Teen Trips To Israel:

Cost, Price & Marketing

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The importance of connections to Israel in the formation of Jewish identity is well documented. Individuals who visit Israel are much more likely to identify strongly with the Jewish community. They are more likely to participate in Jewish life in a variety of ways, including belonging to synagogues, volunteering for Jewish organizations and giving to Jewish philanthropies.

A trip to Israel is often a seminal experience in the formation of a young person’s positive Jewish identity. Therefore, a thorough understanding of barriers that might prevent teens from visiting Israel is essential.

This report analyzes the effect of cost, price and marketing on a family’s decision to send a child to Israel to participate in a teen summer program. Other factors in the decision also are examined, including quality and concerns about safety.

Cost refers to the objective calculation of producing an Israel trip. Price refers to the amount of money for which the trip is sold. The price depends on the cost elements including airfare, hotel, personnel, activities, the length of the trip, and administrative overhead charges. A trip may cost $4,000 to produce and priced at $5,000 or more.

A six-week trip costing $5,000 or more is utilized in this study as a base amount of analysis since many Jewish organizations currently administer trips of that length and cost.

Cost and price have been minimally addressed in other research, but this study was designed specifically to better understand how financial considerations affect the number of teens who visit Israel.

The report was designed to assist Jewish communal institutions and organizations such as federations, synagogues, Jewish family foundations and others involved in the enterprise of sending teens to Israel.

Major summary points include:

- A large proportion of Jewish households cannot afford to send their children to Israel, even though they value such a trip a great deal.

- Some parents are marginal in their commitment to send their children to Israel. Therefore, price is a tipping factor against a trip: having to pay for what parents believe to be an expensive trip keeps them from more serious consideration of the trip’s value in building Jewish identity.

- Most parents are aware that there are teen trips to Israel, but most of these parents are not familiar with the specifics of these programs.
structuring formal and informal events into a trip; encouraging interactions with Israelis of a similar age; emphasizing the impact of learning history by seeing the places where it occurred rather than reading about it in a book or hearing about it in a classroom; and learning about one's own religious affiliation and cultural identity through active participation.

These methods create a dynamic educational experience that reflects the "most contemporary theories of education, acculturation and learning." Also, it recognizes that the teenage years are a formative developmental period and an important, impressionable time in shaping identities. Accordingly, an Israel experience can have deep and long-lasting impact on teenagers and are thus important for the future of the communities in which they will live Jewish lives.

It is important to note that some of the recommendations to improve teen trips to Israel are already being implemented. However, there is as yet no systematic and coordinated effort to maximize what these programs have to offer. Better coordination could result in a higher rate of well matched participants with specific programs, given that many programs have specific goals and are looking for particular types of candidates.

Recommendations from past reports include a proposal to establish a toll-free network number that is user-friendly, well staffed, and well known. Anyone who called could enter basic information and then receive a list of potential programs. New methods of marketing have been suggested, including disseminating more information through the media. Programs could increase assistance in recruiting from program alumni. Many participants indicate that they based their decision to go on the recommendation of past participants.

**Teen Influence on Travel**

- Children have a great deal of influence in decisions about family vacations.

- Teens are key decision-makers in whether or not they go to Israel. They also have a great deal of influence in choosing to participate in any program.

**Teen Travel and Other Experiences**

- Teens participate in a wide variety of activities, both Jewish and non-Jewish. Teen trips to Israel compete with one another as well as with the teens' jobs and other activities.

- Parents who have already sent a teen on an Israel trip are very satisfied with these trips.

- The child’s personal interest, staff and overall program quality, safety, and cost are key factors in parents choosing a teen summer program. Therefore, what parents are willing to pay for is directly linked to the specifics of a program as it meets their child’s individual needs.

- A minute proportion (1%) of Jewish households pay $5,000 or more for their children’s day camp and only 2% pay more than $5,000 for their children’s overnight summer camp experience.

- A majority of Jewish households spends less than $1,000 for any single teen travel experience away from the family within the United States.

- A majority of Jewish households spends less than $2,000 for their child’s travel outside the United States, and only 2% spend more than $5,000.

**Knowledge and Support**

- Most parents know that there are Israel teen programs, but most are not familiar with these programs.

- Most Jews are likely to encourage their teenage children to visit Israel, in part because of ideological, psychological, and emotional ties to Judaism and Israel.

- One-third of Jewish parents are considering sending their children to Israel. Over half of these parents
PRICE

To achieve the maximum number of Jewish teens visiting Israel, a high proportion of these trips will have to be substantially underwritten in the short term, and alternate forms of funding developed in the long term. Scholarships and/or cost reductions must take the price of the trip down below $3,000 for many families. A base price of $5,000 or more will exclude most Jewish families from sending their teens to Israel.

STRUCTURE

A national endowment for the Israel experience is recommended. This endowment should be funded through a national campaign to create a fund to subsidize the Israel experience. The vast majority of American Jewish households either cannot afford to send their child or are unwilling to expend $5,000 for a six-week trip to Israel. Most cannot afford to spend, or are unwilling to spend, half that much. Yet a substantial proportion indicate that a lower price would positively affect their decision to send their child to Israel.

An "Israel Experience Incorporated" that speaks specifically to financing, marketing and administration of Israel trips should be considered. The data indicate that the decision-making process in sending a child to Israel is complicated and, therefore, requires sophisticated pricing, sales and marketing approaches. Given the level of knowledge, personnel and expertise that are needed, it is unlikely that any of the existing Jewish organizations and agencies operating in isolation from one another has the ability to significantly increase the number of teens who go to Israel.

A business plan needs to be prepared for the short-term and long-term financing of the Israel experience. The plan should indicate the amount of money and identify sources for funds to send 5,000 to 50,000 teens each year beginning in 1996 through the next twenty years. It should examine:

- ways to cut the costs and reduce the price
addressed. While parents and teens may share some perceptions and tastes, the strategies for marketing to these two groups should be quite different. Understanding the teens’ needs and desires regarding a trip to Israel is critical since so many parents will defer to their children or at least seriously consult with them before deciding whether to send their child on a trip to Israel.

**Market research on teen satisfaction with the Israel experience needs to be better integrated into Jewish communal planning.** Teens must be understood as consumers of Israel trips. The product can always be improved and it can be marketed more effectively with a systematic understanding of which components were most attractive to various groups of visiting teens.

**Careful marketing of the variety of teen trips to Israel currently in place is recommended.** The value of the trip is largely determined by assessing the quality of staff, the specifics of the trip, and the overall quality of each program. Yet few people are familiar with the programs. Therefore, they are unable to effectively assess the value of the trip. Israel trips must be delineated in terms of purpose, content, participants, quality of staff, and so on. The willingness of parents who can afford to pay is tied to their perception of the quality of the product. Strengthening Jewish identity through an Israel trip is not the sole desirable outcome for parents. It may not motivate some parents to spend a lot of money to send their child to Israel. Specifics about the kinds of trips available, and more information about each trip is needed to “sell” parents on the value of their purchase. Parents must be made to feel that they are purchasing value in teen Israel programs related to their children's needs and desires. People do not buy generic cars, homes, clothing or vacations. Most people, especially those who are highly educated and professional, are discerning consumers. Expect no less about their decision to purchase a trip to Israel for their teen.
The religious identity of children in Jewish households is sometimes ambiguous. For example, 8% of the respondents said they were raising their children as Protestants or Catholics, while 81% said they were raising their children as exclusively Jewish. Religious identities change over time. But Jewish households in which children are raised as Christians are far less likely to send their children to Israel. All teens in Jewish households do not have a proclivity to visit Israel. On the other hand, even in the most assimilated households, including those in which the children are being raised in another religion, a trip to Israel may be important to teens with mixed religious identities. Little is known or understood about the role of Israel in the identity of teens in mixed-marriage households. Children of mixed-marriage couples may constitute a special submarket of teens.
Israel is an important part of the Jewish identity of the households that were sampled. Forty-one percent strongly agreed with the statement that caring about Israel was a very important part of their being a Jew, and another 42% agreed that Israel is very important—a total of 83%. Only 10% disagreed, including 2% who strongly disagreed with the statement that caring about Israel is very important part of their being a Jew.
Four percent of the households with teens make $25,000 or less, and 18% make from $25,000 to $50,000. Another 23% make from $50,000 to $75,000, and 22% make from $75,000 to $100,000. About 28% of the households make $100,000 or more per year. Given these income levels, $5,000 for one child or $10,000 for two children represents a huge expenditure, especially for those with incomes of $75,000 or less—half of all Jewish households with teens. Some mechanism to reduce the price for a significant majority of Jewish households will be necessary to make a trip to Israel affordable for most Jewish households.
Eighty-two percent of households took their last vacation within the United States, 4% to Canada, 3% to Mexico, 1% to Europe, and 3% to Israel. Nine percent went to other destinations. Costs were relatively low, compared to overseas travel.
Most people tend to believe that they are getting relatively good value for their family vacations. Only 10% considered their vacation to be very expensive, while 48% believed it to be moderately expensive. Thirty-one percent thought it was moderately inexpensive and 9% thought it was very inexpensive. This perceived value may influence perceptions of a teen trip, however worthwhile or more expensive that trip might be. The perceived value of the teen trip may be diminished when compared to the value people believe they are achieving through their family vacation.
Children have even more influence about a teen trip to Israel. Sixty-five percent of parents said their children had a great deal of influence, another 26% said their children had some influence (a total of 91%) concerning the decision on their trip to Israel. Teens are key decision-makers in whether or not they will go to Israel. They also have a great deal of influence in choosing to participate in any program. Their parents will defer to them or at least consult seriously with them on such a decision. Parents have ultimate “veto” power in most cases (but not all). A thorough understanding, therefore, of the motivations, desires, attractions, barriers, and disincentives for teens themselves to consider an Israel trip are vitally important in thinking about expanding the Israel experience and the number of teens who will participate. Marketing efforts therefore, must be redirected at teens as well as parents.
Of those who sent their children to Israel, 77% said they were very satisfied, and 9% said they were somewhat satisfied with the experience. None of the respondents indicated that they were dissatisfied with their child's trip to Israel. The study did not explore the teens' levels of satisfaction. Assuming that they felt the same way, the teens could be the best salespeople for other teens to visit Israel.
**Important Reasons to Choose a Teen Summer Program**

**Fig. 15**

- The Program Meets Your Child’s Personal Interests: 86% Very Important, 14% Somewhat Important
- Overall Quality of the Program: 88% Very Important, 11% Somewhat Important
- The Quality of the Staff: 89% Very Important, 10% Somewhat Important
- General Safety of the Program: 92% Very Important, 7% Somewhat Important
- How Much the Program Costs: 53% Very Important, 42% Somewhat Important
- Program Location: 51% Very Important, 40% Somewhat Important
- Who Else Attends the Program: 36% Very Important, 64% Somewhat Important
- A Chance to Be With Other Jewish Peers: 45% Very Important, 35% Somewhat Important

*Note: n=300*
For their child’s last overnight camp experience, 19% spent $500 or less, 15% spent from $500 to $1,000, and 23% spent from $1,000 to $2,000—58% spent $2,000 or less for their child's overnight camp experience. On the other hand, only 2% spent $5,000 or more for such an experience. Therefore, the alternatives of summer camp or day or overnight camp are far less expensive as a summer experience for their teen than a visit to Israel. It is not known from this study whether these camps were under Jewish auspices. But one can assume that the typical expenditure for a Jewish or a secular overnight camp would be far less costly than a trip to Israel.
For teens who traveled outside the United States, 16% spent $500 or less, 16% spent $500 to $1,000, 23% spent from $1,000 to $2,000, and 12% spent from $2,000 to $3,000. While 14% spent from $3,000 to $5,000, only 2% spent more than $5,000 for any trip that their child took to another country. Therefore, a trip to Israel of $5,000 or more is clearly far more costly than most of the travel that parents are currently paying for in terms of teen trips outside the United States.
Fifty-eight percent of parents say that they are relatively unfamiliar with the specifics of what these programs provide. Only 12% of the households said that they are very familiar with the various Israel summer programs, and 30% said they were moderately familiar, a total of 42%. Shopping for an Israel trip, therefore, may be difficult for many parents. They have high expectations, but relatively little information. They are aware of, but not familiar with, Israel trips. In this context, perceived high costs of the program can become even more problematic, part of the multiple barriers to parents sending their children to Israel that must be overcome.
One third of Jewish parents are considering sending their teens to Israel. More than half of the parents feel that a program in Israel would be appropriate for their teen.

One third of Jewish parents with teens are currently considering sending their child to Israel. Among those not currently considering a teen Israel program, fifty-three percent feel that a teen program to Israel would be something appropriate for their child. A substantial market, therefore, exists among parents willing to send their children to Israel or at least to consider it. Some of this feeling may overcome some of the price barriers, or at least influence parents to be initially receptive to a teen trip to Israel.
issues of cost and security can weigh against them. The specifics of the program, the quality of the program, and other factors surrounding the trip are of critical concern. The desire to strengthen a child’s commitment to Israel may not be sufficient incentive to induce parents to send the child on the trip regardless of cost, price, quality of the program, and knowledge about the program.
Security and cost are the most important reasons for not sending a child to Israel.
When asked if they regarded a $5,000 cost for a trip that included air and land travel, housing, food, entry fees, programs, events, and 24-hour staffing and supervision as reasonable, 4% believed that it was very reasonably priced, 52% believed that it was reasonably priced, 26% unreasonably priced, and 9% said that it was very unreasonably priced. The 35% of those who thought it was unreasonably priced represents one barrier to marketing the trip. The 4% is the most receptive market. At best someone may believe that a $5,000 Israel trip is a reasonable expenditure, but very few would believe that they were getting a "bargain" at $5,000 or more. Of course, others may believe a $5,000 price is both reasonable and unaffordable.
Almost 60% of parents find it likely that a lower price would influence them to send their child to Israel.

For those who believed that a $5,000 Israel trip was unreasonably priced, 15% said it was much more likely that they would send their child to Israel if the price were lower, and 44% said it was somewhat more likely, for a total of 59%. Sixteen percent said that it was not very likely that it would make them send a teen on a trip to Israel, and 11% said it was not likely at all. Lowering the price in the matrix of complex factors would be an incentive for more parents to send their children to Israel.
The cost factor is shown to be critical when parents are asked the maximum amount that they are willing to spend on any summer experience for their children. Eleven percent said they were willing to spend $500 or less, 12% said they were willing to spend $500 to $1,000, and 20% said they were willing to spend $1,000 to $2,000; (43% were willing to spend $2,000 or less) for any summer experience for their children. Another 11% indicated that they would be willing to spend $2,000 to $3,000, and 8% said they would be willing to spend $3,000 to $4,000. Only 4% said that they would be willing to spend $4,000 to $5,000. Of the entire sample, only 2% said they would be willing to spend $5,000 or more for any summer experience for their children. Thirty-two percent said that they didn't know how much they would be willing to spend. It can be assumed a very small proportion of these households would be willing to spend anywhere near $5,000 for one summer experience for their child. However, they might be willing to make such an expenditure if they saved for it over time.
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CONCLUSION

It is a well accepted axiom in the organized Jewish community that teen trips to Israel are a vital component in building a Jewish identity. Building upon that identity both before and after the trip is highly desirable. But increasing the number of teens who visit Israel is a primary concern in and of itself. This study demonstrates that a number of issues impede larger numbers of teens visiting Israel, including familiarity with Israel programs, concerns with safety, quality, and the specifics of each program.

The study emphatically demonstrates that cost and price are of primary importance. Unless the organized Jewish community creates mechanisms to provide much wider and deeper subsidies to a large proportion of American Jewish households, many cannot afford to send their children to Israel. They believe that the price is too high, or it does not fall within their income capabilities. Furthermore, there are many competing expenditures, including family vacations and other teen experiences, that are far less expensive than teen trips to Israel as they are currently priced.

Re-thinking our national approach to the Israel is necessary. No single investment in the identity of Jews, and building Israel/Diaspora relations, is more worthwhile. National efforts to create an Israel experience fund are critical. If the North American Jewish community is as concerned about Jewish identity as it seems, then major fundraising campaigns to finance the Israel experience will be required. Funding also may come from creative savings programs at synagogues and Federations to sponsor Israel trips, a special endowment fund for Israel trips, and perhaps a shifting of funds within the Jewish Agency to support teen trips to Israel. Serious efforts must also be made to lower the cost and reduce the price.

Money alone will not solve the problem. Extensive marketing efforts are required. These must address the lack of familiarity of most parents with