

# Jewish Heritage Portugal Tour



Travel dates: Depart USA May 5, 2026 / Return to the USA May 14, 2026

## **DAY 1, Tuesday May 05: USA / Porto**

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

## **DAY 2, Wednesday May 06: Arrive Porto (Old 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.



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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.

Upon your arrival this morning at Porto Airport you will be met by our local guide. We begin our tour with a visit to the city center and visit the Estação de São Bento (São



Bento Railway Station), one of the most important transport hubs in Porto. It's not just a railway station but also a significant historical landmark known for its beautiful Azulejo tilework. We walk along narrow, old famous streets like Rua das Flores (Flowers

Street) down to the riverbank of the Douro River an area called Ribeira, one of the most beautiful and liveliest districts in Porto's historic center, a UNESCO World Heritage-listed area and Porto's most scenic and charming quarter. Its riverside promenade is chock full of restaurants and outdoor cafes. Lying just behind are narrow cobbled lanes lined with colorful old houses. Ribeira's promenades are filled with souvenir shops and hole-in-the-wall restaurants. This is a great place for a leisurely stroll and people watching.

Overnight Sheraton Porto Hotel & Spa. (D)



### **DAY 3, Thursday May 07: Porto – Coimbra - Porto**

This morning, we made our way to Coimbra. Situated along the banks of the river Mondego. Coimbra, Portugal's first medieval capital is steeped in history. 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. Coimbra is famous for its university, the oldest in Portugal and one of the oldest in Europe. 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.



After lunch we make our way back to Porto making a stop at the other side of the riverbank to visit Vila Nova de Gaia, or simply Gaia, famous for distribution of the local port wines with a stop at one of the port wine manufacturers for a visual tour and sampling of the port wine.

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

### **DAY 4, Friday May 08: Porto visits to Mekor Haim Synagogue, Museum and City Tour**

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.



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.

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 5, Saturday May 09: 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 6, Sunday May 10: Porto – Douro Valley - Vilar Formoso Fronteira - Belmont**

This morning we head towards passing along Douro River Valley, one of Portugal's most endearing regions with a panoramic view of its steep, twisting valleys and tidy terraced region that produces the country's beloved port wine.

Next, we visit 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 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 to Belmonte, situated in the remote and beautiful region of Portugal is rich in the history and traditions. The Jewish Community of Belmonte is a landmark in the history of the Jews in Portugal. It was a decisive center of resistance in the 16th century, when a law came into force compelling Portuguese Jews to



convert to Catholicism or else leave Portugal. The expulsion of Jews and Muslims in 1496 and the Inquisition bonfires between 1536 and 1821 did not defeat this Jewish community in Belmonte. Oral tradition and the role of the women, who for generations kept some Jewish practices in secret, meant that a crypto-Jewish community survived throughout the centuries. They 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. The hidden Jews of Belmont were '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".

Overnight at the Covilha Dona Maria Hotel. (B,D)



### **DAY 7, Monday May 11: Covilha - Castelo de Vide – Tomar - Lisbon**

This morning we drive to Lisbon with a stop at Castelo de Vide, 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.

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).

The Jewish quarter of Castelo de Vide Situated on a hill side facing to East and adjoining to the old medieval section. 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”, “Judaria”, “Ruinha da Judaria”, the current “Rua dos Serralheiros” and “Rua Nova”. We

visit a building believed to have been the ancient medieval synagogue of Castelo de Vide that nowadays is a museum and is one of the most emblematic of the town. There is no certainty as to its date, but it is only assumed that it dates back to the time when the Jewish quarter was established in the 14th century.

We stop at the building believed to have been the ancient medieval synagogue of Castelo de Vide that is now a museum and is one of the most emblematic of the town. There is no certainty as to its date, but it is only assumed that it dates back to the time when the Jewish quarter was established in the 14th century. The building underwent profound changes in the 16th century, coinciding with the end of freedom of worship for Jews in Portugal. Altered and adapted over the centuries, the Synagogue also underwent adaptation work to become a residence in the 18th century.



Next stop is Tomar, a small historic village 145 kilometers north of Lisbon, previously 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.

Overnight at the Dom Pedro Lisboa Hotel (B,D)

### **DAY 8, Tuesday May 12: Lisbon (Lisbon, Sintra and Cascais)**

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.

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



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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. Next, 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 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.

Following lunch we return to 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  
Dinner in a local restaurant



Overnight at the Dom Pedro Lisboa Hotel (B,D)

### **DAY 9, Wednesday May 13: Lisbon (Old City Tour)**

Today 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 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 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.

We also visit the Bairro Alto a picturesque quarter dating from the 1500s, that has traditionally been the city's bohemian haunt of artists and writers. Its grid of streets is quiet



during the day but is transformed at night into one of the city's most vibrant nightlife quarters. Behind colorful and graffiti-ridden façades is a variety of traditional and international restaurants, tourist-packed Fado Houses, and a multitude of bars and alternative shops that stay open until late at night.

Throughout the week, and especially on weekends, you'll find people of all ages, backgrounds, and lifestyles bar-hopping through the cobbled lanes or standing outside with a drink in hand, enjoying the city's usual mild nights.

This evening Farwell Dinner with Fado Show in a local restaurant.

Overnight at the Dom Pedro Lisboa Hotel (B,D)

### **DAY 10, Thursday May 14: Departure**

Transfer to the airport for departure. (B)



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