

Landjudentum: The Rural Jews of ShUM, Baden and Franconia

An 10 Day Special Interest Group Tour Program

Come discover the hidden history of Jews in Germany! Hundreds of years ago, when most Jews were still living in small towns or *shtetls* scattered across Europe, three cities rose to prominence as hotbeds of Jewish scholarly pursuit. These were the ShUM cities of Speyer, Worms, and Mainz (named collectively for the first letters of their Hebrew names Schpira, Warmaisa, and Mainz). These cities were the most important of intellectual medieval Jewish life and the teachings and decrees which issued from the ShUM cities are still studied today. In a week-long trip, we invite you to visit Speyer, Worms and Mainz nestled in the idyllic Rhineland as well as other towns and cities such as Frankfurt and Heidelberg representing today's Jewish community in the regions of Baden and Franconia. Come experience synagogues--old and new, medieval mikvehs and near thousand year-old cemeteries. See too how the Jewish communities in this region are growing once again.

Both a financial centre and a metropolis of art and literature, **Frankfurt's** economic prosperity has long been linked to that of the Rothschilds, one of Germany's wealthiest and most influential families. Visit the famous humanist school of the Enlightenment, the "Philantropin," founded by the family patriarch Mayer Amschel Rothschild. Experience the "Museum River Bank" with nearly two dozen museums including Frankfurt's Jewish Museum. In medieval Judengasse visitors can descend the stairs to an 800 year old mikve. You will visit the Jewish cemetery and the Holocaust "Wall of Remembrance." See the birthplace of Goethe, Germany's most beloved writer, and learn of his connections to the Jewish community. Finally, visit the magnificent Westend Synagogue, built in 1910 and the Jewish Community Center with Sohar's kosher restaurant.



Located in the heart of old town, in the former Jewish quarter, the mikveh in **Friedberg** is a good introduction to the hidden heritage of Jews in the German countryside. Built 750 years ago it is one of the most important and impressive remnants of medieval Jewish life in Europe. At a depth of 25 metres it is the deepest mikveh in Germany.

"From our teachers in Mainz, Worms and Speyer, the teachings were spread to all of Israel..."! so say medieval sources. In the Middle Ages, **Speyer** was home to one of the most significant Jewish communities in the Holy Roman Empire. Today, visitors can still see the remnants of two synagogues and the mikveh, and explore the treasures of its small Jewish museum. A visit to the new synagogue, which opens in the spring of 2011, rounds out the visit.



Worms was the home in 12th century to the eminent Talmudic scholar Raschi, earning the city the title of "little Jerusalem," The reconstructed Jewish quarter stands as an extraordinary example of conservation and revival. The Holy Sands cemetery is oldest preserved Jewish burial place in Europe. The Raschi house, and most importantly, the Raschi synagogue testify to the roots of German Jewry.

Mainz's importance can be traced back to a series of influential Rabbis, especially Gershom ben Judah (960 - 1040) whose teachings and legal decisions had an impact on Judaism internationally. His wisdom was deemed so large that he was given the name 'Light of Diaspora'. The new Jewish Community Center physically reflects this tradition: the five letters of the Hebrew word for blessing are worked into the architecture of the building. A former synagogue is used for lectures, concerts and cultural events. The historic Jewish bathhouse has been converted into a memorial centre and the new synagogue of Mainz has received a lot of attention. Of the three ShUM cities, Mainz has the largest Jewish community today.

No visit to this area would be complete without **Heidelberg**. One of Germany's most romantic cities, it is home to its oldest university (1386) and to a medieval castle on a hill. Heidelberg's Jewish history is no less exciting and it is the current seat of Germany's only

Jewish university, the *Hochschule für Jüdische Studien*, making it a hub of Jewish education since the Shoah.

The town of **Baden** and its surrounding territory were home to an important Jewish community in the countryside before the Shoah. Today, a lot of small villages and towns continue to preserve their heritage through their synagogues and cemeteries. In **Offenburg** an interesting example of a small mikveh can be found. The synagogue in **Kippenheim**, constructed in 1850-52, demonstrates the self-confidence of its Jews who moved out of "Jews' Alley" to assimilate with the community. To represent their newly acquired status as German citizens the synagogue is in a Neo-Romanesque style. **Emmendingen** has a very lively small community, re-founded in 1997 and mainly consisting of Jews from the former Soviet Union. Its heritage includes a former bathhouse with a reconstructed mikveh, and a small museum.

The popularity of **Baden-Baden** as a spa dates from the early 19th century when the Prussian queen visited the site to improve her health. The town became a meeting place for celebrities attracted by the hot springs as well as by the Casino, luxury hotels, horse races, and gardens. Baden-Baden enthusiasts included Queen Victoria, Wilhelm I, Napoleon III, Berlioz, Brahms, and even Dostoyevsky!

This lesser known area of **Franconia** has enjoyed a Jewish presence since as early as the 15th century, after making itself welcome to Jews who were expelled from other areas including Bavaria. Clues to its past can be seen through the well-conceived and moving museums of **Fürth**, **Schnaittach** and **Schwabach**. Fürth, Nuremberg's smaller sibling, was known as the "Franconian Jerusalem" for its large Jewish population and its status as a centre of rabbinical scholarship. The original Sukkoth from the 18th century can be seen at two of the museums, and a stroll through the villages gives visitors a real sense of Jewish life in earlier centuries. **Nuremberg**, the center of Franconia, is well-known not only for the Nuremberg tribunals but also for its rich Jewish history. The monumental synagogue in the small town of **Kitzingen** has been renovated and now serves as a cultural centre. Both of its old cemeteries are located in a beautiful, picturesque landscape.

