

Trip to Italy: A Unique Jewish History Experience with Rabbi Dr. Dovid Katz

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If you really enjoy Jewish History, taking a trip with Rabbi Dovid Katz, of Beth Abraham Congregation (Hertzberg's) is an experience of a lifetime. Three families from Ner Tamid, the Elbaums, the Rosens and the Koretzkys recently attended Rabbi Katz's trip to Italy and talked about what they considered to be the highlights of their trip.



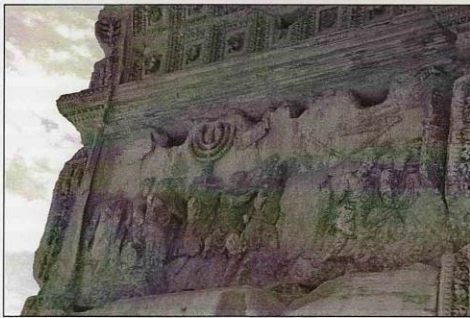
The Whole Group With Rabbi Katz

According to Rick and Judy Rosen, Rabbi Katz bills this trip as "exhausting and exhilarating". "We hit the ground running and didn't stop until we were

on the plane heading back home".

Open to the entire community, the "Jewish History Tour of Italy" took place from May 13-21, 2012. The group of 33 people spent the days intensively exploring Jewish sites and learning about the Jewish history of Italy. Rome, Florence, Siena, Pisa, Livorno, Ferrara, Verona and Venice were some of the key cities visited.

Howard and Judy Elbaum regularly attend Rabbi Katz's ongoing Jewish history series and Howard assists Rabbi Katz with his lecture video presentations. Their son Ari, a former student of Rabbi Katz's, was instrumental in organizing this trip. The group learned what happened to Jews in Italy from the time of their arrival after being taken captive following the destruction of the 2nd Bais Hamikdash (Temple) in Jerusalem to the present, as they explored the synagogues, museums, cities and ghettos. The Elbaums explained that the tour guides in the various museums discussed the secular history and Rabbi Katz shared the Jewish history. Although Rabbi Katz had never previously physically been to Italy, his extensive knowledge of the area through his research and his PhD. in Jewish History made it appear as though he had lived there. "Tour guides are enraptured with him. They've never seen anything like this." Before the trip, explained the Elbaums,



Arch of Titus Depicting The Jews Being Led Away In Captivity

Rabbi Katz provides a list of recommended books so that participants would have the necessary background to appreciate the sites.

In some of the cities, there were remnants of the Ghetto. Howard Elbaum learned that because the Ghettos were limited in area, there was no place to expand except upwards. Therefore, buildings in Ghetto area were higher than the surrounding structures. Ghettos were not a totally negative experience for Italian Jews, however. Because the gates were closed at night, the enclosed environment provided protection against nighttime attacks. Judy Elbaum learned that the Jews of Verona sent a letter of thanks to the local government noting that the Jews felt safe at night because of

their enforced isolation.

Days began at 6:00 a.m. with davening, and by 7:30 a.m. the group was on the bus allowing for an early arrival at the museums and various places they would explore. In the evenings, Rabbi Katz would continue with discussions at the hotel, often as late as 10pm. The first two and a half days were spent in Rome, where places they saw included The Forum and The Arch of Titus. Because the Sistine Chapel in the Vatican is not actively used for Catholic religious services, the group was comfortable in touring this masterpiece of Renaissance art of Michelangelo. It can be accessed through a separate entrance so that one does not have to traverse St. Peter's Basilica.

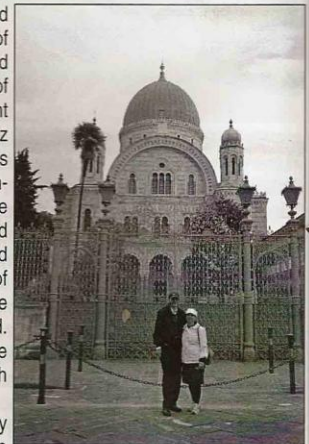


Marge and Marty Koretzky at Trevi Fountain

Martin and Margie Koretzky have also attended Rabbi Katz's lecture series and appreciated that he was a great speaker. They noted that the trip was fast paced and they did a lot of walking since there were many areas where the tour bus was not allowed to park. Rabbi Katz related to the group that all the cities they visited once had ghettos except Livorno, which was very cosmopolitan. The first ghetto was established in Venice in 1516 near an iron foundry. Although the Jews could walk around in the daytime, they had a nighttime curfew. The Koretzkys were fascinated by the magnificent synagogues in Rome and Florence. In Venice, they spent an enriching Shabbat in the historical synagogue which is still located in the area that was once part of the ghetto. Some of the highlights they enjoyed included the Vatican Museum and the Sistine Chapel, St. Marks Square, Doges Palace, and Verona, the city where the story of Romeo and Juliet took place and they enjoyed seeing the beauty of nature there, especially the ancient rivers. Margie noted that Rabbi Katz was very excited to visit the ghettos where ancient Jewish scholars, including Moshe Chaim Luzzato, once lived. Some of the synagogues had Holocaust memorial plaques affixed to them. She related that outside of Rome the Jewish communities are very small and hanging by a thread. It is unclear whether or not these towns will be able to sustain Jewish life in future generations.

The highlight for Marty Koretzky was the Shabbat service which he attended in a Sephardic Synagogue in Venice. Although the main sanctuary was about the size of Ner Tamid, the building ceiling was very high with balconies in the higher level providing additional seating. There were many windows in the structure providing lots of light. Fortunately, that Shabbat morning was a bright, sunny day. The service followed an Italian minhag with which the group was not familiar. Marty found this to be an inspiring experience.

Rick and Judy Rosen considered this trip to be a unique opportunity. They described it as an "education" trip rather than a vacation trip.



Rick and Judy Rosen at Florence Synagogue

Continued on Page 10...