

Dear parent:

I am sure many of you are wondering: why should I let my student go to Israel now?

I am writing to you directly to address some of your concerns/questions - and to say we are here to speak with you personally to reassure you. You should know that we only undertake Taglit - birthright israel trips if we believe we can provide a safe and celebratory experience. If we thought there was a particular threat, or that the situation were too volatile, we would not go. We take our responsibility very seriously, and have even postponed trips in the past.

Israel is not a war zone, though sometimes it may seem that way on TV news. That is, unfortunately, the media's job - to highlight horrific events and pique audience interest, but that isn't an accurate description of life in Israel. Yes - there is a threat of terrorism, as there is in many other places, and the Middle East is a region with many political problems, but people in Israel lead normal lives. They go out to eat, stroll down the streets, attend public concerts, go to the beach, and ride buses.

The government of Israel undertakes extraordinary measures to protect its citizens, and tourists are not specifically at risk. Even so, Hillel and Taglit - birthright israel go beyond this high level of security. We avoid most public gatherings, unless specifically cleared with security personnel. We don't take public transportation. Our itineraries and travel routes are screened in advance and not public. Security and medical personnel accompany every group.

Please review these extensive precautions for yourself:

<http://cms.hillel.org/Hillel/Israel/Trips+and+Opportunities/BRI+site/Safety+and+Security/>

While we are confident in our precautions during programming, we have also taken the step of limiting free time, so that we can be assured of participants' safety when program time is finished. Though there are no guarantees when it comes to safety and travel, we are confident in the safety of these programs. I travel to Israel with every trip, as do many of Hillel's senior staff. Our current president's family lives in Israel, and he returns there every few weeks. Additionally, many of our Hillel professionals have children studying in Israel. We take your child's safety as seriously as we do our own and that of our families.

However, all of these safety concerns neglect a very important point: Why should your son or daughter travel to Israel with us this spring? The simple answer is, in the words of many of our alumni: this is the experience of a lifetime! Taglit - birthright israel is an amazing opportunity to connect with the land and people of Israel - and your child's extended Jewish family. If your child joins the trip, he or she is going to have an incredible experience in Israel. And, as the Jewish sage Hillel once said: If not now, when?

We have brought more than 19,000 participants to Israel in the last 6 years, and we believe that this track record, and our safety precautions, speaks for themselves. If you have any further questions, please contact your local Hillel professional or call our Israel helpline at 202-449-6595.

Best regards, and we hope to see your children in Israel for a safe and amazing journey.

Andrea Hoffman
Director, Hillel's birthright israel trips