

A New Generation for Jerusalem

By day, Jerusalem's Machane Yehuda market (nicknamed the shuk) is buzzing with hundreds of vendors selling spices, freshly baked sweets, and fresh produce piled in colorful stacks on tables lining the streets. At night, the scene transforms entirely as the 19th-century market takes on a more modern feel with craft beer bars and gastropubs. This contrast between trendy and traditional is what's helping Jerusalem revamp its reputation and attract a new generation of conference attendees to the Holy City.

Words Lane Nieset

Jerusalem was deemed one of the hottest travel destinations of 2018 by Bloomberg thanks to the growth of inbound arrivals, which increased by 38 percent reaching 4.8 million arrivals—up 32 percent from the year before. “Jerusalem’s tourism industry has had its ups and downs because of regional instability,” explains Anat Landa, Convention Manager at Jerusalem Conventions and Visitors Bureau (JCVB). “However, in the last decade, the image of Jerusalem as a tourist destination has completely transformed, largely due to massive efforts by the government and municipality to put Jerusalem on the tourist map—and keep it there. Recent indications of success include TripAdvisor ranking Jerusalem fourth in a list of the most promising places for vacation across the world.”

In their daily work promoting Jerusalem as a conference venue, the JCVB is working closely with the scientific community in Israel to promote bids to Jerusalem, which is seen as an intriguing destination for both

conference delegates and organizers. Now that Boardroom readers are familiar with the key industries and clusters Jerusalem has to offer from our “Knowledge in the City” series, it’s time to focus on another important side of the city—tourism. Here’s what attendees can do outside the conference and where to go after a successful day of meetings at the International Convention Center.

BEYOND BALLROOMS

Jerusalem is one of the oldest cities in the world, with structures and artefacts dating back over 3,000 years. Gala dinners in quarries built during King Herod’s time aren’t just a dream—here, they’re a reality. “For centuries, people have been singing and praying about Jerusalem. Artists paint their visions of it, poets write sonnets about it. Jerusalem is in the hearts and souls of millions so it is only natural that it would be a desirable destination,” Landa says. “The increase in tourism to Jerusalem of

late is due largely to the FIT (free independent travelers) who are usually younger, curious and drawn to the mosaic character of the city and its unique energy.”

One way to give delegates a sense of the country’s history is through a tour of one of the largest and most significant cultural institutions in the country—the Israel Museum—followed by a gala dinner. After touring the archaeology wing, which displays findings like the Shrine of the Book (where the Dead Sea Scrolls are housed), delegates will realize the scale of Jerusalem’s history. One major bonus: they can network in a space filled with ancient masks and rare Judaica objects instead of just another ballroom.

COSMOPOLITAN CITY

“We are marketing and promoting Jerusalem as an international city. People already know about Jerusalem being the center of three major religions,



but our job is to show the 21st century Jerusalem, which is a vibrant, innovative, entrepreneurial, creative and charismatic city,” Landa explains. “Jerusalem boasts more than 70 museums—a large number given how small the city actually is. There are international festivals, concerts, theater productions and so much more waiting for conference delegates to enjoy.”

In the past, visitors would add Jerusalem to their checklist of places to see for a few hours while visiting Israel; quickly touring the old City and then continuing on with their trip, but for the last decade, the city is hosting more overnight stays. “Instead of staying three hours,” notes Landa, “tourists stay for at least three days.”

Last year, 10,000 spectators gathered in Jerusalem to watch cyclists race through the city in the first stage of the Giro d’Italia road race, a sign that times are definitely changing for the increasingly cosmopolitan city. This

year, the city will host the Jerusalem International Marathon in March—one of the country’s largest marathons, with over 30,000 participants.

ISRAEL’S INNOVATION HUB

As well as hosting international events, Jerusalem continues to build on its reputation as an innovation leader that caters to start-ups and venture capital investments. The Jerusalem Entrepreneur Tourism Hub (JETH) is one of the more recent additions to the scene, offering business networking and development advice to help drive the growth of the city’s tourism start-up culture. One of the newest benefits the city is providing to conference delegates is the JLM City Pass which provides free public transport from Ben Gurion Airport, free bus and light rail service within the city as well as discounted tickets for cultural attractions.

One of the JCVB’s strategies to acquaint key decision makers with Jerusalem as a conference destination is the annual FAM trip. One of the more recent reactions from a FAM trip participant sums it up perfectly: “Despite many previous visits to Israel and Jerusalem, I had not previously viewed them through professional eyes nor seriously considered Jerusalem as a possible location for our medical conference. This has been a very illuminating visit. The ICC would be an excellent venue for us, and I think Jerusalem and Israel [as a whole] would make a great destination for those wishing to combine conference with travel, vacation and sightseeing.”

More information on Jerusalem as a convention destination on www.jerusalemcvb.com.

