

## Reckoning and Transformation: Israel Educational Travel Post-October 7

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In the wake of October 7, Jews in Israel and across the world have grappled with a jumble of emotions, including a shattered sense of security, overwhelming grief, a profound need to bear witness, and a defiant desire to mobilize and demonstrate resilience. While the war in Gaza continues to rage and its specific outcome is yet to be determined, Israel educational travel too has experienced a seismic shift. Experiences once deemed essential simply no longer fit the realities of a world transformed by October 7. Accordingly, the field of Israel educational travel must completely reassess Israel educational travel, from its core principles to the range of immersive experiences it offers on the ground, and to everything in between. Three critical aspects in particular demand the field's immediate attention post-October 7.

### *Capturing the Human Dimension:*

The scale and intensity of violence, distress, fear, and loss experienced on October 7 have inflicted unparalleled psychological and physical scars on Israelis (and all of us). In Israel, the visceral sense of loss—felt by every individual, family, community,



and the nation as a whole— has had an indelible impact on every aspect of Israeli society. Israel educational travel programs must learn to effectively navigate and engage with these intense human experiences.

The field's obligation is clear: to offer educational experiences that authentically capture the full spectrum of human emotions produced by the traumatic events of October 7. We need to do more than simply acknowledge the tragedy and ensuing suffering; we need to fully honor and amplify narratives that epitomize the depth of the trauma suffered. Beyond educating on the facts of October 7, our goals should also include bearing witness and treasuring stories of Israeli resilience post-October 7, which form an important component of the complex human response to the unprecedented events of that day. Our responsibility lies in preserving and conveying these experiences, ensuring they are not forgotten.

#### *Paradigm Shifts:*

The events of October 7 challenge deeply-rooted beliefs traditionally at the core of Israel educational travel experiences. In particular, the sense of inviolable comfort and safety enjoyed by Jews across the world of having a secure homeland for the Jewish people in Israel has been fundamentally shaken by the security failures of October 7. For decades perceived as an absolute haven for Jews, Israel's military power instilled in Israelis and the global Jewish community not just a pervasive sense of safety and certainty, but

also great pride. The events of October 7 have profoundly destabilized these convictions (particularly among Israelis), raising discomfiting doubts about the strength and dependability of the IDF and Israel's border security, among other things.

The parallel post-October 7 surge in antisemitism has similarly unsettled Jewry in North America. This surge, most visible on college campuses, has raised concerns about our sense of security and well-being as well, challenging our confidence in carefree living as Jews in North America. These unsettling shifts in Israel and elsewhere compel us to reassess how we define our Jewish identities and what role Israel plays in shaping them. To the extent that Israel educational travel experiences are one of the cornerstones of Jewish identity-building in North America, we must now, more than ever, squarely confront these challenges and uncertainties—before, during, and after Israel educational travel experiences.

*Resilience and Civic Society:*

If there is a silver lining to this moment, it is the inspiring demonstration of resilience and social solidarity shown by Israeli civil society in the weeks following the traumatic events of October 7. The inspiring spirit of resilience and social solidarity of Israeli civic society is redefining the idea of Israel as the "startup nation." In parallel, North American Jewry has shown an unprecedented desire to contribute meaningfully to the healing of Israel, including a growing interest in engaging in volunteer work in Israel.

When Israel educational travel experiences resume, volunteerism must be prioritized. More than ever, there is a pressing need to curate impactful volunteer opportunities in which participants actively contribute, and not just passively observe. Such experiences have the potential to spark deep engagement and nurture a profound sense of resilience and community commitment among trip participants.

The events of October 7 demand a comprehensive overhaul of Israel educational travel experiences. In addition to the three priorities discussed above, we must also, as a field, renew our commitment to understanding the related but fundamentally different challenges faced by Jews in Israel and in North America. To that end, all professional Israel travel educators, from Israel and abroad, must work closely together to ensure we remain committed to understanding and supporting the full range and differentiated pace and manner of processing this unprecedented, still-unfolding moment in our history.