Leave It Wild: campaign summary

Yaaqov Lamb

Why I picked this

I was living in Sderot when I created this campaign. Sderot is technically southern Israel, though not quite the Negev, and living there made me want to bring attention to an area I feel is often overlooked. When people talk about tourism in Israel, Tel Aviv, Jerusalem and the Kinneret get most of the attention. My only trip to the Negev was on Taglit in 2019. I wanted to design a campaign that gets young people down south, and makes sure the places they find are still worth finding when the next group comes.

The goal

Get Israelis aged 15 to 24 to visit the Negev and Arava, and make leaving no trace the normal thing to do once they're there.

The problem

There are two problems, and they pull against each other. The first is that young people don't go. The second is what happens when people do go. In a 2021 University of Haifa study, 45% of Israelis admitted they had littered in nature in the past year. More visitors without new habits means more damage to some of the most fragile land in the country.

The south also has something most of Israel has lost: a dark sky. In 2017, Makhtesh Ramon became the first International Dark Sky Park in the Middle East. Worldwide, more than a third of people can no longer see the Milky Way from where they live. For a teenager from the center, the stars over the crater can be the reason to make the trip.

The idea

Make the desert a place young people want to go, and make looking after it part of the fun. The tagline is Discover the desert. Responsibly.

Who it's for

The core audience is 15 to 24 year-olds. The pilot reaches them through the groups that already take them south: youth movements, school trips and student organizations. Alongside them are three partners the campaign can't work without: a field school to run the trips, the Israel Nature and Parks Authority for facts and access, and the local and Bedouin communities who live there and know the land.

What we ask people to do

- **Go lightly.** Stay on marked trails, take your trash home, carry enough water, and don't drive off-road in protected areas.
- **Keep the dark.** Use less light at night, point it down, and leave the sky for the stars and the animals that need the dark.

- **Know what lives here.** Watch wildlife from a distance, never feed or touch it, and stay away from nesting areas.

How it reaches people

- **The Desert Reset.** A 24-hour weekend run by young people for young people: a guided hike, a leave-no-trace camp, stargazing, and a short clean-up in the morning. Everyone leaves with a pledge and photos worth posting.
- **#GiveTheNightBack.** The story that runs through the social campaign. It starts with a simple question, "How many stars can you see from your street?", and shows how a few small changes bring them back. Young people audit the lights on their own street, and local businesses in the south pledge to shield theirs.
- **Four channels.** Earned media, creators and social, toolkits for youth groups, and briefings for municipalities and businesses.
- **Four stories for the press.** Teenagers becoming desert ambassadors (human interest), the rise of low-impact travel (travel), why darkness matters (science), and southern communities shaping how tourism works (local).

Roll-out and measurement

A 12-week pilot in four stages: listen and build (weeks 1 to 3), launch (weeks 4 to 6), activate (weeks 7 to 10), and learn (weeks 11 to 12). It measures what people do, not just what they like: pledges completed, volunteer hours, how well trails and campsites are kept, and how many businesses change their lighting. Targets are set once partners and a baseline are in place, and the results are published at the end, good or bad.

Doing it right

A campaign about respecting a place has to respect the people there. That means designing it with southern residents, Bedouin communities, local guides and conservation experts; keeping big groups away from sensitive sites; checking every fact about wildlife, access and safety with the authorities before it goes out; and treating bigger questions, like transport to the south, as a separate policy conversation.

Sources

- University of Haifa, 45% of Israelis admit to littering in the past year (2021)
- DarkSky International, Ramon Crater named first International Dark Sky Place in the Mideast (2017)
- Falchi et al., The new world atlas of artificial night sky brightness, Science Advances (2016), via the World Economic Forum

Written as a course assignment from my studies at Bar-Ilan University.