



Photo by: Wikipedia Commons

Students seek bloggers to promote Israel

By NOAH RAYMAN
04/07/2010

Hebrew University pioneer project to improve Israel's image.

A student group at Hebrew University has pioneered an innovative way to spread the word about the Israel they know and love, and not the conflict on which the international media so often focuses.

In early August, they will provide an all-expenses-paid, 10-day trip across Israel for one lucky contest winner and three of the best-known bloggers in the world, each of whom, organizers hope, will spread the word on the country that they will get to experience for themselves.

The 24 Hebrew University students came together this year to form "Once in a Lifetime – 2010," a student-run initiative to support Israel's global image.

"It's 24 young individuals with actually no experience in these kinds of projects, and we are all volunteers," said one of the students, Erez Baron.

"This is intended to be the biggest online experience ever created in Israel," he added.

The contest for the one open position began last week and will continue through the first week of July. As of July 1, only seven participants had submitted the one-minute video clips about themselves that are central to the application process, to be judged by a panel next week.

But Baron said the YouTube channel on which videos are posted has already received over 10,000 hits, making it one of the most visited Israeli YouTube sites for the week.

So what does a big online experience mean for Baron? "My aim is that 1 million people will see the project from around the world," he said.

The students are hoping that the three professional bloggers will draw the necessary readers. While the names haven't been announced, Baron said that each blogger reaches hundreds of thousands of people in different parts of the world. Baron compared the journey they have organized to a Taglit-Birthright trip, which brings Jews from around the world for a 10-day free visit to Israel.

"We're basically doing a Taglit with an edge," he said. "We'll get them to experience Israel as Israelis see it. Not like tourists. We'll try to get them to see and feel what it's like to actually be Israeli."

The journey will take the participants clubbing in Tel Aviv and dipping in the Dead Sea, and then will put them up in an apartment in Jerusalem to relate more closely with the local community.

Baron presented a vision of the trip not unlike a reality-television show, with the four participants (alongside two Hebrew University students, a tour guide and a camera crew) traveling across Israel – and regularly communicating home about their experience. The students will also post a five-minute video with a daily summary of the trip. While the fourth traveler – the contest winner – will not have professional experience blogging, organizers hope that the contest will help engage new people with Israel.

The 24 students are working in conjunction with StandWithUs, an international Israel-education organization that has endorsed 12 other projects that use creative ways to defend Israel in the world.