

## LETTERS

Sir, – Why were Israeli tourists in Sinai despite warnings from their government not to travel there?

Though warnings of terror attacks are a fact of daily life in Israel, warnings followed by actual attacks are fairly rare. Our research in decision-making shows that, over time, people learn to ignore things that usually don't happen.

The best example is traffic accidents, which are much more likely than terror attacks. And yet we go on driving. And we go to Taba.

According to the Central Bureau of Statistics, between October 2000 and October 2001, the first year of this intifada, there was an 80% decrease in hotel stays by foreign tourists. But during the same period Israelis *increased* their hotel stays by 20%, beginning even before hotels improved their rates for Israelis.

The key to coping with terror is experience of risk. Israelis live with risk daily; when nothing bad happens they become desensitized to the danger. Foreign tourists, in contrast, get their information from graphic descriptions on CNN. As shown by Israelis Amos Tversky and Nobel Laureate Daniel Kahneman, when people make decisions based on descriptions alone they exaggerate small risks.

This is why tourists visiting Israel from the US are typically much more concerned than Israelis, even though both are taking the exact same risk.

Terror cannot defeat those who face it daily. Speaking also as an Israeli citizen, I know we will continue to drive our cars, ride our buses, and go to our coffee shops.

Occasionally an unfortunate tragedy will happen, but usually it won't.

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