

Discover Jewish Heritage Portugal Sep 08-17, 2024



Friends of AJL Portugal Tour Sep 08-17, 2024

DAY 1, Sunday Sep 08: USA / Lisbon

Depart your home city for the overnight flight to Lisbon, Portugal.

DAY 2, Monday Sep 09: Arrive Lisbon (Old City Tour)

Welcome to Lisbon, Portugal's Capital City. Lisbon's history revolves around its strategic geographical position at the mouth of the Tagus, the longest river in the Iberian Peninsula. Its spacious and sheltered natural harbor made the city historically an important seaport for trade between the Mediterranean Sea and northern Europe, serving as a strategic meeting-place for different peoples. Important Jewish communities settled in this region and contributed to the flourishing of its trade and culture.

Meeting services upon arrival and transfer to the Altis Grand Hotel, a century-old building linked to the country's contemporary history, recognized for the exceptional quality, boasting excellence of 5-star service, the perfect combination for an unforgettable stay in the center of Lisbon.



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This afternoon we visit Alfama, the oldest most charming section of Lisbon and home to the one of the most famous Jewish Quarters. We begin at Baixa, traditionally the financial and commercial center of the city, whose parallel streets run into the vast Praca do Comercio the former Terreiro do Pap, where Dom Manuel I (who reigned



from 1495 to 1521) built the royal palace. In this square, flanked by the river on one side is a beautiful statue of Dom Jose I on horseback. This part of the city was partially destroyed by a violent earthquake on 1 November 1755. From its ruins was to rise the area known as the Baixa Pombalina, so called because its reconstruction was carried out under the auspices of, the Prime Minister of Dom Jose I Marques de Pombal. By

ordering these new streets of sober monumentality to be laid out at right angles to one another in the form of a grid, he was to change the face of Lisbon.

At the time when the Jews were expelled from Portugal in 1496, there were two important Jewish quarters in this area: the Judiaria Grande, close to the present-day church of Sao Nicolau, in the street of the same name, and the Judiaria Pequena, created during the reign of Dom Dinis (1279-1325), in the place where the Bank of Portugal stands today, in a street parallel to the Praca do Comercio. To the east, in Rua da Alfandega, is the Igreja da Conceicao Velha, a church which some authors consider having been built on an old synagogue and is itself remarkable for its richly carved Manueline doorway. A little further ahead is the dos Bicos, one of the most interesting architectural curiosities remaining from the time of the Discoveries, with its original facade of diamond-shaped stones. There are yet other urban and monumental areas in the city that are linked to the history of the Jews in Portugal: The Praca Dom Pedro better known as Rossio, where the Court of the Inquisition was held in the Palacio dos Estaus, at the site where the Dona Maria national theatre now stands, built in the 19th century.

This evening a welcome dinner at the hotel.

Overnight and dinner at the Altis Grand Hotel (D)



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DAY 3, Tuesday Sep 10: Lisbon, Sintra, Cascais

This morning we visit Lisbon's main synagogue called Shaare Tikva, or Gates of Hope. It was built in the early 20th century as Jews, some but not all of the Portuguese descent, returned to Portugal from Gibraltar and North Africa. The main facade of the synagogue faces an inner courtyard since Portuguese law at the time forbade non-Catholic religious institutions from facing the street. Inaugurated in 1904, the Lisbon

Synagogue was the first synagogue to be built in Portugal since the late 15th century and was designed by one of the country's best-known architects, Miguel Ventura Terra. The synagogue served as the center of Jewish life in Lisbon and was a sanctuary for the thousands of Jewish refugees who passed



through Portugal during World War II. The marble Torah ark is inscribed with the Ten Commandments and encrusted with a gold leaf. It is also the home of a collection of documents dating from the 17th through the 20th centuries.

Next, we head towards Lisbon's environs. First stop medieval Sintra, a resort town in the foothills of Portugal's Sintra Mountains, boasting a forested terrain and studded with pastel-colored villas and palaces and former summer resort of Portugal's monarchy. Here we visit the Moorish- and Manueline-style Sintra National Palace distinguished by dramatic twin chimneys and elaborate timework. The hilltop 19th-century Pena National Palace is known for its design and views. Following lunch, we stop at Cabo da Roca. It is a wild and rugged headland marking mainland Europe's most westerly point. The windswept cliffs of Cabo de Roca were believed to be the edge of the world up until the up until the late 14th century and the desolate scenery adds to the allure of the location.

Our tour continues as we make our way to Cascais, Lisbon's coastline and popular holiday destination. Historically, Cascais was a fishing village, until King Luís I (1838 - 1889) choose it as his royal summer retreat. Trailing the Portuguese nobility were the



high society of Portugal, who in turn constructed lavish villas, ornate mansions, and exquisite gardens. Today, Cascais is an elegant fusion of decorative 19th-century architecture, and during the summer it is a bustling resort, with a buzzing holiday atmosphere. The Jewish Community first appeared and became organized in Cascais when Pedro I declared the town independent in 1364. Many residents were accused of Judaism, heresy and apostasy throughout the years. Cascais played host to important Jewish personalities not only within the backdrop of Inquisition or of groups of Sephardim Jews who had settled in Portugal, but more particularly during the 1930s and 1940s. Time permitting we stop at the Chabad House, home to a magnificent book collection, with several original prints dating back to medieval times.

This afternoon we are back in Lisbon. Time permitting, we will stop along the Tower of Belem for pictures and explanation. Dating back to the 16th century, it was built in Manueline style, featuring imposing stonework and detailed carvings, depicting numerous significant figures. Nowadays the fortified white tower is a symbol of



Portugal and an inseparable part of the landscape in Lisbon. As a matter of fact, it was even classified as UNESCO Cultural Heritage of Humanity!

Next, we drive to the Monument to the Discoveries.

Commemorating the Age of Discoveries, it was built to honor the 500th anniversary of the death of Prince Henry the Navigator, one of the greatest Portuguese discoverers. The 52 meter-tall (170 ft) monument depicts numerous explorers onboard a caravel, led by Prince Henry the Navigator.

Overnight and dinner at the Tivoli Avenida Liberdade Lisboa Hotel (B,D)



DAY 4, Wednesday Sep 11: Lisbon / Tomar / Castelo de Vide / Belmonte

This morning we depart Lisbon making our way towards Tomar, a small historic village 145 kilometers north of Lisbon, an interesting regional that was a strong hold for the Knights Templar religious order. The remains of their fortress and a monastery are still intact and open as a museum. Buried away in one of the narrow streets of the old Jewish quarter rests the oldest existing synagogue in Portugal dating back to 1438. After the forced conversions that followed in 1496; the synagogue was used as a prison, a church, a hayloft and finally a warehouse. In 1921 the building was declared a national monument and in 1939 the owner, Samuel Schwartz donated it to the state for use as the Abraham Zacuto Museum.

Abraham Zacuto was a famous Spanish astronomer, astrologer, mathematician, rabbi, and historian who served as Royal Astronomer in the 15th century to King John II of Portugal). The Museum displays numerous ancient tablets, gravestones, texts, and artifacts showing all aspects of Jewish life in ancient Portugal. A mikveh was discovered next door during excavations of the outbuilding in 1985.

Next, we visit Castelo de Vide is a picturesque village in the district of Portalegre, with an ancient and perennial past, with origins at the top of an elevation of Serra de São Mamede. Castelo de Vide is marked by the Restoration war, according to the walls and ramparts surrounding it; many



military personnel from other countries settled here throughout the first decade of the 19th century. The oldest built heritage in the village is essentially of Moorish and Christian origin. The sixteenth and seventeenth centuries are represented by several examples of civil and religious architecture. Easter festivities are the most characteristic events, by mixing it with Jewish rites. The gardens, huge, cultivated acres, town corners, house style, manors, fountains and the marks of the past are the traits that characterize Castelo de Vide.



On a hill side facing to East and adjoining to the old medieval part was the Jewish quarter from Castelo de Vide. Meander along narrow sidewalks which go from “Porta da Vila”, in the Castle, to “Fonte da Vila”, in everything equal from those who form the remaining medieval nucleus. The urban area for the Jewry from Castelo de Vide grew, fundamentally, from the streets “Fonte”, “Mercado”, “Arçário”, “Mestre Jorge”, “Judaiaria”, “Ruinha da Judaiaria”, the current “Rua dos Serralheiros” and “Rua Nova”. The extent of this space can be understood due to of the proximity to the Castilian border.

The Jews who lived within the walls of the little hilltop town of Castelo de Vide were engaged in the traditional activities of commerce, crafts, and sometimes medicine. The Spain edict from 1492, promulgated by the Catholic Kings, Fernando and Isabel, caused a massive displacement of Jewish families seeking to escape Spain and many if not most crossed in Portugal along the border in this region. The Jewish population grew after 1492 with the arrival of Jews from Spain. The former Judaria is fairly easy to identify around the market square (Praço de Comércio). Between the fourteenth and sixteenth centuries the characteristic little streets led to the small synagogue. A niche, used as a church altar in the seventeenth century, might be a vestige of the Aron



Kodesh. The municipality is currently conducting research into this movingly simple building.

Continuing to Belmont and the charming Pousada Convento Belmonte, the former convent of Nossa Senhora da Esperanca (Our Lady of Hope) is now the luxurious

Pousada Convento De Belmonte. The ecclesiastical origins of the convent have been maintained in this new, elegantly designed Hotel. An original amphitheater can be found in the surrounding woodland and the Pousada has an 18th-century chapel.

Overnight Pousada Convento Belmonte. (B,d)



DAY 5, Thursday Sep 12: Belmonte / Vilar Formoso Fronteira / Trancoso / Porto

This morning we tour Belmonte, situated in the remote and beautiful region of Portugal is rich in the history and traditions. A foundation stone dated 1297 was discovered of a synagogue showing there has been a Jewish community with a long history. It was 'discovered' in 1917 by Samuel Schwartz, a Galician mining engineer. Thinking they were the only remaining Jews they only believed Schwarz was a Jew when he recited the Shema Yisrael, and they recognized the name "Adonay".

They had maintained their Jewish identity for over four hundred years by marrying mainly among themselves and adhering to the belief in a single personal Deity who would

redeem his people at the end of days.

They practiced some Jewish observances, the Sabbath, and some holidays. They often lit candles on Friday night where they could not be seen from outside and



observed Passover and Yom Kippur a day or two before or after the Jewish calendar date to confuse the Inquisition.

Next, we drive to Vilar Formoso Fronteira da Paz (Frontier of Peace) to visit the memorial museum devoted to the role played by the Portuguese border town of Vilar Formoso in the reception of Jewish refugees and others from France and elsewhere who were escaping the Nazi persecution during World War II. The memorial honors the work of Sousa Mendes and the role of the people of Portugal that help save



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refugees takes the form of a museum built into two former warehouses at the Vilar Formoso railway station, which is of itself of considerable interest because of its azulejo tiles decorations (painted tin-glazed ceramic tile of a kind found in Spain and Portugal).

Continue towards the medieval town of Trancoso is very strongly marked by its Jewish past. Indeed, throughout the Middle Ages, the community of this city in northern Portugal has experienced an economic and social expansion almost unique in Europe.



Trancoso, thanks to its important fair, was a city of passage and exchange. We visit the Isaac Cardoso Interpretation Centre for Jewish Culture is a contemporary building situated in the former Jewish quarter of Trancoso. It pays tribute to the Jewish doctor born in Trancoso in the early 17th century,

who became Chief Physician of the Court of Madrid and sought refuge in Verona, Italy, due to religious persecution.

This center's mission is to preserve the Jewish legacy in the region, and is a place of study, reflection, and knowledge of the Hebrew presence in this town.

We continue to the Sheraton Porto Hotel & Spa boasting elegant design with plenty of creature comforts. The towering white building lets in lots of natural light through its glass facade, illuminating the pool and winter garden. We select this hotel for its excellent service and close proximity (walking distance) of the synagogue.

Overnight Sheraton Porto Hotel & Spa. (B,D)



DAY 6, Friday Sep 13: Porto visits to Mekor Haim Synagogue, the Museum and city tour

Welcome to Porto, a coastal city in northwest Portugal known for its stately bridges and port wine production. In the medieval Ribeira (riverside) district, narrow cobbled streets wind past merchants' houses and cafes. Porto is also Portugal's second city, home to one of the oldest Jewish communities in the country that was spared by the earthquake of 1755 that destroyed much of Lisbon but left Porto intact, including the

streets of the former Jewish quarter, narrow streets, and balconied houses, with street names such as "Rua Monte Judeus," "Escadinhas do Monte dos Judeus," and Pátio das Escadinhas do



Monte dos Judeus." The main synagogue stood on the Escadas da Vitória, a place still locally called "Escadas da Esnoga," meaning "stairway to the synagogue." There is a plaque that marks this site.

Porto had a vibrant Jewish community before the establishment of the Portuguese kingdom in 1143. Many Jewish merchants had their offices along the Porto riverfront. One of its three Jewish neighborhoods was called Monte dos Judeus (Jews' Hill). A synagogue was located on the Rua da Sinagoga (Synagogue Street), which is now Rua de Sant'Ana (Saint Ana Street). To live in the town, Jews needed the permission of the Bishop of Porto.

The contribution of Portuguese Jews to world history is enormous and its history is inseparable from the Jewish presence in Portugal between the 5th and the 15th centuries. In the northern region of the country are villages, cities, and small towns where important Jewish communities once thrived. It would be hard to trace back the arrival of the first Jews in Porto as it is to trace back the foundation of the city. Although Porto tolerated its Jewish community and even tried to protect it for many years, the



expulsion of the Jews from the country following the infamous Inquisition completely destroyed its Jewish Heritage.

This morning we visit the Kadoorie - Mekor Haim (Source of Life) Synagogue is the largest synagogue on the Iberian Peninsula and one of the largest in Europe. Built with donations from Jews from all over the world, it was significantly inaugurated in 1938, a



time when in Nazi Germany synagogues were being burned down and the Estado Novo was being implemented in Portugal. This architectural monument is one of the most extraordinary houses of Jewish worship in the world and is also the headquarters of the Comunidade Israelita do Porto (Israeli Community of Porto). The community was founded in 1923 by Captain Artur Barros Basto (1887-

1961), known for trying to rescue the descendants of Jews forced to convert to Christianity in the 15th century, who kept in secret the practice of precepts of the Jewish religion.

This Synagogue is a singular architectural monument, and one of the most extraordinary places of Jewish worship in the world. It is also the headquarters and "heart" of the Jewish Community of Oporto, which was founded in 1923 by Captain Barros Basto, who became known in the Jewish world for trying to rescue the descendants of the Jews who were forced to convert in the 15th century and who continued to practice, in secret, certain precepts of the Jewish religion.

We continue our visit across the street at the Holocaust Museum of Oporto. Created in 2021 by the Jewish Community of Oporto in partnership with B'nai B'rith International and Holocaust museums in Moscow, Hong Kong, the United States and Europe.

Board our bus and make our way to the city where we begin our city tour of Porto's historic center the Ribeira district, a UNESCO World Heritage-listed area. We walk along narrow, cobbled streets, across the 19th century Ponte de Dom Luis Bridge to visit Porto's other half - the port-soaked Vila Nova de Gaia. We will visit the first Jewish



neighborhood of the city, the lost medieval synagogue in Porto and all the forgotten places where the Jewish influence left its mark in town. Our guide will share with the history of the Jewish Heritage in Porto for you.

We stop for lunch (on our own) before returning to the hotel. Evening Shabbat Services (for those that wish to participate), followed by a Shabbat Dinner at the hotel.

Overnight Sheraton Porto Hotel & Spa. (B,D)

DAY 7, Saturday Sep 14: Porto / Shabbat

Today is free to relax and take in the Shabbat in Porto with the Jewish community. The synagogue is beautiful and was renovated recently by the community. There are typically a variety of people from all over the world at the Shabbat services organized by the Jewish Community.

This evening we visit a local restaurant including a short panoramic tour aboard our bus.

Overnight Sheraton Porto Hotel & Spa. (B,D)

DAY 8, Sunday Sep 15: Full Day Excursion to Douro Valley

One of Portugal's most endearing regions is the Douro River Valley, the winding, terraced region that produces the country's beloved port wine. The Douro is one of the major rivers of the Iberian Peninsula, flowing from its source near Duruelo de la Sierra in Soria Province across northern-central Spain and Portugal to its outlet at Porto. The Douro Wine Region is the oldest demarcated wine region in the world, dating from the 18th century. The amazing landscape of the vineyards in the slopes is unique and the reason why the landscape is considered to be UNESCO world heritage.



The estates which produce the grapes to make Port wine are known, as elsewhere in Portugal, as quintas. Our tour begins with a visit to a Port wine producer. There will be a personalized guided tour of the vineyards where the process of making the Port wine will be explained.

Next, we board a short scenic cruise of beauty and serenity enjoying the beauty of the hills and grape vines around you. we stop for lunch at typical Portuguese restaurant and will be given the choice of meat, fish, or vegetarian (lunch is on your own).

Afternoon return to Porto and our hotel for overnight and dinner.

Overnight Sheraton Porto Hotel & Spa. (B,D)

DAY 9, Monday Sep 16: Porto / Coimbra / Lisbon

This morning we make our way to Coimbra. Situated along the banks of the river Mondego, Coimbra is famous for its university, the oldest in Portugal and one of the



oldest in Europe. Coimbra is a city steeped in history. It was Portugal's medieval capital for more than a century. Its historic center dates to Moorish times and offers a unique atmosphere with its dark cobbled lanes and monumental cathedrals. On summer evenings, the city's old stone walls reverberate with the haunting metallic notes of the guitarra (Portuguese guitar) and

the full, deep voices of fado singers. Time permitting, we will visit the university's famous "Biblioteca Joanina" library, dating back to the 18th century, it was designated as one of the most beautiful libraries in the world.

Continue to Lisbon where we will enjoy our Farewell Dinner at a local restaurant.

Overnight and dinner at the Altis Grand Hotel (L,D)

DAY 10, Tuesday Sep 17: Departure

Transfer to the airport for the flight home. (B)



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