

Statement on COVID-19, Our Extended Refund Policy and Frequently Asked Questions

Updated April 23, 2020

Although COVID-19 has reached all our communities, here at Aardvark Israel we are planning optimistically for the future. We know we will get through this! We continue to receive inquiries about our programs in Israel and **we want to assure you that our staff is making all the necessary plans for the next semesters to begin as scheduled in the Fall on August 31, 2020 and in the Spring on January 11, 2021.**

When the outbreak began, our Spring Semester was well underway, and we immediately implemented modifications to the program in order to ensure the health and safety of all our participants and staff while still continuing to operate. Although many gap year organizations discontinued their programming and some of our students did elect to return to home, approximately 50 Aardvark participants chose to remain in Israel on our program. **Through adjustments to the daily schedule and in full compliance with the health guidelines of the Israeli Government, we have enabled our students to continue their gap year in Israel in a meaningful and safe way.** To date, we have not had any students or staff contract the virus. Throughout this period, we have been in constant contact with Masa, the Jewish Agency, the Ministry of Health, and the Ministry of Tourism for guidance in our continued operation and to assist us in planning for the future.

The students currently on the program are participating in online classes, workshops, and activities, and some are continuing to intern through remote work setups. They are also engaged in volunteering in ways that are particularly important right now, and in full compliance with health regulations, such as harvesting fruits and vegetables at small farms where migrant workers have returned home, grocery shopping for the elderly and disabled citizens who cannot leave their homes, delivering essential products and supplies to the poor, and creating educational digital content. As circumstances improve, we are continuing to adapt our programming to return to our regularly scheduled activities as much as conditions allow. Please follow us on [Facebook](#) and [Instagram](#) to see our program in action. If applicants for 2020-21 programs and/or their parents would like to speak to a current participant or the parent of a current participant, we will be happy to connect you.

In order to meet the needs of students who either cannot or do not yet feel comfortable returning to their home countries at the conclusion of the semester in May, we have created a Summer Semester as an extension of our regular program in Israel. We are working together with students and their families to structure their extended time in Israel to best meet their needs and interests, while at the same time continuing to uphold a high standard of safety.

We look forward to the arrival of a new group of students in several months. While we do not currently foresee any disruptions to the start of our 2020-21 Year Program and Fall Semester (beginning August 31, 2020), the situation is evolving daily. We will continue to monitor the situation closely and we will modify the program as necessary in the best interest of our participants' health and safety. We also want to provide you with added peace of mind in planning for the coming year.

- We have extended our cancellation deadline. **If you choose to cancel for any reason before July 1, 2020, we will provide a full refund of tuition.**
(For students scheduled to arrive in the Fall of 2020)
- We will be offering several payment plan options in order to assist families who have been impacted financially due to COVID-19.
- We have recently included “*Purchase Protection*” as an optional product you may purchase in your Aardvark application online. This insurance policy is being offered to you by a third-party vendor. Purchase Protection covers cancellation due to the death, accident, or illness of the applicant or a member of their immediate family. Unlike many plans currently offered, this plan also covers any COVID-19 health situations for the applicant or their family.
- We will be requiring all participants to conduct a health self-assessment immediately prior to travel to Israel, and a subsequent health assessment will be conducted immediately upon arrival. These assessments will include reporting the participant's temperature and answering a brief questionnaire to screen for any possible COVID-19 symptoms or recent exposure.
 - If any participant is exhibiting symptoms of the virus or was recently exposed prior to leaving home, they will be required to postpone their arrival to the program until a quarantine period has been completed.
 - On the first day of the program, if a participant is exhibiting symptoms of the virus or was recently exposed, they will be immediately separated from the group and required to complete a quarantine period.
- We will continue to provide you with updates and full transparency as this situation evolves.

Although we do not envision any drastic changes to the program in the Fall or Spring, we are prepared to modify the program if necessary. Our current students and their parents will tell you that we have done this successfully, demonstrating sensitivity and resourcefulness, and in a way that has allowed our students to be both safe and engaged in meaningful experiences. Our proven record and experience will ensure that we are offering you a positive, meaningful, and safe program in Israel! We look forward to meeting you soon!

We will be updating this statement and the FAQs below as needed based on the continued developments of COVID-19 in Israel. Please also feel free to reach out to us at info@aardvarkisrael.com or by phone with any questions or concerns you might have.

Frequently Asked Questions:

1. How seriously has the coronavirus impacted Israel?

From the first diagnosed case of COVID-19 in Israel on February 21, 2020, the government quickly implemented strategies to proactively and aggressively prevent the spread of the virus. The timing, variety and aggressiveness of measures which were taken ultimately proved to be highly effective in ensuring the public's safety. As a result, Israel has been a leader in the management of the pandemic and has demonstrated a high rate of testing, and low rate of infection, death, and serious cases. The government of Israel issued strict orders throughout the crisis which were implemented nationwide in order to ensure a coordinated approach to the containment. These restrictions have been constantly reevaluated with adjustments being made on a frequent basis to balance health objectives with the true needs of society. As Israelis, we are experienced in facing challenges head on and we are using those skills to successfully overcome these circumstances as well. The country is prepared for this and has the resources, due to our constant state of readiness, to care for the safety and welfare of all of us.

2. What preventive and protective measures have you taken to help assure that current participants remain healthy?

Students have been briefed frequently so that they understand the regulations in place and their obligation to abide by them. Participants are required to maintain physical distancing from one another (2 meters apart) with the exception of those in their own apartment, wear face masks outside of their apartments, diligently wash their hands and use hand sanitizer, and keep their apartments extra clean. Specific instructions were provided to students to help them understand that when cleaning they must also wipe down often forgotten areas such as the door handles and light switches. Signs were posted in each apartment to serve as visual cues to remind them to maintain high levels of hygiene and what exactly to do if they don't feel well. A variety of educational workshops were also conducted to help the students understand the health, safety, economic, political, and other implications of the pandemic. Among these workshops was a session with a physician working in Jerusalem's Hadassah Hospital who provided clear information as it relates to our students' age group and answered questions about COVID-19. Through one on one conversations with staff, students have also had the opportunity to clarify questions or concerns they have about how to stay safe

during this time. Engaging the students in an educational social media campaign also has helped reinforce the message of maintaining physical distancing and proper hygiene.

3. How have you addressed the mental health needs of the participants who are feeling the weight of quarantine and social isolation?

We have been framing the quarantine as “physical distancing while socially connecting” as a way of helping students feel less isolated. We acknowledge the anxiety this situation has caused, and we are addressing it head on. The staff of the program has been very present and involved with the students to provide individual and group support. Engaging in group volunteer work while abiding by health guidelines has also served as a way of preventing students from being alone. Additionally, clinical social workers have been made available for individual sessions at no cost.

4. If it is necessary to hold some activities online and engage in modified programming, what types of things can we expect?

While we do not anticipate the need for the program to be conducted largely online, we are prepared if modifications to the program will be necessary at some point. The activities would be similar to those offered to our Spring 2020 Semester participants. For example, our students have been volunteering as described above, others are engaged in internships through remote work setups. In addition, we are conducting online classes allowing them to fully participate in the academic component of the program, including earning college credit. Students are also participating in other sessions online such as yoga, concerts, resume building workshops, Israeli Dancing workshops, cooking classes, Hebrew activities and more.

5. What would happen if a student needed to be quarantined or got sick? What if the whole group needs to be quarantined upon arrival?

The students will be cared for and taken care of! If an individual participant needs to be quarantined or is sick, we have provisions for separating them from the group and providing them with the care they would need. Clear protocols are in place for each of these scenarios and we are prepared to deal with this type of situation. Students will also be briefed upon arrival so that they understand clearly what to do if they do not feel well or believe that they may have been exposed.

6. Does the health insurance included in the program tuition provide full coverage for COVID-19?

Yes, provided the illness is first diagnosed in Israel during the term of coverage. Coverage is provided by an Israeli company called Harel. No co-pay is required for doctor’s visits, prescription medication, lab tests, or hospitalizations. Coverage is limited to incidents and illnesses occurring in Israel (pre-existing conditions are

excluded). An overview of the coverage is included in our Program Guide and the full policy is available on request.

7. How will you keep parents informed with any developments during the program?

Our staff sends out weekly updates to parents about the day to day activities on the program. We also send out additional updates with the relevant information that parents need to or would want to know. Since the start of coronavirus, we have emailed frequently – sometimes even daily – in order to ensure that everyone was informed and up to date. We also have hosted several Zoom meetings in order to provide information to parents. In the case of any urgent or serious situation, parents will be called immediately.

8. Are you still planning to run the International Trips?

With the first international trip scheduled for mid-October, we believe it is too soon to determine whether we can safely operate these trips. We are continuing to plan for the best-case scenario, but we understand that these plans may need to change. If we are forced to cancel any international trip up to 30 days before the scheduled travel, we will offer participants the opportunity to substitute a different trip in its place or receive a full refund for the fees paid for the trip.

9. Will the Marva army experience and Mada ambulance program still be available? What about other add-on programs?

As of now, these programs are expected to take place as scheduled. If you are enrolled in an add-on program and it is cancelled prior to its commencement, a full refund of the add-on fees will be provided.

10. I don't want to miss out on securing my place on the program but I'm concerned about paying the deposit. What do you suggest?

We understand your concern and that is why we have expanded our refund policy so that you may receive a full refund of program tuition should you decide to cancel before July 1, 2020 for any reason (for programs beginning Fall 2020). There is no risk in paying a deposit and this will allow you to continue to move through our application process without leaving all the paperwork until the last minute, as well as guarantee your place on the program (pending completion of your application and acceptance to the program.) We also are offering payment plans to families needing this accommodation. As the situation develops, we will continue to keep all our applicants and their families fully advised so that you can make an informed decision based on what is best for you and with no financial risk.

11. What would happen if we cannot travel to Israel at the end of August due to border restrictions or the lack of flight availability?

We do not anticipate this being a problem at the end of August when the program begins, but if a student must arrive late to the program due to travel restrictions, we will be happy to accommodate them as needed. We will reassess the situation 30 days prior to the start of the semester and if it is deemed necessary, we may postpone the start of the program or arrange for staggered start dates in order to accommodate everyone.

12. When should I book my flight?

We recommend that you begin looking for flights now that offer flexible cancellation and date change options. Some airlines may be waiving their change or cancellation fees due to COVID-19 and offering reduced fares at this time.