

Abraham Accords Peace Institute Analysis

Easier Visas Lead to Tourism Growth and Increased GDP

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Executive Summary

The Abraham Accords (AA) opened the door to warm peace and full relations between Israel and several of its Arab neighbours. An analysis conducted by HVS, in partnership with the Abraham Accords Peace Institute (AAPI), indicates that improved visa procedures would expand the movement of tourists among AA member nations, resulting in potential economic growth and stronger people-to-people ties. The reduction in barriers to increased tourism is an integral component in enabling regional trade and economic partnerships.

While hundreds of thousands of Israelis have visited Accords member countries, relatively few citizens of these countries have visited Israel since the signing of the historic peace agreements. There are several factors contributing to the relatively small number of such visits. This paper examines one of these factors - the visa process and requirements for travellers from Abraham Accords and other Middle Eastern countries wishing to visit Israel. It provides recommendations, including the implementation of an eVisa policy, which can lead to an increase in Abraham Accords visitors to Israel, thereby helping to realize the great potential of the tourism sector for contributing to mutually-beneficial cooperation and peace.

In general, countries which have a more traveller-friendly policy regarding entry visas benefit from expanded tourist growth, which has a positive effect on their GDP.

Visa restrictions are a policy instrument that governments use to monitor, control and limit the cross-border flow of people. These restrictions impose a burden on those subjected to them and allow the country imposing the restriction to pre-screen individuals before they arrive at its border. Visa restrictions are considered the 'first line of defence' against the entry of 'risky' travellers, who are seen as potentially posing a threat to the security, stability or resources of a country.



The introduction of a visa restriction by a destination country for citizens from a particular origin country can deter tourism inflows. Studies undertaken by Neumayer (2006, 2010 and 2011) [1; 2; 3] and Bertoli & Fernández-Huertas (2012) [4] show the effect of visa restrictions on a country's tourism levels. Neumayer (2010) [2] observed that countries with visa restrictions reduce on average the bilateral flow of tourists by around 60%. Further studies on this topic show that countries with visa restrictions reduce on average the bilateral flow of exports and foreign direct investment by about 25% and the bilateral flow of immigrants by around 40%, respectively (Bertoli & Fernández-Huertas, 2012) [4].

Visa restrictions, therefore, serve as a mechanism employed by many countries to regulate the entry of foreign travellers. These restrictions, while intended to maintain security and control over immigration, can have a profound impact on the tourism industry. The process of obtaining a visa often entails significant costs, bureaucratic procedures, and delays, thereby presenting a substantial hurdle for potential tourists.

The main challenge for now remains finding the proper balance between easing visa restrictions and national security considerations. Currently, the visa status for travel between Israel and other Abraham Accords countries remains diverse, with UAE – Israel establishing a reciprocated visa exemption agreement, Bahrain – Israel having visa exemption limited to non-ordinary passports, and Morocco – Israel having a non-reciprocated eVisa facility for Israelis traveling to Morocco. Israel remains without an eVisa scheme for Abraham Accords countries or other nations. Further details on the visa relationships between each nation are provided below.

Looking at case studies of recent visa waiver agreements between Israel and Georgia (2014), Taiwan (2011), Ukraine (2011), Belarus (2015) and Serbia (2010), there exists evidence of immediate growth of tourism arrivals spread across multiple years. While these growth periods have not been sustained over the long term in most cases, other factors like expenditure on market development and a lack of dedicated growth plans could have played a role in the stagnation of arrivals from these markets. Despite this stagnation, visa waiver agreements saw compound annual growth rates in tourism between 4.5% and 20.0% for different markets over a two to eight-year period. These case studies provide instances supporting the expansion of visa waiver agreements in Israel.

While these cases pertain to Israel, the biggest study of the impact of visa waivers on regional cooperation remains the formation of the Schengen zone, which improved trade, economic ties and tourism between participating countries as well as internationally. Multiple studies have taken the Schengen case study in the view of replication across stable regions around the globe.

Although the benefits of a relaxed visa policy are evident, the studies have also highlighted possible negative effects on national security, population sentiments and stability (Artal-Tur, Pallardo-Lopez & Requena-Silvente, 2013 [5]; Beenstock, Felsenstein & Rubin, 2015 [6]). While the UAE – Israel normalization has led to Israel becoming a top 20 source market for Dubai in 2022, and its 8th largest source market for the first quarter of 2023 (Department of Economy and Tourism, 2023 [7]), opposition to Israel and normalization remains among parts of the populations of Abraham Accords countries. Such opposition creates national security considerations for Israel in determining its visa policy. A full review of the range of policies indicates that the most practical lever to improve tourism could be the adoption of an eVisa policy between all member nations. This decision can potentially account for national security considerations while improving tourism, without not adding pressure to the existing consular services infrastructure.

While eVisa policies, as noted, already exist in some bilateral relations (Bahrain and Morocco extending the opportunity to apply for eVisas to Israeli citizens), significant growth could be activated by an Israeli decision to reciprocate the facility to Bahrain and Morocco immediately, while planning to extend it to other nations in the region and around the globe. A robust eVisa program can improve Israel's attractiveness to potential international travelers, as well as the country's global destination ranking.

Introduction

Numerous countries employ visa restrictions as a means to limit the entry of certain visitors. The expenses and inconveniences associated with obtaining a visa pose a significant obstacle for many travellers. Tedious visa processes require, more often than not, visitors complete an application, visit embassies, consular offices or designated service centres, pay processing fees and undergo lengthy waiting periods all for the possibility of being denied visa. As a result, one of the first checks visitors include in their travel plans is the visa requirement status of the destinations they wish to travel to. Traditional visa requirements therefore are a strong deterrent as they force travellers to rethink their plans.

The consequences of visa restrictions on tourism are far-reaching. Countries that impose stringent visa regulations may experience a decline in tourist arrivals, as travellers opt for more accessible and hassle-free destinations. This can lead to a significant loss of revenue for the tourism industry, affecting various sectors such as accommodation, transportation, and attractions. Moreover, events of international significance, such as the Olympic Games or major conferences, can be adversely impacted by visa restrictions, deterring potential attendees and dampening the overall success and economic benefits of these events.

The introduction of a visa restriction by a destination country for citizens from a particular origin country can deter tourism inflows. Studies undertaken by Neumayer (2006, 2010 and 2011) [1; 2; 3] and Bertoli & Fernández-Huertas (2012) [4] show the effect of the visa restrictions on a country's tourism levels. Neumayer (2010) [2] observed that countries with visa restrictions reduce on average the bilateral flow of tourists by around 60%. Further studies on this topic show that countries with visa restrictions reduce on average the bilateral flow of exports and foreign direct investment by about 25% and the bilateral flow of immigrants by around 40%, respectively (Bertoli & Fernández-Huertas, 2012) [4].

The biggest case study remains the formulation of the Schengen zone within Europe which shows that being part of the Schengen Agreement increases net bilateral trade between member nations by 0.09% per year and increases incoming migration by 1%, resulting in a 0.09% increase in imports (Dane Davis, 2014) [8]. The agreement also facilitates 1.25 billion trips by travellers within the region annually. The research concluded that, if the agreement were to be disbanded and free travel were to be restricted, it could cost individual country economies between €5 billion and €18 billion per year, while the cumulative GDP loss for the EU region would be between €471 billion and €1.43 trillion over a ten-year period (European Parliament, 2016) [9].

Studies in the early 2010s showed that visa restrictions had a clear effect on the flow of international travellers limiting travel by just over 20% (Artal-Tur, Pallardo-Lopez and Requena-Silvente 2013) [5]. In the context of Israel, Beenstock, Felsenstein & Rubin (2015) [6] found that complete removal of the visa requirements can almost triple the incoming tourism arrivals to Israel. They also found that partial waivers of visa restrictions are estimated to increase tourism in the range 48% to 68%. Concerns about terrorism and national security, particularly intense among those living in developed countries, is providing a basis for an increase in entry requirements, in terms of both the number and the severity of these barriers, including visa restrictions.

There is thus a significant opportunity for Israel now to improve tourism inflows to the tune of 20% to 68% in terms of number or arrivals while preserving national security concerns. These studies compare similar countries in terms of economic profile and compare and contrast the visa regulations in this view to act as a strategic lever. Choices made by the authorities on implementing a particular visa structure can therefore improve tourism as studies and estimates show.

In the following section, we identify major benefits and challenges regarding the Abraham Accords countries adopting a more liberal visa policy.



Benefits

A supportive visa policy can yield many positive results for a nation. These can be grouped as below:

- 1. Increased tourism:** one of the main benefits of a less restrictive visa policy is the subsequent increase in tourism inflows. With fewer barriers to entry, a country can successfully attract more tourists which in turn can bring in more foreign exchange, increased tourism revenue and support the local economic growth.
- 2. Business opportunities:** in addition to leisure-based tourism, less restrictive visa policy brings in more business travellers and enables execution of business deals thereby improving corporate relationships in the country.
- 3. Improved outlook for economy:** Trade and commerce growth can be stimulated through a less restrictive visa policy. This can potentially improve cooperation and economic outlook for a country.
- 4. New investment sources:** visa policy can open up the avenues for foreign direct investment into the nation. Countries have historically had investor visas or set up special economic zones to fully reap the benefits of new investment sources triggered by visa policy changes.
- 5. Immigration benefits:** visas also provide countries an option to strengthen their labour markets, goods and services consumption and boost economic growth. By strategically inviting immigrants in key areas of the economy, the country can improve its infrastructural and administrative capabilities through a more skilled workforce.

Case Study

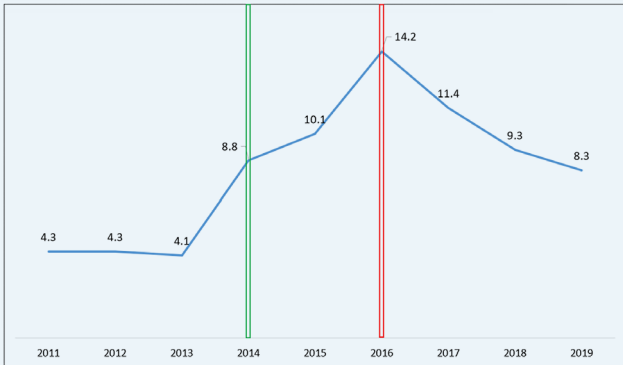
Israel entered into a visa exemption agreement with Georgia (2014), Taiwan (2011), Ukraine (2011), Belarus (2015) and Serbia (2010) since the start of 2010. With these exemptions, Israel experienced immediate growth periods. The following table highlights the growth seen in inbound arrivals from these nations post the signing of the visa exemption.

Table 1: Visa Exemption And Tourism Growth

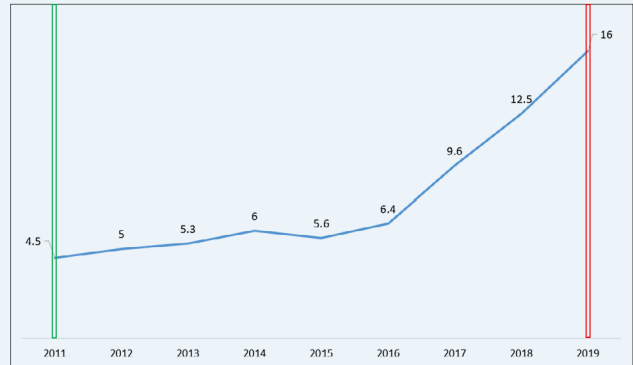
Country Name	Exemption in Effect	Arrivals in Exemption Year (In Thousands)	Last Year of Growth	Arrivals (In Thousands)	Years of Growth post Visa Exemption	CAGR for Growth Period
Georgia	Apr-14	8.8	2016	14.2	2	17.29%
Taiwan	Aug-11	4.5	2019	16	8	15.14%
Ukraine	Feb-11	106.8	2017	146.3	6	4.60%
Belarus	Nov-15	15.9	2017	27.3	2	19.74%
Serbia	Sep-10	4.1	2019	10.5	9	9.86%

All markets posted significant growth post the signing of the visa exemption and this growth lasted more than two years in most cases. Ukraine was perhaps the only market that did not post a near double digit growth however, this can be attributed to its already mature nature in terms of number of arrivals. Taiwan and Serbia have shown sustained growth post the signing of the exemption agreement for over eight years supporting the cause for visa exemption as a lever to boost tourism. While evidence exists of visa regulations unlocking tourism growth, it is important to highlight that these agreements should be supported with concrete marketing plans and the necessary infrastructure to attract inbound tourism. As the graph showcases below, continuous investment in tourism (marketing, infrastructure, experiences etc.) is necessary to sustain growth. Serbia and Taiwan however, continued to grow as of 2019 before COVID.

Visa Exemption And Tourism Growth - Tourism Arrivals In Thousands



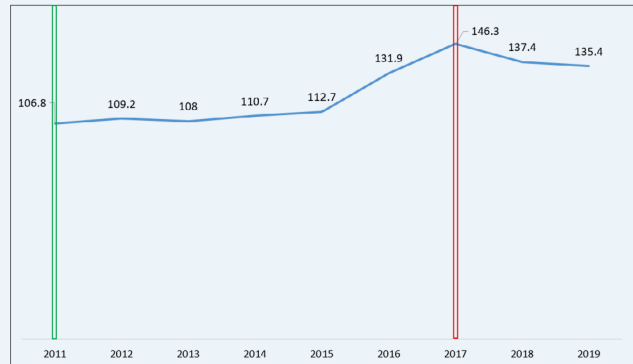
Tourist Arrivals: Georgia to Israel
(2 year growth after visa exemption in 2014)



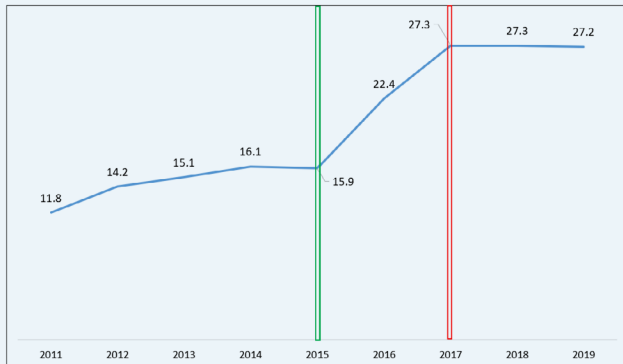
Tourist Arrivals: Taiwan to Israel
(8 year growth after visa exemption in 2011)



Tourist Arrivals: Serbia to Israel
(8 year growth after visa exemption in 2010)



Tourist Arrivals: Ukraine to Israel
(6 year growth after visa exemption in 2011)



Tourist Arrivals: Belarus to Israel
(2 year growth after visa exemption in 2015)

Challenges

While a free visa policy can have multiple benefits, some key hurdles to implementing the visa regime within the Abraham Accords nations are as below:

- 1. Security concerns:** visas serve the function of screening for potential security threats. There are fears that a less restrictive visa policy can lead to countries exposing themselves to security risks. The challenge is to balance the security related screening of threats and providing easy access to the country for tourists.
- 2. Immigration control:** while the policy can improve the situation on labour shortages, it can also negatively affect the local employment levels especially if the immigrant population is highly skilled. This can lead to higher unemployment and reduced wages for local population if it is not controlled and regulated.
- 3. Diplomatic relationships:** visa free policy requires strong diplomatic ties and reciprocity. Effective implementation of the policy requires commitment from both parties and any lesions in diplomatic ties can be a major barrier to sustainable implementation. Finally diplomatic ties ensure responsibility is respected and maintained and easy resolution on issues can be achieved.
- 4. Increased pressure on economy:** overexploitation of visa free access can artificially influence population levels thereby putting pressure on the country's infrastructure, goods, and services supply. This can increase the supply pressures by artificially increasing demand and putting pressures on the marginal sections of the society leading to increased political tensions.

Currently, the Abraham Accords nations face some, if not all, of the above challenges in different degrees and therefore, cooperation is needed to establish away forward on visa policy for the countries and the region. Later sections of this report highlight some actions that can be taken in an attempt to find the right balance on visa regulations in the region.

Regional Best Practice – Euro Schengen Zone

Signed in 1985 and ratified in 1990 in Schengen, Luxembourg, the Schengen Agreement comprises 27 European countries that have, by virtue of their opting in, abolished passport and related border patrol at mutual borders for citizens, residents and valid visa holders of a member state. Mobilised as a common visa policy for the European Union, international travel is promoted, and travellers benefit from “free” and “borderless” travel thanks to this demonstration of regional cooperation.

The scheme has had a significant impact on tourism in Europe, and its importance cannot be overstated. One of the most significant advantages of the Schengen visa scheme is that it has made travelling to Europe much easier for visitors. Instead of having to obtain separate visas for each country they plan to visit, tourists can obtain a single Schengen visa that allows them to travel to any of the 27 countries in the Schengen area. This has made travel to Europe more convenient, less expensive and less time-consuming, which has encouraged more people to visit the region.

The Schengen visa scheme has also helped to promote tourism by reducing barriers to entry for travellers. By having a common visa policy, the Schengen area has made it easier for people from non-EU countries to visit Europe, which has helped to boost tourism. In addition, the Schengen area's common border policy has made it easier for tourists to move around and explore different parts of Europe, which has further encouraged tourism. Moreover, the Schengen visa scheme has facilitated the growth of the travel and tourism industry in Europe. The ease of travel and reduced bureaucracy has led to an increase in the number of tourists visiting Europe, which has resulted in more employment opportunities and an increase in revenue for the tourism sector.

According to the European Parliamentary Research Service, as of 2016, 1.6 million people work in one Schengen country and live in another. Moreover, 3.5 million people cross internal Schengen borders every day. According to the study conducted by Dane Davis in 2014, net bilateral trade between Schengen member nations

increases 0.09% per annum while incoming migration increases 1% resulting in import increases of 0.09%. In terms of tourism, the agreement's existence facilitates 1.25 billion trips from travellers within the region every year. The research concluded that disbanding the agreement and moving away from free travel could directly cost individual country economies between five and eighteen billion euro every year, while the cumulative GDP loss for the EU region would be around €471 billion to €1.43 trillion over a ten-year period (Source: European Commission, 2016).

Israel

According to the Israeli Embassy, there are different types of visa for which foreign nationals can apply. These include:

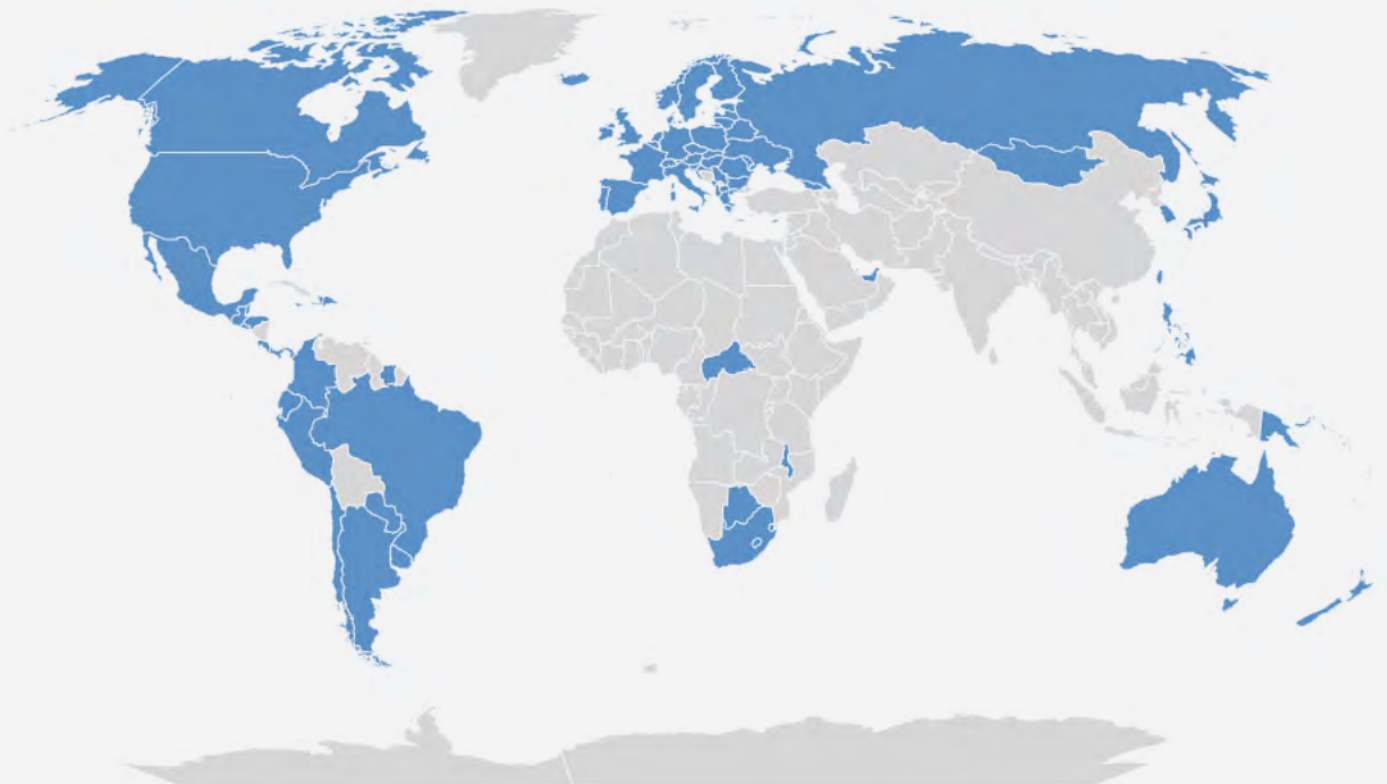
- **Immigration visa:** this visa allows a foreign national to live in Israel permanently. To qualify for an immigration visa, the foreign national must be eligible to immigrate to Israel under the Law of Return, which grants the right of return and settlement in Israel to Jews and their descendants.
- **A/1 Temporary Resident visa:** this visa is a temporary resident visa for Israel that is granted to those who are eligible to make Aliyah according to the Law of Return. It allows individuals to experience Israel before making the commitment to becoming Israeli citizens.
- **A/2 Temporary Resident visa:** this allows a foreign national to study in Israel at a university or other accredited educational institution. To qualify for an A/2 visa, the foreign national must have been accepted by a school in Israel. They must also meet certain financial and medical requirements.
- **A/3 Clergy visa:** this visa allows a foreign national to perform religious duties in Israel. To qualify for an A/3 visa, the foreign national must be a member of the clergy of a recognized religion.
- **A/4 visa for spouses and children:** this visa allows the spouses and children of A/2 and A/3 visa holders to live in Israel.
- **B/1 Work visa:** this visa allows a foreign national to work in Israel for a short period of time. To qualify for a B/1 visa, the foreign national must have a job offer from an Israeli company. This visa is given to experts and artists, among others, and is granted solely with the approval of the Ministry of the Interior.
- **B/2 Visitor's visa:** this visa allows a foreign national to visit Israel for a short period of time, such as for tourism or business. To qualify for a B/2 visa, the foreign national must have a valid passport and a return ticket. This visa is valid for up to three months from the date of issue depending on the nationality of the traveller.

Tourism purposes usually require a visitor visa (B/2) which allows access to Israel for up to 90 days. While the visa is priced moderately (€21 or \$24), the process is considerably long with travellers having to apply for a visa and even attending a visa interview. While the cost is modest, the processing time for a visa can be between one to two months which is a considerable barrier to entry for prospective travellers. However, there is a significant number of countries which enjoy an exemption status with Israel.

Visa Exemption for Travel to Israel

The following is a pictorial representation followed by the list of countries that enjoy visa exempt status (for up to 90 days) when travelling to Israel:

Map 1: Visa Exempt Status When Travelling into Israel by Passport Holder Nationality



Visa Exempt Status When Travelling into Israel by Passport Holder Nationality

Albania	Bulgaria	Ecuador	Haiti	Lithuania	Nauru	Portugal	South Africa	United States
Andorra	Canada	El Salvador	Honduras	Luxembourg	Netherlands	Romania	South Korea	Uruguay
Argentina	Central African Republic	Estonia	Hong Kong	Macau	New Zealand	Russia	Spain	Vanuatu
Australia	Chile	Eswatini	Hungary	Malawi	Republic of North Macedonia	Saint Kitts and Nevis	Suriname	Vatican City
Austria	Colombia	Fiji	Iceland	Malta	Norway	Saint Lucia	Sweden	
Bahamas	Costa Rica	Finland	Ireland	Mauritius	Palau	Saint Vincent and the Grenadines	Switzerland	
Barbados	Croatia	France	Italy	Mexico	Panama	San Marino	Taiwan	
Belarus	Cyprus	Georgia	Jamaica	Federated States of Micronesia	Papua New Guinea	Serbia	Tonga	
Belgium	Czech Republic	Germany	Japan	Moldova	Paraguay	Singapore	Trinidad and Tobago	
Belize	Denmark	Greece	Latvia	Monaco	Peru	Slovakia	Ukraine	
Botswana	Dominica	Grenada	Lesotho	Mongolia	Philippines	Slovenia	United Arab Emirates	
Brazil	Dominican Republic	Guatemala	Liechtenstein	Montenegro	Poland	Solomon Islands	United Kingdom	

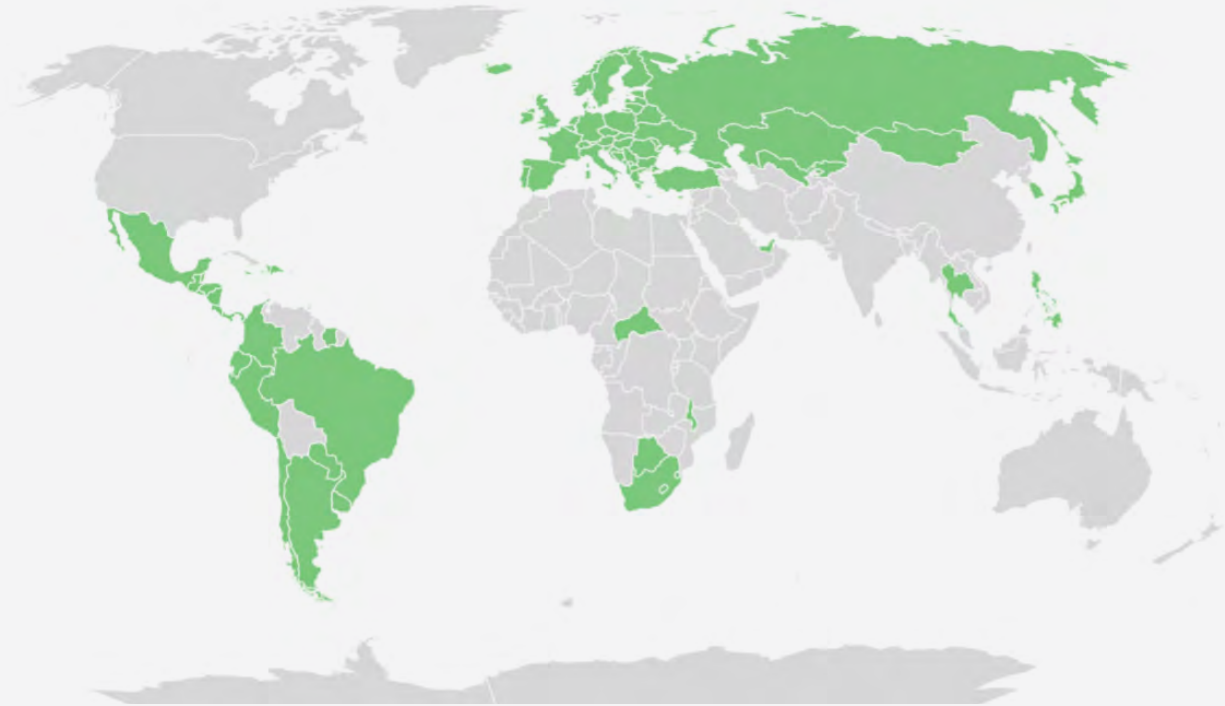
Country	Visa Status
Bahrain	Non-exempt: Before a visa application can be completed, confirmation from Israeli Foreign Ministry is required. Post this, citizens need to apply for traditional visa at the Israel Embassy. Bahrain signed a visa exemption agreement with Israel for non-ordinary passports on 18th October 2020.
Egypt	Partial Exemption: Before a visa application can be completed, confirmation from Israeli Foreign Ministry is required. Post this, citizens need to apply for traditional visa at the Israel Embassy. Citizens can enjoy visa free access for up to 14 days when entering through Taba border and visiting up to Beer Sheva
Jordan	Non-exempt: Before a visa application can be completed, confirmation from Israeli Foreign Ministry is required. Post this, citizens need to apply for traditional visa at the Israel Embassy or designated organisations offering consulate services
Morocco	Non-exempt: Citizens need to apply for a traditional visa at the Israel Embassy or designated organisations offering consulate services
Oman	Non-exempt: Before a visa application can be completed, confirmation from Israeli Foreign Ministry is required. Post this, citizens need to apply for traditional visa at the offices of designated organisations offering consulate services
Sudan	Non-exempt: Before a visa application can be completed, confirmation from Israeli Foreign Ministry is required. Post this, citizens need to apply for traditional visa at the offices of designated organisations offering consulate services.
Saudi Arabia	Non-exempt: Before a visa application can be completed, confirmation from Israeli Foreign Ministry is required. Post this, citizens need to apply for traditional visa at the Israel Embassy or designated organisations offering consulate services
United Arab Emirates	Exempt: UAE citizens enjoy visa exempt status when visiting Israel. This was achieved after the signing of the normalisation agreement under the Abraham Accords

Below are the Israeli visa requirements for other Abraham Accords nations and certain other nations in the region:

Visa Exemption for Israeli Travellers

The visual below shows the countries that allow visa-free entry from Israeli passport holders along with a list of these countries:

Map 2: Countries Allowing Visa Exempt Status to Israeli Passport Holders



Albania	Bulgaria	El Salvador	Haiti	Latvia	Montenegro	Republic of North Macedonia	Solomon Islands	United Arab Emirates
Andorra	Central African Republic	Estonia	Honduras	Lesotho	Nauru	Romania	South Korea	United Kingdom
Argentina	Chile	Eswatini	Hungary	Liechtenstein	Netherlands	Russia	South Africa	Uruguay
Austria	Colombia	Federated States of Micronesia	Iceland	Lithuania	Nicaragua	Saint Kitts and Nevis	South Korea	Uzbekistan
Bahamas	Costa Rica	Fili	Ireland	Luxembourg	Norway	Saint Lucia	Spain	Vanuatu
Barbados	Croatia	Finland	Italy	Malawi	Palau	Saint Vincent and the Grenadines	Suriname	Vatican City
Belarus	Cyprus	France	Jamaica	Malta	Panama	Samoa	Sweden	
Belgium	Czech Republic	Georgia	Japan	Mauritius	Paraguay	San Marino	Switzerland	
Belize	Denmark	Germany	Jordan	Mexico	Peru	Serbia	Thailand	
Bosnia and Herzegovina	Dominica	Greece	Kazakhstan	Moldova	Philippines	Singapore	Trinidad and Tobago	
Botswana	Dominican Republic	Grenada	Kosovo	Monaco	Poland	Slovakia	Turkey	
Brazil	Ecuador	Guatemala	Kyrgyzstan	Mongolia	Portugal	Slovenia	Ukraine	

In addition to the above nations, below are the visa requirements imposed on Israeli nationals by other Abraham Accords nations and certain other nations in the region:

Country	Visa Status
Bahrain	e-Visa and Visa-on-arrival: Bahrain signed a visa exemption agreement with Israel for non-ordinary passports. In the meantime, however, Bahrain has added Israel to the list of eligible countries to use its e-Visa and visa-on-arrival facilities for a maximum of 90 days if the applicant meets some general conditions
Egypt	Partial Exemption: Citizens can enjoy visa free access for up to 14 days when entering through Taba border or Sharm El Sheikh International Airport when visiting Sinai. Travel to other parts of Egypt require a traditional visa
Jordan	e-Visa and Visa-on-arrival: Visa free entry for up to 2 days when using the Yitzhak Rabin Crossing / Wadi Araba Crossing. Crossing is prohibited via King Hussein/Allenby Bridge. 30 days visa issued upon arrival at Jordan River Crossing and Queen Alia International Airport. e-Visa available for all other cases
Morocco	e-Visa: The eVisa has a duration of 30 days and can be extended up to six months with multiple-entry in Morocco. Israel is one of the only two nations that are eligible for an eVisa from Morocco (the other being Thailand). Nationals of Israel born in Morocco can obtain a visa on arrival. They must have a Moroccan national ID card. Nationals of Israel residing in Israel with a letter issued by the Council of Jewish Communities of Morocco can obtain a visa on arrival. Visa facility available through the Moroccan Embassy in Tel Aviv or through the e-Visa website.
Oman	Non-exempt: Citizens need to apply for a traditional visa at the offices of designated organisations offering consulate services
Sudan	Non-exempt: Citizens need to apply for a traditional visa at the offices of designated organisations offering consulate services
Saudi Arabia	Admission Refused: Currently, travel to Saudi Arabia for Israeli nationals is restricted as a part of the Arab League Boycott of Israel. However, Israeli Muslims can get a temporary Jordanian passport to go to Saudi Arabia for Hajj purposes only and Israeli business-people can obtain a special visa to enter the country
United Arab Emirates	Exempt: Israeli citizens enjoy visa exempt status when visiting UAE for up to 90 days. This was achieved after the signing of the normalisation agreement under the Abraham Accords

In terms of visa relations with the Abraham Accords member nations and neighbouring countries, Israel has only exempted nationals from the United Arab Emirates while Bahrain, Morocco, Sudan, Jordan and Egypt continue to remain on the “visa required” nations list for Israel. Additionally, Israeli citizens enjoy a higher degree of freedom as compared to the visa related freedom enjoyed by nationals from other countries.

Lack of Reciprocity by Israel

While most of this has been achieved thanks to the signing of the Abraham Accords, visa regulations relaxed by other nations have not necessarily been reciprocated by Israel. This reciprocity needs to be extended in order to ensure long-term growth of travel between the countries in the region. While border security remains of paramount importance, actions need to be taken in terms of visa status to ensure sustainable tourism growth into Israel from the region.

Recommendations

Based on the above we recommend the following actions:

- Visa exemption to all member nations: this status, currently enjoyed only by the United Arab Emirates, could be extended to all member states. However, with that said, safety and security would need to be monitored extensively for all travellers coming from these nations to deliver a seamless arrival experience.
- Visa on arrival status: this can be extended to member nations to reduce the processing time and administrative efforts. This can significantly reduce the workload currently facing the Israeli Embassies and improve the attractiveness of the destination in the minds of the travellers. However, visa on arrival should be handled with extra sensitivity in these cases as denials on arrival might lead to unfavourable sentiments and hamper travel growth in the long term from the region.
- e-Visa facility: the most suitable solution to the current situation might be the introduction of an e-Visa facility. Currently, Israel does not have an e-Visa scheme for nationals from any country around the world. There were plans in 2022 to launch this facility to simplify the process; however, this has not yet been implemented. By providing an e-Visa facility to travellers, Israel can ensure that:
 - workload of Embassies / Consulates around the world is reduced;
 - visitors get their visa from the comfort of their home without having to physically attend the Embassies for interviews;
 - safety and security measures are intact as visitor's documents can be reviewed by the visa authorities before the issuance of the visa;
 - the destination's attractiveness increases as the visa barrier to entry is relaxed, albeit not removed entirely.
- Leveraging ally support: certain countries have leveraged support of other nations in their own visa policy. For instance, many countries around the world offer visa free access to travellers holding a valid US visa. Additionally, non-native residents of one of the GCC countries can travel to another GCC member state without having to apply for another visa. This cooperation can ease pressures on the country's administrative infrastructure and can at the same time limit security threats. While the recommendation would be to have regional cooperation on visas (one visa for the region, visa of one country in the region accepted in other countries, extension of visa free travel to valid residents including non-natives), inorganic growth can be brought in by leveraging common partners like the US. For instance, travellers from Morocco, Bahrain, Jordan, Egypt etc. possessing a valid US visa could be allowed visa exemption into Israel and vice-versa.

Finally, the change and ease of visa issuance can have further benefits for Israeli nationals. Visa agreements are often bilateral and reciprocated. By allowing e-Visa or visa exemption status to the nationals from different countries, Israel stands to benefit from the same visa status for its own outbound citizens. This could thereby improve the Israeli passport ranking and mobility score, the latter of which currently is 151 (up by 1 point from 2019 as per the Global Passport Rankings).

Conclusions

The attractiveness of a destination as a tourism hotspot depends on a few factors with one being accessibility. Accessibility factors of a destination can be divided into two main categories: tangible and intangible. While the tangible factors include the destination's location, transport connections and infrastructural capabilities, intangible factors like visa and other legal requirements also play a major part in attracting tourists from around the globe.

Visa rules can have a significant impact on tourism to a country. In general, the easier it is for tourists to obtain visas, the more likely they are to visit a particular country. Conversely, if a country has strict visa rules



or requires lengthy and complicated visa application processes, this may discourage potential tourists from visiting. Below are some specific ways in which visa rules can affect tourism:

- **Accessibility:** Visa requirements can either make a destination accessible or inaccessible to potential visitors. If a country has a visa-free policy, it can attract more tourists, particularly those who are seeking last-minute travel opportunities or those who don't have the time to go through a lengthy visa application process. On the other hand, if the visa process is difficult or the fees are high, it can dissuade potential visitors and make the destination less accessible.
- **Cost:** Visa fees can be a significant cost for tourists, particularly those traveling on a budget. If visa fees are too high, some tourists may decide to visit a different country that has more affordable visa fees or no visa requirements at all.
- **Perceived hospitality:** Visa rules can also impact the perception of a country's hospitality towards foreign visitors. If a country has a welcoming visa policy, it can create a positive impression and encourage visitors to explore the country further. Conversely, if the visa process is cumbersome or the rules are unclear, it can create a negative perception of the country, and deter potential visitors.
- **Length of stay:** Visa rules can also impact the length of time that tourists are willing to spend in a particular country. If the visa process is lengthy or if the visa only allows for a short stay, tourists may decide to visit a different destination that offers a longer stay.

Overall, visa rules play a crucial role in determining the number of tourists visiting a particular country. By implementing appropriate visa policies that balance security concerns with ease of travel, countries can attract more visitors and boost their tourism industry.

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About the Abraham Accords Peace Institute

The Abraham Accords Peace Institute is a non-partisan, non-profit U.S. organization dedicated to supporting the implementation and expansion of the historic Abraham Accords peace agreements. The mission of the Institute is to strengthen the new bonds created through the Abraham Accords, and ensure that these relationships achieve their fullest potential. The Institute is the primary platform for disseminating the progress made through the Accords, and for the development of new growth opportunities by convening and leveraging public and private sector entities for discussion, planning, and cooperation. Its focus is on deepening trade, investment, tourism and people-to-people ties among AA members, and on expanding the circle of countries which are part of the Accords.

