

Jewish guests in Switzerland



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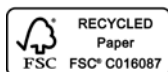
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Introduction

Jewish guests have a long tradition in Switzerland and love the local tourist activities.

As a hotel owner, it is normal for you to show hospitality towards your guests from near and far. If your guests are from a different cultural background, some familiarity with their traditions and customs helps to avoid misunderstandings and makes their stay

smooth and comfortable, for the guests and the host. The purpose of this brochure, "Jewish guests in Switzerland", is to address this topic. Jewish culture is especially diverse, with regard to the different religious movements, the provenances and the languages of the people. Jewish tourism has a long tradition in

Switzerland and Jewish guests are captivated by the magical landscape of mountains and lakes, the huge range of outdoor activities and the outstanding infrastructure. Since their needs are very different from perhaps our own, especially when it comes to food and accommodation, this can create uncertainty for you as a hotel owner about how to look after your guests. This new brochure discusses these issues. It was developed by HotellerieSuisse and Switzerland Tourism in collaboration with the Swiss Federation of Jewish Communities (SIG), the umbrella organisation for Jews in Switzerland. It will help you to make your Jewish guests feel welcome. As well as useful information on Jewish culture and religion, you will find many helpful tips and suggestions to help both sides feel comfortable together, so that your guests, and you as their host, will enjoy an unforgettable shared experience.

We wish you interesting reading and exciting encounters with your guests from near and far.



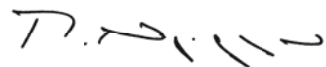
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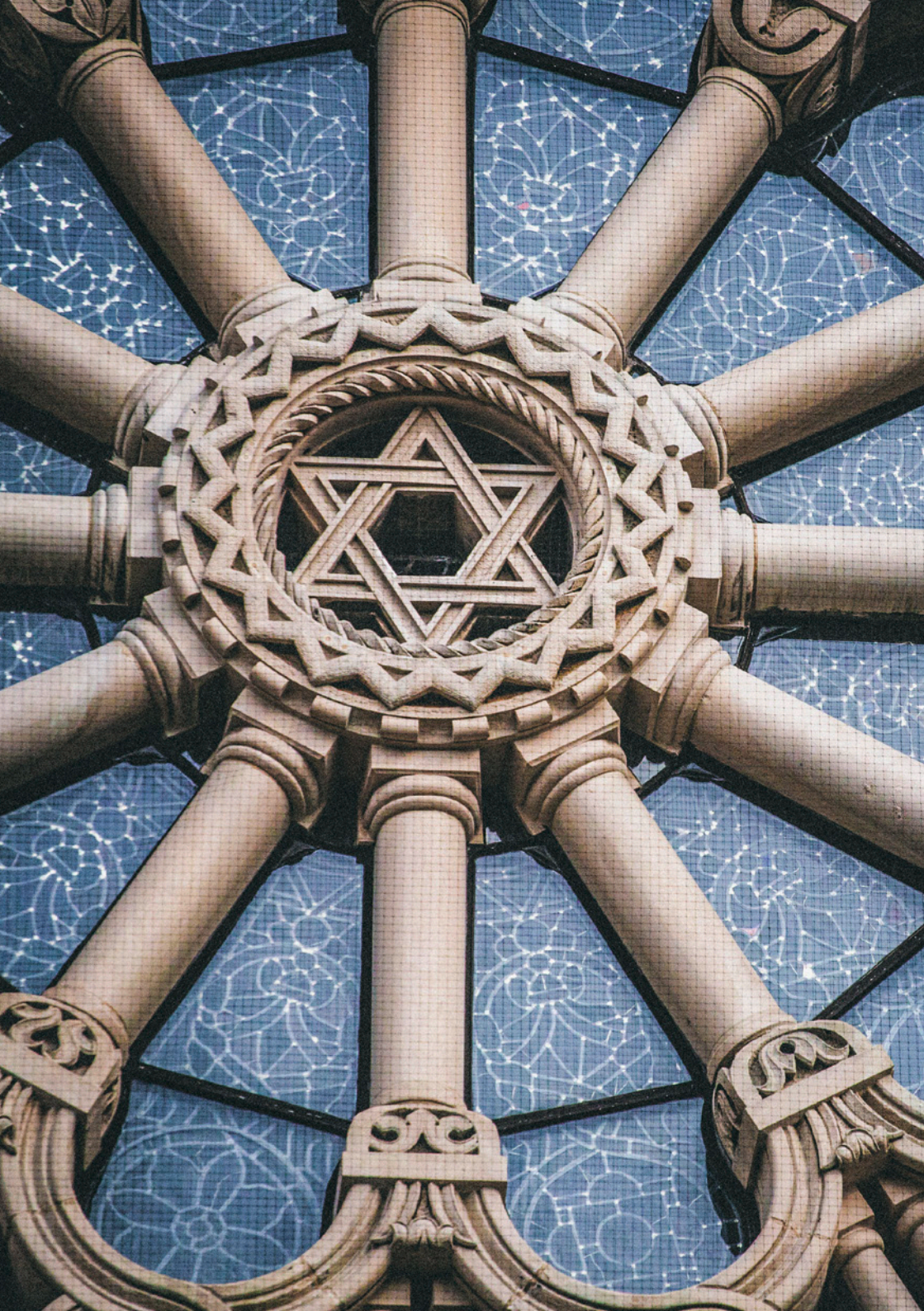


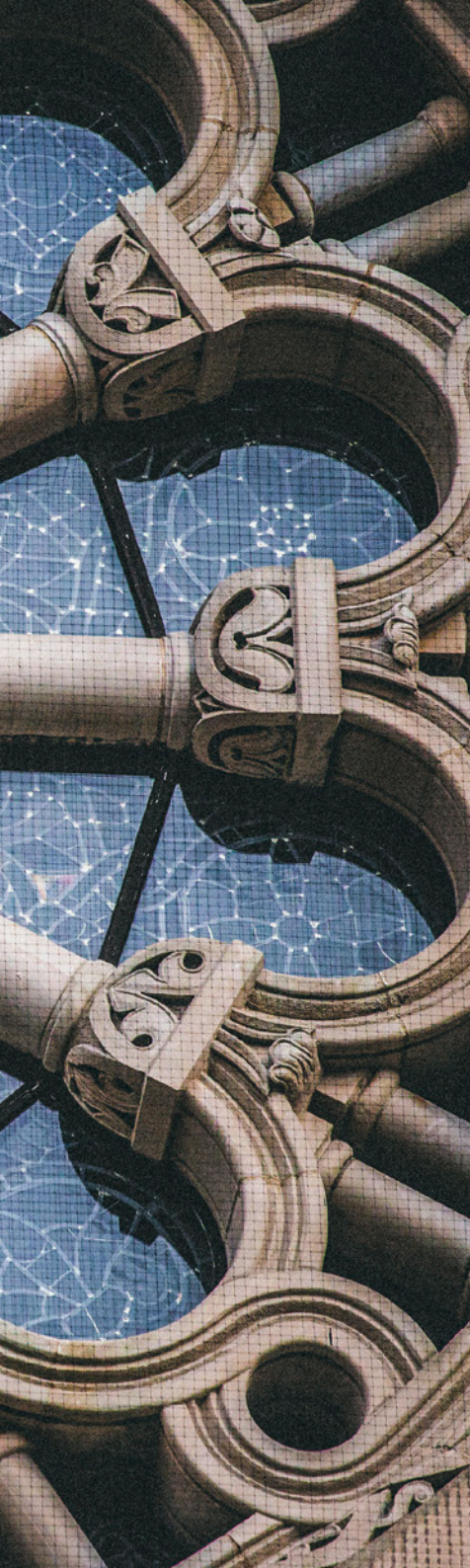
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General information on Judaism

Historical overview

The area known today as Israel has been inhabited by people of the Jewish faith since around 1000 B.C. 2000 years ago, the period of the Jewish diaspora began. The Jews gradually dispersed all over Europe. This period witnessed three major migrations, which have left the Jewish people subdivided into three main groups until today. The "Sephardim" migrated across North Africa, before finally settling on the Iberian Peninsula. The journey taken by the "Ashkenazim" led them through Italy and up the Rhone valley and they mostly settled in the Rhineland area. The "Mizrachim" made their home in the Middle East and North Africa, and are therefore called "oriental Jews". During the crusades in the 12th century, anti-Jewish pogroms became increasingly common in the Rhineland, which prompted the first Ashkenazi Jews to migrate to Eastern Europe.

Jews in Switzerland

Jewish craftsmen and merchants probably arrived in Switzerland as early as Roman times. By the Middle Ages, Jewish communities had formed in several cities. However, their situation increasingly deteriorated, and especially during the plague epidemics, they were discriminated against, persecuted, executed and later expelled from the territory.

From the 17th century onwards, Endingen and Lengnau were the only communities where Jews were granted a long-term right of residence. But even there they did not enjoy equal rights; they were not allowed to practice certain professions or to own land.

It was not until the amendment of the Federal Constitution in 1866 that Jews were afforded the same rights as all other Swiss citizens. From this point onwards, a diverse Jewish life developed in Switzerland with many new communities.

Today, the Jewish population in Switzerland is around 18000. The majority live in the cities of Zurich, Geneva, Basel, Lausanne and Berne. These communities boast synagogues, kosher food shops, bakeries and butchers. In addition, the Jewish Museum of Switzerland is located in Basel.

In 1492, because of the Inquisition, all Jews in Spain were forced either to leave the country or convert to Christianity. The Sephardic Jews living there chose to migrate onwards to France, central Italy and the area known today as The Netherlands.

From 1648, after the Thirty Years War, many Jews were able to settle in central and western Europe once again. In 1789, during the French Revolution, and especially throughout the 19th century, the legal status of Jews steadily improved in many places and they were thus granted equal rights in several countries.

The biggest catastrophe for European Jews began with the appointment of Adolf Hitler as Chancellor of the Reich in Germany. It was followed by social and legal marginalisation and ended in persecution, imprisonment and murder. When the Second World War broke out and the territories under German occupation expanded, Jews living in other European countries were also targeted. Six million European Jews were murdered by the Nazis. Most of the survivors of the Holocaust emigrated: to North America, Australia, or the Palestine Territory, then under British control, where the state of Israel was founded in 1948. After the Second World War, Jewish life started to blossom again in many places, including Europe. Today, Jewish people play an integral role in society in many countries and participate in the administrative, economic and social life of these countries as citizens with equal rights.

Key data

Worldwide

14,5 million Jews, around 0.2% of the population.

Groups

Ashkenazim: central, northern and eastern European Jews and their descendants.
Sephardim: Jews and their descendants, whose ancestors came from the Iberian Peninsula.
Mizrachim: Jews originating from Asia, Africa and mainly from the Middle East.

There are additional small groups whose names suggest their geographical origins, such as Beta Israel, Yemenite Jews, or Cochinites.

Geographical distribution

Most Jews live in Israel. The remainder are spread around the world as the so-called Jewish diaspora. Large diaspora groups can be found in the USA, Canada, France and the United Kingdom.

Israel

6.5m Jews.
75% of the population and 45% of the worldwide Jewish population.
Languages: Hebrew, Arabic, Russian, Yiddish, French and English.

USA

5.7m Jews.
1.8% of the population and 39.3% of the worldwide Jewish population.
Languages: English, Yiddish, Hebrew.

Canada

390,000 Jews.
1.1% of the population and 2.7% of the world-

wide Jewish population.
Languages: English, French, Yiddish, Hebrew.

France

456,000 Jews.
0.7% of the population and 3.1% of the worldwide Jewish population.
Languages: French, English, Yiddish, Hebrew.

United Kingdom

289,500 Jews.
0.4% of the population and 2.0% of the worldwide Jewish population.
Languages: English, Yiddish, Hebrew.

Switzerland (18th place)

18,700 Jews.
0.2% of the population and 0.1% of the worldwide Jewish population.
Languages: German, French, Italian, English, Yiddish, Hebrew.

Source:
Della Pergola, Sergio
2018: World Jewish
Population 2017, in:
Dashefsky, Arnold,
Sheskin, Ira M. (Pub.)
2018: American Jewish
Year Book 2017,
pp 297–377.

Religious and cultural characteristics

Judaism

For statistical purposes, whoever states that they are Jewish is classified as such. Orthodox Judaism deems a person to be a Jew only if the mother is Jewish, whereas in Liberal Judaism the fact that the father is Jewish is also deemed to be decisive. However, in all denominations of Judaism, it is immaterial as to whether the person practices Judaism or not. Whoever is born as a Jew is deemed to be Jewish.

The Jewish religious tradition is monotheistic, believing in one god. The religious teachings of the Jewish people are divided into the written scriptures set forth in the Torah, and oral teachings which find their written version in the Talmud. The code of Jewish Law, known as Halakha, is based on the written and oral teachings of Judaism, as well as rabbinic law – a body of laws developed over the centuries. The Shulchan Aruch is a written book of rules summarizing the Halakha. It contains the entire code of Jewish Law applicable today, and is followed by practicing Jews, who use it to guide them in their daily lives.



Religious movements

There are different religious movements within Judaism. We can distinguish between orthodox and non-orthodox Jewish denominations.

Jewish Holidays 2019/2020

Rosh Hashanah

(Jewish New Year):

30/9–1/10/2019

19/9–20/9/2020

Yom Kippur

(Day of Atonement, Repentance, Fasting, Prayer and Spiritual Peace):

9/10/2019, 28/9/2020

Sukkot

(Festival of

Tabernacles):

14/10–20/10/2019

3/10–9/10/2020

Chanukah

(Festival of Lights):

22/12–30/12/2019

10/12–18/12/2020

Purim

20/3–21/3/2019

9/3–10/3/2020

Pesach

20/4–27/4/2019

9/4–16/4/2020

Shavuot

(Festival of weeks):

9/6–10/6/2019

29/5–30/5/2020

Tisha Be'Av

(Day of Fasting and Remembrance):

10/8–11/8/2019

29/7–30/7/2020

Updated Jewish holiday dates can be found on the internet.

Strict orthodox

Strict orthodox Jews follow a precise interpretation of the code of Jewish law. Many of them wear the traditional clothing worn by their forefathers in Eastern Europe, to carry on their traditions. This includes growing side locks. Other strict orthodox Jews, such as those with a western European background, cannot always be recognised by their appearance.

Modern orthodox

Modern orthodox Jews also follow the code of Jewish Law, but are not always easy to recognise by their appearance. Some wear a Kippah (a cap of cloth or leather). They believe strongly in obeying the Jewish dietary laws and observe all of the Jewish religious holidays.

Secular

Secular Jews comprise the largest group of Jewish people. Some secular Jews observe certain religious laws and traditions. This includes circumcising their sons, celebrating Jewish holidays and, often, not eating pork. But for some secular Jews, religion plays no part in their lives at all. For this group, the Jewish religious laws have no significance; at most they value Jewish traditions and culture.

Geographical distribution

Today, the global population of Jews is around 14.5 million. More than 80% of all Jews live in Israel and the USA. 19 countries have Jewish communities of 18,000 or more. In addition to Canada and Argentina, several European countries have large Jewish communities, such as France, the United Kingdom and Germany. Switzerland lies further down the table in 18th place, with a Jewish community of around 18,000. The majority of Jews are secular-traditional. This means they are not identifiable as Jews by their appearance, they lead a secular life, but still obey some of the religious laws. The Jewish communities in various European countries tend to differ from one another, depending on their history or the Jewish communities they live in. The percentage of strict orthodox Jews worldwide is estimated at 10% of all Jews. Centres of strict Orthodox Judaism include New York, London, Manchester, Antwerp, Strasbourg, Vienna and Zurich.



Today, the global population of Jews is around 14.5 million. More than 80 % of all Jewish people live in Israel and the USA.

Prayer times

People of the Jewish faith pray three times a day. Prayers are said in the morning, at midday and in the evening. Jewish men are duty-bound to pray, while women are freed from this obligation. Prayers can be said alone, although many prefer communal worship. Ten men are required to form a so-called “minyan”. Communal worship can take place in a prayer room, or spontaneously in a public place. Only then can readings from the Torah or other parts of a religious service be held. On the Shabbat, the whole family often dresses up and visits the synagogue.

Languages

In principal, most Jews speak the languages of their respective native country. Many also speak English and Hebrew. Yiddish is often used as a colloquial language among strict orthodox Jews.



Jewish culture

The characteristic of Jewish culture is its rich diversity, whether it's the range of different religious denominations, the countries and places of origin, or the languages. Jewish communities can be found in almost every corner of the globe. Many have lived there for centuries and consider these regions as their home countries. As a result, they have also adopted cultural features of their home country. However, the Jewish culture handed down through the generations for thousands of years also guides their lives and this heritage is interwoven into the social fabric of their home countries.

The result is a vibrant diversity among Jews, with different blends of Jewish traditions and mentalities mixed with those of their respective home countries. The common characteristic they all share is a commitment to their Jewish origins and traditions. The religious denomination of Judaism they belong to determines the intensity of their commitment to long-standing Jewish traditions and principles. Yet, despite all of this diversity, there are

Jewish culture is characterised by its diversity, the number of religious denominations, places of origin and languages.

a few general rules to guide us. The majority of Jews worldwide do not eat pork. Jews who are identifiable by their appearance, at least those who cover their head (with a Kippah or a fur cap), adhere more strictly to religious customs, especially the dietary laws and the religious holidays. However, not every Jew who covers his head follows the religious laws strictly. Some eat vegetarian dishes at the breakfast buffet while others only drink a glass of water in such situations. Some offer their hand to the opposite sex, others do not. There are those who kosher a rental apartment before use, yet there are others who don't feel this is necessary. Ultimately, each Jew decides for themselves what level of religious observance is appropriate.

Jewish tourists on holiday

Regions and resorts with Jewish tourists (selection)

German-speaking Switzerland

Grisons

Albula, Arosa, Bivio, Davos, Klosters, Lenzerheide, Obersaxen Mundaun, Pontresina, Savognin, Scuol, Sedrun, St. Moritz

Valais

Bettmeralp, Riederalp, Saas-Almagell, Saas-Grund, Saas-Fee, Zermatt

Bernese Alps

Adelboden, Grindelwald, Gstaad, Lenk, Wengen

Western Switzerland

Valais

Crans-Montana, Haute-Nendaz, Thyon-Les Collons, Verbier, Villars-sur-Ollon

Jewish tourists have been visiting Switzerland in large numbers since the 19th century. Back then, people even talked about “Jewish Alpine tourism”. The Jews who joined in the development of the Alps as a tourist destination for the middle class were mainly from European cities such as Zurich, Vienna, Berlin or from the United Kingdom. What attracted them, like many other Europeans, were the mountain ranges of the Alps and the recreation opportunities away from the hustle-bustle of the cities. Many Jews were also lured to Switzerland by the promise of healthy mountain air. As early as 1919, the Etania sanatorium was established in Davos, where thousands of Jews were treated for pulmonary diseases in the following decades.

Switzerland – destination of choice

Today, Switzerland remains a popular destination for Jewish tourists. Some come from inside Switzerland, others from Belgium, the United Kingdom, the USA – and increasingly more from Israel. Several mountain regions offer kosher hotels which target this customer segment, both in the summer and winter seasons. There are also Jewish guests who prefer to stay in other hotels, or to rent a holiday apartment.

Hotspots

In general, Jewish guests visit Swiss destinations all over the country, all year round. The mountain regions are among the favourites. Hotspots include Engelberg, Engadin, Davos and Arosa, but also the Saastal or Crans-Montana. Davos has been a special favourite for Swiss Jews for decades. This means local infrastructure is available, such as a ritual immersion bath, essential for Jews with strict religious beliefs, and kosher foods and facilities are also available in Davos. The growth of these hotspots can also be explained by a Jewish religious requirement for group worship, a so-called minyan, whereby a minimum of ten men must be present.

Offer Fridays and Sundays as arrival/ departure days.

Peak seasons

In the same way as for other tourists, the peak seasons for Jewish tourists are determined by the school holidays in their home countries. The main season is in the weeks following Tisha Be'Av, the Jewish day of fasting and mourning. This completes the three weeks of mourning to commemorate the destruction of the Temple of Jerusalem. It is held on different days every year, in July or August. This is the time when Jewish families with strict religious beliefs visit Switzerland. A large number of them are Israelis who come to the Swiss Alps to escape the summer heat at home. It is not unusual for Jewish tourists to travel accompanied by many children. Other popular holiday periods for Jews with strict religious beliefs are the school ski holiday weeks or during the Pesach holiday in spring.

Rental apartments

Large Jewish families often prefer staying in rental apartments rather than hotels. Among other things, rental apartments offer the advantage of greater flexibility to Jewish visitors, since they can take steps to make their environment kosher and Shabbat-friendly. For those who observe stricter religious beliefs, this not only means making the kitchen kosher (see section on Kosher food and drink), but also making preparations to observe the Shabbat (see section on Shabbat). Jewish tenants for rental apartments can often be found through specialised agencies or on standard online booking platforms.



«I have already straightened out a lot of misunderstandings – on both sides.»



Rafael Mosbacher,
Davos mediator

If you sit down outside in Davos in the summer and have a coffee with Rafael Mosbacher, you will be astonished. People come up to him, say hello, and fire off questions at him. Most of them are Jewish tourists. They ask him for hiking tips and public transport timetables. “They call me ‘Rosh haKehilah’, the Jewish Community Head in Davos”, he explains. Swiss locals also know him. Whether it’s in the community administration, the tourist office, or holiday apartment landlords, he gets a warm welcome wherever he goes. Mosbacher was born in Zurich in 1950 and manages a catering company. He has known Davos as a holiday destination since he was a youngster. Nowadays, he drives up here from Zurich with his family every summer over the weekend to rest and relax. Davos is not only his holiday getaway; he calls it his second home. And as such, he works hard for the Davos community.

With its long, rich history of Jewish visitors, Davos has clearly got under his skin. Founded in 1916, Etania was a sanatorium for Jewish patients with pulmonary diseases and was well known far beyond the local area. When the “old” Etania closed down almost 20 years ago, Davos suddenly lost important pillars of the Jewish religion in the village, since the sanatorium was home to a synagogue, a ritual immersion bath and a kosher restaurant. He wanted to do something about it, emphasising that “Davos is an important destination for Jewish guests”.

With considerable support from the community, he found a new location for the synagogue, initially in the cross-country ski centre and later in a former underground hospital. At the same time, he put a local shop in touch with Jewish suppliers, thus providing a selection of kosher food items. These infrastructure projects for Jewish guests did not go unnoticed and the news spread. After decades of Jewish tourism in the region, tourist numbers began picking up.

The increasing number of Jewish guests also had an impact on Mosbacher’s role. He became a cultural mediator. Not all local people could relate to the behaviour or needs of their Jewish guests – and vice versa. That’s why Mosbacher has been investing more and more time in educating and mediating. He regularly meets with tourism officials or holiday letting agencies, helping them understand Jewish culture. He approaches Jewish guests directly, either in the synagogue or on the street. “By doing this, I have already straightened out a lot of misunderstandings – on both sides”, he says. Others should also experience Davos like he does – and get to know and love the place, just like he does. That is why he acts as a mediator, all year round.

«Davos is important for Jewish guests.»

Rafael Mosbacher



Shabbat – the Jewish day of rest

The Shabbat is a reminder of God's rest day taken during the biblical creation, and its observance is one of the ten commandments Moses received from God. The day of rest begins on Friday evening at least half an hour before sunset and ends when darkness falls on Saturday evening. The Shabbat is ushered in by the women lighting festive candles which must continue burning until they extinguish themselves. People dress up, invite family and friends and prepare a festive meal.

Rules and prohibitions

A considerable number of rules and prohibitions must be complied with on the Shabbat. Although they apply to all religious denominations of Judaism, the level of observance of the Shabbat rules varies considerably. If the comprehensive definition is observed, various activities, or the use of certain objects, are prohibited. Generally speaking, work is prohibited, as is travelling by car, bus, train or bike. For those practicing strict observance, the use of electrical



appliances or devices such as phones, radios, TVs, washing machines, light switches, doorbells, lifts, cookers or ovens is forbidden. Making purchases or sales, or writing, are also prohibited activities. In addition, when outside your accommodation, you are not allowed to carry any objects like keys, an umbrella, backpack or bag. This is why Jewish guests who strictly observe religious law will not arrive on a Saturday, or, in the winter season, they will request a late check-in if the Shabbat ends at 5.30 pm.

Alternative solutions

Guests who strictly observe the Shabbat rules must accept certain limitations, but can also prepare accordingly and find alternative solutions. Special hotplates can be used to keep food warm during the day. Lights can often be operated by timers. Automatic lights, like those in fridges, can be disabled for the duration of the Shabbat. Many modern appliances even come with a Shabbat mode.

Shabbat tips

Providing a separate table for Shabbat candles will improve fire safety levels.

Notify guests in advance of movement sensors for operating lights or automatic sliding doors.

Offer rental periods that run from Sunday to Sunday.

Provide a hotplate (Shabbat hotplate). They can be purchased in Zurich in kosher supermarkets (e. g. Koshercity or Schmerling). In certain holiday villages, such as Davos, hotplates are also locally available for rent.

Timers provided in holiday accommodation also help guests observe Shabbat rules.

Pragmatic solutions that benefit all parties can be discussed freely with guests.

Kosher food and drink

For millennia, Judaism has observed traditional religious dietary laws known in Hebrew as “kashrut”. These laws define the preparation and consumption of foods and drinks. Simply put, foods are divided into two categories: permitted or “kosher”, and forbidden or “non-kosher” or “treife”. As is the case with all religious regulations, there are major differences in the degree of observance of kashrut, and it varies according to religious denomination. Jews who adhere strictly to religious laws closely follow the regulations, while secular Jews conform only partially or not at all.

Kosher drinks

Wine, grape juice and certain spirits are only deemed kosher if the bottle displays a kosher certification. According to certain interpretations of the dietary laws, milk is only defined as kosher if the milking and bottling is supervised by Jews. Water is kosher, as are numerous soft drinks, if they are tested for kosher production, such as Coca-Cola and Red Bull.

Kosher meats

Special regulations apply in the dietary laws governing meat. The consumption of meat is only permitted if it originates from animals which are ruminants and have cloven hooves, such as beef or lamb, or from poultry. Meats that are excluded include pork and horse-meat. Mammals and poultry must be slaughtered and processed under specific conditions. This ritual slaughter is known as “shechita”. Fish are kosher, provided they have fins and scales. Eating shellfish or fish without scales or fins, such as prawns, squid or mussels, is forbidden.

Separation of meat and milk

A further characteristic of the dietary laws is the strict separation of meat and dairy products. For this reason, kitchens must separate plates and cooking utensils, i. e. plates, cutlery, pots and pans or sponges, into the categories “meaty” and “milky”. Meat and dairy products may only be cooked separately and cannot be eaten together. After consuming meat products, an interval of several hours must be observed before eating dairy products.



Tips for a kosher kitchen

Snacks or ice cream produced and packed under kosher regulations can also be offered in non-kosher restaurants.

Restaurants can offer a small selection of kosher products purchased from a kosher supermarket.

The majority of Jewish people refrain from eating pork.

Jewish guests from overseas can be made aware of the kosher lists available from the Jewish communities in Switzerland.

For kosher shopping and consumption, guests can be directed to a summary of kosher supermarkets, hotels and restaurants, available at www.swissjews.ch.

For a welcome gift, a fruit basket and a bottle of mineral water is always a good idea.

Glass tableware is seen as a neutral option and is often requested by Jewish guests.

Jews who strictly follow religious laws only eat kosher food and may reject dishes offered to them. In such cases, ask your guests what dishes they would prefer.

Kosher kitchen and koshering

Jews who are strictly religious and rigorously observe the dietary laws, are restricted to eating only in kosher restaurants or a kosher kitchen at home. This is one reason why rental apartments are becoming popular holiday residences, in addition to kosher hotels. In a rental apartment, the first step is to ensure the kitchen is kosher, known as “koshering”. The main task is to heat up the hotplates one by one and remove any food residue. The hotplates are then often covered with special aluminium foil. When it comes to modern appliances like induction ovens, such measures are not always practical, so nowadays, many Jewish guests rent special hotplates for their stay. In many cases, it’s easier to bring tableware and cooking utensils from home. Glass tableware is seen as neutral and is suitable for use.

Eating and drinking out

The numerous food regulations, which are not observed by everyone with the same level of commitment, means that Jewish tourists don’t all behave the same when they go out. Some never eat out, or only visit kosher restaurants or hotels. Others choose vegetarian dishes or fish instead of meat – but only fish with fins or scales. That’s why we see situations in some holiday regions where large Jewish families visit a non-kosher restaurant, only order drinks and no food. It can be very complicated for restaurants or hotels to expand their services to include a kosher menu, and is only possible by complying with all the regulations and then receiving a kosher certification. That is why this service is generally restricted to specialist restaurants with a kosher kitchen.

Kosher shopping

When buying food, Jewish guests will make sure the products are kosher, depending on how strictly they follow the dietary laws. That is why some Jewish guests check product information very carefully. They also get help from the so-called kosher lists from the Jewish communities in Switzerland. They catalogue the kosher products available in Swiss supermarkets. Fruit, vegetables, eggs and grains are all classified as kosher. All other foods are checked for their ingredients and included in the kosher lists. Even a small amount of non-kosher ingredients will make a product non-kosher. Some towns and villages have special butchers for kosher meat and kosher supermarkets or a “kosher department” in the supermarket.



«Food is not something you just take for granted.»



Noam Hertig,
community rabbi
in Zurich

Shakshuka recipe

Olive oil
Canned tomatoes
Sweet peppers
Onion
Eggs
Salt, pepper, cumin,
chilli, parsley

Heat the olive oil, add the onion and sweet peppers, sauté well. Add cumin, paprika and chilli and sauté briefly. Add the tomatoes and simmer together. Place the eggs in the tomato sauce and continue to cook on low heat until the eggs are poached. Add salt and pepper to taste and sprinkle the parsley on top.

Noam Hertig loves to cook, but sadly he doesn't have time for it. His wife is a good cook and is in charge of the kitchen in the Hertig household. This allocation of roles has also come about because Hertig is often out until late in the evening. Since 2017, Noam Hertig has been community rabbi of the Israelitische Cultusgemeinde Zürich ICZ.

On his days off or at the weekend he does get involved in the cooking. His favourite dish is Shakshuka, an Israeli dish made with poached eggs in a sauce of tomatoes, sweet peppers and onions. "My kids love it", he says with a smile. In the Hertig household, a diverse range of dishes find their way to the dinner table: from pasta to fish, from Indian to Thai. The cuisine is international – and all kosher.

It can take quite an effort to live a kosher life. First of all, the family shops at major distributors. When shopping, they use the kosher list prepared by their community. If items are not available from the major distributors, the family buys them in specialised kosher supermarkets. And back at home, they need to ensure that meat and dairy products are not combined. That's why the Hertigs have two sets of kitchen utensils, knives, forks and spoons, and tableware. The family seldom eats out, since the choice of kosher restaurants is limited.

When asked why Jews follow a kosher diet, Rabbi Hertig has a simple answer: "Because it is explicitly stated in the Torah." Since a more specific justification is not provided, the rabbis tend to offer different explanations. Rabbi Hertig believes the concepts of discipline and education are a good place to start. It's important to know what you eat, where it comes from, and how it is prepared. "Food is not something you take for granted and people should make a conscious decision to explore the topic." After all, for many Jews, the matter of how strictly they follow the rules of a kosher diet is a very personal decision.

«It's important to know what you eat, where it comes from, and how it is prepared.»

Rabbi Noam Hertig

Leisure activities

Generally speaking, you will meet Jewish tourists all over Switzerland, at all of the tourist attractions and programmes offered. When Jewish tourists travel in larger family groups, it's natural that they look for destinations or tourist programmes offering activities the whole family can participate in together. The most important thing is that the children are able to play and get plenty of exercise. That's why child-friendly programmes are very popular, especially if they are easily accessible with children's buggies and by using public transport.

Hiking tours and excursions

The mountainous regions are among the most popular destinations for Jews living in countries which don't have this kind of scenery, like Israel. Israel is a hot country, especially in summer. So they are really thrilled when they experience the cool, fresh mountain air in Switzerland. The unique scenery with lakes and mountains, the huge range of outdoor activities, the well-marked hiking trails and the excellent tourist infrastructure also speak for themselves.

That's why it is not unusual to encounter families and large groups of Jewish tourists on the hiking trails in summer. But for the local residents, it can be quite surprising to see strict orthodox Jews wearing their traditional clothes hiking in the mountains. It is important to understand that this clothing is worn, among other things, as an expression of respect for their religion and traditions. As such, this clothing cannot be replaced by functional outdoor garments, even if it might be a more practical solution. Jewish guests who come from countries with no opportunities for hiking in the mountains know sometimes little about the challenges of such excursions. It's possible that they underestimate the level of difficulty, the suitability for families, or the changeable weather encountered on some hiking tours. This is why it is helpful if they can seek information from local residents or can be proactively given tips or recommendations.

Establish clear rules for using the swimming pool, communicate them to all guests and if in doubt, try to talk the matter over and reach an agreement.

Another option is to offer separate swimming pool opening hours for males and females.

Wellness

Wellness programmes are becoming increasingly popular for many tourists. This is no different among Jewish tourists. But there are also many diverging perceptions here, based on religious denominations and cultural backgrounds. For many Jews who strictly observe religious laws, it is unlikely they will visit swimming pools where men and women bathe together. However, there are other Jews who visit such swimming pools. In some countries it is common for women to wear special swimwear which covers the legs and arms. There are countries and cultures where it is acceptable to wear clothes when swimming. This is prohibited in Switzerland. Clarification can be provided with information on the local customs and by clearly explaining the rules and how they apply equally to all guests making use of the bathing facilities.

Visitor cards and passes

Visitor cards or passes which permit the use of public transport, cable cars or recreation programmes for free or at reduced rates, are popular among all tourists. Jewish tourists frequently use these offers. Problems can arise due to language barriers. What can then happen is that Jewish tourists who only speak foreign languages may not understand the terms and conditions of the visitor cards. This problem can be solved if the parties bring in someone who speaks both languages and can act as an interpreter.



«It is important to discuss openly the different mentalities and cultures.»



Motti Ibenboim,
Israeli travel operator

A dog sledge ride in Norway, an African safari, a Mediterranean cruise and, of course, a hiking tour in the Swiss Alps – all of them are high on the list of popular holiday destinations for Jewish tourists. The preparations for such trips are no different than those made for other tourist groups. However, when it comes to organising holidays for Jews who are strictly religious and follow kashrut, the Jewish dietary laws, and who observe the Jewish Shabbat, tour operators need to go the extra mile. This tourist group needs the assistance of specialised travel agencies.

Motti Ibenboim and his family operate the “Maaglei Nofesh” travel company in Israel. Their target customers are religious Jews who eat kosher food and observe the Shabbat. Their customers not only come from Israel, but also the USA and various European countries. Holidays in Switzerland have been in their catalogue for 23 years. “Jewish tourists love Switzerland”, Ibenboim says. That is why the country is an important destination in his portfolio. “The beauty, the visual appeal, the cleanliness and orderliness are all aspects our guests really appreciate”, he explains. Their company’s business model is to rent an entire hotel for a certain period. By providing their own cooks and a Shabbat-friendly infrastructure they can satisfy their customers’ needs.

Based on his experience, Ibenboim is well aware how important it is to discuss openly the differences in mentality and culture between his guests and the local inhabitants. For example, many locals are not aware that when a Jewish tourist who strictly observes the

dietary laws leaves the kosher hotel there is hardly anything he is permitted to consume, except perhaps water, soft drinks or fruits. The size of the families also surprises the locals. “An orthodox Jewish family never stops after just one or two children”, he laughs. Ultimately, he believes it is in the interests of both the locals and the Jewish

guests if they understand each other better. That is why he is always interested in seeking a dialogue with his Swiss partners. He thinks their collaboration together is “fantastic” and is the reason why Switzerland occupies a special place in his heart.

«Jewish tourists love Switzerland.»

Motti Ibenboim

Swiss hospitality for Jewish guests

The variety of ways Jewish people lead their lives is immense, reflecting their vibrant national and cultural heritage and the rich religious fabric underpinning their lives. Accordingly, the host country must demonstrate some flexibility and tolerance, since there are times when creative ideas and solutions are required.

Communicate with respect

The golden rule is that an open, responsive communication style is always the quickest way to answer most questions. In the same way as a host may not have an immediate answer as to the best way to meet their guests' needs, the majority of first-time visitors are not aware of the things they need to look out for and where to ask for assistance. It is certainly important for Jewish guests that they personally, as well as all other Jewish visitors, are treated with respect and tolerance. Jewish guests do not expect their hosts to be experts in Judaism. This makes them very appreciative if their hosts are aware of some of their specific needs and develop customised offers to meet them.

General rules

Hosts can assume that Jewish guests wearing traditional head coverings and clothing tend to observe religious laws more strictly. Those without traditional clothing or head coverings will inform you of their specific needs or wishes relating to their religion. Others do not wish to hear any mention of their Jewishness at all. The most important general rules concern the different laws regarding food, drink and the Shabbat. Jewish tourists are accustomed to maintaining a kosher lifestyle even in a foreign environment. They also appreciate information, such as the availability of kosher shops or restaurants, or discussions on mutually agreeable solutions for a kosher kitchen in the holiday apartment. Many Jewish guests are not permitted to use electronic devices on the Shabbat, such as automatic doors, lights or locks. If workable, solutions such as side entrances, timers and manual locks could help get around such issues.



Mutual understanding

It's quite normal for people to lead different lives or to interact with each other in different ways. Tourists are aware that Switzerland has its own unique, typical cultural characteristics and traditions. Yet that doesn't mean they are familiar with them, or immediately understand them. It's the same the other way around. For example, it is very common in Switzerland for strangers to greet each other if they meet on the street or a hiking trail. That's not always the case in other countries or cultures. That's why the failure to return a greeting is not always a sign of disrespect; it's quite possible that the guest is surprised and doesn't know about the culture of saying "Grüezi" when greeting strangers. If a strictly religious Jewish guest doesn't shake hands with a woman, it is not because he is unfriendly, it is simply a matter of traditions and customs. Mutual understanding helps hosts and guests avoid confusing and unpleasant situations and misunderstandings. This is a place where people from very different cultural and religious backgrounds meet. That is exactly why it can be an inspiring, educational experience and why a holiday visit here can be an unforgettable, positive experience for both guests and hosts alike.

Strictly religious Jews do not always shake hands with the opposite sex. They are not aware this is a common Swiss custom.

Likrat Public – understanding through encounters

The FIFA Ascot Hotel in Zurich conducted a Likrat Public meeting in December 2017.

The hotel is popular among Jewish guests and hotel staff are familiar with their needs. 15 employees attended the hour-long meeting and participated enthusiastically in the discussions.

“Today I got answers to all of the questions which I would be reluctant to ask our Jewish guests”, explained Caroline, a front office manager, “that’s what made this meeting so inspiring.”

Link to the article:
www.likrat.ch/en/public/ascot

Further information
www.likrat.ch/en/public

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“Do you serve kosher breakfasts? Can I use a non-electronic key on Saturday? Could you please leave the light on in my room?”

Perhaps you sometimes get questions like this from Jewish hotel guests. Likrat Public shows you how to handle such situations. Cultural differences can lead to misunderstandings, especially in the tourist industry. The Likrat Public project was launched to help to prevent this from happening. The goal is to help non-Jewish organisations better understand their Jewish customers. In a Likrat-Public encounter, employees then have the opportunity to clarify uncertainties in behaviour, communication, wishes and questions in dealing with Jewish customers or guests. The encounters are conducted by specially-trained young Jewish adults and can be held as part of a continuing education course, team-building activities, or as a stand-alone event.

Likrat Public has already successfully held a number of these events in holiday resorts such as Arosa, Davos and Saas-Grund. Events have also been held for hotel staff, such as at the St. Josef Hotel, the Alexander Hotel, the FIFA Ascot Hotel and the Four Points Hotel, all in Zurich. In the health sector, an event was held for Wollishofen Physiotherapy and at the “Alpamare” Wellness Spa.

Local mediators

Likrat Public plans to locate Jewish mediators at selected tourist destinations in the summer of 2019 and 2020. They will be available to answer questions from Jewish tourists and local tourism representatives, and will also offer mediation services.

Likrat Public is a service offered by the SIG, the umbrella organisation of Jewish communities in Switzerland, and a further development of the Likrat dialogue project, which addresses schoolchildren.

The Swiss Federation of Jewish Communities (SIG)

The Swiss Federation of Jewish Communities (SIG) is the political umbrella organisation for Jews in Switzerland. The SIG was founded in 1904 to protect and promote the shared interests of Jews in Switzerland. Today, 16 communities throughout Switzerland are members of the umbrella organisation.

The SIG represents Jewish interests on the national level with the federal authorities, institutions throughout Switzerland and the media. It promotes dialogue with other religious communities, encourages the awareness of Judaism in Switzerland and represents Swiss interests in international Jewish organisations. An important objective of the SIG is the prevention of any form of anti-Semitism and racism. In addition, the SIG coordinates and supports the cultural, youth and social activities of the member communities.

Feel free to contact us with any questions:

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