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Israeli Profs. Use High-tech Ends to Gauge Tourists' Feelings in Jerusalem

Western Wall, Church of the Holy Sepulcher aroused the greatest levels of emotion in visitors, as well as a park near city hall.

Gili Melnitcki | Mar 15, 2017 5:04 AM

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An ultra-Orthodox man looks at the Western Wall and the wooden ramp leading up to the Temple Mount in Jerusalem's Old City, December 12, 2011. Credit: Ronen Zvulun, Reuters

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You're a first-time visitor to Jerusalem, what sites are likely to arouse the strongest feelings? Naturally one would be the Western Wall, but how about the Daniel Auster Garden next to city hall?

Prof. Noam Shoval, Yonatan Schvimer and Prof. Maya Tamir – all of the Hebrew University – set out to find out what were the peak tourism experiences in Jerusalem using a combination of objective and subjective measures.

To do that, they gave 68 foreign tourists visiting the city smartphones with a GPS function that showed where they were at any moment

emotion via electro-dermal activity, and through questionnaires answered in real time.

The result is a map that shows Jerusalem's Old City and a swath of downtown punctuated by green, yellow, orange and red dots showing various levels of reaction (green being the mildest, red the strongest) at different points.

The results were something of a surprise.

"As expected, the places that aroused the greatest emotion in Jerusalem were sites like the Church of the Holy Sepulcher and the Western Wall," said Shoval, an expert in urban geography and tourism.

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What was more surprising was the Daniel Auster Garden, a small patch of green space right outside the Old City walls that yielded a patch of red dots nearly on par with the world-famous religious sites.

"That's an open space that we Israelis are used to passing by day after day without attributing any importance to it," Shoval said. "Only by using the physiological measures we collected did we understand that for a tourist it was an emotional moment."

People passing through the park see the first view of the Old City Walls, he explained.

The survey also revealed a surprising pattern for tourists' reaction to seeing the Western Wall for the first time: Being in the plaza fronting the wall was less emotionally arousing than the walk from the Dung Gate to the plaza itself, according to the physiological measures, even though the questionnaire answers gave the opposite response.

Shoval said the study, which was published in the Journal of Tourism Research last month, is aimed at helping travel agencies, tour guides and others to better market tourist sites.

"The most important contribution of the research was the combination of advanced technology that enables us to go out into the field with research tools that until now were restricted to the lab, and use it to better understand urban tourism," Shoval said.



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