

THE HOLY LAND JOURNEY:

Evangelicals and Israel Travel



GREY MATTER
RESEARCH & CONSULTING

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Strategic Solutions for Success

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SMALL BUT IMPORTANT

Israel ranks only #100 in the world for size of population, but it holds a **disproportionately large amount of attention for Americans**. Of course there are the aspects of world politics and international relations, as well as technology and innovation. But in this case we are talking about tourism.

According to the National Trade & Tourism Office, Israel was #24 on the list of countries visited the most by Americans.

Before the pandemic upended international travel, the Israel Ministry of Tourism recorded 897,100 visitors from the United States in 2018 and 969,400 in 2019. Overall the total number of inbound tourists was 4,113,100 in 2018 and 4,551,600 in 2019.

While Israel tourism ground to a painful stop in March 2020 with the onset of COVID-19, the desire among evangelicals to visit Israel remains. As COVID restrictions are lifted, it is a reasonable assumption that, over time, travel to Israel will resume.

Although only a small proportion of evangelical Protestants in the US have visited Israel, our new research shows that most want to—even while having some questions about the safety of such a visit.

Infinity Concepts and **Grey Matter Research** partnered to research over 1,000 American evangelical Protestants. In this report we examine evangelical interest in visiting Israel.

40%
of evangelicals are
extremely interested in
visiting Israel

KEY INSIGHTS

- 1** Israel is #100 in the world for population, but #24 for the most-visited countries by Americans.
- 2** Evangelical Protestants are less likely than average to have traveled internationally (56%, compared to 71% of all Americans).
- 3** Only 7% of all evangelicals have ever visited Israel.
- 4** 40% of evangelicals are extremely interested in visiting Israel, and a total of 80% are at least moderately interested in visiting.
- 5** Spiritually engaged evangelicals (e.g., attend church regularly, read the Bible regularly, participate in a small group) are significantly more likely to be interested in visiting Israel.
- 6** The most common ways evangelicals would consider going to Israel are traveling with a group led by a well-known Christian leader or Bible teacher (50% would consider this option) and traveling with a group that includes their pastor and people from their church (49%). However, six out of ten (60%) would consider visiting multiple ways.
- 7** 82% have at least some doubts about the safety of a trip to Israel, including 60% who have fairly significant concerns about it.
- 8** Those who are not interested in visiting Israel usually see it as unsafe; those who really want to go are much more comfortable with the safety of such a trip.
- 9** Over half the evangelicals who have visited Israel before (52%) are extremely interested in returning. Another 43% of previous visitors are moderately interested in a repeat trip. This means 95% of previous visitors would consider returning, which by itself is a pretty strong recommendation for Israel travel.

Evangelical: A Quick Definition

Researchers have defined “evangelical” in ways that have them representing 7%, 23%, and even 35% or more of American adults. For this study, we considered an evangelical to be someone who agrees strongly with all four of the following theological positions:

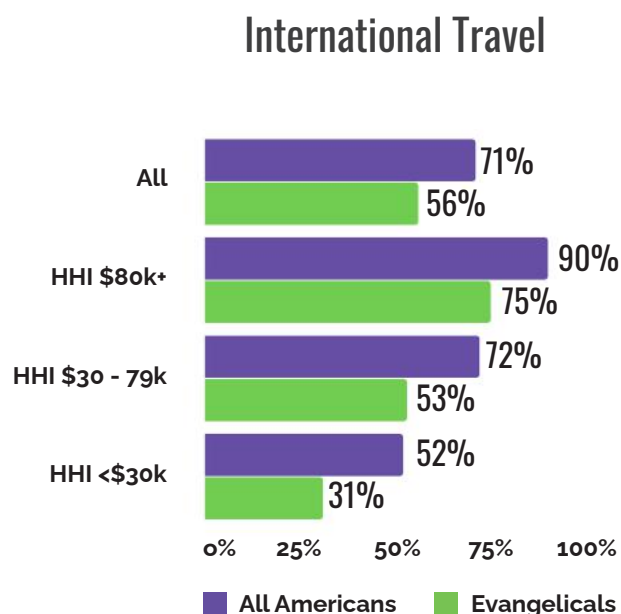
- The Bible is the highest authority for what I believe
- It is important for me to encourage non-Christians to trust Jesus Christ as their Savior
- Jesus Christ’s death on the cross is the only sacrifice that could remove the penalty of my sin
- Only those who trust in Jesus Christ alone as their Savior receive God’s free gift of eternal salvation

Further, we limited our study to those who did not identify with a non-Protestant group, such as Mormon, Roman Catholic, or Orthodox. This is a study of American **evangelical Protestants**, a group representing **23% of American adults**, or about **59 million people**.

Travel Experience

Evangelical Protestants are less likely than average Americans to have traveled internationally. According to Pew Research, 71% of American adults have traveled internationally at some point in their lives. Among evangelicals, that number is just 56%.

This difference is consistent by household income level. Evangelicals are less likely than average to have traveled internationally no matter whether their income is \$80,000 or more (90% nationally, 75% among evangelicals), \$30,000 to \$79,999 (72% nationally, 53% among evangelicals), or under \$30,000 (52% nationally, 31% among evangelicals).



Pew found that men are more likely than women to have traveled abroad, and in this evangelicals are no different (62% among men, 50% among women). And although the Pew study did not release any information about age groups, among evangelicals, those 70 and older are the most likely to have traveled abroad (68%, compared to 58% in the 55 – 69 age group and 51% of those under age 55).

Although more than half of evangelical Protestants have traveled internationally, **just 7% have ever visited Israel.** As with international travel in general, this understandably varies by income: 3% among those with a household income under

7%
of evangelicals have
visited Israel

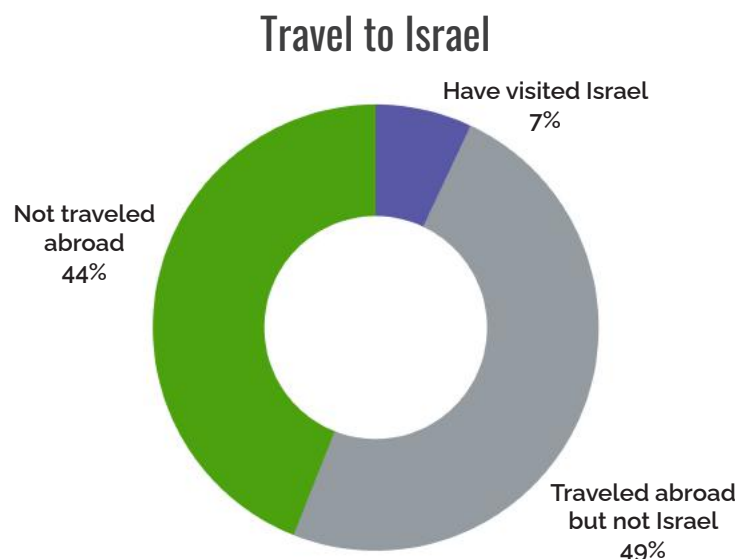
\$30,000, doubling to 6% in the \$30,000 – \$79,999 category, and then doubling again to 12% among those earning \$80,000 or more.

Men are more likely than women to have visited Israel (10% to 5%). White (non-Hispanic) evangelicals are more likely to have been there than are others (8% to 4%). Pentecostal and charismatic evangelicals (i.e. those who report having spoken in tongues) also are more likely than other evangelicals to have been to Israel (11% to 6%).

Evangelicals who are more spiritually engaged are significantly more likely to have visited Israel.

- 9% of those who attend church at least monthly have visited, compared to less than 1% of those who infrequently or never attend worship
- 10% of those who gave to charity in the last 12 months have been to Israel, versus 4% who did not give to donor-supported organizations outside of a congregation
- 10% of those who read the Bible at least once a week have traveled there, versus under 1% of less frequent readers
- 12% who are part of a small group have been to Israel, compared to 3% among those who are not part of a small group

And while in this study we did not directly explore what motivated their travel to Israel, from these clear and consistent differences, as well as from previous research, it is clear that religious faith was a significant part of the motivation to go.



Travel Interest

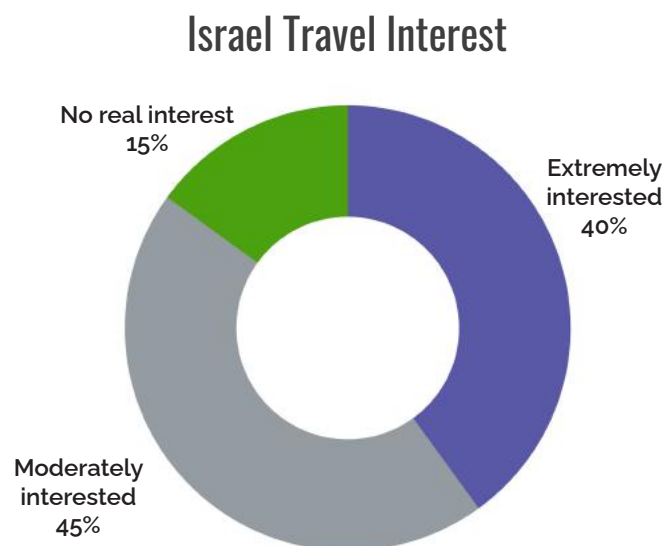
While only 7% of evangelicals have been to Israel, there is substantial interest in this destination. We asked people how interested they would be in visiting Israel, assuming the pandemic is no longer a factor and they could afford the trip.

Those who are not interested in visiting may lack specific interest in Israel, or they may lack the desire to do any long-distance travel whether the destination would be Israel, Japan, or Peru.

Forty percent (40%) of evangelical Protestants are extremely interested in visiting Israel, while another 45% have a moderate interest in doing so. Only 15% express no real interest in visiting Israel.

Interest in visiting is higher among younger evangelicals than among older people; nearly twice as high among the youngest evangelicals as it is among the oldest group. There aren't a lot of differences in interest level by other demographic factors, but there are many according to faith.

First, **interest is much stronger among evangelicals who believe that the Jews are still God's chosen people today** (which is around half of all evangelicals; for more information, see the Infinity Concepts/Grey Matter Research report [The Jewish Connection: Evangelicals and Israel](#)).





Second, just as previous experience visiting Israel is substantially more common among evangelicals who are more engaged in their faith, so is interest in a future trip. Evangelicals who read the Bible at least once a week, attend church at least once a month, and/or are part of a small group have significantly higher interest in visiting Israel than do those who are less engaged spiritually.

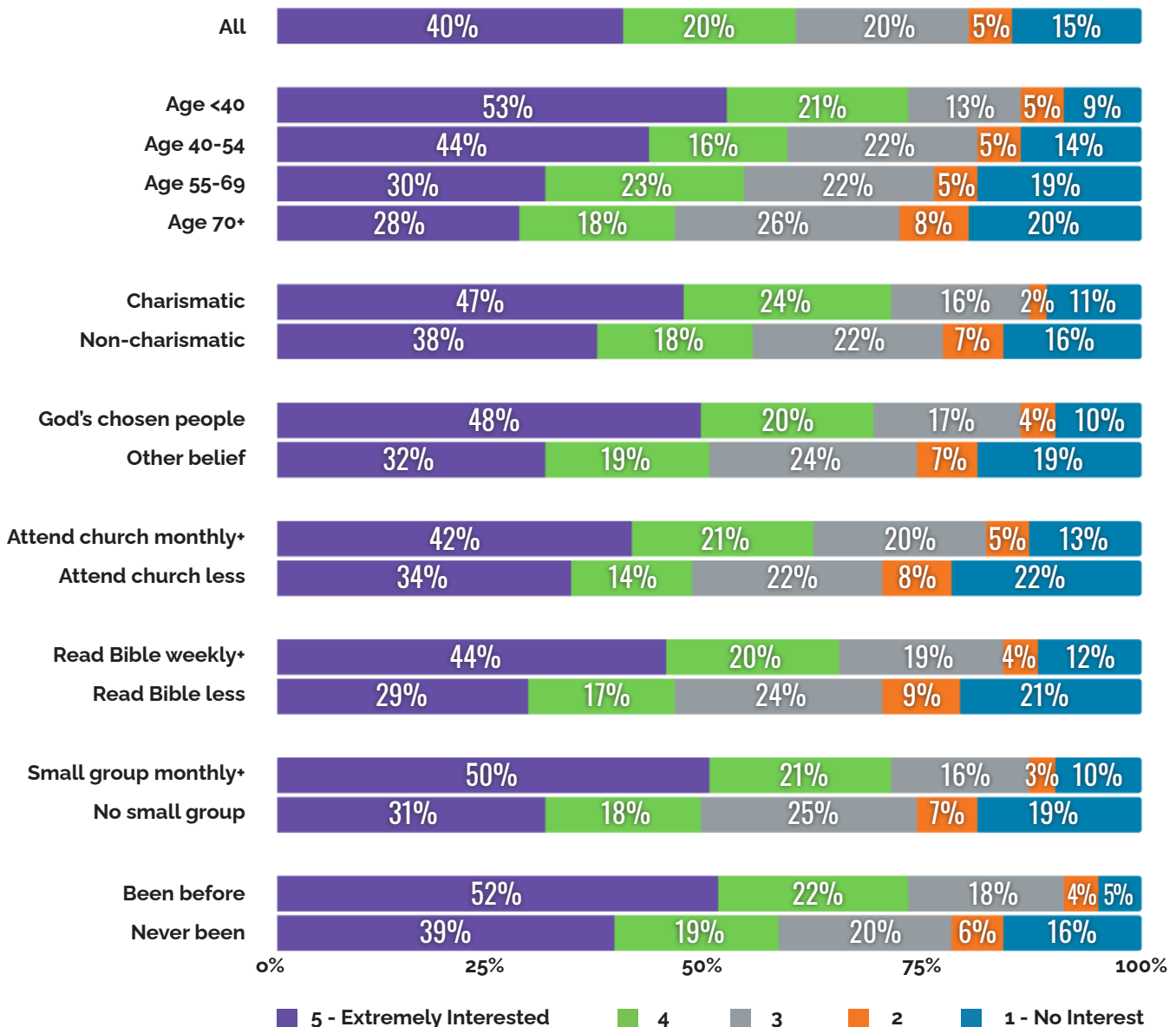
85%
of evangelicals
are interested in
visiting Israel

Third, **Pentecostal and charismatic evangelicals have much higher interest in Israel travel** than do other evangelicals.

One other difference we note is that people who have already been to Israel are the ones most likely to want to travel there (again). **Over half the people who have visited Israel before (52%) are extremely interested in returning, and another 43% of previous visitors are moderately interested in a repeat trip. The fact that 95% of previous evangelical visitors would consider returning is a pretty strong recommendation for Israel travel.**

95%
of evangelicals who
have been to Israel are
interested in returning

Interest in Visiting Israel



Some numbers (such as these) do not add to exactly 100% due to rounding.

We presented six different ways by which people could visit Israel, from independent travel to group tours. Most evangelicals who have an interest in going to Israel also would consider more than one of these options.

The two most popular ways of visiting Israel are traveling with a group led by a well-known Christian leader or Bible teacher (50% would consider this option)

and traveling with a group that includes their pastor and people from their church (49%). These leaders provide spiritual perspective and insights during the tour.

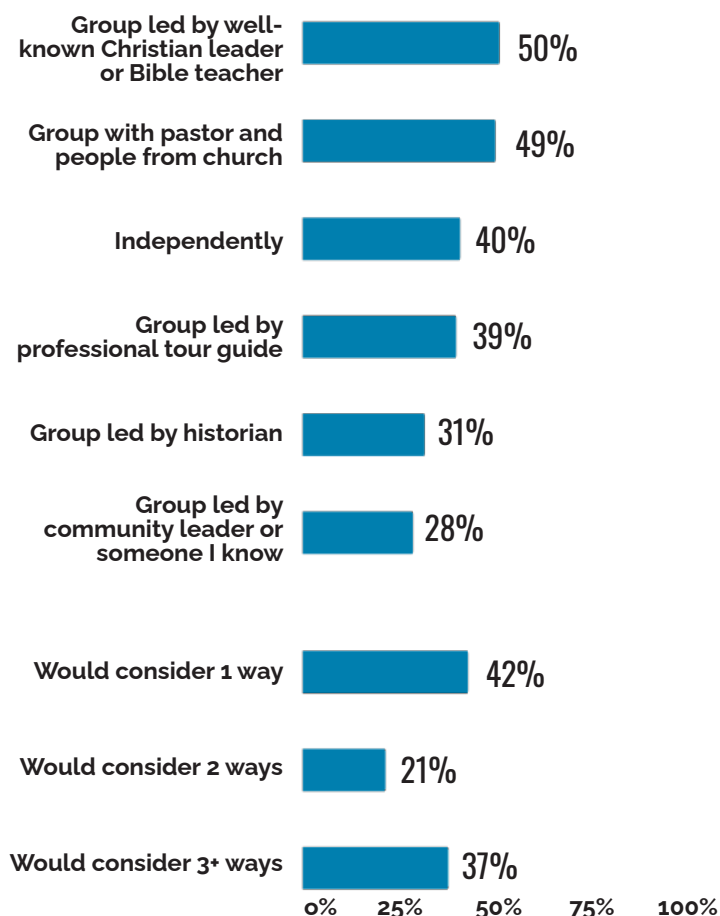
Forty percent (40%) would consider independent travel (alone or with a spouse or friend).

The three less popular options are also group travel, like the top two options, but lacking spiritual leadership and teaching.

Thirty-nine percent would consider a trip led by a professional tour guide, while 31% would opt for a group led by a historian, and only 28% would choose to travel in a group led by a community leader or someone they know.

The younger the individual, the more likely independent travel is to be a consideration, from 52% among those under 40 to only 22% among those 70 and older.

Ways They Would Consider Visiting



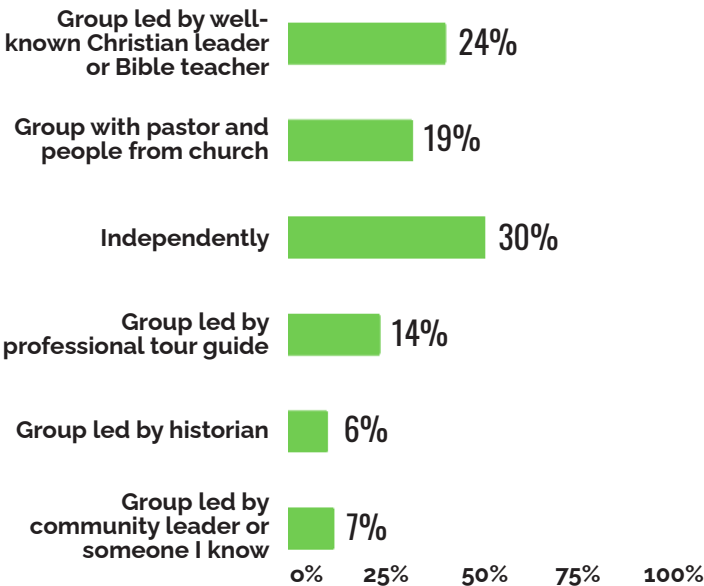
58%
are not set on how
they would like to
travel to Israel

Economics may also factor into this. **All of the group options are more likely to be considered by higher-income evangelicals.** Independent travel is much more of a consideration for the lowest-income evangelicals (47%, falling as income rises until reaching 31% among the highest-income potential travelers). It appears that independent travel is assumed to be less expensive, and therefore more reachable or desirable to those with fewer financial resources.

Traveling with their pastor/church or with a well-known Christian leader/teacher are both considerably more popular among evangelicals who are more engaged in their faith—regularly attending church, reading the Bible, and/or participating in a small group.

Nearly six out of ten evangelical potential visitors are not set on how they would want to go; instead, they would consider multiple options for the trip. This includes 21% who would consider two different ways and 37% who would consider three or more different options for traveling to Israel.

Only Way They Would Consider Visiting



Among those who only have one way of travel to Israel they would consider, independent travel is the top choice (30%), followed by a group led by a well-know Christian leader or Bible teacher (24%) and a group including their pastor and people from their church (19%). Fourteen percent are only willing to consider a professional tour guide, while few are only interested in a group led by a community leader or someone they know (7%) or by a historian (6%).

If we group these findings into the categories of (1) spiritual tour leader, (2) non-spiritual tour leader, and (3) independent travel, **43% prefer to tour Israel with a spiritual leader**, 30% would only consider independent travel, and 27% would opt for a non-spiritual group tour.

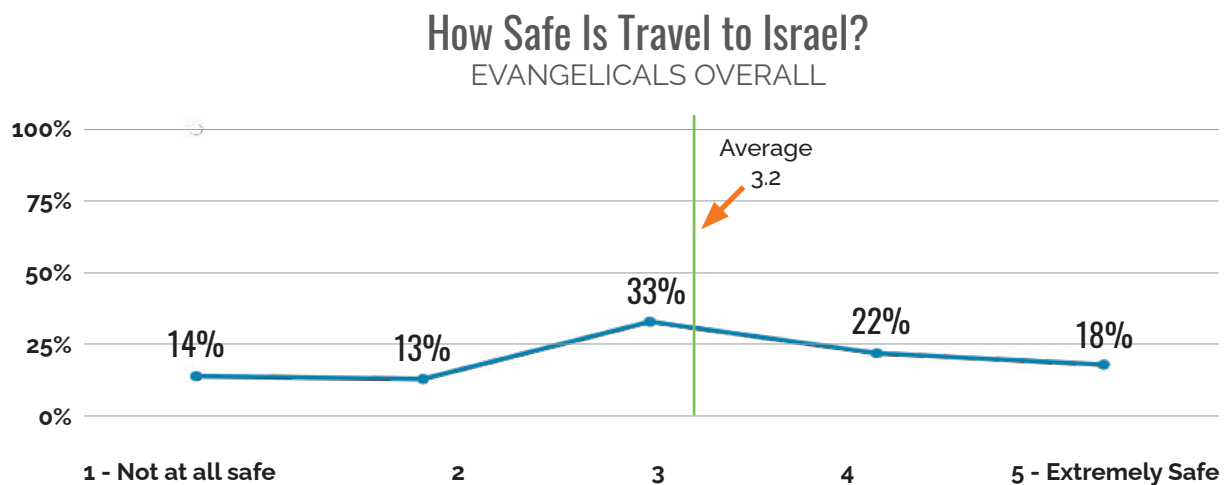
Continuing this line of thought a bit further, 70% of evangelicals prefer to travel in a group while 30% would prefer to travel independently.

70%
of evangelicals
prefer to travel in a
tour group

Safety

The last issue we investigated related to Israel is the perceived safety of making such a trip. We asked evangelicals to assume the COVID-19 pandemic is no longer an issue.

Evangelicals are divided over how safe it would be to travel to Israel. Overall, 14% feel it is not at all safe to do so, and a total of 27% see Israel as generally unsafe (1 or 2 on a five-point scale). On the other hand, 18% believe it is extremely safe to go to Israel, and a total of 40% come down on the safe side of the scale (4 or 5 on the scale).

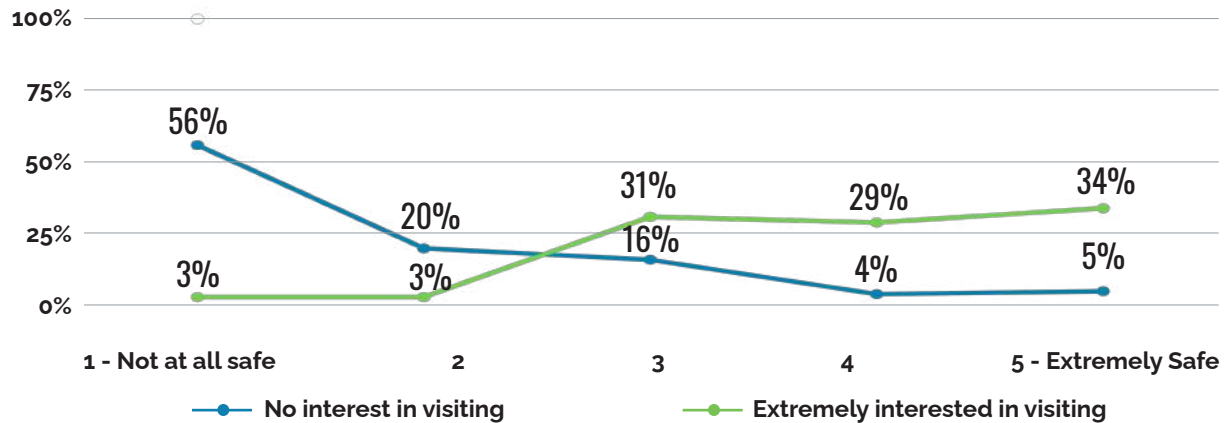


The perceptions of safety are strongly correlated with interest in travel to the country.

Among those who are extremely interested in visiting Israel, 34% feel it would be extremely safe for them to go and a total of 63% feel it is generally safe, while only 3% are concerned the visit would be not at all safe.

Among those who are not at all interested in visiting Israel, only 5% feel it is extremely safe and a total of 9% feel it is generally safe, while 56% believe it is not at all safe to do so.

How Safe Is Travel to Israel?



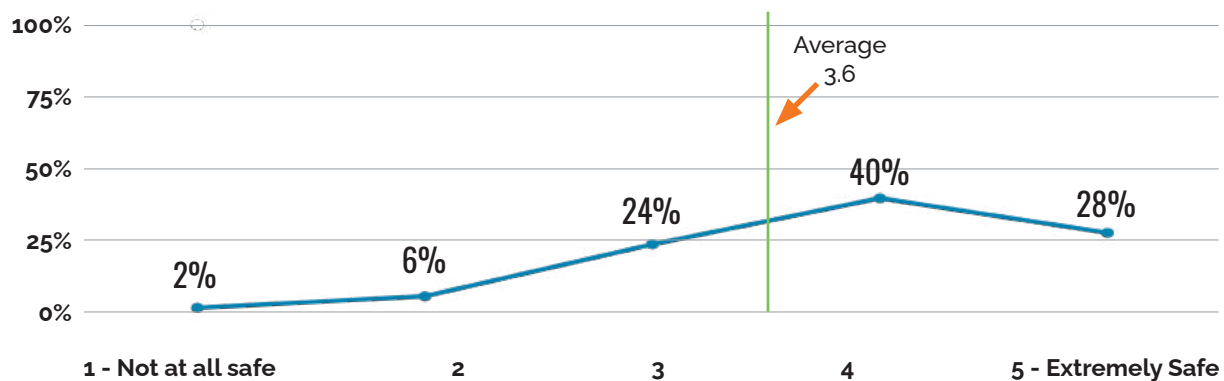
However, it is concerning for Israel tourism that **even among evangelicals with the strongest desire to visit Israel, almost half have at least some questions** about the safety of such a trip.

In contrast, evangelicals who have been to Israel before also have a very different view of the safety of such a trip.

Among evangelicals who have previously visited Israel, a total of 68% believe it is safe (4 or 5 on the scale), including 28% who believe it is extremely safe. Just 2% feel it is extremely unsafe to visit and a total of 8% are on the side of unsafe (1 or 2 on the scale).

68%
of evangelicals who
have previously visited
Israel believe it is safe

How Safe Is Travel to Israel? EVANGELICALS WHO VISITED PREVIOUSLY



What Does It All Mean?

Prior to the COVID pandemic Israel welcomed almost 5 million tourists annually, with about 1 million of them coming from the United States alone. Many of these tourists were Christians who desired to visit the biblical and historical sites of the Holy Land. A significant portion of those Christian pilgrims were evangelicals.

At the onset of COVID, Israel was one of the first nations to close its borders to international travel. Since that time travel in and out of Israel has been highly restricted. After nearly two years, Israel began to ease restrictions to start the slow and cautious process of opening of Israel to tourism once again.

In 2019 Israel welcomed as many as 100,000 American tourists per month. After the onset of COVID, fewer than 40,000 tourists from the United States visited Israel in all of 2020. Things did not improve in 2021 and the economic impact of the loss of tourism has been significant.

During the COVID pandemic, many hotels had to close or refocus their energies toward Israeli domestic travel. Tour guides have had to find other areas of employment, and the industries supporting tourism have ground to a near halt.

The Knesset (Israel's national legislature) has discussed just how long it will take to restore unrestricted travel to Israel, and it appears it may be quite some time before tourists have unfettered access to the country. For Israel, the renewal of tourism is important to both its economy and its international brand. The World Tourism Organization estimates 2019 saw \$8.44 billion reach Israel through tourism, directly accounting for 2.1% of GDP (gross domestic product), and the country ranked 13th in the world in receipts per tourist.

Our survey shows that once COVID-related issues are set aside, evangelicals have a desire to visit Israel. The significance of this should not be underestimated.

From 2002 to 2019, tourist expenditures in Israel nearly tripled, according to the World Bank. Our data shows the level of interest evangelicals have in Israel. It is no surprise that many evangelicals would be drawn to this place. It is, after all, the land of the Bible, the book that is central to the evangelical worldview.

Out of 59 million people represented in the survey, only 7% have been to Israel (4.1 million). Of that group, 52% or about 2.2 million strongly want to return.

Additionally, 47 million other evangelicals have at least some interest in going, with 23.6 million extremely interested in visiting Israel.

In 2006, Infinity Concepts was engaged by the Israel Ministry of Tourism as their Christian agency of record. They continued in this role through 2012. During this engagement, Infinity Concepts conducted focus groups about Israel tourism in 2006 and 2009. At that time, the three primary reasons people gave for not visiting Israel were: money, time, and safety. As a result, the focus of communication was developed around three concepts: Travel to Israel was **safe, affordable** and **transforming**. As the perception of safety increased, so did Christian tourism.

Our study shows the most popular way to consider Israel travel is group travel with a spiritual leader. As pastors, leaders, and Bible teachers host tours to Israel, our experience is that their followers will often make the time to include travel to Israel on their schedule.

A significant obstacle facing tourism to Israel is the perception of safety.

Among all evangelicals, 27% see Israel as generally unsafe. On the other hand, a total of 40% believe it is quite safe to go to Israel, including 18% who believe it is extremely safe.

This stands in stark contrast to the perception of evangelicals who have previously visited Israel. Among these people 68% believe it is safe to visit Israel with 28% stating it is extremely safe, while only 8% see Israel as generally unsafe.

Evangelicals who have visited Israel have a distinctly different perception of safety in Israel. **It would seem that Israel tourism could benefit from a renewed public relations effort to help people better understand the safety of travel to Israel, especially in tourist areas.**

Israel must face the challenge of rebuilding its tourism infrastructure in the coming years. This is an opportunity to grow economically and help people fulfill their desires to visit the Bible lands. **Given the freedom to do so, our study tells us the potential exists for evangelicals to visit Israel in significant numbers.**



ADDITIONAL REPORTS

from Infinity Concepts and Grey Matter Research

If you found this report beneficial, Grey Matter Research and Infinity Concepts also offer five other reports on evangelical Protestants:

- **[The Ripple Effect: Congregations, COVID, and the Future of Church Life](#)**
A study on how evangelicals worshipped during the pandemic, and how this has affected their feelings about church going forward.
- **[The Generosity Factor: Evangelicals and Giving](#)**
Research on how and where evangelicals give money. The study also reveals significant age differences in giving, and points to some long-term concerns for donor-supported organizations.
- **[The Jewish Connection: Evangelicals and Israel](#)**
There are many evangelicals who financially support Christian organizations that serve Israel and the Jewish people, as well as many Jewish and Israeli charities. Without evangelical support, many of these organizations would struggle to survive.
- **[The Congregational Scorecard: What Evangelicals Want in a Church](#)**
Evangelical Christians are largely satisfied with the church they attend most often. However, eight out of ten still would like to see at least one change to their church.
- **[The Generation Gap: Evangelical Giving Preferences](#)**
While the median age of American adults is a little under 46, it is very common for donor-supported ministries and charities to maintain a donor base that is considerably older. Many organizations are concerned about their long-term viability as their donors age, and eventually die off.

ABOUT INFINITY CONCEPTS



Infinity Concepts is an integrated marketing–communications agency focused on inspiring people of faith to action. We specialize in the following:

- **Consulting:** We help you think more strategically and lead more effectively.
- **Branding:** We help determine your Brand Essence, define your Brand Promise, develop Brand Alignment, and create your Brand Image.
- **Creative:** We provide effective and memorable creative. We offer superior quality graphic design, copywriting, website development, logo design, and much more.
- **Fundraising:** We help you build a loyal and generous donor base that embraces your organization and supports your vision.
- **Public Relations:** Through proven strategies, effective communication, and media relationships, we will put your organization on center stage and let the world see the great things you are doing.
- **Media:** We will help maximize your media investment through optimized media planning, placement, management, and reporting.
- **Digital:** We create high-impact, cohesive messages to reach and motivate your audience through multiple digital and social media platforms.

For 20 years, Infinity Concepts has helped its clients *think more strategically, operate more efficiently, and communicate more effectively.*

Just a Few Clients We Have Served

American Friends of Magen David Adom • Cancer Treatment Centers of America
Cornerstone Television Network • Church of God of Prophecy • Evangelical Press Association
Faithful Central Bible Church • Faith Life Now • Friends of the IDF • Saving Moses
Holocaust Remembrance Association • Total Living Network (TLN) • Metro World Child
Israel Ministry of Tourism • Jewish Agency for Israel • Marilyn Hickey Ministries
NRBTV • One Voice Ministries • ZOE International • Foursquare Missions International

You can learn more about Infinity Concepts and how our team of experts can help you make a bigger impact. If you are looking for an agency to be your thoughtful strategic partner and impassioned advocate, Infinity Concepts may be for you: www.infinityconcepts.com

Infinity Concepts President, Mark Dreistadt, and Chief Growth Officer, Darrell Law, can be reached at 724-733-1200 or by email at Mark@infinityconcepts.com and Darrell@infinityconcepts.com.

ABOUT GREY MATTER RESEARCH



What do you wish you knew about the people you are trying to reach: donors, potential donors, customers, or the general public? And what could you accomplish if you knew the answers to those questions? **That is where we help you make a difference.**

Grey Matter Research helps our clients make wiser decisions with **valuable, relevant consumer insights**. We specialize in serving **Christian organizations**, although we have partnered with many secular charities and for-profit companies, from professional sports teams to vehicle manufacturers to branding, marketing, and fundraising agencies.

Our motivation is to **partner with our clients**, which is why we have been working with some of the same organizations **for over two decades**. Whether we are helping a client discover how consumers perceive their brand, learn what the donor experience is like, develop new messaging, or any other topic, we have **A Passion for Research That Makes a Difference**.

Just a Few Clients We Have Served

American Bible Society • National Christian Foundation • World Vision
National Association of Evangelicals • Young Life • Duke University
The Coca-Cola Company • Joyce Meyer Ministries • The American Legion
Bethesda Lutheran Communities • Covenant House • Northwest University
General Motors • The Christian and Missionary Alliance • Focus on the Family
The Assemblies of God • Children's Mercy Hospital • Catholic Relief Services
Prison Fellowship • Compassion International • Paralyzed Veterans of America
Moody Global Ministries • BMW • Cancer Treatment Centers of America

Our work has been **covered by the international media**, (MSNBC, Christianity Today, NPR, Wall Street Journal, USA Today, Fast Company, Harvard Business Review, NonProfit Times, many others), translated into multiple languages, used in US Senate panel hearings, and included as part of the curriculum at universities in the US and Italy.

You can learn more about how we help clients, as well as check out a variety of available research reports, on our website: www.greymatterresearch.com.

Company president Ron Sellers would be delighted to chat with you. Call him at **1-602-684-6294**, or meet him digitally at ron@greymatterresearch.com.

Additional Resources from Infinity Concepts

■ **CAPTIVATE Magazine**

Get the latest news and guidance on branding, church growth, fundraising, leadership, digital marketing, podcasting, media buying, and much more by accessing the latest edition of **CAPTIVATE** magazine. [Click here](#).

■ **Donor Trend Analysis**

Every nonprofit should have a clear understanding of what is happening with its donors by measuring key performance metrics to monitor the health of its donor file. The **Donor Trend Analysis** gives insights into your donor retention rate, average lifetime donor value, donation frequency, number of multi-gift donors, average gift amount, new donor acquisition trends, lapsed donor trends, and much more.

This Donor Trend Analysis is valued at \$800. However, you may qualify to receive this valuable report for FREE! [Click here](#) to complete your application to see if you qualify for a FREE **Donor Trend Analysis** for your church, ministry, or nonprofit.

■ **Digital Assessment**

Your digital presence matters, now more than ever! What does a donor experience when they give to your organization online? Are you posting too little or too much on social media? Does your website effectively communicate your story and impact? How well do you engage with your followers through social media?

Infinity Concepts provides a FREE **Digital Assessment** to qualified churches, ministries, and nonprofits. This analysis will help you improve the way you communicate and engage with people and donors online. [Reach out](#) to see if your organization qualifies for a FREE **Digital Assessment** by the experts at Infinity Concepts.

■ **Strategic Solutions Newsletter and Blog**

Tap into a wealth of insights, tips, and information on a variety of topics from our seasoned team of experts through our *Strategic Solutions* newsletter and blog.

- [Click here](#) to check out the insights from our experts on our blog.
- [Click here](#) to have *Strategic Solutions* delivered to your in-box each week.

Additional Resources from Grey Matter Research

In addition to our custom research work for clients, we offer a variety of exclusive reports.

A small selection is below; [click here](#) for information on all of them.

■ What America's Favorite Charities Have in Common

Donors often claim they like to support small, local organizations. The reality is they generally favor massive global brands. And most people of faith do not favor supporting faith-based organizations. Learn what sets America's favorite charities apart in the minds of donors. [Click here.](#)

■ Lost Opportunities: Faith, Giving, and Social Media

Learn how donors and people of faith use social media to interact with nonprofit organizations and congregations. [Click here.](#)

■ Charitable Overhead Ratios and Donor Decisions

Donors often believe ministries and charities spend more on fundraising and administration than they should. Because of this, many organizations think donors will not support organizations with expense ratios exceeding a certain threshold. We find that is often not true—and in fact, donors frequently do not have a clue what their favorite organization's overhead ratio really is. [Click here.](#)

■ Charity Watchdogs: Ignore Them at Your Own Risk

How many donors actually use charity watchdogs to research organizations they might support? [Click here.](#)

■ How Much Mail and Email Donors Receive and Read

Donors report receiving more prospecting messages than messages from organizations they already support. And very few just toss or delete everything they receive—your messages have the opportunity to get read. [Click here.](#)

■ Six Ways Your Survey Research May Be Misleading You

The only thing worse than no research is bad research, and there are many ways you can unintentionally receive misleading data from your surveys—even when they are conducted by professionals. [Click here.](#)