

## Rude Story 5

11/6

The University of Florida is canceling study abroad trips and adding new safety measures due to increasing worldwide conflicts.

One prevalent trip that has been canceled is Birthright Israel, a free 10-day guided trip to Israel for young Jewish adults once they turn 18. All other study abroad trips to Israel also are being canceled following the Oct. 7 attack on Israel by Hamas and Israel's response.

UF Hillel is still planning on sending students to Israel for their programs Onward Israel and Onward Israel Fellowship in summer 2024. Onward Israel matches students with an internship, while Onward Israel Fellowship gives students a chance to learn about Tel Aviv. Cara Levin, the senior IACT Israel engagement associate at UF Hillel, said safety is a major factor when planning the trip.

"Our travel is overseen by the Israeli government and a subset of the government that makes sure we are being safe at all times," Levin said.

Shayna Cohon, a third-year student who traveled with UF Hillel for Birthright Israel and Onward Israel, said that there were certain measures put in place on her trip that made her feel safe while being abroad.

"We would travel on buses to the north and south of Israel, and I always felt secure," Cohon said. "If we had any health concerns or just conflicts in general, we had people we could turn to."

Birthright Israel and Onward Israel programs will have to increase safety measures in the future because of increasing conflicts in Israel, Cohon said.

However, UF Hillel is not very involved in the safety measures put in place when sending students to Israel; much is done directly by the Israeli government.

“That’s Israel’s part in the partnership because we’re on the grounds in their land,” Levin said.

Cohon noted that increased security on these trips will make students feel more inclined to go.

“It’s crazy to me how safe I felt, and I am so glad I did,” Cohon said. “But now they will need more security, and it would benefit a lot and encourage more people to go after all of this.”

Besides UF Hillel, the UF International Center is also not sending people to Israel.

“We were constantly monitoring everywhere,” said Jess Mercier, the assistant director of outreach and marketing for the UF Study Abroad unit within the UF International Center.

“We’re not sending people to Russia right now. We’re not sending people to China right now. We’re not sending people to Israel right now.”

Besides monitoring countries that might become unsafe to send students to, the UF International Center has international health insurance coverage that students studying abroad are required to be enrolled in.

“Good insurance covers everything from just needing to go to the doctor with a cold to emergency evacuations,” Mercier said. “We also have an emergency response team, phone line and constant monitoring of all these locations before, during and after students are abroad.”

The UF International Center recently added a new note on their study abroad page labeled Worldwide Caution. This addition gives a warning to students looking to study abroad, as well as listing resources to assist students in their decision. Mercier said this new note was added because many countries are on higher alert now.

UF student Natalie Talarico studied abroad in Spain last summer. She recommended students pick a country that they would feel comfortable in.

“It’s already an out-of-place experience,” Talarico said. “You’re already going to experience culture shock, so I’d do something that isn’t super out of the ordinary.”

Cohon added that picking a country to study abroad in times of increasing conflict can be hard, and it is important to have a balance of safety and experience.

“Be aware of where you’re going, aware of your surroundings,” Cohon said. “Be cautious of everything, but also don’t take things for granted.”

Source List:

Shayna Cohon

5617160026

Jess Mercier

[jmercier@ufic.ufl.edu](mailto:jmercier@ufic.ufl.edu)

3522943335

Natalie Talarico

7862055776

[talariconatalie@ufl.edu](mailto:talariconatalie@ufl.edu)

Cara Levin

[clevin@ufhillel.org](mailto:clevin@ufhillel.org)

