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Visit Israel too often? You may be forced to make aliya  
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Mar 24, 2009 0:48 | Updated Mar 24, 2009 2:48

## Visit Israel too often? You may be forced to make aliya

By RUTH EGLASH

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Jewish tourists who spend more than 180 days in Israel, even without violating the terms of their [tourist visas](#), are being increasingly harassed by border patrol officials, detained at the crossings and, in some cases, deported to their port of origin or forced to make aliya against their will, according to a [Tel Aviv law](#) firm.

Kan-Tor & Acco, a global relocation law firm that specializes in immigration matters and visas to Israel and the US, said Monday that it had noted a significant increase over the past few weeks in the number of Jewish tourists being detained by authorities at the border crossings, after the Interior Ministry deemed them to have exceeded the acceptable time limit



Ben Gurion Airport  
Photo: Ariel Jerozolimski

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for tourist status.

"Most of the time the calls come at night - people call us from the airport's holding center, panicking and asking us to help bail them out," Amit Acco, a partner in the firm, told *The Jerusalem Post*. "In one case, a person was threatened with deportation because of visiting Israel too many times, and although we succeeded in posting a NIS 50,000 bail, it was contingent on the person making aliya within two weeks," he said.

Acco does not dispute the state's right to request that anyone who spends so much time [in the country](#) that the center of their lives is here adjust their status to something more permanent.

He argues, however, that the Interior Ministry's [immigration policy](#) is not widely known among Jews, and maintains that in recent months, it has been enforced in an erratic and sometimes inhumane manner.

In some cases, Acco points out, Jewish tourists are refused entry with no explanation at all and are simply sent back to the country from which they came.

"That could mean they are handed over to the local authorities in a third country such as Jordan or Egypt and put in a dangerous situation," he said.

He noted that until recently he would have a maximum of five cases like this a year, but that he was currently working with three clients directly and was aware of at least another 10 similar cases.

"We do not know who is Jewish and who is not when they arrive at the airport," responded Interior Ministry spokeswoman Sabene Hadad.

"But Israel's definition of a tourist, just like anywhere else, is non-citizen who makes a short visit to a country. If that person spends many months here or is a student here, then they need to adjust their status accordingly," she said.

Hadad denied that anyone had been deported and maintained that all those brought in for questioning by airport authorities had previously received warnings that they must consider changing their status or be denied entry.

"Someone who visits Israel excessively will be asked [by the Border Police] to explain what their business is in Israel," she said.

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"If they own an apartment and spend long periods of time here, then they might need to change their status," she said. "If they are a student, then they need a student visa, and if they are working here, they need to have a work visa."

However, said Acco, one of the main problems is that many Jews see visiting Israel as their birthright and simply don't realize that their entry under some circumstances could be contested.

Even when they are warned by the Border Police that they will be denied entry next time, they don't take it very seriously, he claimed.

"While the law regarding the entry visa is clear, the government does not publicize the fact that if a person spends more than a certain number of days here within a one-year period, they are expected to change their status," said Acco, calling on the Interior Ministry to make sure Jews worldwide were made fully aware of the regulations.

Hadad, however, refuted the claim that people were unaware of the policy, adding that in most cases it was made very clear to the person, whether they were Jewish or not, that they had to obtain the appropriate visa.

She said the ministry did not plan to publicize the policy in a more formal manner in the near future.

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Joseph - USA (03/24/2009 05:00)


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Sheine - (03/24/2009 04:10)

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