

# EARLY OUTCOMES OF THE HONEYMOON ISRAEL EXPERIENCE: Contributing to Couples' Jewish Journeys

September 2016



# OVERVIEW

Honeymoon Israel (HMI) provides immersive trips to Israel for young couples consisting of at least one Jewish partner, with the goal of building families and communities that are meaningfully connected to Jewish life and the Jewish people. Since its inception in 2015, HMI has engaged Rosov Consulting to support, document, and evaluate the program’s early development and impact on participants.

This report showcases findings pertaining to HMI’s impact on individuals who participated in 12 trips that took place from June 2015 through March 2016 from seven cities across the United States: **San Francisco**,<sup>1</sup> **San Diego**, **Los Angeles**, **Phoenix**, **Denver**, **New York City**, and **Washington, D.C.** The vast majority of the data presented in this report reflects outcomes from eight trips that took place during December 2015, February 2016, and March 2016; these data were collected via pre-trip surveys fielded **two weeks prior to the trips** and post-trip surveys fielded **three months following the trips**.<sup>2</sup> Differences in outcomes between cities and various sub-populations are noted when relevant. Additionally, this report integrates data from post-trip in-depth interviews conducted with couples who took part in trips during June and November 2015.

Being that HMI is a new initiative, having only recently emerged from its pilot stage, it is important to consider that future outcomes may differ from those described here. HMI aims to attract a greater number of individuals who are less connected to Jewish life, relative to the pilot participants.

Cover Photo: S. Tarek



## HMI Trips & Data Collection

TRIP	Pre/Post Survey	3-Month Interview	6-Month Interview	9-Month Interview
Los Angeles, June '15		🧠		🧠
Phoenix, June '15		🧠		🧠
Denver, Nov. '15			🧠	
Washington, D.C.: Nov. '15			🧠	
San Francisco, Dec. '15	☑			
San Diego, Dec. '15	☑			
New York City, Feb. '16	☑			
Phoenix, Feb. '16	☑			
San Francisco, Feb. '16	☑			
Los Angeles, March '16	☑			
Denver, March '16	☑			
Washington, D.C., March '16	☑			

## DESCRIBING THE SAMPLE

Of the 296 individuals (148 couples) who participated in HMI trips during December 2015, February 2016, and March 2016, 171 individuals (58%) completed both the pre-trip and post-trip surveys, representing a total of 119 couples. The majority of respondents were female, less than 35 years of age, and were involved in relationships of a duration of less than four years. Of the 171 respondents, 114 (67%) were members of interfaith couples and 57 (33%) were members of Jewish-Jewish couples, in total representing 81 interfaith and 38 Jewish-Jewish couples. Additionally, of the 171 respondents, 103 (60%) were born Jewish and 68 (40%) were not.

We conducted focus groups and interviews with 21 couples from **Los Angeles** and **Phoenix** who took part in the inaugural HMI trips during June 2015; we spoke to these couples three months after they returned from Israel, and we interviewed 16 of these couples again nine months following the trip. We also spoke with 13 couples from **Denver** and **Washington, D.C.** who participated in trips during October 2015 six months following their return from Israel.<sup>3</sup> Attention was paid to assembling a diverse group of couples to take part in these conversations, composed of varying demographics and characteristics. In total, we spoke with 34 couples (68 individuals) in an effort to discern the trajectory of impact over time.

### Jewish Identity of Survey Respondents, by City

City	Identity as a Couple		Individual Identity	
	Individuals from Interfaith couples	Individuals from Jewish-Jewish couples	Non-Jews	Born Jewish
San Francisco	29	13	18	24
San Diego	12	8	6	14
Phoenix	10	8	6	12
New York City	17	4	6	15
Los Angeles	13	9	10	12
Denver	14	9	12	11
Washington, D.C.	19	6	10	15
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>114 (67%)</b>	<b>57 (33%)</b>	<b>68 (40%)</b>	<b>103 (60%)</b>

<sup>1</sup> There were two San Francisco trips included in the pre/post analysis, one during December 2015 and the other during February 2016. For the purposes of this report, the two trips were grouped together, in order to describe meaningful findings pertaining to the city as a whole.

<sup>2</sup> All findings from the pre/post survey analysis are statistically significant with a p value of <0.05, unless otherwise noted.

<sup>3</sup> A fuller description of the findings of these interviews were submitted as separate data memos in April 2016 and June 2016.

# COUPLES GET WHAT THEY CAME FOR

Couples' motivations, as expressed before going on the trip, largely correspond to what they most valued after the trip. HMI couples share two primary motivations with some exceptions, as we describe below.

## COUPLES GET WHAT THEY CAME FOR

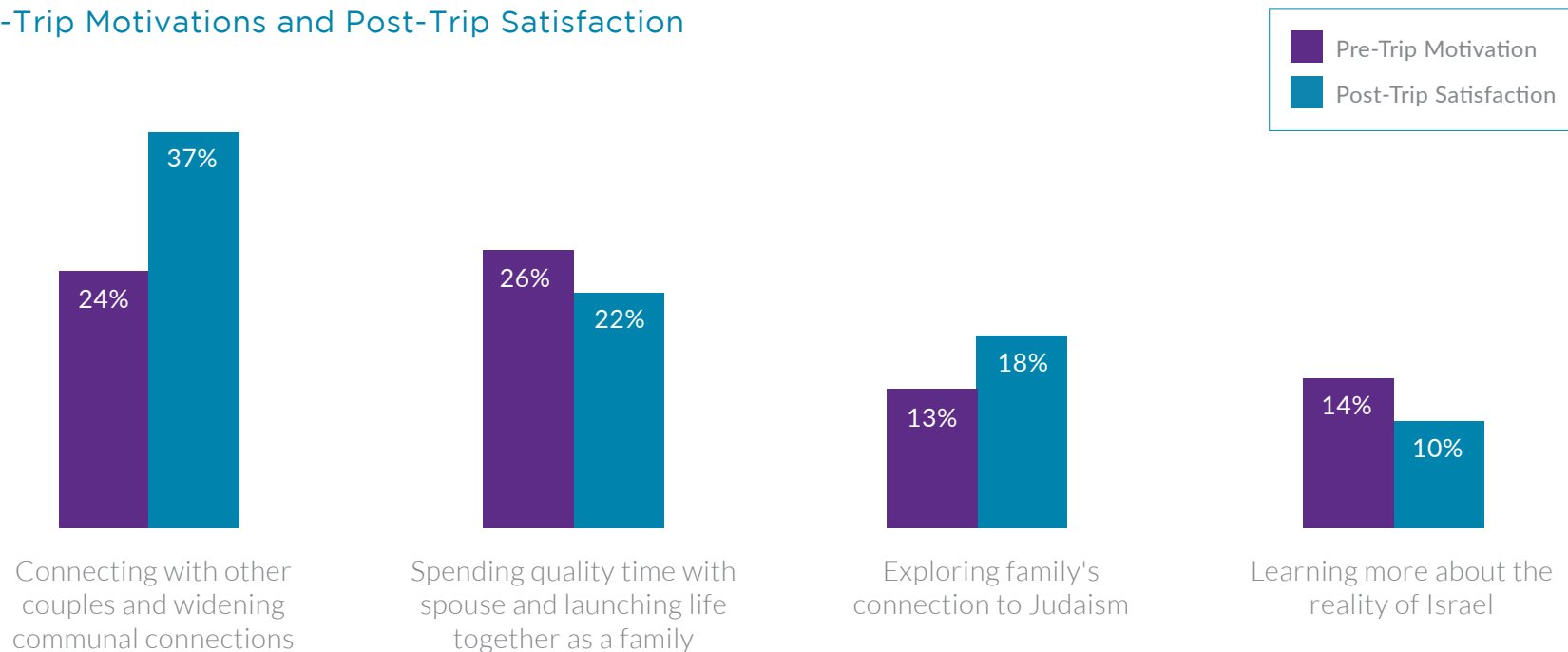
Two motivations for participating in HMI stood out in pre-trip surveys: **spending quality time with one's spouse** and **the opportunity to connect with other couples**. When asked after the trip what they were most satisfied with, these same items rose to the top: particularly connecting with other couples, with nearly 40% of respondents selecting this option. (The section titled "Developing a Community of Peers" delves into this further on page 16.)

Notably, Jews-by-choice differed slightly from both non-Jews and those born Jewish in that they were most interested in and satisfied with exploring their family's relationship to Judaism, learning more

about Israel, and connecting with other couples. This may be a reflection of the commitment and vested interest in Jewish identity which is to be expected of Jews-by-choice relative to the rest of the participants.

When comparing cities, respondents from **San Francisco** and **Denver** differed in that they were most interested and satisfied with connecting with other couples and learning more about Israel. Additionally, while **San Diego** respondents did not indicate that learning more about Israel was one of their primary interests prior to the trip, this aspect of the trip emerged as one that they were most satisfied with.

### Pre-Trip Motivations and Post-Trip Satisfaction



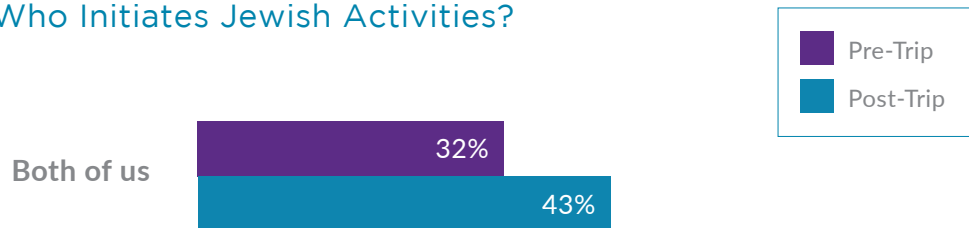
# COUPLE & FAMILY DYNAMIC

Both the survey findings and conversations with trip participants reveal that certain relationship dynamics may be altered after the trip.

## A MORE BALANCED PARTNERSHIP

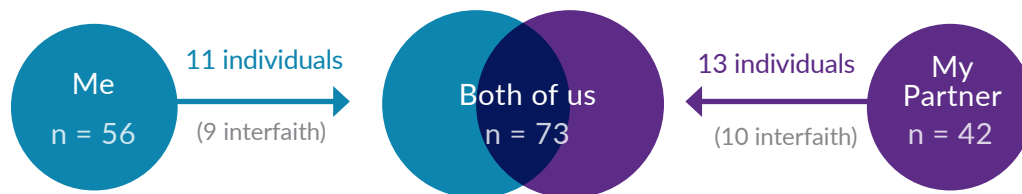
There were shifts for many couples with respect to who initiates conversation about and engagement with Jewish activities. With respect to children, we see that couples are becoming intentional about the way they incorporate (or plan to incorporate) Jewish education and Jewish traditions with their children.

### Who Initiates Jewish Activities?



Particularly for interfaith couples, three months following the trip we see the non-Jewish partner taking more initiative after the trip and both members of the couple feeling that they are in more of an equal partnership when it comes to initiating Jewish activities. Several couples termed this phenomenon “leveling the playing field,” during post-trip interviews. It is important to note that there were a few individuals who started with a more balanced partnership but shifted away from that following the trip; not all couples experienced the trip in exactly the same way.

### Finding a Balance



*"If she can't go to shul, I'll go on my own. That sense of equality...authority and comfort level in Judaism...I don't feel like I have to go to her with questions or ask her first."*

- A Jew-by-choice who was previously more dependent on his partner to lead and/or mediate their Jewish experiences.

*"Before the trip I was more hesitant to include Judaism and now I am more open to it and so since (my partner) was always more into it, now we are more aligned."*

- Non-Jewish partner from an interfaith couple

*"There is more of a shared dialogue and experience so it has made me more open to having the conversation—it put us on a more equal footing."*

- A Jew-by-choice from an interfaith couple

## A WILLINGNESS TO TACKLE RELIGIOUS DIFFERENCES

Our study posited that couples who were willing to discuss their religious differences head-on, were healthier and more likely to resolve internal tensions. Nearly all of the respondents who indicated that they avoided these discussions prior to the trip, prefer to discuss their differences three months following the trip. **Of the 18 respondents who experienced this shift, 15 were from interfaith relationships.** Five individuals reported that they avoid discussing their differences following the trip, even though they preferred to have such discussions before. As such, we see once again that not all couples experience the trip in exactly the same way.

### Discussing Religious and Cultural Differences

Pre-Trip

88%

Post-Trip

96%

Participants discuss their religious or cultural differences because it makes their relationship stronger

12%

4%

Participants avoid discussing their religious or cultural differences because it puts a strain on their relationship

*"I think he's more open to [talking about] it and we explore our options. I would have been more hesitant [before the HMI trip] to bring up [the idea of attending Jewish Baby University] because I would assume he would not be interested.*

- A participant who was born Jewish and is part of an interfaith couple



## TALKING ABOUT... BUT NOT DECIDING TO RAISE JEWISH CHILDREN

Of the 171 individuals who completed both the pre-trip and post-trip surveys, 31 (18%) had children prior to the trip, and an additional eight respondents gave birth following the trip. Slightly less than a third of those with children had already enrolled them in either formal or informal religious education prior to the trip, mostly in Jewish settings, with a few respondents choosing both Jewish and Christian education. Notably though, following the trip, **approximately a third of those with children and more than half who plan to have children in the future (n=116 following the trip), reported that while they had discussed religious education they had not made any firm decisions yet.**

As explained above, post-trip surveys were completed three months after a couple returned from the trip. For many couples, this was a period of re-entering their regular lives with intense schedules. For some this also included moving to a new home and in some cases, the intensely inward period of preparing for and having a first child. Couples we spoke with cited these as reasons for their lack of clarity on this issue. It will be important to follow these couples over longer periods of time to see how these decisions take shape.

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*"[there was] another [HMI] couple who just had a baby, we were able to talk about how to incorporate Jewish things into kids' life—they were so loving and open."*

– A Jew-by-choice from an interfaith couple

## FROM HONEYMOON TO “GOOD NIGHT MOON”

Both before and after the trip participants were asked whether they engaged in certain kinds of Jewishly-related activities with their children, such as speaking about Israel, reading Jewish-themed books, participating in a Shabbat or holiday celebration, etc. According to the survey findings, the trip does not seem to make much of a difference; many of the couples with children were already participating in these activities prior to the trip. There was a notable exception:

**Following the trip, approximately half of the respondents who had children reported arranging play-dates with the children of other HMI couples.**

While the survey data may not highlight any stark shifts in the types of activities parents are engaging in with their children, post-trip conversations with couples offer perspective on how the HMI community is actually influencing couples' discussions and choices. Both those who currently have children and those who are planning to have children noted **HMI's role in serving as a catalyst in fostering important conversations about raising children Jewishly.**

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*"The trip had a big impact on wanting to get more involved in the Jewish community, especially now that we're pregnant. We're not affiliated, but we're looking at Jewish daycare. The trip kick-started those feelings and thoughts for when we got back home, that we want to raise our children Jewishly, that we want them to have a strong Jewish community."*

– A participant who was born Jewish and is part of a Jewish-Jewish couple

# PARTICIPATION IN JEWISH LIFE

In addition to impacting how individuals within a couple relate to one another, the HMI trip also influences participants' relationship with Jewish life. HMI couples appear to be turning towards Jewish life following their experience.

## ACTIVELY EXPLORING JEWISH LIFE AND MAKING “SOME” DECISIONS

Prior to and following the trip, participants were asked the following question:

**?** “Please rate how true each of the following two statements is of you as a couple, where 1 means ‘not very true of us as a couple’, and 5 means ‘very true of us as a couple.’”

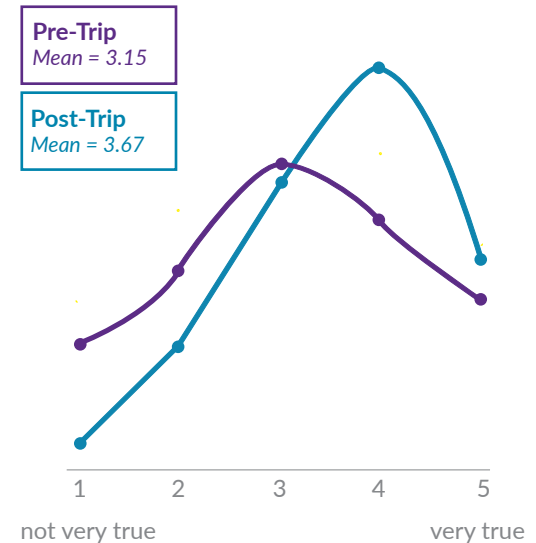
The statements were:

- A. We have been exploring our engagement with Jewish religious/cultural life
- B. We have made firm decisions about how to live our life Jewishly

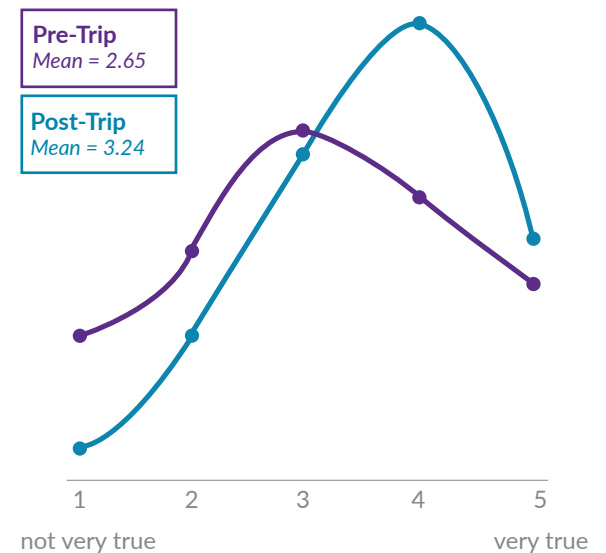
**Respondents reported more exploration and more decision-making regarding Jewish life three months following the trip.**

Interfaith couples were more likely to have declared themselves “explorers” than Jewish-Jewish couples. Regarding commitment to Jewish life, the change among those from interfaith and Jewish-Jewish couples was similar.

We have been exploring our engagement with Jewish religious/cultural life.



We have made firm decisions about how to live our life Jewishly.



## FEELING INCLUDED IN THE JEWISH FAMILY

Prior to and following the trip, participants were asked the following:

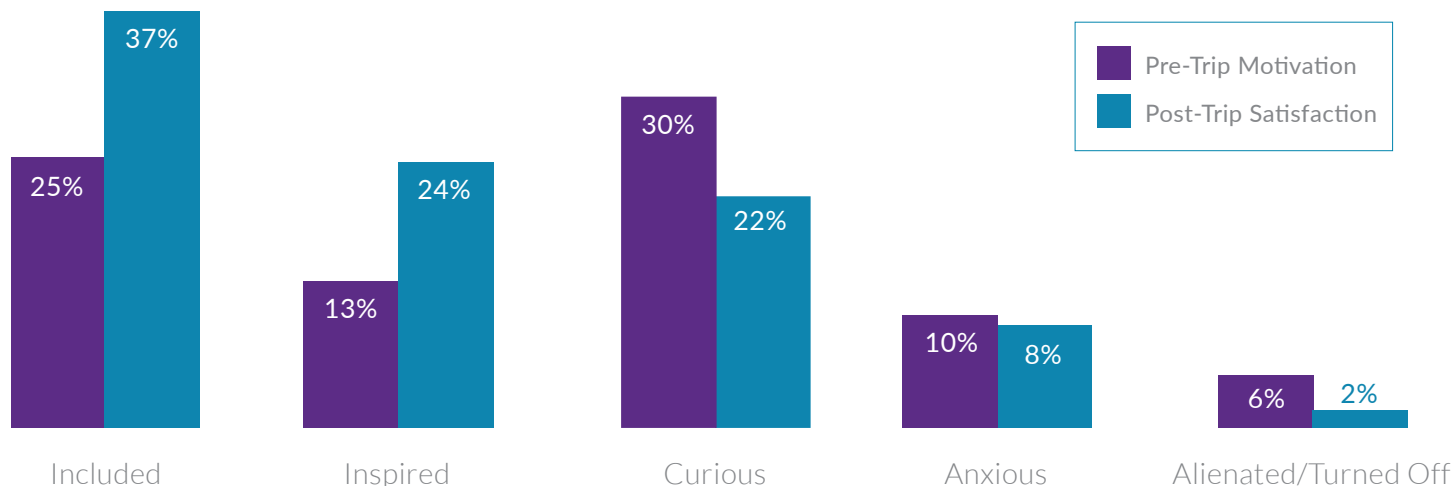
**?** *“Please choose the adjective that most accurately applies to you. When thinking about doing Jewish things I feel...”*

**There was a significant increase in the percentage of respondents who felt “included” and those who felt “inspired”.**

Fostering a greater sense of inclusion, especially among those who at times may feel like “outsiders,” is one of the pillars of the HMI mission—to welcome such individuals to the family. The HMI management team previously explained: “Our goal is to say to young couples, whether they are Jewish or one is Jewish, that they’re welcome as part of the Jewish community.”<sup>4</sup>

Similarly, among those who felt “inspired” following the trip—but had not selected this choice prior to the trip—nearly a third (32%) were either non-Jews or Jews-by-choice, and more than half (57%) were from interfaith couples.

### Attitudes towards “Doing Jewish Things”



*“I feel more comfortable among the Jewish community we have here. Beforehand I would occasionally go with (my partner) to high holiday services and didn’t feel like I belonged there or understood what was going on, but now I have more exposure and therefore feel more comfortable in that space.”*

– A non-Jewish partner in an interfaith couple

*“The trip reiterated that even though I’m a convert, I’ve been adopted, it makes me feel so loved and comforted.”*

– A Jew-by-choice from a Jewish-Jewish couple

<sup>4</sup> Drew Himmelstein, "Honeymoon Israel program is like Birthright for newlyweds," <http://www.jweekly.com/article/full/74468/honeymoon-israel-program-is-like-birthright-for-newlyweds/>

## MORE FREQUENT CONVERSATION ABOUT DOING JEWISH THINGS

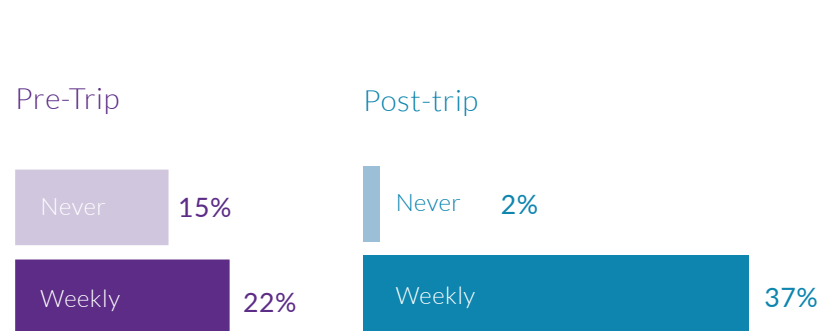
Does feeling included have any impact on the couples' conversations about doing Jewish things? Three months following the trip, respondents reported discussing doing Jewish things with their partners more often.

This increase in frequency was significant among the whole sample of respondents, as well as separately both among individuals from Jewish-Jewish couples and interfaith couples, with the change among those from interfaith couples being particularly notable. More than a

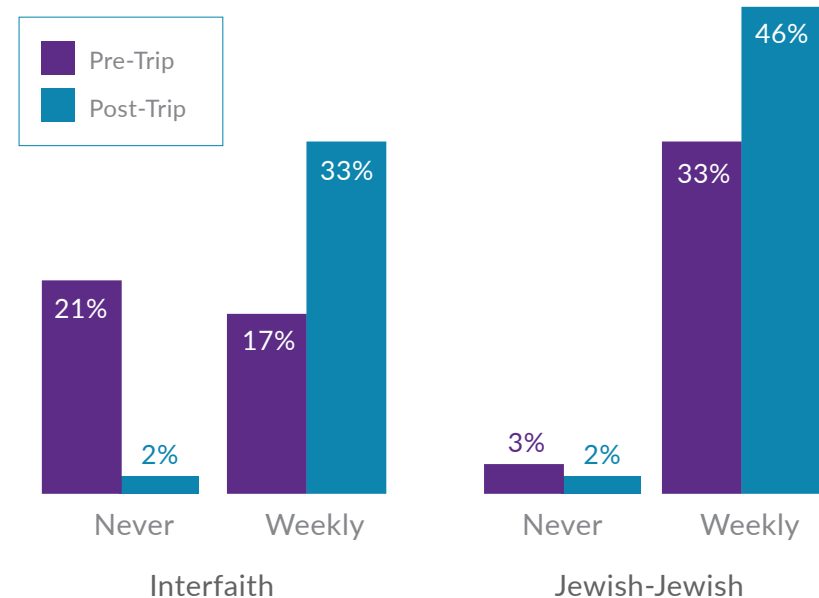
fifth of respondents from interfaith couples reported that they "never" discussed doing Jewish things with their partners prior to the trip; that number dropped precipitously after the trip. Likewise, the percentage of respondents from interfaith couples who discussed Jewish things on a "weekly" basis **nearly doubled** three months following the trip.

When comparing cities, respondents from all cities reported an increase in their frequency of discussing doing Jewish things, although this increase was smaller among respondents from **Los Angeles** and **Washington, D.C.**

### Frequency of Discussing "Doing Jewish Things"



### Frequency of Discussing "Doing Jewish Things": Respondents from Interfaith vs. Jewish-Jewish Couples



## MORE PARTICIPATION IN JEWISH ACTIVITIES

### Jewish Activities at Home

In the satisfaction survey fielded to participants two weeks following the HMI trip, approximately half (52%) of the respondents reported that their desire to engage in Jewish life at home increased “a great deal” as a result of the trip, and more than three quarters (79%) of the respondents indicated that they were “very likely” to participate in Jewish traditions at home.

**The percentage of participants who reported taking part in Jewish activities at home grew from 60% before the trip, to 73% three months following the trip.**

In post-trip conversations with participants, couples shared more specifically how they had begun experimenting with and implementing new Jewish practices at home. Examples included incorporating “a form of Shabbat” on Friday nights, either in their own home or in friends’ homes; holiday and Shabbat dinners; decorating their home with Jewish art; and having a brit milah and/or baby-naming service in their home.

**Nearly double the percentage of individuals from interfaith couples participated in such activities for the first time following the trip, relative to Jewish-Jewish couples.**

Most of those who participated in these kinds of activities for the first time following the trip were from **San Francisco, Denver, and Phoenix**, and more than a third were non-Jews.

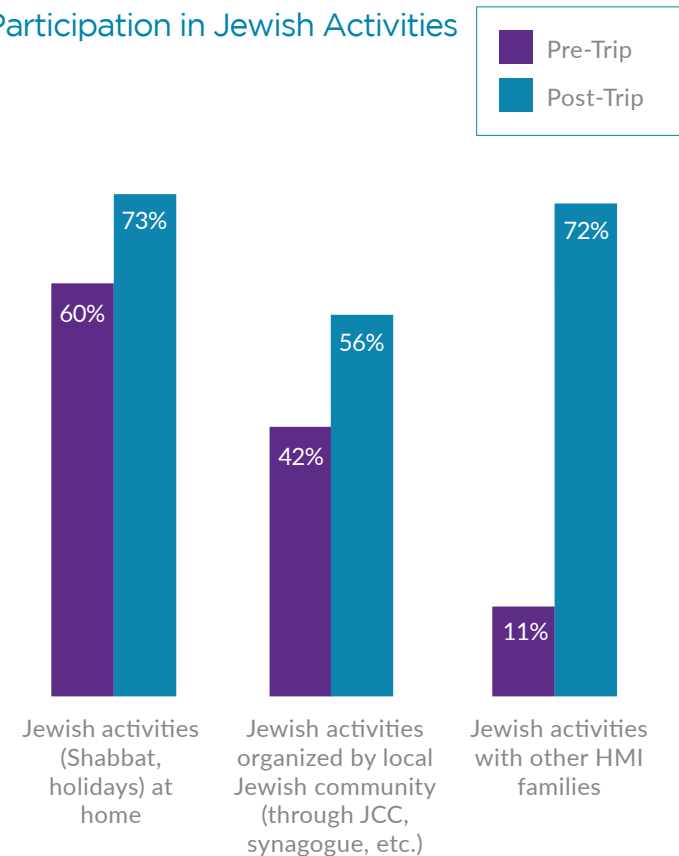
*“[The] biggest impact for me was on our family...we probably wouldn’t have Shabbat on Friday nights without the trip. It’s easy to do, quick, we can do it with [our daughter] and she can see what it is.”*

– A participant who was born Jewish and is part of an interfaith couple

*“We have celebrated more Shabbats in the past six months than in my (entire) life and are looking for other ways to get involved.”*

– A participant who was born Jewish and is part of an interfaith couple

### Participation in Jewish Activities



## Jewish Activities Organized by the Local Jewish Community

Two weeks following the trip—as reported in the satisfaction survey—slightly less than half (44%) of the respondents indicated that they were “very likely” to participate in local Jewish programs. However, the percentage of participants who participated in activities organized by the local Jewish community, such as through a JCC or synagogue, **had grown from 42% before the trip, to 56% three months later.**

In post-trip conversations with participants, couples mentioned a few different ways they had become more involved in organized Jewish life. Some mentioned attending Shabbat and/or holiday services more frequently, a few joined synagogues or other Jewish communal organizations (such as a JCC), some became more active in organizations in which they were already involved, and a few parents enrolled or considered enrolling their children in Jewish preschools.

When comparing cities, approximately half of the respondents from **New York City** and **Denver** participated in such activities for the first time three months following the trip, which was significantly greater than the percentage of respondents from the rest of the cities. Among those who participated in these kinds of activities for the first time following the trip, more than half (56%) were from interfaith couples and 41% were either non-Jews or Jews-by-choice.

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*“I have been to Shabbat at the synagogue a handful of times which is more than before...and even when we haven’t gone the urge has been there.”*

– A participant who was born Jewish and is part of an interfaith couple

## Jewish Activities with other HMI Couples/Families

Two weeks following the trip—as reported in the satisfaction survey—the vast majority (88%) of respondents indicated that they were “very likely” to participate in social events with other HMI couples from the trip. In a similar vein, the percentage of participants who actually participated in Jewish activities with other HMI couples had grown from 11% to 72% —**nearly three quarters of respondents had participated in Jewish activities with other HMI couples three months following the trip.**

Based on post-trip conversations with participants, these activities included holiday and Shabbat dinners; life-stage events, such as baby showers, baby naming ceremonies, weddings, and birthday parties; attending lectures and/or services together; and participating in other events in the community with other HMI couples. **Some couples mentioned that they were more likely to attend community events because they had other HMI couples to go with.** Other couples mentioned that while they were less likely to attend events, they felt that the HMI community itself is the Jewish community they had been searching for.

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*“We all chipped in, collaborative effort, got together and it was really nice. We all shared stories, had a Jewish theme, but then played games. I think everyone felt there was a place for them at that table. It’s comfortable. Just an example of what’s representative of the experience.”*

– A participant who was born Jewish and is part of an interfaith couple, who organized a Passover Seder with other HMI Couples

# DEVELOPING A COMMUNITY OF PEERS

HMI couples consider their trip mates to be new-found friends. Although it is premature to understand the cultural components of this new community, it appears to be one of the primary ways in which couples engage in Jewish life.



## BUILDING AN HMI COMMUNITY

Three months following the trip, participants were asked to indicate how strongly they agree or disagree with several statements regarding their relationship to other HMI couples and the HMI community. As previously noted, respondents were most satisfied with the opportunity to meaningfully connect with other couples.

When we compared the way respondents from the various cities speak about the HMI community, we found that those from **Phoenix** and **New York City** felt most strongly connected to their HMI peers, while those from **Los Angeles** and **Washington, D.C.** felt less connected.

Though part of a separate trip from those represented in the pre/post survey analysis, couples from the **Los Angeles** trip in June 2015 mentioned in post-trip interviews that they still keep in contact with only a few couples from the trip; they also shared that there had not been a lot of larger group contact following the trip. Likewise, couples from the **Washington, D.C.** trip in November 2015 expressed similar sentiments; they had connected with a few couples individually, but felt that there were not enough opportunities to reconnect with the larger group.

### Value-Add of the HMI Community (% who selected "agree" or "strongly agree")

97%

I made new friends on the HMI trip

89%

I have a community of friends with whom I feel comfortable doing Jewish things

87%

Connecting with other couples from our HMI trip gives me a sense of new-found community

85%

I feel part of an HMI community

84%

Connecting with HMI participants offers me new opportunities to do Jewish things that I did not have before going on the trip

83%

I have friends I can turn to for discussing Jewish life as it relates to my family

# RELATIONSHIP TO THE LOCAL JEWISH COMMUNITY

On the whole, respondents reported a greater sense of connection to and engagement with their local Jewish community following the trip. They are more aware of opportunities and more confident in their ability to participate should they choose to do so.

## CONFIDENCE, AWARENESS, CONNECTION & DIRECTION

Both the pre-trip and post-trip surveys asked participants to indicate how strongly they agree or disagree with several statements regarding their relationship to the local Jewish community in their respective cities.

Growth in each of these domains resonated both with respondents from interfaith couples and Jewish-Jewish couples, with the exception of knowing a Jewish leader who serves as an inspirational role model; in this particular area, those from interfaith couples were more impacted relative to those from Jewish-Jewish couples.

When comparing cities, respondents from **Phoenix** experienced less of a shift in the displayed areas. Interviews with couples from **Phoenix** who participated in the June 2015 trip may shed some light on this finding. Three of the couples we spoke with were not only not connected to an organization, but also mentioned that they didn't have any Jewish couple friends before the trip. While none of those three couples went on to join organizational community life in **Phoenix**, they now felt they had a Jewish community through their new HMI friends.

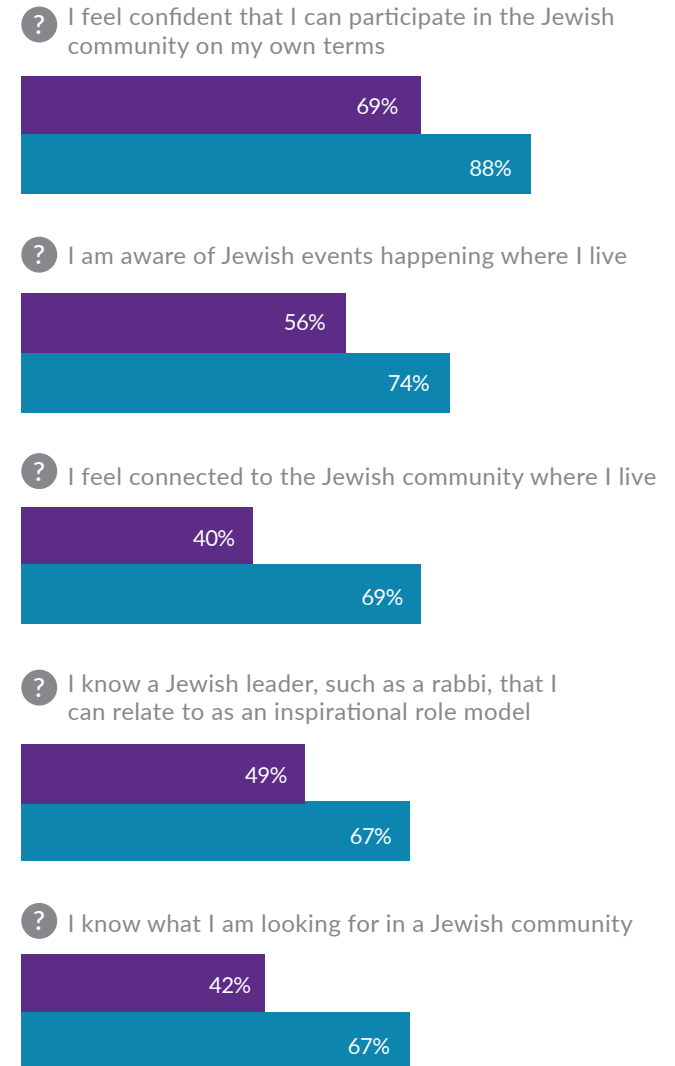
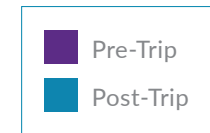
*"I think I never really felt like I had a community that was like me in how I think about my Judaism and how I practice my Judaism, and I found that community in HMI, and in that respect I feel a greater connection to my being Jewish."*

- A participant who was born Jewish and is part of an interfaith couple

*"Before the trip we knew there were couples our age in the area, but we'd never seen them before. It's not just that they are there, but they live half a mile down the street. HMI made it that much more real."*

- A participant who was born Jewish and is part of a Jewish-Jewish couple, on meeting young couples similar to them

## Relationship to the Local Jewish Community (% who selected "agree" or "strongly agree")



# RELATIONSHIP TO ISRAEL

In addition to affecting how participants relate to their partners, each other, and Jewish life, the HMI trip fosters a deeper connection to Israel as well.

## RELATIONSHIP TO ISRAEL

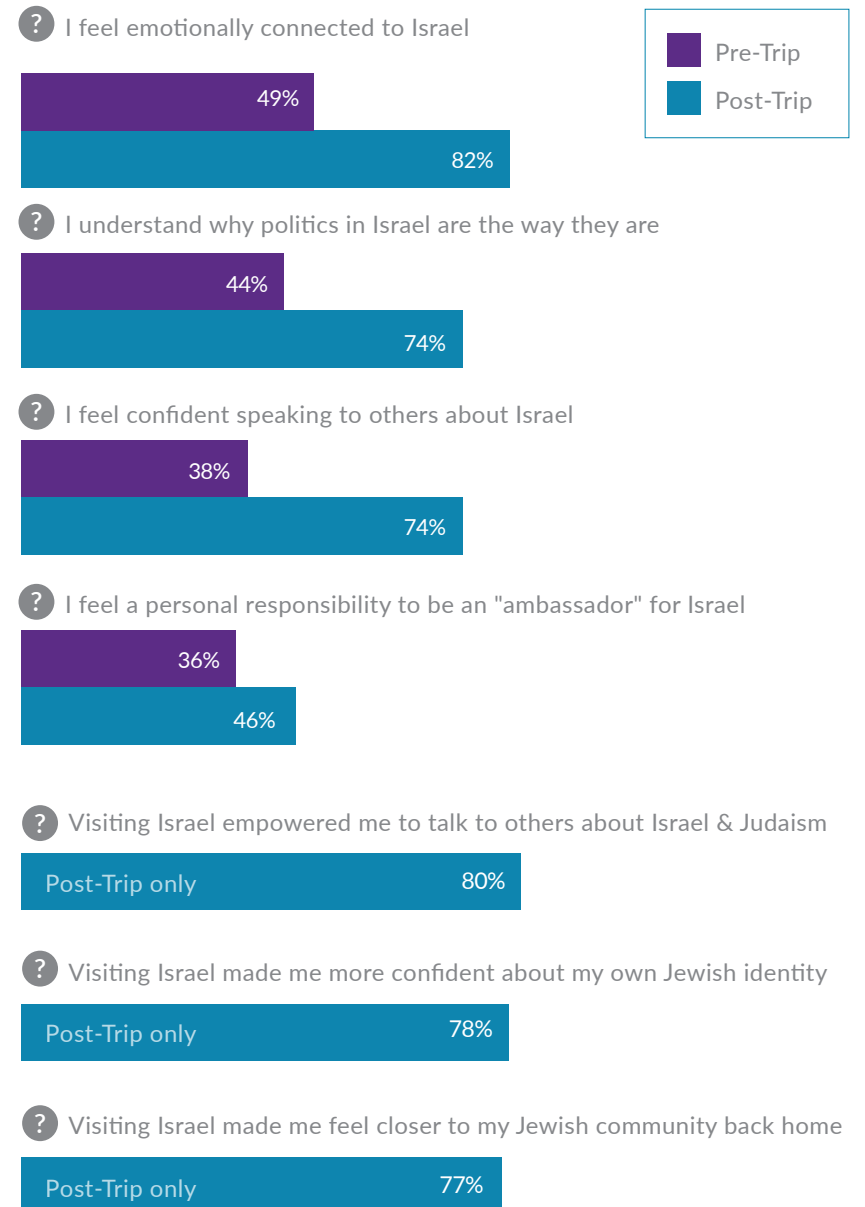
Both the pre-trip and post-trip surveys asked participants to indicate how strongly they agree or disagree with several statements regarding their relationship to Israel, and the post-trip survey included a few additional statements addressing the impact that visiting Israel may have had on participants' sense of Jewish identity and community.

These three-month post-trip findings are similar to those from the two-week post-trip satisfaction survey, in which the vast majority (85%) of respondents reported that their knowledge of contemporary Israel increased "a great deal" as a result of the trip, and two-thirds (67%) of respondents reported that their connection to Israel and Israelis increased "a great deal" as well.

**Notably, the percentage of those who feel confident speaking about Israel nearly doubled three months following the trip.**

Respondents' connection to their Jewish community back home and confidence in their own Jewish identity resonated more strongly with those from Jewish-Jewish couples, relative to those from interfaith couples.

## Israel-Related Outcomes (% who selected "agree" or "strongly agree")



# REFLECTIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

## An Immersive Experience and Powerful Launching Pad

The findings described in this report seem to point to the HMI Israel experience as a powerful launching pad with carefully crafted conditions aimed at nurturing the young couples who participate. In the early months following the trip, HMI participants expand their social network of similarly-minded couples with whom to share their Jewish journey, and in particular their evolving identification with the Jewish family. Additionally, the trip's controlled environment harnesses a particular open, exploratory, and non-judgmental spirit which, during the first few months, helps couples figure out together how they want to relate to Jewish life in ways that are meaningful for them. It is important to note that we do not yet know the long-term trajectory of the couples after they have embarked from the launching pad.

- ◆ Being that the findings described in this report reflect outcomes of HMI in its pilot stage, it will be valuable to explore how these outcomes may change as the initiative evolves over time, and more specifically, as HMI attracts a greater number of participants who are on the outskirts of Jewish life. This more-targeted selection process, comprised of a written application and interviews with the HMI leadership team, will continue to build off of the selection criteria previously constructed by Rosov Consulting to identify applicants who benefit HMI's logic model.
- ◆ More than half of the survey respondents who plan to have children have not yet made firm decisions about religious education for their future children; it will be important to see what choices these couples make and how they make them. For couples who already had children at the time of the trip, it may be necessary to refine and re-focus the questions in the current survey instruments to better ascertain how they experience Jewish life with their children before and after the trip. Current questions inquire about the types of Jewish activities parents engage in with their children; new questions ought to delve deeper into what it means for parents to "raise their children Jewishly".
- ◆ The study findings beg the question of how the trip contributes to the evolving "Jewish landscape" of cities that host multiple trips. Of the seven cities involved in the pre/post analysis in this report, only one—San Francisco—had data for more than one trip. As HMI expands both within these seven cities and to different cities, it will be important to understand the cultural and organizational milieu and to more deeply explore the ways in which the city culture affects the couples' attitudes and choices.
- ◆ For future study of the outcomes described in this report, we recommend including a comparison group of individuals who did not participate in HMI, in order to further probe the value-add of the HMI experience.

