

Dear Editor:

I just finished reading the last edition of *Asian Jewish Life* and must send you a few words about the article on Israelis and drug abuse in India. Indeed many Israeli backpackers use drugs. I am not so sure about the statistics given in the article, but I find it strange and quite upsetting that it is pictured that it is only Israelis that are using drugs in India. One might wrongfully assume that all the other tens of thousands of young backpackers are not using any drugs and are instead just visiting museums.

This is a one sided story that fails to present reality. Adding to that, the Israeli military salary is hardly enough for a beer on a weekend and surely one can't use it to pay for a trip.

I just wanted to let you know how I feel as an Israeli.

Regards,
Gil Azoulay

Dear Gil:

I am very sorry if the article offended you. That was clearly not the intention. You are absolutely correct. Backpackers of many nationalities use drugs but the article was specifically on one organization's efforts to help Israelis. Asian Jewish Education Foundation International (AJEFI) is an organization with the central focus of Jewish education in India and providing support for Israelis in India. Their programs include developing Judaic studies, providing free accommodations to Jews and Israelis, offering drug rehabilitation for Israeli backpackers, and organizing community service projects that bridge sustainable relationships between Judaism and India.

This organization doesn't work to help backpackers as a whole nor do they aim to help Indians as a whole. They specifically aim to aid Jews and Israelis. I understand the potential sensitivity involved in seemingly singling out Israelis but the organization is an organization run by Jews to help Jews in a publication that reaches Jews.

In the same issue, we highlighted another organization, Lev Olam. Lev Olam also operates in India and recognizes the same potential temptations but have found a way to harnesses the Israeli backpackers' energy and enthusiasm into a force for positive change. The article shows the best of Israeli travelers. Both organizations reach out to the same demographic but with different focuses, and with both doing important work.

If awareness of these types of resources and increased awareness about drug abuse helps even one single person, then we have done our job.

Erica Lyons



Faces: Weaving Indian Jewish Narratives, Fulbright Senior Scholar Fellowship 2011-Siona Benjamin

The project proposal is to raise Western awareness about the history of the Indian Jewish communities by using photography and painting to document the faces and stories of this ancient group and their heritage. www.artsiona.com

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