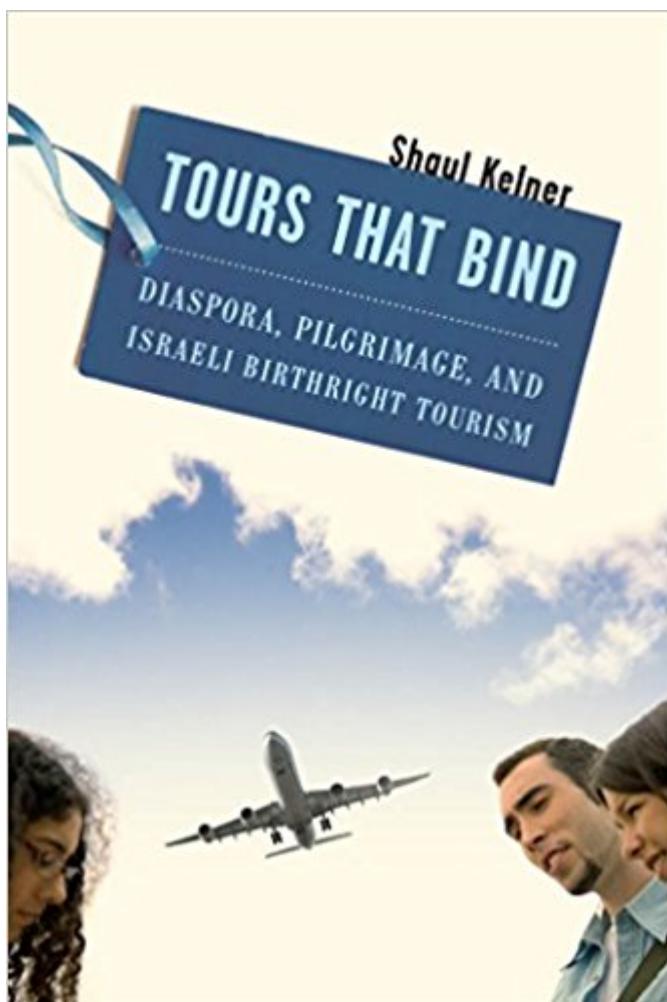


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# Tours That Bind: Diaspora, Pilgrimage, And Israeli Birthright Tourism



## Synopsis

Winner, 2010 Association for Jewish Studies Jordan Schnitzer Book Award2011 Honorable Mention for the American Sociological Association Culture Section's Mary Douglas Prize for Best BookSince 1999 hundreds of thousands of young American Jews have visited Israel on an all-expense-paid 10-day pilgrimage-tour known as Birthright Israel. The most elaborate of the state-supported homeland tours that are cropping up all over the world, this tour seeks to foster in the American Jewish diaspora a lifelong sense of attachment to Israel based on ethnic and political solidarity. Over a half-billion dollars (and counting) has been spent cultivating this attachment, and despite 9/11 and the ongoing Israeli-Palestinian conflict the tours are still going strong. Based on over seven years of first-hand observation in modern day Israel, Shaul Kelner provides an on-the-ground look at this hotly debated and widely emulated use of tourism to forge transnational ties. We ride the bus, attend speeches with the Prime Minister, hang out in the hotel bar, and get a fresh feel for young American Jewish identity and contemporary Israel. We see how tourism's dynamism coupled with the vibrant human agency of the individual tourists inevitably complicate tour leaders' efforts to rein tourism in and bring it under control. By looking at the broader meaning of tourism, Kelner brings to light the contradictions inherent in the tours and the ways that people understand their relationship to place both materially and symbolically. Rich in detail, engagingly written, and sensitive to the complexities of modern travel and modern diaspora Jewishness, Tours that Bind offers a new way of thinking about tourism as a way through which people develop understandings of place, society, and self.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"Kelner provides vivid descriptions, conversations, and analyses resulting from his experiences on multiple Taglit trips, his involvement with the Brandeis evaluations, and his own studious academic work."-Howard M. Weisband, Israel Journal of Foreign Affairs "Kelner lucidly lays out evolving conceptual structures in the field of diasporic homeland tourism, illuminating a spectrum of intellectual trends, and using them both to enrich nuanced understandings of the larger significance of the Israel trip in contemporary Jewish life and to portray Israel trips as part of "broader transnational trends that are gaining momentum worldwide."-Sylvia Barack Fishman, H-Net Reviews "Tours that Bind is an exceptional work. Shaul Kelner offers one of the finest social scientific studies of contemporary Jewish life in a generation."-Riv-Ellen Prell, author of *Fighting to Become Americans: Jews, Gender and the Anxiety of Assimilation* "Tours that Bind . . . serve[s] up some fascinating insights into one of the most daring and effective social experiments of the modern Jewish Diaspora."-The Jerusalem Post "After several years of serious scholarship, Kelner concludes that tourism is the great equalizer, an opportunity for institutions to compete for the ability to represent a people. Though not the first book to explore Birthright's impact, Tours That Bind approaches the subject academically, analyzing how Israel co-opts the Jewish diaspora to strengthen its nation-state."-Jewish Book World "Kelner, assistant professor of sociology and Jewish studies at Vanderbilt University, has written an original and persuasive account of the ways in which tourism has evolved into an important means for the creation of transnational identities and commitments. Using Birthright tours to Israel as his example, Kelner offers new ways to think about place, society, and self."-Society (Social Science and Modern Society) "The best book to date on diaspora tourism. Kelner sweeps away the cobwebs that have clouded the relationship between young American Jews and the state of Israel. Rich description, subtle theory, and jargon-free writing make this book a joy to read. A major contribution to the literature on tourism and Jewish studies."-Edward M. Bruner, author of *Culture on Tour: Ethnographies of Travel* "Tours That Bind is must reading for those who work on homeland/diaspora relations. Ditto for those who research tourism in all its modalities."-Contemporary Sociology: A Journal of Reviews "...[O]ffers some intriguing insights into a phenomenon of considerable importance in the American Jewish community."-Adam Kirsch, Tablet Magazine "Drawing mainly on his own participant-observation experiences, Kelner situates the program in a context of political tourism, giving us new tools with which to understand the visceral, emotional and cognitive impacts on the participants. This provides a sophisticated lens through which to analyze what the Birthright

program, and others like it, does, how it accomplishes its goals, what those goals are and why the mechanisms used may also limit its impact.â••Harriet Hartman, The Forewardâ•“This fascinating, carefully researched study focuses on a specific kind of tourism... the Israeli Taglit-Birthright program... This study is insightful, rich in data, and exceptionally well informed. While the subject focus is unique, the volume contributes broadly to understanding pilgrimage and tourism, youth culture, and Israel-diaspora relations... Highly recommended.â••CHOICE”In analyzing tourism as a potent but imprecise tool for transnational political socialization, Kelner makes an important contributiong to scholarship on tourism, transnationalism, and diaspora.”-Ben Brazil, Sociology of Religion”If sociology is an art form, Shaul Kelner is a master artist.” -Sociological Forum

Shaul Kelner is Assistant Professor of Sociology and Jewish Studies at Vanderbilt University.

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