



American Circus Troupe Stuck In Israel Due To FAA Ban

Group of Young American Performers Now Forced To Stay In Israel Until Monday

By MEGHAN KENEALLY

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A circus troupe that traveled from St. Louis to Tel Aviv to take part in a cross-cultural exchange expected to be doing backflips as part of their routine, but not when it came to their travel plans.

Jessica Hentoff is one of the chaperones for Circus Harmony, a Missouri circus group that has been traveling to Israel since 2007 to work with a youth circus in Galilee that includes both Jewish and Arab children.

The Americans' trip was scheduled to end today after spending two weeks training and performing in Israel, but the temporary ban preventing U.S. carriers from flying in and out of Ben Gurion Airport means that their departure has been pushed back to Monday.

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"We came despite the conflict because we felt we would be safe in the Galilee," Hentoff, the artistic and executive director of the non-profit circus group, told ABC News.

Hentoff traveled with nine American children between the ages of 9 and 20, who are all members of a troupe called the St Louis Arches. When they arrived in Galilee, they connected with 18 young members of a local circus troupe and performed several shows throughout northern Israel.

The performers are thrilled about the delay.

"My students had actually been begging me to extend our stay here in Israel," Hentoff said Tuesday night. "At this point, they only know it will be for 24 hours. However, the soonest flight we could get does not leave until Monday night."

The gymnasts are not the only ones stranded by their airlines. Dozens of flights have been canceled and airlines have not said when they will resume their regular schedule after the Federal Aviation Administration banned commercial airlines from flying into Tel Aviv's international airport on Tuesday. The ban was instituted after a rocket launched by Hamas landed one mile away from the airport.

The FAA only regulates American air carriers, but other international companies including Turkish Airlines, Air France, Scandinavian Airlines and Lufthansa followed its lead. British Airways and Russian carrier Rossiya have continued their scheduled flights into Israel, as has the country's commercial airline El Al. Former New York City mayor Michael Bloomberg flew into Tel Aviv early this morning on an El Al flight as a show of support.

Taryn Lachter, a 24-year-old from Ohio, just finished a Birthright trip to Israel and her Tuesday flight to New York went out as planned because the Jewish heritage organization uses El Al and those trips went unchanged.

Though Lachter's flight arrived in New York on time, there was a last-minute complication when she handed her ticket to a flight attendant.

"She was literally looking at my passport when the siren went off and she said I had to go find shelter," Lachter said of a rocket alarm that went off in Ben Gurion before her flight.

The FAA is scheduled to give an update about the ban today, although even if they allow flights to resume immediately, the fallout from the schedule break will be felt throughout the week.

That is the case for Hentoff and her group, who are not going to be able to leave until Monday.

"It is the grown ups in the group - myself and two chaperones - who are wanting to return to the U.S. to get back to work," Hentoff told ABC News. "Of course, their parents are very anxious to have them home. We are also missing some important events at our circus."

The students are making the most of their extended trip, however, with a swimming trip at a kibbutz scheduled for today and plans for more shows during their five extra days.

"Our host families are gracious. Our children are resilient. They are more than that. They are an amazing example of what can happen when you focus on what connects you instead of what divides you," Hentoff said.

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