

## The Management of Israeli Heritage Sites

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*This paper highlights the current flaws in the management of Israeli heritage sites, stressing in particular the untapped potential for tourism. It recommends enriching the experience of heritage sites and maximizing their financial potential and value, by separating the functions of planning and administration, establishing a new government company to concentrate all administration of heritage sites, and making a clear distinction between local and national sites.*

The **first chapter** describes the heritage sites in Israel, breaking down 1) their classification; 2) the planning paradigm of dividing Israeli sites into national parks and nature reserves; 3) who is responsible for national parks and heritage sites; and 4) legislation regarding heritage sites.

The **second chapter** details the structural deficiencies in the heritage sites market: nature reserves being privileged over national parks; the complication of some sites being declared national sites; the lack of effective evaluation or incentives for efficient administration; the multiplicity of ministries and agencies dealing with heritage sites, and the lack of connection between sites and their local communities.

The **third chapter** looks at the US and the UK models for heritage site administration.

The **fourth chapter** discusses conclusions and offers recommendations.

### Summary:

Heritage sites in Israel are a cultural resource for the population to connect to their history and preserve it, as well as an economic resource as tourist attractions.

Preserving and developing heritage sites as tourist attractions also serves a role in Israeli advocacy, acquainting non-Israelis with the country's rich history and culture as well as its Zionist story. Data shows that tourists who experienced a heritage site identified more strongly with Israel and became ambassadors for the sites. Israeli tourism has a lot of untapped potential, the realization of which will contribute both to the general Israeli market and the development of peripheral residential areas.

The Ministry of Tourism found that in 2011, income from tourism represented 5.3% of the Israeli market's GDP. In 2014, a Ministry survey of tourists found that 22% of them came to tour and travel and 21% came as Christians on pilgrimage. Such data points to nearly 50% of tourists to Israel who would be interested in heritage sites, should such be available and information about them accessible. Moreover, improvement of the tourist experience at the sites would in turn increase demand and

perhaps even a rise in tourism generally, as heritage sites are Israel's primary tourist attraction.

Most of Israel's heritage sites suffer from a lack of any tourism-oriented management and thus fail to appeal to a wide audience. The Ministry of Tourism tends to focus on Christian sites and modern appeal, without providing much information about national sites or presenting the Zionist story of the State of Israel. In addition, there are structural flaws in the heritage site tourism market, including an imbalance between national parks and nature reserves, inefficient administration, lack of oversight and evaluation and thus lack of incentives, multiplicity of acting bodies (no less than nine government agencies, aside from other private and public actors deal with heritage sites) with insufficient coordination among them, lack of professional workforce and a lack of connection to local communities.

Most of the legislation and other action taken in this area has been in response to realities on the ground, without any overall vision or long-term planning. Despite the State dedicating substantial funds to heritage sites, structural challenges prevent their efficient use.

This paper offers a comprehensive solution: divide planning and management, separate nature reserves from the national parks, and concentrate administration in a new government company responsible for managing all heritage sites, working alongside other governmental bodies dealing with planning and oversight (such as structure preservation).

### **Recommendations:**

- 1) Establish a government company to oversee all management of heritage sites. This company will be funded by: admission fees, government grants for tourism-supporting businesses, sale of memorabilia, donations, income from educational and tourist activities, government establishment grants, and government bonuses for performance. The sites will be funded by their own generated income, by an annual grant from the government company per meeting the company's standards (set according to the site's potential to attract visitors), and an annual bonus when passing the company's set goal. This funding mechanism creates incentives to appeal to tourists and meet the goals set by the oversight apparatus.  
The new company will operate according to clear principles: it will cooperate with local authorities charged with creating commerce and tourism envelopes around the sites; assist in the development of local sites and museums to enhance the tourism experience in the region; train administrators and professional reserves to work at the heritage sites under its management, and be governed by a directorate appointed by the Ministry of Tourism's planning agency.
- 2) Establish a planning agency in the Ministry of Tourism by amalgamating the various government agencies dealing with heritage sites in all other ministries - such as the Israel Antiquities Authority in the Ministry of Culture and the

National Heritage Plan in the Jerusalem Affairs and Heritage Ministry. This planning authority will assist in preserving, overseeing, and setting policy for heritage sites in Israel. Strengthening the Ministry of Tourism will help introduce tourism-oriented thinking into the management of heritage sites.

- 3) Separate the categories of national park and nature reserves, with The Ministry of Environmental Protection continuing to oversee nature reserves and administer their natural preservation through the Israel Nature and Parks Authority, enhancing its ability to focus on and specialize in nature preservation.
- 4) Categorize all heritage sites as either local or national, with local sites to be administered by the relevant local authorities and national sites to be placed under the management of the new government company. This categorization should be available online to all viewers.

Dividing the sites into "local" and "national" categories will help regulate the responsibilities between the local authority and the management company. As national sites become tourism anchors, the local economies will strengthen. The new company will provide professional management assistance to museums and local sites in order to enhance the local tourism experience in the national site's area.

For the [full Hebrew paper](#)