



Why Israel Needs a National Digital Trail Platform for Hiking, Trekking, MTB & e-MTB

Israel is uniquely positioned to become a global leader in independent outdoor tourism, but it currently lacks the infrastructure layer—a national, GPX-based, interactive trail system—that turns landscapes into connected, navigable, and economically productive journeys. International experience shows what is possible when hiking and cycling are treated as a national mobility system rather than a collection of isolated sites.

In the United States, the Great Allegheny Passage generates approximately USD 75 million in direct annual spending and USD 121.2 million in total economic impact, supporting 1,393 local jobs along rural communities. Similarly, Kingdom Trails in Vermont produces USD 10.3 million annually from roughly 94,000 riders, with average visitor spending of USD 176 per day.

These examples demonstrate that when people can move freely through landscapes using clearly mapped, graded, and supported trail systems, they generate distributed regional economies—precisely the kind of growth Israel seeks for the Negev, Galilee, Golan, and Arava.

Domestically, Israelis generated 15.9 million hotel person-nights in 2022, with 41.7% concentrated in Eilat alone. Israelis also made 9.4 million domestic trips with overnight stays and accounted for 9.83 million visits to Israel Nature and Parks Authority sites, representing the overwhelming majority of nature-based visitation.

International visitors show similar spatial patterns. In 2019, over half of foreign tourists visited the Dead Sea, more than a third visited the Galilee, and significant numbers reached the Golan Heights and Eilat. Approximately 70% of inbound tourists are free-independent travelers with an average stay of 8.3 nights, primarily from high-spending countries.

Research on the Israel National Trail demonstrates that long-distance hiking functions as therapeutic mobility, supporting stress reduction, emotional recovery, and psychological resilience. Physical movement across the land also fosters place attachment, national identity, and civic belonging.

These social and health benefits reinforce economic sustainability. People who feel connected to the land return more often, stay longer, and travel more slowly, generating sustained local spending.

A National Digital Trail Network integrating hiking, MTB, and e-MTB routes into a unified GPX-based platform would unlock this untapped potential. It would transform millions of existing visits into connected journeys, strengthening the periphery, public health, and national connection to the land.



References

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