

ELYSE GLICKMAN
Jewish Exponent Feature

Some people believe there is no better way to usher in a new year than to travel. The argument is that a change of scenery is the perfect way to clean one's slate and improve one's outlook for the year ahead.

That said, why wait for 2011 when you can travel more easily during September, and when there are no black-out dates or artificially elevated fares for late-summer or holiday-season travel? Furthermore, traveling over the Jewish New Year means less stress and more oxygen.

Rosh Hashanah in a foreign land can be as much of a cultural reawakening as a spiritual one.

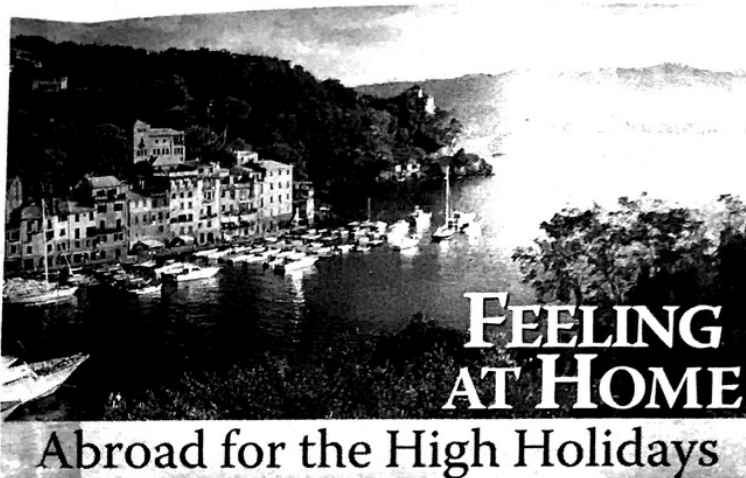
This is certainly the case with tours offered by the Chicago-based company Select Italy (selectitaly.com), which takes customized journeys to Italy to the next level with tours that delve deep into history, and the endurance of Jewish culture and heritage.

These detail-oriented private walking tours include "Medieval & Modern Jewish Rome," "Jewish Witnesses of Ancient Rome, Shades of Struggle: The Survival of Roman Jews, Ostia and the Old Synagogue," and full- and half-day tours of Jewish Venice.

"When I'm in Rome, I always pay a visit to the City Rose Garden," says Select Italy president and Rome native Andrea Sertoli, drawing attention to a lesser-known corner of Rome with Jewish history. "Like most corners in my hometown, it has its charm and fascinating history. Located above the Circo Massimo, on the side of the Aventino hill, the area has been, in fact, a Jewish cemetery for centuries" from 1645 until 1950.

"At the end of World War II," she continues, "the Jewish community of Rome and the city authorities agreed to transfer the cemetery into an area of the Verano" — Rome's largest cemetery — "offering the site to recreate there the original Rose Garden, lost during the war."

Sertoli notes that thanks to the gracious gesture of the city's Jewish community, a section of the garden is laid out in the form of a menorah, outlined by walking paths and flowerbeds.



FEELING AT HOME

Abroad for the High Holidays

The garden also boasts a fantastic collection of more than 1,100 varieties of skillfully grown and preserved roses. He also recommends visiting the "Giardino degli Aranci," known for its particularly romantic views in late summer and early fall, and its proximity to good bakeries and pizzerias.

Another wonderful place to toast and ring in the Jewish New Year is Portugal, which is also home to Douro Valley and Port wine country, the oldest demarcated wine region in the world.

Rosh Hashanah is a particularly auspicious time for a visit, as September and October are high season for wine harvests at estates (wineries) like Quinta da Pacheca, complete with grape-stomping and parties (www.quintadapacheca.com).

PURSuing PORTUGAL

Meanwhile, Portuguese specialist tour operator Episode-Travel (www.episode-travel.com), offers a feast of Jewish history with its "Portugal's Secret Jews Tour," in which travelers can experience the spectrum of Portuguese-Jewish history over six days, starting in Lisbon.

Points of interest include Estoril, where many Jewish refugees were saved during World War II; Évora, where several homes still bear signs of mezuzot; and the Alentejo plains and Castelo de Vide, where Jews and Christians coexisted peacefully in the 15th century.

The tour also covers Ammaia, where a Roman village has been excavated and the oldest Iberian Jewish vestiges are manifested in such artifacts as a nearly 2,000-year-old stone from a ring that bears symbols of Sukkot.

In Belmonte, the group celebrates Shabbat together and meets members of the Jewish community. Following Shabbat and a dinner is a full day of touring the area and its Jewish quarters, which stood outside the castle walls here.

The tour concludes in Tomar, where a 15th-century synagogue marks the epicenter of what was once one of the greatest Jewish communities in Europe of that time.

Points East — the journal of the Sino-Judaic Institute — reports there are hidden historic treasures waiting to be discovered in Kaifeng, China, where the descendants of a 1,000-year-old community are reviving their practice of Judaism.

Though centuries of change, wars and turmoil scattered the original Kaifeng Jewish community, several hundred residents are now coming forward as bona fide members of the House of Israel.

They hold firm to this belief, despite the facts that their features are indistinguishable from their neighbors (just like other Jews around the world), as well as the fact that they had no rabbi for the better part of two centuries, no synagogue or other organization.



The port of Portofino is cruise-ready for Rosh Hashanah; a Jewish man commemorates the holiday in Kauai.

If the idea of traveling overseas is seductive, but you prefer to travel lighter — without a passport — Hawaii is your go-to spot for a Rosh Hashanah flavored with the multicultural vibe our 50th state is famous for.

Honolulu (www.shaloha.com) and Maui (www.mauijews.org) have sizable Jewish communities and well-publicized High Holiday celebrations.

However, Kauai, Hawaii's lush "Garden Island," is home to a 20-year-old Jewish community, which hosts observances of major Jewish holidays, as well as monthly Shabbat observances for its 100-person membership, and visitors from the mainland and abroad (www.kauai-jewishcommunity.com).

And when it comes to sea-worthy experiences ... on Sept. 9, *Crystal Serenity* will be cruising the Mediterranean Sea between Santorini (Greece) and Sorrento (Italy), while *Crystal Symphony* will cruise the North Atlantic Ocean between Dublin (Ireland) and Reykjavik (Iceland).

For these two cruises (www.crystal-cruises.com), a rabbi will be on-board to make arrangements for many aspects of Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. Services will be conducted in Hebrew and English. ♦



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Though travelers often associate India with earthy, jewel tones found in the great historic sites, palaces and temples of Rajasthan and the "Golden Triangle" (headlined by the wondrous Taj Mahal), Calcutta — or Kolkata, as it is now officially known — is awash in green.

While much of the city's foliage is a direct result of British colonialism personified in sprawling parks and gardens, most of it is a product of West Bengal's natural tropical terrain.

In fact, when you leave the airport, the wide, palm tree-lined boulevards and pastel-hued modern buildings evoke Miami. As you drive deeper into the city and closer to downtown past narrower residential streets, New Orleans comes to mind, with all the lacy verandas, terraces and quaint cafes. Through it all, every spare space is filled with lush equatorial plant life.

However, there is also plenty to remind you that you are indeed in India — from Hindu temples to bustling bazaars and markets to stores and boutiques of all stripes showcasing vibrant local fashion, textiles and jewelry.

Even the popular Chinese restaurants smell and taste wonderfully different from our favorite moo-shu joint back home. It is indeed surprising that Kolkata is not as popular a tourist destination as one would think.

"Why Kolkata? While Mumbai (Bombay) and Delhi are fast-paced and you may have to deal with *touts* (aggressive street vendors), Kolkata is more laid-back, and offers lush green parks and colonial charm woven into the city fabric," muses my host Dolly Soanse as we stroll through the historic New Market shopping area's patchwork of vibrant meat, fish, produce and sundry stalls to reach Nahoum's Bakery, an old-school Jewish bakery that remains an essential food-shopping stop for the locals.

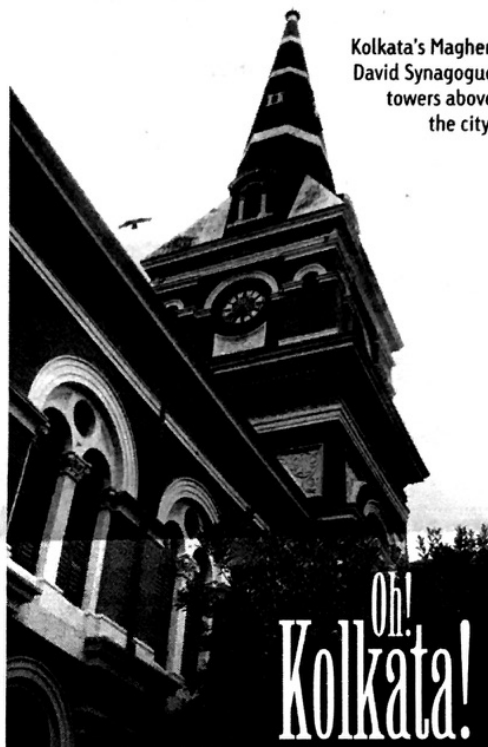
WE ARE THE WORLD

"We have a lot of culture and a very literate population — one of the highest literacy levels in India — as well as interesting diversity, including Gurkhas, native Bengalis, Nepalese, Tibetans and other groups from all over India, as well as Armenians and expats from Europe, North America and Australia," explains Dolly.

Beyond those attributes — and the many art galleries, museums and concerts in the cooler winter months — there are several reasons why Jewish travelers will find a visit to Kolkata satisfying.

Though only 30 elderly Jews remain from a population that once included Iraqi Jews and European Ashkenazi who settled in Kolkata before and after World War II, the Government of India Archaeological Survey

Kolkata's Maghen David Synagogue towers above the city.



Exotic, enticing — yet offering a truly relaxing, laid-back experience

and a small group of concerned citizens have taken up the cause of maintaining the city's five synagogues, including the Maghen David Synagogue and Beth-El Synagogue near Ezra Street, named for seminal Kolkata 19th-century real estate magnates David Joseph Ezra and Elia David Ezra.

David Nahoum is one of the aforementioned citizens. The grandson of bakery-founder Nahoum Israel Mordecai (who came to Kolkata from Iraq in 1870) literally keeps the fires of tradition burning at the namesake family bakery.

After more than 100 years, Nahoum's is still a thriving local business (complete with its own Facebook page), thanks to classic Jewish breads, cream rolls, baklava, macaroons, pastries and interesting Indian hybridizations, such as their cheese samosa.

After indulging in a few of these, Dolly and I make our way to the two neighboring synagogues. They are most impressive, with gem-toned Sephardic window treatments and Indian architectural flourishes framed by British Colonial structure.

Dolly, who visited two years ago, affirmed that the Indian government's support paid off, as the temples

were in the best shape she had seen. Though most of Kolkata's Jews moved to Israel and elsewhere, the temples evoke feelings of pride, awe and wistfulness.

In addition to Nahoum's, foodies should not miss Halderam's, a stand-alone food court devoted to India's great street foods, sweets and *chats* (savory snacks) like *puchkas* (hollow, fried *puri* pastry filled with a mixture of water, tamarind, onion, chili, masala spice and potato), popular all over India, but raised to high art in Kolkata.

The upscale Oh! Calcutta and Sigree restaurants (www.speciality.co.in) are distinguished by regional menus with specialized dishes (for West Bengal and India's far north, respectively) that will surprise Indian food fans and non-fans alike through subtle flavors and low-fat cooking preparations that contrast with heavy Punjab and South Indian fare widely available in the United States.

As one of India's great draws is its status as one of the world's most tolerant countries, a popular bus tour covering a variety of Hindu, Jain and other temples is recommended, but often sold out.

Victoria Memorial will also keep culture vultures busy for at least a morning with its fascinating art and history exhibits, reflecting deep connections with the British Empire and other European cultures that brought their influences into India via the busy trade routes of the 17th, 18th, 19th and early 20th centuries.

The Indian Museum — one of the oldest museums in Asia, founded back in 1914 — makes for an unusual academic experience, with a 4,000-year-old mummy, fossils, coins, stones, Gandhara art, meteors and botanica mounted in library-like settings, with displays and artifacts exhaustively labeled. Make it a point to allocate enough time for a sound visit.

While open markets are as busy in Kolkata as they are elsewhere in India, Kolkata is also home to several spotless enclosed malls, like South City and the Forum, blending known European and American brands with chic Indian fashion boutiques, such as Ritu Kumar and Biba.

There is also a large branch of FabIndia that will appeal to anybody who swears by the Philadelphia-based firm Urban Outfitters, and wonderful discovery boutiques.

The temptation to return is firmly embedded on my mental to-do list, but it's combined with a belief that Kolkata is also figuratively one of the hottest cities on Earth.

It's only a matter of time before the rest of the world catches on. ♦

For information on Kolkata and West Bengal, visit: www.incredibleindia.org, www.kolkatabhub.com and www.tourismindia.com. For a customized trip, which can cover Jewish highlights, see: www.makemytrip.com.

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Laguna Beach and its Orange County environs are no strangers to pop culture or a reputation that defines it as haven for all things WASP-y.

However, don't let that possibly keep you away from what could be a delightful California getaway by the sea, complete with some very pleasant surprises.

Through '60s teen movies, a generation got to know Orange County as surfer and beach-bunny central. In the 1980s, every fashionista knew Orange County to be the home of South Coast Plaza — one of America's largest and highest-end malls, complete with its own designer sweatshirt line.

In the last decade, through the lens of nighttime soap "The O.C." and the quasi-reality show "Laguna Beach" (a soap, for all intensive purposes), it was a

playground for young, beautiful surfers, stars, sun-worshippers and anybody else who could afford the beachfront's famously lavish lifestyle.

Among members of the pre-reality show generation, Orange County also had a reputation for being politically conservative and genteel-y gentle. Although historically there have been no established "Jewish" neighborhoods comparable to those in Los Angeles (and Philadelphia), today there are around 50 synagogues and institutions (B'nai B'rith, B'nai B'rith Women and ORT) serving locals and visitors.

In 1973, discussion about the need for a unifying Jewish center among members of the Women's Division of the Jewish Federation of Orange County hit full pitch. Soon after that, nine couples joined together to put up \$100 each to rent a storefront in Laguna Beach to create one of the area's pioneering Jewish community centers.



The Surf & Sand (far left), along with patrons of Chef Jeff Armstrong enjoying his masterful cuisine

O.C. Can You See?

Star-spangled
activities abound
in Laguna Beach



The area is also home to a well-attended Israel Expo every May, launched in 1972 as the Orange County Israel Cultural Fair. Though it did not create the frenzy generated by the Laguna Beach-based annual summertime performance art extravaganza, Pageant of the Masters (selling out months in advance), it drew very respectable crowds from around Southern California.

QUAINT, YET SOPHISTICATED

Demographers have also traced a sizable influx of Jewish South African immigrants to the area, and a high concentration of Jews can be found near Laguna Beach — in the

communities of Irvine, Newport Beach and Laguna Hills.

Though it all, Laguna Beach has remained a quaint, sophisticated enclave with its Surf & Sand Hotel, which has adorned a scenic oceanfront section of Laguna since the late 1940s and anchors the area's epicenter. Even with a nationally acclaimed chef (Jeff Armstrong) and its mod cream, blue and brown decor now in place, it still resonates as a major destination for those who want to experience the area's more sensual, sedate side.

While postcard views, sprawling public areas and window-walls still define Surf & Sand's character, there are wonderful improvements that have brought the stalwart hotel into the 21st

century. This includes a thorough revamping of the Aquaterra Spa.

Beyond the Surf & Sand, you will discover downtown Laguna has a similar upscale tropical funkiness to the "Main Streets" of Maui or Kauai — an eclectic mishmash of art galleries, jewelry stores, designer-clothing salons, yoga studios, and trendy cafes and bars.

Those who prefer long lingering walks along the beach may also look into local companies offering dolphin and whale safaris, or eco-tours covering the flora and fauna of the beach and nearby parks and botanical gardens.

Architecture and American history buffs will want to look into self-guided historic home tours offered by Laguna Beach Visitors Center.

Paradise away from the beach can be found free of charge at the Hortense Miller Garden, established in 1959. The garden, home to more than 1,500 plant species, a natural history and horticultural library and docent tours, covers 2.5 acres of an upper slope area of North Laguna.

If your idea of a "riot of color" includes interesting people-watching on many levels, and you plan your trip several months ahead, it is worthwhile to purchase advance tickets for the Pageant of the Masters spectacle, which takes place every summer. ♦

For more information about the Surf & Sand Resort, see: www.surfandsandresort.com. For Jewish activities in and around Laguna Beach, see: www.jewishorangecounty.org.



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Although Taiwan is a small island nation, you need at least a week to explore its riches, from the lush landscape of Taroko Gorge to fascinating indigenous cultures to the gastronomic safaris of night markets and street food to the architectural marvel Taipei 101, the tallest building in the world for a brief time.

Some travel writers introducing Taiwan to the West liken it to what mainland China might have been like had it developed as a democracy, which only tells part of the story.

The old "Made in Taiwan" image has been replaced by an upgraded one. That new image blends "Asian Tiger" commercial success and technology with historic Chinese legacies that thrive because the island escaped the grasp of Mainland China's Cultural Revolution.

This rich melting pot is also home for Don Shapiro (senior di-

rector and editor of *Taiwan Business TOPICS* at American Chamber of Commerce in Taipei, and Taiwan Jewish Community president) and Dr. Ephraim F. Einhorn (Taiwan's chief rabbi, and a certifiable Jack of all trades — with diplomatic credentials and a stack of business cards to prove it).

Though each man comes from a different generation and political outlook, the one thing they have in common is that they came to Taiwan for a (relatively) short visit and ended up building full, multifaceted lives over several decades.

Taiwan's Jewish community took root in the '50s, when U.S. troops were stationed there, and hit its peak mid-1970s, when foreign corporate executives began bringing their families over.

Shapiro, who came of age in Buffalo, N.Y., and graduated from Columbia University's School of Journalism, arrived in 1969 to cover the political scene for 10 months. Instead, he found Taiwan's real "story" to be its emer-



That Bind in Taiwan

gence as a major Asian powerhouse.

He also took an interest in Taipei's restaurant/food scene. He started out joining a Wednesday-night dining club, and years later, established a special annual edition of *TOPICS* dedicated to Taipei's rich bounty of Pan-Asian culinary adventures.

"When I arrived in Taipei, I did not actively seek out the Jewish community," says Shapiro. "It was only after my daughters were born that I realized I needed to have some identification with the Jewish community, and I wanted them to be exposed to customs and traditions, and learn about their Jewish identity."

He further explains that during Taiwan's manufacturing boom in the 1960s, the Jewish community grew to 50 families, which made up two small congregations. In Shapiro's group, laypeople conducted services in converted chapels, while a Philippines-based rabbi came in on major Jewish holidays.

He also recalls how his congregation transformed a rented house into a community center that became the epicenter of Jewish life.

The other home for the city's Jewish community was the President Hotel, which had a

room for services and a staff trained to prepare kosher meals.

When that hotel was torn down, facilities moved to the Landis Hotel, and more recently, the Sheraton Taipei (www.sheraton-taipei.com/english/index.htm), an elegant, centrally located luxury hotel. This is now officially the prime site for services and Jewish events.

The Sheraton Taipei's Suite 577 is Rabbi Einhorn's spiritual home, as well as a safe haven for the many prayerbooks and Jewish religious volumes he has rescued over the years.

Several more books in his prized collection, said to be the largest in Asia, are found in his business office across the street from the site of a former U.S. military installation that is now part of Taipei's ongoing urban "greening" efforts.

At 92, Einhorn fancies himself a modern, youthful individual (even well-versed in online social networking), as well as a real-life international man of mystery, whose his narrative could translate well into a Steven Spielberg or Robert Zemeckis film, where the lead character serendipitously ends up being a witness to history over several decades.

Although he won't discuss his survival of the Holocaust or

details about his colorful diplomatic missions on the record, he will muse about what keeps him young and busy enough to justify the dozen business cards he hands out to people who seek an audience with him.

"I reversed my biological clock," proclaims Einhorn. "If you were to see what I do on any one day and how I become involved intensely in many projects at once, it is that I often do my best work after midnight."

He talks about his diplomatic work, which placed him in every Mideast country at one point or another.

While keeping Taipei's Jewish community in swing, he also serves as its colorful uncle.

To experience greater Taipei, I refer back to Don Shapiro, whose knowledge about food is as encyclopedic as his coverage of Taiwan's strong influence on the world business stage.

Whether dining at Xiao Wei — one of his favorite go-to spots for authentic Szechwan fare — or innovative destinations like AoBa, one simply cannot go wrong with anything that he and

Shapiro have created.

When I ask Shapiro places he would take friends and family visiting Taiwan, he particularly likes the National Palace Museum, with its vibrant and exquisite collection of dynastic treasures.

While a fashionista cannot go wrong at SOGO department stores, tiny local boutique jewels abound, such as Hui Liu Tea-house, with its darling assortment of artisanal teas, kitchen accessories and handmade computer bags rendered by local artists. ♦

For travel information, go to: www.go2taiwan.net.

For flight information, see: www.evaair.com.tw.



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When we traveled as a family, my parents never chose destinations like Hawaii or the Caribbean. Their explanation? Tropical destinations with fancy resorts were not "real" places.

However, Mom and Dad would find Curaçao — located in the Caribbean's southern reaches — quite agreeable. While it has its share of resorts, beaches and diving schools, capital city Willemstad also sparkles with museums, interesting architecture (Dutch with splashes of Caribbean color), excellent food and shopping — and a landmark synagogue.

Congregation Mikve Israel-Emanuel, the oldest operational congregation in the Americas, is said to have taken root in 1651, when the directors of the Dutch West India Company made an appeal on behalf of Jan de Illan (or Joao d'Yllan), a successful Jewish businessman, to set up a trading post on the remote Caribbean island.

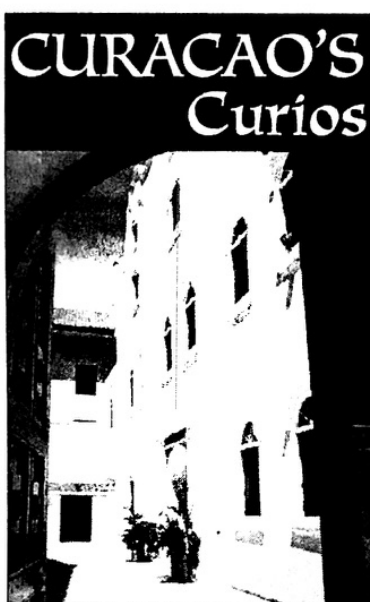
At the time, Amsterdam was a safe haven for educated, business-savvy Jews escaping the Spanish Inquisition, and de Illan was part of a community that was transforming the Netherlands into a trade powerhouse worldwide.

De Illan, who was born in Portugal where he had been denounced for "Judaism," was banished to the Netherlands by conducting commerce with relatives in Brazil. Seeing both the potential for commerce and community building, he had hoped to bring 50 families to build a small nation out of the island.

Though he only recruited 12 families, they steadfastly sailed to Curaçao in the summer of 1651 and put down roots for the first incarnation of Mikve Israel (translation: "The Hope of Israel"). However, new immigration from Holland, Portugal, France and even other Caribbean islands, expanded the community and the necessity for a larger temple.

Several rebuildings ensued to accommodate the influx between 1651 and 1732.

The inviting yellow building erected in 1732 housing the present day Mikve Israel-Emanuel (www.snoa.com) is now widely touted as one of the island's "must do" attractions. Located in Willemstad's bus-



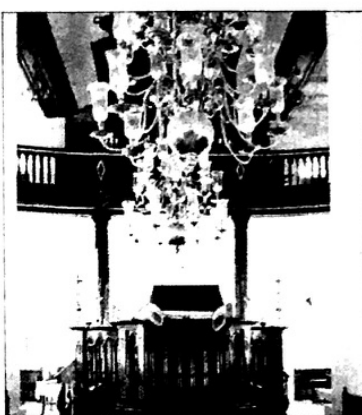
ting Punda area, the architecture reflects Caribbean adaptations to 18th-century European architecture.

The main section of the temple is held up by four pillars named for Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel and Ruth. The spare but elegant site is also outfitted with a bimah, banca, seats and chandeliers from the 18th and 19th centuries, and covers the floor for symbolic reasons: a reminder of the great Exodus: God's message to Abraham to spread seed; and a means to muffle footsteps of those who practiced their Jewish faith in secret during the Inquisition.

While experiencing a Reconstructionist Shabbat service, wedding or Bar Mitzvah in this setting is unforgettable, the adjacent Jewish Historical Museum (est. 1970) reinforces feelings of pride with well-labeled items from Jewish life on the island and priceless artifacts from Europe.

Several of the 18 scrolls brought by Spanish and Portuguese Jews date back to the Middle Ages (the oldest from about 1320) — their Willemstad home rescuing them from a fate that met other artifacts in Europe during World War II.

In contrast, the recently erected Shaarei Tzedek Synagogue (www.shaareitsedekcuracao.com), an hour's walk from Willemstad, was brought to fruition under the



of History

And that includes its history-making Congregation Mikve Israel-Emanuel

leadership of 34-year-old Rabbi Ariel Yeshurun and serves a mainly Orthodox/Ashkenazi community, though they often join forces with Mikve Israel for programs and religious services.

The shul and community center were 60 years in the making, starting with an influx of World War II survivors and continuing with the collaboration of local and expat congregation members sharing in the responsibility of preserving the island's unique Jewish legacy.

While Curaçao is now 80 percent Catholic, the island was 58 percent Jewish between 1730 and 1820. Indeed, Curaçao is a place of great meaning for Jews of both Ashkenazi and Sephardi backgrounds.

Off the synagogue path, there is much to see and do, along with fine accommodations. At first glance, the Kura Hulanda Hotel (www.kurahulanda.com) resembles a 1950s Technicolor film set. After a good walk around, however, it opens out into lush courtyards, a waterfall, sculptures and tucked-away galleries.

The Kura Hulanda Museum, anchoring the property, is an enormously moving look at the Caribbean slave trade and African culture. It reminds visitors that this multicultural society was borne out of a past that should never be forgotten —

even with the knowledge the Dutch had been tolerant and even protective toward Jews through history.

Cocktail enthusiasts should not miss Mansion Chobolobo Distillery (www.curaaliqueur.com), home of the original Blue Curaçao liqueur — which, by the way, also produces delectable rum raisin, coffee and chocolate spirits, and is in the process of becoming a certified kosher producer.

Curaçao's best — and arguably most authentic cuisine — is served up daily at Marshe Bieuw (a tented, open-air line of lunch counters) and Jaanchie's, in the island's rustic northwest, featuring a savory buffet of people-watching and local color.

Other dining options range from arty-trendy hotspots like Mundo Bizarro and Moon to waterfront surf-and-turf grills to far-above-average hotel dining, such as the Floris Suites Hotel, an uber-trendy boutique property across the road from the Marriott.

On the southeastern side of the island, the newly opened Hyatt Regency Curaçao (curacao.hyatt.com) is wowing guests with two solid, full-service themed restaurants (Medi and Shor) and an ingeniously designed spa that offers guests individual self-contained suites.

History, shopping and dining notwithstanding, the allure of the great outdoors remains Curaçao's top draw. Christoffelpark (www.christoffelpark.org), the largest national park, is rich in hiking trails, local flora, fauna and wildlife. More adventurous types will want to scope out rustic spots, such as the "Blue Room" sea cave and Santa Cruz beach, as well as numerous scuba-diving concessions that circle the island like a pearl choker.

The mysteries of the deep are now open to non-swimmers, not only thanks to the popular family attraction SeaQuarium (a compact, kitsch-free variation of Sea-World), but also Substation Curaçao (www.substation-curaçao.com).

While many Caribbean islands can qualify as paradise, what makes Curaçao special is that it can support resorts, a diverse citizenry and a special regard for the Jewish people who shaped its life and times. ♦

For more information, visit: www.curacao.com or www.ctb.an.



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In the late 1990s, when dot-com youth culture was in full swing and I was dating a nice Jewish programmer from nearby Silicon Valley, there were frequent jaunts to the Haight and Fillmore West to drink in a taste of American pop culture and a groovy show that only San Francisco could offer.

We spent many a Chanukah at Union Square, where Lollapalooza founder/rocker/impresario Perry Farrell staged a day of performances and the local motorcycle-riding Chabad Rabbi Yosef Langer lit the giant menorah with great fanfare.

I have always liked the fact that every trip I make up there is radically different from the last. While my 2006 visit, for example, was focused on antiquing and visiting historical tourist draws, such as the Buena Vista (the presumed birthplace of Irish coffee), the Marina District and the De Young, my friends and I this year voted to go where the proverbial day took us.

This included jaunts to several innovative bars, where American cocktail culture trends take shape and Banana Republic's flagship store runs its annual post-holiday mega-sale.

This go-round, we upgraded our lodgings to the Kimpton Palomar Hotel (www.hotelpalomar-sf.com) in the literal heart of the city, just steps from BART subway trains that hit every neighborhood worth visiting.

The Palomar has everything you want in a San Francisco boutique hotel — comfy rooms, workout room, razor-sharp staff up on the latest hot spots, proximity to Union Square, solid department store shopping with top U.S. names (Nordstrom, Saks, Neiman-Marcus, Macy's) and a nearby street vendor peddling fresh, crispy churros that mate beautifully with a cup of coffee from the hotel or the nearby branch of Coffee Bean & Tea Leaf.

While this hotel does have a hint of old-school San Francisco elegance in its vibe, Hotel Monaco (www.monaco-sf.com), its nearby sister property skirting Maiden Lane and Chinatown, translates 1920s style and 1960s color into 21st-century luxury.



If You're Going to San Francisco ...



Above, the facade and interior of the Contemporary Jewish Museum, a must-see attraction by the bay in San Francisco, with the Yerba Buena Center nearby.

Kimpton is also now the proud parent of the famous Sir Francis Drake Hotel, which has been updated to bridge its historic past with present-day luxury and amenities.

Speaking of bridging the past with the present, the Palomar is also a two-block trek to the Contemporary Jewish Museum (thecjm.org), which neighbors the Yerba Buena Center for the Arts and the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art.

All the Jewish museum's exhibits are organized in an interactive manner. The permanent "Being Jewish: A Bay Area Portrait" poignantly illustrates how Jewish life took shape in San Francisco and continues to evolve.

The current temporary exhibits — around until the middle or end of March — are simply wonderful. "As It Is Written: Project 304, 805" captures *soferet* ("scribe") Julie Seltzer in the act of writing out scripture for a new Torah slated to travel around the world to congregations in need.

While the visuals reflect on ages-old traditions and practices using mixed media and synagogue artifacts from around the globe, they are also emblematic about how the Jewish world endlessly adapts to the times, including the fact that women have only recently been allowed to serve in the capacity of Torah scribes.

"Black Sabbath," set up like a mini-

malist jazz club, represents a lively journey through 20th-century pop music, illustrating the powerful connections between the African-American and Jewish culture that shaped it.

And "Curious George: The Art of Margaret and H.A. Rey" is perhaps the biggest surprise, not only spelling out the literary couple's Jewish roots, but also their dramatic escape from Nazi-occupied Europe. The Reys' experiences with anti-Semitism and attenuated journey from Paris to New York partially by bicycle and with a stopover in Rio ended up providing an enduring foundation for the beloved series of children's stories.

Where to eat? We visited Lucky Creation, a go-to vegetarian lunch place in Chinatown, especially as it is top ranked by local papers as the best vegetarian restaurant in the city. We were wowed by everything we ordered, from a faux-chicken-curry chow mein to a heaping plate of stellar "kosher" pork and beef (made from gluten and soy) that were spot-on in flavor.


However, by being brave enough to approach locals with leftovers on our first night, we were referred to Z & Y Szechwan, one of the area's newer spice hound havens. The four-alarm hot pots and the venue's star dish, "Chicken With Explosive Chili," exceeded expectations.




Things continue moving forward. The

way to foodie culture, and people have traded in their Grateful Dead threads and ultra-casual Polartec sweats for fashionable, tailored outfits and high-end designer labels. (Nob Hill is always a deluxe treat and visit.)

San Francisco's overall vibe is very youth-driven, though that continues to change over time. Thankfully, when it comes to keeping a visitor's experience fresh, San Francisco stays the same in the ways that matter — from its quirky-chic architecture to Chinatown, the green parks and the majestic views of the Pacific Ocean, and even the touristy trappings near Fisherman's Wharf and charming neighborhoods where bohemian harmoniously flirts with a city-slicker mindset. ♦

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ELYSE GLICKMAN
Jewish Exponent Feature

Gas 'n' Go?

Memorial Day — and upcoming summer — blues over rising gasoline prices? Those increases may curb some road trips, but they can also fuel your creativity, resourcefulness and appreciation of great escapes close to home.

Indeed, some travelers believe that the journey can be just as satisfying as the destination. This is particularly true with road trips, as the stretches of highway open out to the many fascinating flavors of Americana.

The skyrocketing pump prices, however, have unfortunately brought a bitter aftertaste to the road trip's normally delightful buffet of delights. While such trips were traditionally seen as cost-effective, spontaneous ways to see the country, fuel prices have shifted that paradigm to the point where in some cases, airfares (though also rising in price, along with baggage fees and rumors of coin-op toilets) can end up costing about the same.

John Townsend, a spokesperson for AAA Mid-Atlantic, meanwhile, warns that even with rumblings of some price stability taking place, the crude oil market's general volatility may still end up pushing prices higher with Memorial Day weekend here.

Reinforcing the AAA's assessment is a March 2011 survey of 40,000 travelers from **BedandBreakfast.com**. More than 43 percent of respondents admitted that increasing gas prices would affect their plans for travel this summer.

Meanwhile, the 2011 National Online Consumer Behavior study by CityGrid Media and Harris Interactive revealed that 87 percent of women ages 18-34 said gas prices and distance influence their decision — concerns shared by 67 percent of men in the same age range.

B&B's AND BIKING

Enter the B&B industry, buoyed by B&Bs Kick Gas!, a campaign spearheaded by the Professional Association of Innkeepers International. In what is allegedly the largest collective effort to help travelers concerned with high gas prices, this program assures travelers can get the help they need where they need it most — at the pump.

Local drivers should also check out **www.pennsylvaniagasprices.com**, which at a glance enables road-trippers to plan where they can stop for gas in different parts of the state in advance of their trip or during the journey if they've got a smartphone in hand.

(On the **www.BetterwaytoStay.com** website, more than 300 inns and B&Bs throughout the United States and Canada, including a number in the Philly area, have posted offers for free gas, gas credits and rewards for carpooling and eco-driving. There are also plenty of offers for free gas cards and discounts on lodging.)

Solomon Singer, who tracks trends and information for **BnBfinder.com**, cites a PAII study that independently owned bed-and-breakfast lodging and inns did well even with last summer's spike in gas prices.

Why? Because people stayed closer to home, and those

Saving money at the pump is a road worth taking with these choices

properties provided that much needed change of scenery, claims Singer, who expects history to repeat itself this summer.

He offers tips on such spots, which can be found on his firm's website.

Such as? Just hours from Philadelphia, the North Fork of Long Island, a 30-mile peninsula jutting into the Atlantic Ocean, is bursting with activity that will please all kinds of travelers, advises Singer. More importantly, once you get there, the vacation is virtually gas-free. The beaches, restaurants, shopping, art galleries and outdoor activities like biking and hiking are all within walking distance.

On Long Island, Arbor View House Bed & Breakfast and Spa and Aunt Dot's Victorian Bed and Breakfast are both close to beaches, cycling, kayaking and all of the charm of these seaside communities.

Further north, Singer recommends the Seagull Inn Bed and Breakfast, of Marblehead, Mass., 20 miles from Boston and near Chandler Hovey Park, for its views at Castle Rock and acres of waterfront at Devereux Beach.

In Kennebunkport, Maine, he likes the Maine Stay Inn, a member of the National Register of Historic Places.

Gas-conscious vacationers should check with innkeepers about biking options, continues Singer. Some inns keep bicycles on hand for guest use, while others partner with local bike-rental services.

Using a bike to get around during your getaway can mean you use next to no gas at all. And there is nothing that says summer like biking up and down the coast.

Closer to home? If you want to explore wondrous natural settings and small-town charm that are truly in Philadelphia's backyard, look no further than the Pocono Mountains Visitors Bureau (**www.800poconos.com**) to offer up some inspiration on destinations of luxury, value and unusual experiences with minimal travel costs.

One of those finds is Woodloch Inn, which Rory O'Fee, marketing manager for the nearly 100-year-old resort, describes as a cruise ship on land. (The web site, **www.woodloch.com**, features themed discounted room and



Inn the know: By the time you get to Woodloch (left) ... hop aboard the Carousel in Long Island, just a pony ride away from Arbor View House Bed & Breakfast and Spa.



package specials.)

The Lodge at Woodloch appeals to a young, trendy crowd, while the Woodloch Springs golf resort appeals to sophisticated couples.

The original resort is

steeped in tradition, but keeps families happy with such newer bells and whistles as a 28-foot rock climbing wall, Broadway-style shows (this year, focused on a British royalty theme), go-karts, rifle range and batting cages alongside nature hikes and waterfront beach activities.

Beyond the cost of transportation, be it the pump price or the plane ticket, travelers will be looking for other ways to save money to offset the cost of coming and going.

Joel Fan, president/founder of **LuckyChic.com**, recommends the following tips:

- **Smartphone apps can save you money, whether it be GasBuddy to help you find the cheapest gas near you or ATMHunter, which allows you to avoid fees when withdrawing money.**

- **Brown-bag it:** Make your own lunches or breakfasts when traveling. It's cheaper and healthier to munch on fruit, sandwiches and snacks than eating every meal at a restaurant.

- **Drive consistently and carefully:** Avoid braking hard or accelerating quickly; you waste gas each time you accelerate just to brake a few seconds later.

- **Fill 'em up:** Check that your tires are inflated according to the manufacturer's recommended pressure. By maintaining well-inflated tires, you ensure your car is getting better mileage than on under-inflated ones.

- **Invest in a GPS:** Using a GPS cuts down on the chances of getting lost while driving to your destination, which can waste time and gas.

- **Quality goes a long way:** Make sure to have your car or motorcycle inspected before you take a road trip.

- **Take advantage of deals:** If you are a member of organizations that offer discounts, look into where you could be saving money. AAA offers its members a variety of savings, which include discounts to attractions and local restaurants.

- **Get maximum bang for your buck:** Don't forget to take pictures! You'll have the photos to remember your vacation forever. ♦

ELYSE GLICKMAN
Jewish Exponent Feature

Israeli food culture is on the rise, as are wine tours, agri-tours and other forms of foodie-tainment along the highways and back roads leading from Jerusalem and Tel Aviv to the Golan Heights.

While artisanal cheesemakers in Israel may not have the celebrity marquee status of Haim Cohen, Moshe Segev and other chefs reshaping international notions about Israeli cuisine, they are providing a much-welcome public service.

Many of the nation's highest-

profile restaurants (Herbert Samuel and Carmella in Tel Aviv, for example), as well as larger wineries with tasting rooms, make the cheeses available and gorgeously presentable on their menus.

The open-air markets of Tel Aviv, Jerusalem and the Golan Heights just would not be the same without cheese vendors who provide the spontaneous joy of memorable things to spread on warm, fresh-baked bread from neighboring carts and bakeries.

However, unlike the wineries and the restaurants' sophisticated settings, the world of Israeli cheesemaking is an all-ages affair. In fact, between the deft storytelling talents of the cheesemakers — like Shai Seltzer's Jerusalem mountain compound and Ein Camonim's Avrutski family — and the process of making cheese, the experience can be quite kid friendly, especially among households bent on getting their children off of peanut butter and jelly and into more grown-up fare.

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The big cheese: Shai Seltzer offers a taste.



The (Israeli) Cheese Factory

Ein Camonim, located in the Upper Galilee (Acre-Safed Highway 85, between Hanania Intersection & Nahal Amud) and founded 20 years ago by Amiram Avrutski, is one of Israel's first boutique cheesemakers, as well as a well-oiled machine, in terms of how it ethically raises prized breeds of goats.

SMELLS LIKE A WINNER

While the barns and fields have a bit of a strong aroma, you will be disarmed by his daughter's affectionate tour of the facilities and the goats' wide-eyed sense of wonder and friendly demeanor.

Any discomfort with strong smells will also be rewarded when you return to the shop and restaurant area for an epic tasting that runs about \$25 and includes fresh-baked rolls and their made-on-site olive oil.

Their very happy goats produce a sweet, rich milk that flows, with the Avrutskis' skilled hands, into 30 kinds of cheeses made on the premises, including French-style cheeses. They also offer ice cream made on sight with local fruits that even the fussiest children of all ages will enjoy.

For those who want to take their passion for cheese further and are enjoying a longer stay in Israel, Ein Camonim offers cheese workshops as well.

Though one would not guess it at first, thanks to his rugged Mt. Eitan enclave near the Jerusalem-area village of Sattaf and his bearded, casual appearance, Seltzer is one of Israel's leading cheese experts (www.goat-cheese.co.il), a member of the Italian Academy of Cheese and a cheesemaker/farmer since 1974.

Actually, it's more an artisanal art in this land of milk and honey — and cream

Any first impressions, however, will fall away after an afternoon with him. He is both lively and methodical when discussing how he makes his cheeses, his breeding of the ideal goat for Israel's climate and perfecting the art of affinage (maturing and aging cheese).

"We have no advertising for our farm, Saturday is the only day we are open to the general public, and our dairy is kosher," says Seltzer as he cuts up his perfect circles and passes slivers out to his rapt group.

"It is interesting that so many locals preparing for Shabbat will come in on Fridays to both buy and eat cheese. Purity is also important to what we feed the goats, which is why we are not certified organic, as the different things our goats eat will result in what makes the flavors of our different cheeses special.

"Each cheese I am serving represents different plants eaten by different goats," he notes. "It is also fascinating to taste how what plants goats eat in different times of the year affect output."

Seltzer goes on to explain that his goats are particularly drawn to medicinal plants and herbs, which have in turn generated interest from various universities and medical institutions, such as the Beit Egon Institute for the plants and resulting cheeses' applications to digestive issues, fertility and diabetes.

"Take a bit of the Bulgarian

cheese under your tongue and let it melt," he says with encouragement as we bite into morsels similar to feta. It goes down almost like a salty white chocolate.

We drink his formulation of yogurt between bites to clean the palate. Unlike other plain yogurts, his variation has the light sweetness and consistency of crème fraîche.

Other unusual creations we sample are cheese with a chalk rind (which he says is digestive and absorbs "bad" bacteria in the stomach), cheese with a grape leaf rind cover, and his versions of Camembert, Manchego and Gouda.

"It is art I take so seriously that I travel the world to find bacteria to perfect the colors in my spectrum."

A visit to the HaMeiri Cheese shop in Safed, in contrast, is more of an opportunity to learn about the history the biblical town's food culture than the actual process of cheesemaking. Furthermore, the cheese it is famous for is rendered from sheep's milk.

"My great-great grandfather came here in 1840, in the years after the tragic earthquake and subsequent Arab attacks almost destroyed the Jewish community in this area," current owner Meir HaMeiri details.

A visitor is captivated and surrounded by hundreds of photos telling the story of the city's history through family eyes. Though HaMeiri was at one time concerned that the nearly 200-year-old legacy would die with him, his son, Yaniv, recently returned from Tel Aviv to enter the family business, keeping the dream and the landmark dairy alive. ♦

ELYSE GLICKMAN
Jewish Exponent Feature

Though pop culture references Bangkok's more risqué side (the '80s song "One Night in Bangkok," and the recent film "Hangover 2," among them), a trip to Thailand's capital shows facets that are as multi-dimensional and culturally interesting as New York, Tel Aviv or Hong Kong.

Its appeal is also reflected in the fact that in 2009, it was ranked the second most expensive city in Southeast Asia, behind Singapore — thanks to the high-tech and business booms of

the 1980s and 1990s.

However, most savvy travelers will be delighted to know there are plenty of bargain-priced delights to be found (i.e., cross-town cab fares as inexpensive as bus fares in most U.S. cities; the plethora of night markets and bazaars; a U.S. dollar-friendly exchange rate) that counterbalance its most indulgence-worthy offerings and tourist traps.

It also has a small-but-bright Jewish presence. To get to Beth Elisheva, you wind your way through an expat-friendly neighborhood anchored with the upscale Emporium Shopping Complex, a verdant city park and several small residential streets. However, a Shabbat at this center is worth the journey — and not only because of the interesting sights, sounds and smells encountered along the way.

Though Rabbi Yosef Kantor and wife Nechama (a native of Los Angeles) conduct Friday-night services in a traditional Chabad setting, his sermons are colorful, accessible (as English-language prayers and anecdotes

are inventively woven in) and welcoming, as are the regulars and visiting expats of the congregation.

Once I find the area efficiently via the city's SkyTrain, I trek through the park and down the lively pub, boutique and street-food lined avenue. Eli Savransky, who greets and leads

me to the nearest air conditioning vent, engages me in conversation about how he came to Bangkok a decade ago from Tel Aviv to work in "diamonds, semiprecious stones and jewelry."

"What you'll like about our congregation is that everybody has a story, and Rabbi Kantor won't let you leave until you've shared yours and had an opportunity to hear everybody else's," says Savransky. "At dinner, you will witness a miracle, with all these strangers becoming family."

During the service, Kantor introduces herself to me, and then to other new "visiting" members, including Sandy Perlstein, who grew up in Philadelphia and resides in Washington, D.C., with her husband.

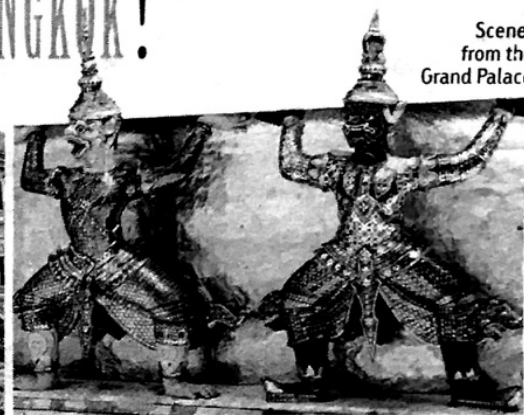
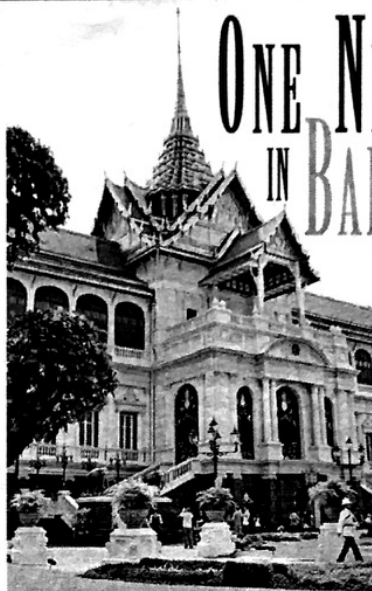
CONVERSATION SPANS THE GLOBE

Shabbat dinner, catered by the Koshers Place, includes several rich Middle Eastern sides, a Thai fish dish, a beef dish that reminds me of my maternal grandmother's "Chop Suey," and traditional roasted chicken. It sets the stage for a dialogue about the Jewish Bangkok experience that is at once local and international, intimate and global.

Kantor, prepping each diner to tell his or her story about how he/she ended up in Bangkok, reminds us that we all have a Jewish soul, regardless of how we worship.

I venture across town to the Shangri-La Hotel, via a long but inexpensive cab ride, with a warm and fuzzy glow coming from within. I wake up the next morning,

You'll need more to traverse this exotic and fascinating Asian city



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ELYSE GLICKMAN
Jewish Exponent Feature

If there is any truism that applies to the Golan Heights and Galilee, it is, "Don't judge a book by its cover."

The Galilee has a reputation as a tourism-and-pilgrimage hub, with attractions that include Tiberius, Capernaum and the Mount of Beatitudes.

The Golan Heights, regrettably, often gets press for political turmoil and border skirmishes. Even with preconceptions established by location and history, however, Northern Israel is a rich, verdant and radiant region with much to offer everybody, including foodies, art and architecture buffs, and outdoorsy types.

Though the idyllic Pausa (www.pausa-inn.co.il; **translatable into English**) recently counted National Public Radio and a variety of top international news services as guests during the Lebanon conflict five years ago (with one reporter deftly commenting that it was the best place to stay in wartime), it is best known locally as a bastion of sanity, creativity and intellectual conversation that start at owners Avigdor and Einat Rothem's dinner table.

It also should not come as a surprise that Avigdor is the local chairman of the international Slow Food movement, especially given that most of what goes on at their table comes from the compact (one acre) but diverse and fertile gardens surrounding the property.

Quality meats and wines are sourced from local providers. To give the guests an idea of the home-grown pleasures that await them, the Rothems present them on arrival with a glass of their lemoncello, made from lemons grown on their property.

"Though we, of course, take guests' dietary concerns into consideration, every day our menu is fixed and prepared," explains Avigdor. "We like to eat things that are sourced as close to our property as possible, supporting local businesses, and creating a lower carbon footprint."

"People who come here come to enjoy watching classic movies on our lawn, taking cooking and art workshops and stimulating, grown-up conversations over a

carefully prepared dinner."

Even though Pausa is a short drive from many of the Golan's top wineries, prime hiking and the Mt. Hermon Ski Resort, one of the biggest treats with a Pausa stay is Avigdor taking you on a tour of the grounds after a lavish and exquisitely arrayed breakfast.

When you visit Ilan Roberg's signature restaurant (www.roberg.co.il; offered in Hebrew only) in the Jewish village of Livnim, you are — literally — part of the family.

Besides the fact that this restaurant will have you completely craving Roberg's take on kosher food, there is a good chance you will be able to recreate the experience at home with your own family.

At Roberg's chef's table, you can watch Ilan and his adult children demonstrate the right way to prepare a traditional Israeli herb salad and then update it with sushi-grade tuna and Asian seasoning.

Although there are glorious views of the Sea of Galilee and nearby mountain ranges, you may be just as captivated by flat screen TVs that show the different courses of your meal coming together, step by step.

Though Ilan Roberg trained Israeli army chefs to feed the troops well, and had stints at upscale hotels like the Sheraton Tiberius, he views his restaurant's concept not as gourmet food, but well-prepared kosher food in a family setting.

While Muscat, the acclaimed restaurant of Mizpe Hayamim (www.mizpe-hayamim.com/Muscat_Restaurant) in Rosh Pina, is chef-driven, the rest of the resort definitely has a hands-on approach for its guests as well as its day-to-day maintenance.

Founded in 1923, it is a forerunner to the modern spa resort experience. As it exists today, the resort balances the timeless (1,000 meters of organic hotel garden and fields with livestock, and views of Mt. Hermon and Galilee) with the new (age).

Guests will also be enchanted by personalities like resident artist Sara Shoval, a 65-year-old former dancer who lives her passion through the art work, art class instruction, garden walks and body work — spa — services she provides for hotel guests.

Why the Galilee and Golan Heights — yes, Golan Heights — offer foodies a table of contents

Northern Exposure

Ilan Roberg and the slice-of-life style practiced at his well-regarded gourmet restaurant in Livnim

"If you can dance, you can sculpt. If you can sculpt, you can draw, and if you can draw you can write — and move on to new things though your life," she says.

Speaking of moving on, ambitious travelers will discover not all treasures and great discoveries are buried within, and the an-

cient city of Tzfat, the highest community in Israel, reflects this.

The compact city is packed with charming narrow streets, historic landmarks, synagogues, jewelry salons and galleries, such as the Gallery of Mystical Art and Safed Candles.

The 360-degree views from

the nearby Villa Galilee Boutique Hotel (english.villa-galilee.com) are epic. However, pair them with Victorian manor-house appointments, a fresh-from-the-farm breakfast spread, vibrant floral landscaping and a nicely situated pool and what you end up with is a literal piece of heaven. ♦

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Photos by Elyse Glickman

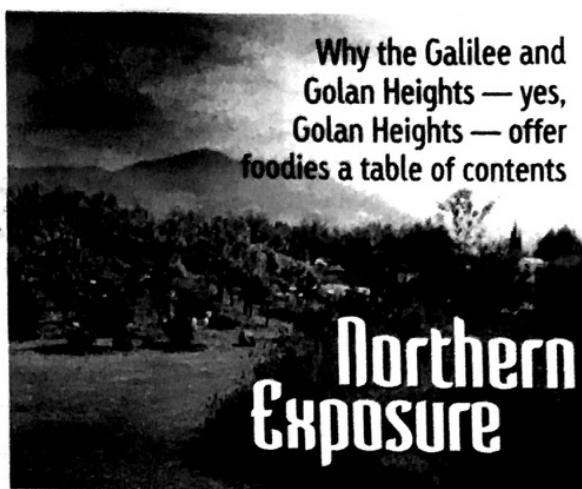


Photo by Paul Kotnik/Pennsylvania Ballet Co.

WHAT'S THE POINTE?



Everything is beautiful at the ballet
— and may be useful as everyday exercise

ELYSE GLICKMAN
Jewish Exponent Feature

Even if Mother Nature and her cousin Gene (i.e., genetics) have made other plans for our bodies, it is no surprise that so many of us covet a dancer's form.

Besides the fact that it does look great in fashionable clothing, what else is not to love — ballet offers sharper balance, graceful movements, lean muscle, speed and endurance.

Though most of us are not built to be dancers, and many of us may not be into the social element of dancing, there is no denying you can see classical ballet's influence in existing exercise programs (such as Pilates) and in innovative new programs such as the Dailey Method, the Bar Method and Ballet Beautiful that take that art form even more literally — even if following them does not guarantee a future with the Pennsylvania Ballet.

However, like any other new exercise plan, you should approach it with caution, even if you are in good shape. Women's health expert Dr. Sara Gottfried notes one should "look before you leap" by not only realistically assessing your fitness needs but also your time constraints, classes, instructor competence and use of different types of equipment involved.

"I've been to over 100 ballet barre classes over the past five years, and I cringe when I hear a new instructor give uneven guidance," says the Harvard-

trained, board-certified Gottfried, whose book on *The Hormone Cure* comes out this fall.

"Go to the most experienced teachers when you are first starting out," implores Gottfried. "At my local Dailey Method studio, the co-owner is a nurse and truly understands the female body. Her cues and adjustments are spot on. When my knee feels tweaky, I call her over, and she corrects my alignment.

"Secondly, avoid crowded classes, as you will have less individualized attention, which puts you at greater risk for injury."

How to prevent injuries? By having "optimized alignment, which means it's best to have the instructor spot you. If a busy schedule prompts you to rely on a home DVD, try to go to at least 10 classes so you can be familiar with the proper alignment and get the most out of your DVD investment."

Mary Helen Bowers, a former dancer with the New York City Ballet and Natalie Portman's ballet trainer for the movie *Black Swan*, created Ballet Beautiful (www.balletbeautiful.com) around the notion that a world-class ballerina's body shape can be accessible to everyone.

While Ballet Beautiful's method is built around professional ballet training, it is modified to provide non-dancers with the techniques to quickly build and maintain a ballerina's stamina and lean muscle.

"Ballet Beautiful comes out of my recovery from an injury I suffered when dancing with

the New York City Ballet," Bowers recalls. "I was only 16 when I joined the company and did not know about the right ways to take care of my body or the benefits of something like cross-training."

She adds, "When I got this particular injury, I ended up joining a health club to rehabilitate. I realized when trying out new sports like kick boxing, that in ballet, you use a different set of muscles than in other kinds of fitness programs, which also explains why ballerinas have a different kind of body shape than other athletes."

This later led Bowers to develop stretches and exercises that, like cross training, work a variety of different muscle groups. However, they also strengthen and improve tendons and joints.

"What gives a dancer that slender shape and gracefulness is that they use muscles that are not targeted or used in other fitness programs or sports."

Bowers observes that those who follow the workout regularly feel empowered because they are attaining greater fine motor control over their bodies.

Balletone, another program introduced in the last decade, evolved from single dance-based workouts into a family of programs spanning several genres and accommodating a wide audience of people.

The workouts featured in the DVD series are designed to simultaneously improve strength, flexibility and cardio.

"We focus on the function of dancer's conditioning, and the by-product is the dancer's body," says Balletone instructor Shannon Fable.

Though many people are familiar with Pilates, they may not be aware that its own roots lie in classical ballet. "The connection is that Joe Pilates came to New York City in the 1930s and started visiting a variety of Ballet studios," details Kara Wiley, a Los Angeles-based Pilates instructor (www.karawilypilates.com).

Though Wiley has produced several DVDs that bring her expertise to people around the country, she takes a step further toward accessibility and portability through her Tesseract Beginner Mat Pilates card deck, offering the 15 most essential Pilates poses. ♦