



Jewish Provence (Marseilles, Avignon, Carpentras)

May 8th – 11th 2015

This is a slightly new challenge for Jewish Journeys – attempting to pack in an entire region complete with its Jewish stories in one short weekend!

Conveniently, there were four historic communities that comprised the Comtat Venaissin, the area as it was known in pre modern times. Each has its own small reminders of a Jewish presence from yesteryear, leaving us the challenge to excavate the stories and messages associated with them. There is a little symbolism in the air given that we start on a national holiday commemorating VE day, and maybe less symbolically relevant, the day after the British General Election.

By Sunday, our attention moves beyond the Provencal hinterland, to the bustling port city of Marseilles, home to one of France's largest Jewish communities and where the story of modern Jewry has been written. Combining complex stories of Jews from the turbulent mid-20th century, we meet local Jews today, members of a community who are relative new comers to the city and who are aware that the tide of history may be about to turn again in this area.

Friday

11.00 Meet at Marseilles airport

Drive to **Saint Maximin la Sainte Baume** where we begin our journey.

The beginning: In the heart of the Provencal countryside, we encounter a tiny shard of memory – the remembrance of Jews of a distant past. Who were they? How and why did they get there? and where did they go All is set for the start of the journey.

Lunch, followed by drive to **L'Isle-sur-la-Sorgue**.

....where a recently restored Jewish site completes our orientation. Jews were present in Provence from the Middle Ages drawing from both the Ashkenazi and the Iberian experiences. In L'Isle-sur-la-Sorgue, the story moves to an acculturated and successful mercantile community in the 19th century.

Drive to **Avignon**, check in to Hotel (Novotel Avignon Centre)

Erev Shabbat service in Avignon synagogue.

By no means large but certainly the largest in the area, we join the small local community that reflects, like so many French Jewish communities the addition of Jews from North Africa.

Dinner Le Vintage

Overnight Avignon

Saturday

0900 Jewish sites of Avignon

Today, we visit three of the four communities of the former province of the Comtat Venaissin. For a brief but influential moment in history, Avignon was home to the papacy, thereby heightening its role in the Jewish story. Our journey takes place in and around Papal palace.

In the late morning, we move away from the palace to the centre of the old town and stories from the cusp of the modern era when, metaphorically speaking, the walls of tradition came tumbling down, the *ancien régime* was defeated and new rules for Jewish life were written.

Lunch

1400 Drive to Cavaillon

Cavaillon, home to what many argue is the prettiest and most compact Jewish quarter, we visit the small museum and synagogue.

Carpentras was once the central community of the Comtat Venaissin, but today it is a small community of 18 families who maintain the oldest synagogue in the whole of Europe. We join them for Mincha and a chance to see the careful and carefully restored community in action. Most significantly, it is the oldest synagogue in France and the second oldest in the world!!

1900 Return to Avignon, dinner on your own

2200 Havdalah

Overnight Avignon

Sunday

0900 Depart the hotel.

1000 Les Milles Detention Camp

And so to the present period of history – from the dramatic high point of modern French Jewry, complete with its optimism and confidence in the future, our attention turns to the dark period of the German invasion and the French compliance. This was not a death camp but in a different way has come to symbolize much of the distinctly French story of the Holocaust.

1100 Drive to Marseilles

1145 Almost by definition Marseilles played a crucial role in the harsh realities of the twentieth century. As a southern coastal city, it was a key point of departure for those seeking safety any place they could. We focus on the people and personalities from that time. Key sites include the Gare St Charles, the Hotel Splendide, Hotel de Ville and Place Varian Fry by the American embassy.

1300 Lunch

1400 Marseilles visit continues

1600 Meet the Jews: Our chance to talk with youth in the contemporary Marseilles Jewish community about their sense of the future for French Jewry.

Dinner

Overnight Marseilles (Grand Tonic Hotel)

Monday

Breakfast

0900 Port – Rebuilt Vieux Port

The drama continues in the area of what was once both a Jewish quarter and the old port. Here in the 1930's and 40's the full drama of Jewish homelessness was played out as Jews from mandate Palestine organized the illegal departure to the growing *yishuv* in the Land of Israel.

We walk on foot across the Port area to the Cathedral

1100 Contemporary Museum of European and Mediterranean civilisations

...and finally, after a long journey we conclude (pause?) in a museum whose title gives away why this is a Jewish Journeys 'classic', bridging between Europe and the Mediterranean. It is the ideal place to conclude, back where we began, by asking who are the Jews and literally where are they going?

1200 Close (option of continuing in the museum)

IMPORTANT NOTES

Please note the following (especially important for first timers):

- This is a draft itinerary and subject to change
- It is a good idea to bring a golf seat as we tend to stop in all sorts of places to talk and unpack some of the issues connected with the sites we visit
- Please bring and generally wear good, comfortable walking shoes.
- We will be using a mix of walking, a coach and even might use public transport to get to our sites during the weekend. We have chosen a hotel which is generally within a radius of half a mile for many of our sites and we do these short distances on foot.
- We have included two meals in the price of the weekend, Friday evening and Sunday evening. Drinks are not included in either.
- Please check a weather site for an update prior to leaving for Provence, but whatever the forecast, bring a hat and something for rain.
- PLEASE ensure you have comprehensive travel and medical insurance before travelling
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