



Report of the State Comptroller of Israel | May

Ministry of Environmental Protection

Maintenance & Cleanliness of Tourist Attractions in Israel



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Background

The tourism industry is one of the largest and fastest-growing industries in the global economy and develops according to globalization and population growth. Throughout history, Israel has been a multi-national, multi-cultural meeting point, which made it a junction of global and national heritage tourism. Tourism serves as an engine for economic growth. Therefore, a policy maximizing the economic, environmental, and social advantages embedded in this resource is needed to plan and manage tourism services and attractions and develop forward-looking approaches related to tourism policies.

Meeting the potential of the tourism industry is highly linked to tourists' level of satisfaction, which affects the selection of the tourist attraction, constitutes a competitive advantage, and determines its business potential. Several main factors affect the tourists' satisfaction level with the attraction, including the appearance of the attraction, which is affected by the level of maintenance, cleanliness, and safety. In addition to contributing to heritage and cultural values, maintenance and preservation of tourist attractions are essential in maintaining the public financial investment made to develop the attraction. Maintenance and preservation conserve heritage assets for the next generations by maintaining their physical condition. In addition, the maintenance level affects the safety level at tourist attractions. Regulatory, funding, management, and supervision bodies affiliated with local and central government, governmental companies, and the private sector manage the maintenance, appearance, and cleanliness of tourist attractions in Israel. The Ministry of Tourism leads the tourist industry at the national level, and it is assisted by the governmental companies under its responsibility by conducting public tourist infrastructure projects. The governmental policy from June 2021 indicates that improving tourists' experience through improving the level of service, with an emphasis on appearance, maintenance, and cleanliness, is "critical to achieving maximal impact and competitive advantage" in tourism over time. It was further indicated that "the main effort will be dedicated to improving the services provided to tourists, setting cleanliness standards and maintaining public attractions and meeting them.



Key Figures

**about NIS
1.2 billion**

the total Ministry of Tourism investments to develop tourist attractions in Israel in 2011–2020

**about 10
years**

an ongoing condition of inadequate maintenance and cleanliness of tourist attractions in Israel indicated by the Ministry of Tourism and Israel Government Tourist Corporation (IGTC) audits

**33
out of 100**

the score given by tour guides to the maintenance level of the toilet cubicles at different tourist attractions in Israel noted in a State Comptroller survey

**75%
to 87%**

the extent the level of maintenance at the tourist attractions (cleanliness, safety, signage, trail marking, etc.) affects tourists' decision to revisit these attractions


only 18%

of the tourist attractions in which the Ministry of Tourism invested in 2011–2020 are inspected by the Audit Division of the Tourism Experience Administration

**48
out of 100**

tour guides' level of satisfaction with the appearance and cleanliness of tourist attractions in Israel

Audit Actions

 From January to August 2022, the State Comptroller's Office examined the maintenance and cleanliness level at tourist attractions in Israel. The audit was conducted at the Ministry of Tourism, the Israel Government Tourist Corporation (IGTC), the Dead Sea Preservation Government Company Ltd. (DSPG), the Israel Antiquities Authority, Israel Nature and Parks Authority (INPA), and the Jewish National Fund (JNF). Supplementary audits were conducted at the Ministry of Jerusalem Affairs and Jewish Heritage, the Ministry of Finance, Environmental Protection, and the Council for Conservation of Heritage Sites in Israel. The audit included mapping the level of maintenance and cleanliness at tourist attractions in Israel (the physical condition or level of maintenance and cleanliness); the Ministry of Tourism's responsibility for maintaining tourist attractions in Israel; maintenance management by bodies that are in charge of developing tourist attractions; monitoring and enforcement of maintenance and cleanliness at tourist attractions; and investing in touristic projects and the loss of their touristic value.



To assess the current level of maintenance and cleanliness at tourist attractions in Israel, the State Comptroller Office conducted, in 2022, a public participation process that included two surveys: one survey was conducted amongst over 1,600 active tour guides and a second survey that focused on public opinion, was conducted amongst a sample of 600 active Israeli travelers representing heterogeneous populations. The participants' level of satisfaction with the physical condition of tourist attractions was translated into a scaled score of 0 to 100 (0 is the lowest score, 100 is the highest score).

Key Findings



Inadequate Maintenance at Tourist Attractions as a Touristic Barrier – a series of maintenance surveys and audits conducted by the Ministry of Tourism and the IGTC in the past decade raised a continuous inadequate level of maintenance and cleanliness at some tourist attractions. For example, at most (68%) of the attractions that were examined in the Tour Guide Association survey from 2017, there was a shortage of public toilet cubicles; at 50% of the attractions, there was inadequate signage or none; 38% of the attractions had safety issues; at 26% of the attractions there were inadequate infrastructures; accessibility, parking and shading issues were found at 20% of the attractions and cleanliness issues were found at 10%–15% of the attractions. According to these surveys, the ramifications of this situation prevent from meeting Israel's touristic potential and constitute a critical risk for the Ministry's work, harmful to tourist infrastructures and tourists' experience, loss of investments in tourist infrastructures, and harm to the image of the State of Israel.




Continuous State of Inadequate Level of Maintenance and Cleanliness – the surveys conducted by the State Comptroller Office amongst about 1,600 tour guides and 600 active travelers found that the physical condition of some of the tourist attractions in Israel is not optimal and that they are poorly maintained (score range of 53–75). The following findings were also found:

- **Segmentation of Level of Satisfaction by Type of Tourist Attraction** – it was raised that the lowest level of travelers and tour guides' satisfaction is with the level of maintenance and cleanliness at municipal tourist attractions: the average score given to satisfaction with the level of maintenance and cleanliness of municipal tourist attractions was low (66) and the tour guides' average score was even lower (53). The average level of travelers' satisfaction with the physical condition of archeological and historical sites, pilgrimage and religious sites, nature reserves, and national parks was medium (73–76), and the average score given by tour guides about the above sites was low (56–58).




- **Satisfaction with Safety and Infrastructure Integrity at Tourist Attractions** – the tour guides expressed a low level of satisfaction with all components of maintenance at tourist attractions: the components of safety and integrity of infrastructures and the general level of maintenance were given an average score of 52; the component of appearance and cleanliness was given an average score of 48; the component of signage, directions, and lighting was given an average score of 48; and the component of toilet cubicles was given an average score of 33.

 **The Ministry of Tourism Actions** – the audit raised a gap between the Ministry's strategic point of view presented in its documents over the problematic condition of maintenance at tourist attractions, defined as "critical" in the risk survey, its recognition that the low level of maintenance is harmful to tourism, to tourists' experience and the State of Israel's image in Israel and abroad, with the ministry's actions, as the responsible body for setting the policies for the tourism industry:

- **Defining a "Tourist Attraction"** – the Ministry of Tourism did not define in a circular, a procedure, or any other document what a tourist attraction is and does not set any criteria for recognizing a specific site as a tourist attraction. The lack of clear ministerial criteria for defining "tourist attraction" might deprive the Ministry of Tourism of a basic tool for managing actions and investing resources in its main field of responsibility and hinder it from applying an effective policy.
- **Follow-up and Supervision** – out of the 77 infrastructures and tourist attractions to which the Ministry of Tourism allocated about NIS 1.2 billion in 2011–2020 for the development of public tourist infrastructures – only 14 sites (18%) are included in the list of sites that are subject to the Audit Division of the Tourism Experience Administration in the Ministry of Tourism and only 5 sites (6%) are included in the list of tourism supply for collecting data by the Central Bureau of Statistics.
- **Defining the Term "Maintenance"** – the Ministry of Tourism did not define "maintenance" in its various documents vis-a-vis support requests and governmental companies. In addition, the Ministry did not define the term "breakdown maintenance" and how it differs from "maintenance." As a result, there is no definition for maintenance at tourist attractions, which is necessary to clarify the responsibilities of the various stakeholders, including local authorities, governmental companies, and the contractors they engage with.
- **Policy Setting** – although the Ministry of Tourism has identified maintenance as critical to its work and the image of the Israeli tourist industry, it has not conducted a thorough mapping of it and has not assessed the level of maintenance at tourist attractions in Israel. The Ministry did not set this as one of its main objectives and

did not adopt maintenance approaches, advance proposals for systemic handling of the problem, or form a *modus operandi*.

- **Mapping the Condition of Tourist Attractions** – the Ministry of Tourism has not mapped or thoroughly analyzed the condition of tourist attractions in Israel. Moreover, despite the negative findings raised from the Ministry's satisfaction surveys (in 2009–2017, there had been an ongoing decline from a score of 78 to a score of 62), from mid-2017, the Ministry of Tourism has minimized the number of subjects for which the level of satisfaction is measured. Thus, for the past 5 years, it has not collected updated information regarding tourists' level of satisfaction with cleanliness. The lack of data that facilitates decision-making and prioritization hinders the Ministry from identifying barriers and managing an effective policy to advance the site's maintenance, cleanliness, and safety. Furthermore, the data submitted by the Ministry of Tourism to the Central Bureau of Statistics on tourists' visits to tourist attractions are partial.
- **Risk Management** – as part of a risk management process, the Ministry of Tourism had identified the risk deriving from lack of maintenance as critical, yet it did not mitigate the risks it had found as necessary in such processes. In addition, the Ministry did not set a policy or adopt an effective maintenance model with the various stakeholders to handle the risks and minimize the number of chronic maintenance deficiencies.

 **Providing Maintenance Solutions Through Contractual Mechanism of the Ministry of Tourism and Governmental Companies** – the current mechanism includes a procedure for supporting tourism infrastructures, master agreements between the Ministry of Tourism and DSPGC and IGTC, and agreements with entities that receive support for operating the tourist attractions, and which anchors the responsibility for conducting maintenance, remains a formal, ineffective mechanism in case of violations. Here are the main findings:


- **Failure to Address all Aspects of Maintenance in the Development of Public Tourist Infrastructures Policy** – according to this policy, the entity that receives support is responsible for ongoing, continuous maintenance of the project. Nevertheless, the policy does not specify what the entities are requested to do but rather indicates "to do whatever is necessary for ongoing, continuous maintenance of the project." The policy does not specify maintenance aspects, such as safety, cleanliness, gardening, signage, and preventative maintenance. This might lead to future disagreements regarding the duties of the entities that received the Ministry's support.
- **Including Maintenance in Prioritization of Investments** – according to the Development of Public Tourist Infrastructures Policy, the threshold score for budgeting a free-entrance tourist attraction is 65, while the threshold score needed





for budgeting a paid tourist attraction is 70. Thus, the project's score might be 0 in terms of level of maintenance, yet the project can still be granted financial support. Therefore, even if a specific authority did not adequately maintain budgeted projects, it might still be supported. Moreover, except for two cases, the Ministry did not deprive funding from local authorities although it was aware that they had not adequately maintained tourist attractions within their jurisdiction in the past.

- **Partial Reference to Maintenance in Master Agreements** – the master agreement between the Ministry of Tourism and the IGTC, which manages a substantial number of tourism projects in Israel (in 2015–2021, the Ministry referred 126 projects to IGTC, at NIS 591.1 million), did not address maintenance or instructions committing the IGTC to delegate the responsibility for maintenance to the operator by an undertaking letter. It was further found that the master agreements between the Ministry, IGTC, and DSPG do not indicate IGTC and DSPG's obligation to supervise the operator and ensure it fulfills its maintenance obligations.
- **Lack of Sanctions in Agreements with Support-Seekers** – the agreements of IGTC and DSPG with the support seekers do not include sanctions or any other agreed-upon measures in case of violations. In addition, IGTC and the Ministry of Tourism do not monitor or supervise maintenance in projects managed by support seekers who did not meet their ongoing maintenance commitments.
- 👎 **Ineffective Audit Division** – the list of parameters in the Tourist Attractions Audit Form includes only aspects of appearance and cleanliness. Moreover, it was found that 82% of the sites developed in 2013–2020, with the support of the Ministry of Tourism, and approved by the Development of Public Tourist Infrastructures are not included in the Audit Division's pool of tourist attractions. It was further found that out of 1,545 audits conducted by the Audit Division at tourist attractions from November 2020 to early April 2022, the "general impression" parameter received very high scores in 75% of the audits, high scores in 19% of the audits and very low scores only in 1% of the audits. Given these findings on the level of maintenance at tourist attractions and the positions presented by the Ministry of Tourism and the IGTC on the poor condition of many sites, the above scores and the effectiveness of the audits conducted by the Audit Division are questionable.
- 👎 **Lack of Enforcement Powers** – in the absence of enforcement powers, the Ministry attempts to handle deficiencies found in maintenance audits by sending written requests to rectify maintenance deficiencies to the relevant local authorities.
- 👎 **Vandalism at JNF sites** – 578 cases of vandalism were found at JNF sites in 2020–2021. 151 cases were found from January to May 2022. As a result, there is a need to replace thousands of items that were destroyed; for instance, in the Menashe and Hasharon regions alone, 1,200 tables, 900 barbecue facilities, 900 signs, and 360 playground fixtures were replaced as a result of vandalism in 2016–2021. Significant

harm is also caused to the forests due to motor vehicles, such as ATVs, that are used in the forests and cause multiple damages, such as the generation of new trails, which lead to drifts and harm to trees, vegetation, and landscape. There are nine supervisors working for the JNF's Supervision Unit; however, given the vast territories and open areas the JNF is responsible for, it is highly challenging for the unit to enforce vandalism with its limited tools.

 **Maintenance of Antiquities Sites** – by August 2022, 13 years after the Antiquities Authority published its policy regarding the maintenance of antiquities sites, the Authority's Conservation Department has not formed or validated any relevant guidelines, has not given instructions to any of the stakeholders involved in heritage conservation and has not demanded ongoing maintenance plans from managers or operators of antiquities sites. In practice, the Antiquities Authority has not completed its professional policy regarding the maintenance of antiquities following the conservation phase and has not supervised adequate maintenance or carried out maintenance by itself. Thus, it does not meet the Antiquities Law requirements.

 **The Maintenance of Cleanliness Fund¹** – the Ministry of Environmental Protection's activities to manage cleanliness and maintain ongoing cleanliness at tourist attractions are limited. In addition, the calls for proposals initiated in 2021–2022 by the Ministry to local authorities with a socio-economic status of 1–5, which focus on promoting cleanliness of public areas at NIS 50 million, did not directly address environmental cleanliness at tourist attractions in these local authorities.

 **Examining the Economic Ramifications** – it was found that the Ministry of Tourism did not examine the economic ramifications of the trash piled up at tourist attractions or the impact of faulty maintenance or lack of maintenance.








Investment in Low Socio-Economic Local Authorities – regarding tourism projects in peripheral authorities, the Ministry of Tourism bears a more significant share of the inputs than the local authorities.

Planning a Data Collection Model – the State Comptroller Office commends the Ministry of Tourism monitoring the volume of visitors at 20 main tourist sites in Israel to define them dynamically (under traffic) and enable making decisions on development and marketing.


1 The Maintenance of Cleanliness Fund was established in 1986 under the Maintenance of Cleanliness Law, 1984. The Fund is managed by the Ministry of Environmental Protection to raise funds designated for protecting the environment, promoting cleanliness, handling waste and recycling.




Key Recommendations

-  Without disclaiming the responsibility of the local authorities to maintain tourist attractions within their jurisdiction, it is recommended that the Ministry of Tourism, which allocated budgets for developing public tourist infrastructures, improve and elaborate the maintenance duties specified in its contracts with the governmental companies and the entities that receive support, and define the duration of maintenance and the sanctions that should be imposed in case of violations. Thus, specifying the various maintenance components to be addressed. It is further recommended that the Ministry anchor in a contractual mechanism the duty of the governmental companies to supervise the local authorities regarding their maintenance obligations at tourist attractions and their commitment to take all necessary steps in case of violations. In addition, the Ministry should ensure that the governmental companies perform the supervision above.
-  Given the Ministry of Tourism's investments in developing tourist infrastructures at NIS 1.2 billion in 2011–2020, the State Comptroller Office recommends that the Ministry of Tourism complete the risk management processes of adequate maintenance of tourists' attractions and ensure that the entities that receive supports meet their obligations and adequately maintain the tourist attractions.
-  It is recommended that the Ministry of Tourism, the Ministry of Environmental Protection, and the Maintenance of Cleanliness Fund tighten their collaboration to reduce the volume of trash and improve cleanliness at tourist attractions within the jurisdiction of low socio-economic local authorities. To increase public awareness through education and emphasize the importance of cleanliness at tourist attractions while considering the provisions of the Maintenance of Cleanliness Law regarding using the "surpluses from disposal fees" for "additional purposes," as defined by law. It is further recommended to integrate cleaning activities at tourist attractions with the activities of the National Cleaning Management founded by the Ministry of Environmental Protection.
-  It is recommended that the Ministry of Tourism clearly define "tourist attraction" in collaboration with additional tourism entities such as the Ministry of Jerusalem Affairs and Jewish Heritage, Israel Nature and Parks Authority, Israel Antiquities Authority, JNF, and the Council for Conservation of Heritage Sites in Israel. Once the definition is agreed upon, they should systemically collaborate so all the information related to tourist attractions to which the definition applies is pooled.
-  It is recommended that the Ministry of Tourism examine the gaps in its strategic policies and documents and the proposals submitted throughout the years regarding the systemic handling of maintenance at tourist attractions and maintenance methods used by tourist entities overseas. Furthermore, it is recommended that the Ministry contacts the different entities mentioned above that hold or invest in tourist attractions, such as the Israel Nature

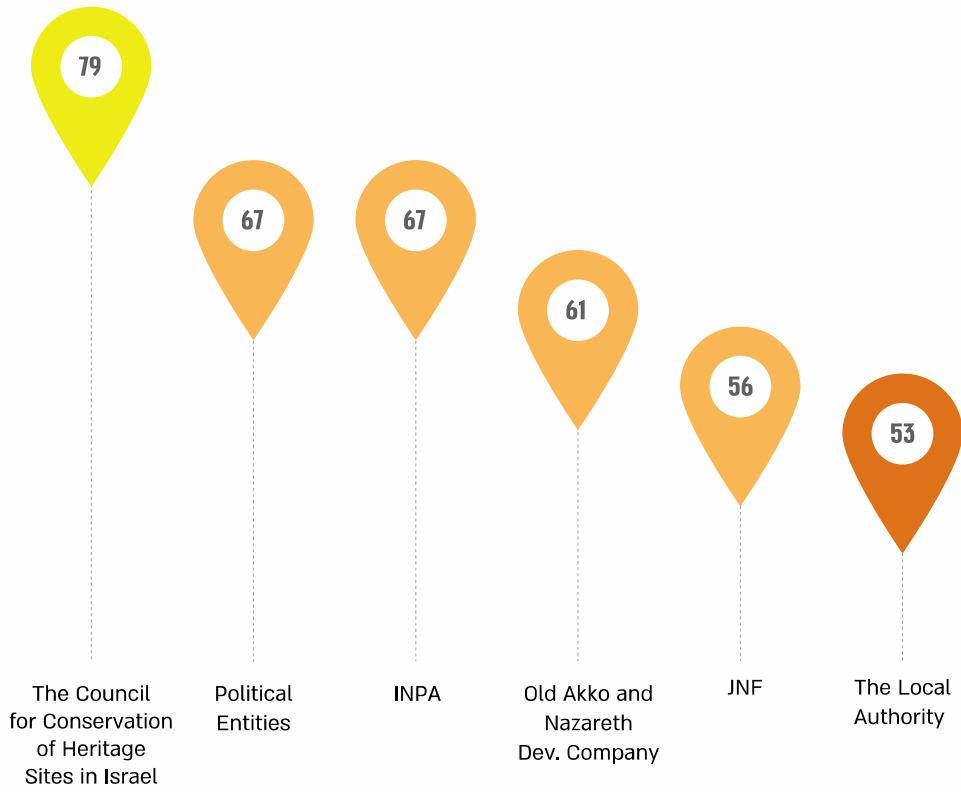
and Parks Authority, the JNF, the Ministry of Jerusalem Affairs and Jewish Heritage, local authorities, and the Ministry of Finance and form, in collaboration with them, a maintenance model and means to improve supervision of maintenance at tourist attractions under their responsibility. In addition, they should form a forum for consultation, coordination, prioritization, and decision-making to improve ongoing maintenance at tourist attractions, prevent safety deficiencies, appearance, maintenance, and cleanliness, and retain public investments in the long run. It is further recommended that the Ministry of Tourism consider applying a model including a budget for developing and operating tourist attractions in advance.

 It is recommended that the Ministry of Tourism map the current physical condition of tourist attractions in Israel, including aspects of maintenance, cleanliness, safety, and appearance, including all data and trends in a database that will be published and available to the public. Moreover, it should analyze the data to identify the causes hindering an adequate level of maintenance across all tourist attractions and examine the link between the financial and peripheral status of the local authorities and the level of maintenance at tourist attractions within their jurisdiction. It is further recommended that the Ministry of Tourism and the governmental companies share information over the physical condition of the tourist attractions so that they all have the most precise, updated situation report of the maintenance level at tourist attractions in Israel.

 The Ministry of Tourism should ensure that the governmental companies perform maintenance audits and that the local authorities implement the provisions in their signed maintenance agreements. It is recommended that the Ministry of Tourism set specific rules regarding sanctions, namely specifying the cases in which new requests for the development of sites are to be rejected – in case of local authorities that do not adequately maintain tourist attractions within their jurisdiction. In addition, the Ministry should consider alternative enforcement tools to properly maintain tourist attractions and incentivize the local authorities to maintain them. It is recommended that the Ministry of Tourism consider alternatives, such as raising the threshold score needed for budgeting a tourism project or setting a minimal threshold score for maintenance capabilities so that support seekers with low or zero maintenance capabilities would not be budgeted.

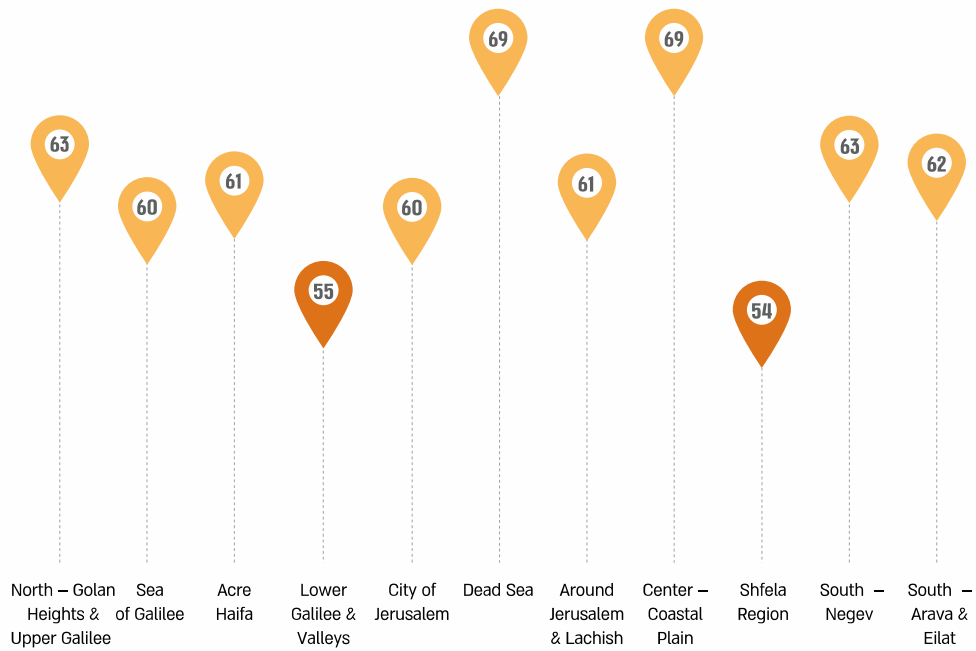


The Average Score of the Examined Tourist Attractions, According to the Body that Provides Maintenance





The Average Score of Tour Guides' Satisfaction with Maintenance and Cleanliness at Tourist Attractions in Different Geographical Areas





Summary

Meeting the potential of the tourism industry is highly linked to tourists' level of satisfaction, which affects the selection of the tourist attraction, constitutes a competitive advantage, and determines its business potential. Over the years, the Ministry of Tourism has identified the maintenance and cleanliness of tourist attractions as a "critical risk" for its work, for the development of tourism, and the image of tourism in Israel. The components of maintenance and cleanliness are essential for the conservation of tourist attractions; they significantly affect the sites' appearance and tourists' experience, and imperative to meet the potential of tourist attractions – both as an economic branch and as national assets of multi-generational value. In 2011–2020, the Ministry of Tourism and additional governmental bodies invested substantial sums of money in the development of tourist attractions in Israel (about NIS 1.2 billion); however, to retain the public investments in the tourism industry and the multi-generational value of these sites as a national, historical resource, the infrastructures at these sites must be preserved, and the risks related to inadequate maintenance must be minimized.

The audit raised an ongoing, long-lasting state of inadequate maintenance and cleanliness at many of Israel's tourist attractions, which constitutes a barrier to meeting the potential of these sites. The report includes various findings on different issues, including the lack of a clear definition of the term "tourist attraction"; the absence of a database allowing follow-up of the maintenance at tourist attractions; ineffective usage of the contractual mechanism; lack of effective supervision mechanism; and lack of a binding policy for maintaining antiquities sites. The Ministry of Tourism, is responsible for the holistic management of the tourism experience, including managing its foreseeable risks and promoting adequate maintenance and cleanliness at tourist attractions according to a regulated risk management process. Hence, it is recommended that as reviewing this audit and implementing its recommendations, the Ministry examine the gaps in its strategic policies and documents, the proposals submitted to it throughout the years, and the maintenance approaches used by different tourist entities in Israel and abroad. Furthermore, it is recommended that the Ministry collaborate with the different entities mentioned above that hold or invest in tourist attractions, such as the Israel Nature and Parks Authority, the JNF, the Ministry of Jerusalem Affairs and Jewish Heritage, local authorities, and the Ministry of Finance and form, a maintenance model and means to improve supervision of maintenance at tourist attractions under their responsibility. It is recommended that the Ministry of Tourism initiate and operate an interface with tour guides and travelers, as they are the "on-site agents," to get ongoing feedback on the level of maintenance and cleanliness at tourist attractions. The findings and trends should be shared to promote transparency and accountability and improve maintenance at tourist attractions in Israel.

