

## **Press release: Designation of the Ramon Crater, Israel as an International Dark Sky Park**



The Israel Nature and Parks Authority has been informed that the Ramon Crater in the Negev desert of Israel has won the prestigious title "International Dark Sky Park" by the International Dark-Sky Association (IDA).

This international title recognizes those sites around the world where the night sky is maintained in its natural state, preserving the unique appearance of the starry night sky in all its glory, for ecological, astronomical and cultural reasons. So far, only 54 other nature reserves and parks have been awarded this title in 15 countries around the world, and Israel is the first recognized country in the Middle East region.

The Ramon Crater International Dark Sky Park places Israel on the global front in terms of environmental thinking on the subject of reducing light pollution, a matter that has only recently become of great importance to the environment, human beings and the global economy.

The Ramon Crater is part of the nature reserves of the Tzinim Cliff and the Negev Highlands, and it is the largest and most impressive crater of the three unique erosion craters in the Negev desert. The genesis-like landscapes of the Ramon Crater include geological formations that are unparalleled in the world, and tell a fascinating story about the geologic evolution of the Earth. The desert landscape in Makhtesh Ramon is breathtaking especially at nightfall. The crater is known to have an exceptional quality of star-studded sky and a natural undisturbed night environment that allows not only the development of a unique ecosystem but also a unique human night experience.

Shaul Goldstein, General Director, Israel Nature & Parks Authority: *"The Negev desert is one of the most beautiful areas in the world and in my view, the most beautiful of them. In order to preserve the special values that exist in the Negev, the Israel Nature and Parks Authority is carrying out many activities. Among the conservation priorities for the Negev's ecosystems and landscapes is the very important task of preserving the night, dark skies and the very special starlight of the Negev. The recognition will enable the preservation of the important values represented by the Ramon Crater in ecological, scientific, cultural and experiential terms for the general public. Moreover, this flag project is a model that presents innovative standards for the use of artificial lighting at night at the sites of the Israel Nature and Parks Authority, and will contribute to making all nature reserves in Israel places where these important values are preserved for future generations. Within the framework of the recognition, the Authority will promote cooperation with the Israeli public, visitors from around the world, nearby communities, the Israeli Armed Forces, the community of astronomers and especially the residents of the nearby town of Mitzpeh Ramon."*

J. Scott Feierabend, IDA Executive Director: *"The designation of the Ramon Crater as an International Dark Sky Park is a watershed moment in the history of the International Dark Sky Places Program. We have high hopes in the value of the new Dark Sky Park toward raising awareness of the threatened night sky elsewhere in Israel, as well as in the broader Middle East."*

The Israel Nature and Parks Authority won international recognition after three years of scrutiny and examination by the IDA. Thanks to the quality of the night sky found in the reserve at the strictest level required by the organization, a unique lighting program for the area in the campground, alongside a diverse educational program that will be popularized, the Ramon Crater Nature Reserve was found to be the most deserving of this prestigious international title. This recognition defines the western Ramon Crater as an undisturbed core area, and the eastern part of the crater as an area where the Authority allows visitors to enjoy a unique nighttime experience within campgrounds adapted to minimize light pollution, combined with educational content on astronomy and nature at night.

One of the most important elements of the proposal is the many letters of support received from organizations, including research institutions, local and regional communities and professional associations that are connected to the Ramon Crater and to the preservation of the night sky, who added their support for the announcement of the Ramon Crater.

The activities of the Israel Nature and Parks Authority in the Nature Reserves and National Parks have received international recognition for a unique, scientific, ethical and educational approach to nature conservation, which is the best model for protecting nature reserves and making them accessible to the general public.

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