’Italia 2018 website: [Giro d’Italia 2021 | Official site](#)

⁸ Booking.com flagged for labeling Jerusalem an “Israeli settlement”. Times of Israel, 31.7.2018. Accessed online at: <https://bit.ly/2ORGdAl>

⁹ “Israel to turn to U.S. government over Airbnb removal of settlement listings”, Reuters, 20.11.2018. Accessed online at: <https://reut.rs/2FyUEtx>

¹⁰ The BDS Movement website: [What is BDS? | BDS Movement](#)

BOYCOTT: involves withdrawing support for Israel and Israeli and international companies that are involved in the violation of Palestinian human rights, as well as complicit Israeli sporting, cultural and academic institutions.

DIVESTMENT: campaigns urge banks, local councils, churches, pension funds and universities to withdraw investments from all Israeli companies and from international companies involved in violating Palestinian rights.

SANCTIONS: campaigns pressure governments to fulfil their legal obligation to hold Israel to account by ending military trade, free-trade agreements and expelling Israel from international forums such as the UN and FIFA.

Why BDS?

It takes enormous budgets to sustain the Israeli occupation and its settler-colonial project in Palestine. Obviously, US aid to Israel (an average of \$3.8 billion a year¹¹) provides a portion of this budget, but not all of it. Israel manages to sustain its project through business ties with other countries and corporations. Those corporations are one of the main reasons why Zionist settler colonialism in Palestine, and all of its tools of oppression and dispossession, are able to continue. Those corporations are the financial backbone of the occupation.

For example, military exports and training are now some of Israel's largest sources of income and a very powerful diplomatic tool for its political gain. In 2017, Israel's military-related exports totalled \$9.2 billion (a 40% increase since 2016).¹² Israel's expertise in oppression and military control has created a growing interest and dependency that Israel counts on to develop and sustain itself, further developing and entrenching its military occupation of Palestine.

Normalization vs BDS

In the Palestinian context, normalization refers to any project or activity that creates the impression that Israel is a state like any other and that Palestinians, the oppressed, and Israel, the oppressor, are both equally responsible for so-called "conflict." Far from challenging the unjust status quo, such projects contribute to its endurance and are intellectually dishonest and should be boycotted. Normalization is not limited to economic relations, it also includes normalizing Israel through cultural and academic cooperation globally.

Organizations, foundations, unions and academic and cultural institutions around the world have endorsed BDS, stating that there's an ethical obligation to cut ties with Israel. There is also

¹¹ "U.S. \$38B military aid package to Israel sends a message", USA Today, September 14, 2016. Accessed online at: <https://bit.ly/2r9XZmg>

¹² "Israel's arms exports spike, hitting record \$9 billion", Haaretz, May 2, 2018. Accessed online at: <https://bit.ly/2rglATZ>

a strong need to promote awareness about how things that seem harmless and simple, such as pharmaceuticals or cultural events, intersect with and directly benefit “Israel,” providing it with the power and resources needed to sustain its settler-colonial project in Palestine.