Visit Palestine: Change your View

Israeli tourism is at the heart of Israel both economically and nationally. Before 1948, tourism to Palestine was initiated in order to encourage immigration of Jews to Israel and has been twinned with Zionism from its inception. Today's tourism is still very much a Zionist project and together with initiatives like Birthright Israel (Taglit), it is funded and overseen by the government's Hasbara department. Yet Israel is also in the midst of a sixty-year occupation and a battle with Palestinians that generates news headlines daily. Travel to Israel however, on either Jewish or Christian tours, and none of this will be on your tour agenda.

Visit Palestine: Change Your View, is a travel agency to be launched by Public Studio in April 2014 during a residency at ARTPORT Tel Aviv in Jaffa, Israel. After many years of working across borders, we are often asked questions such as: "What is it like over there? How can you go back and forth? Are you frightened? I would go, but as an Israeli, I can't." Visit Palestine: Change Your View is a contemporary artwork that aims to answer these questions and positions by leading tours to the West Bank. Public Studio produced a set of full-colour travel posters under the agency Public Travel, compiled into a custom envelope, to correspond with this project.

In 2008-2009 we lived in Ramallah for a year. We traced the roads across the West Bank that are at the heart of a controversial rerouting of Palestinian lives—They are known by activists as the Apartheid roads as they represent a system of segregated roads—one for Israelis and the other for Palestinians. As we traveled these roads we filmed each and every one, sometimes driving with settlers, sometimes with Palestinians who would tell us about their lives and their travels. At the same time, we joined a hiking group called Shat-ha. It means 'to wander' in Arabic. We thus also journeyed Palestine on foot where we were met with numerous impediments: Army blockades; road changes; settler land-grabs and the like. Despite all the obstacles one meets while traveling in this region, one is still greeted by magnificent vistas, nature, culture and yes, an Orwellian system of surveillance, security and restriction of movement.

What happens to a culture when it is closed-off from public view, when people are restricted in their movement, when another controls their lives? Since the wall that encloses the West Bank has been erected, not only are families and Palestinians cut-off from one another, but they have also been removed from Israeli view. Israelis no longer know Palestinians (and vice-versa but for soldiers and settlers), they do not interact, and they have little to no communication. The result is the fear of the unknown—Israelis are subject to a barrage of misinformation and a propaganda war that serves the state's agenda in what they refer to as 'the territories.' How does one speak above this din? How do regular people get heard?