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May. 11, 2006 21:40 | Updated May. 11, 2006 23:41

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## Young US journalists to explore 'cool side of Israel'

By [TALYA HALKIN](#)



Should Americans on a seven-day visit to Israel be climbing Masada or following Madonna? Dining on a kibbutz or splurging on nouveau Israeli cuisine? For David Brinn, the editorial director of Israel21c, the choice is clear. At least, that is, if the Americans in question are a group of hip, 20-something journalists writing for youth media publications like CosmoGIRL and Us Weekly.

So after Brinn and his colleagues greet the 11 American journalists they have invited to spend a week in Israel starting next Sunday, chances are they will be whisking them off to a meeting with local indie-rock singers or leaders of the local gay and lesbian community.

Founded four years ago, Israel21c is a non-profit, non-political organization dedicated to informing Americans about the Israel that lies beyond the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

"We're focusing on a readership of 18- to 30-year-olds - Americans who don't think about Israel at all unless they think about suicide bombings," said Brinn. "Our concept was to find story ideas for editors and reporters writing about things like music, art, fashion and restaurant culture, and which could show the 'cool' side of Israel - it's a very important aspect of re-branding the country."

According to Brinn, studies that show that most

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Americans, including those supportive of Israel, know very little about the country.

"They perceive it as a dark, enclosed Third World country, not a vibrant place that is part of the 21st century," he said.

Brinn underscored the importance of changing such perceptions among young Americans who have no historical ties to Israel.

"It's much better if an 18-year-old in America has an image of Israel as a great place for windsurfing, rather than as a place where buses blow up," he said.

The classical pro-Zionist media stories, as Brinn noted, focus on the contributions that American Jews make to Israel. By contrast, he said, the aim behind next week's trip was to show that Israel is a strong, vibrant culture that is actually contributing to American culture.

"We're turning the whole paradigm upside down," he said.

"This approach is not about how Americans can help Israel, but about how Israel is contributing to life in America."

During their visit, the American journalists will meet prominent Israelis such as American-born filmmaker Joseph Cedar and writer Etgar Keret, as well as young chefs, jewelry makers and designers.

Having just returned from a year of lecturing on American campuses, Eytan Schwartz - the winner of last year's hit reality-TV show The Ambassador - was hired by Israel21c as a consultant for next week's trip.

"I've found that overwhelmingly, in the US, most kids do not know or care about Israel in the most basic way," Schwartz said. "They might even be supportive of Israel and still not care, because what they care about are beaches and great music.

"When you market a product to different audiences, you illuminate different qualities depending on who you're trying to sell it to," he said. "So we're not taking them to visit an army base, but we're bringing them to IDF radio to see soldiers who are DJs."

The Israel21c initiative to bring young American journalists to Israel was organized in collaboration with the Foreign Ministry, the America-Israel Friendship League, and America's Voices for Israel.

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According to Zehavit Ben-Hillel, of the Foreign Ministry's  
Department of Public Affairs, the ministry's support for this  
particular trip, she said, stemmed from its recognition of  
the importance of reaching the 18-to-25 age group.

"We want to try and be as relevant as possible to every  
group we target," Ben-Hillel said.

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