

Only 151 Jews of Rhodes survived camps

"No matter what happens, travel gives you a story to tell" – Jewish Proverb

WHEN IT comes to vacation, travelers are faced with many different and equally exciting options. Sometimes the options seem almost overwhelming, with all the types of travel now available to vacationers. One option is to plan a trip on a cruise ship.

Cruise lines make it easy for the worrisome traveler by including everything they need. Instead of having to book plane tickets, call a hotel and then have to pay for food and entertainment separately, cruises offer it all. You're able to unpack once and return to the comfort of your familiar room every night.

Much of the western border of Israel is the Mediterranean Sea, which allows a vacation by ship. Mano Cruise is the only cruise line that leaves from Haifa.

Since 2009, Golden Iris, formally the Cunard Princess, sails to Greece, Cyprus, Italy, Romania, Bulgaria, and Italy. Their sailings are from March to November; except for Yom Kippur when the ship is at its home port.

The first step of my 420-mile journey to Rhodes began the moment I stepped on the Golden Iris.

A warm welcome by the crew, a nice stateroom, three kosher meals, entertainment, some updated exercise equipment, and duty-free shopping are available on the ship.

They also provide a Las Vegas style casino, a synagogue, a spa, a beauty-



Story by Andee Gold

salon, and a swimming pool where I could relax while we were at sea.

We stopped at Rhodes, a Greek Island that holds a city of the same name. It is the largest of the Dodecanese Islands in the Aegean Sea and is also known as the Island of Roses.

The settlement of Jews in Rhodes is mentioned for the first time in the Book of Maccabees and it dates back to the 2nd century B.C.

Proof of the Jewish presence in Rhodes has remained visible for many centuries. The narrow, arched, paved medieval alleys of the "Juderia" (Jewish) quarter, bear until today many Jewish symbols.

The historian Josephus also mentions the Jews of the island, in the 1st century AD. Later historic texts confirm their

A smile from the handsome boy who was destined to die at Auschwitz

"Angel Boy", 1943, photo of a young Rhodian Jewish boy, of the Angel family, wearing the Star of David on the lapel of his coat.

The Jews of Rhodes were not required to wear the Star. For the photo he is wearing it as an innocent gesture of pride, instead of its actual use as a symbol for persecution.

Tragically, the boy was deported the following year to Auschwitz, where he was murdered along with about 1,500 Jews of Rhodes.

Photo from Miru Alcana

Photo: Courtesy of the Jewish Museum in Rhodes



Inside the Jewish Museum of Rhodes

presence during the 12th century.

During the past five hundred years, the background of the Jews of Rhodes was influenced principally by those Jews who fled Spain at the time of the Spanish Inquisition.

The Jewish community on Rhodes spoke the Ladino language (also called Judeo-Spanish), which is similar to modern-day Spanish. During its height in the 1930s, the Jewish community had a population of approximately 4,000 people.

In 1943, Rhodes was taken over by the Germans. In less than a year, 1,673 members of the Jewish community were arrested and deported to the Auschwitz concentration camp, where 1,522 were slaughtered.

Only 151 survived, many of whom emigrated to Southern Africa, Israel, the United States and other places. In 1947 the island was ceded to Greece as part of the spoils of war.

Miracles happen even during war time. "The Jewish community leaders decided to hide their Sefer Torahs. Included among these Torahs was an 800-year-old scroll, one of the oldest in the world. In secret, the Torahs were given to the Turkish religious leader, the Grand Mufti of Rhodes for safekeeping.

The Grand Mufti hid them in the Morad Reis mosque, in the pulpit. After the war, the Torahs were returned to the few people of the Jewish Community who had survived." **Aron Hasson,**

Founder of Rhodes Jewish Museum

The Kahal Shalom Synagogue is the only remaining synagogue used for services on the island of Rhodes, and is the oldest in all of Greece. Built in 1577, the synagogue was designed in the traditional Sephardic style.

Currently, there is a small Jewish community, some 20 Jews who are living on the island.

The Synagogue is used only for prayer services when visitors or former residents and their families visit the island for Friday night prayer services,

special occasions, and High Holidays. (No need for tickets for attending the High Holidays services.)

Two very special women, Bella Angel Restis (President), and Carmen Cohen (Director), of the Jewish community of Rhodes work year-round to ensure that many visitors are accommodated and offered activities and events, in order to appreciate the Jewish heritage and history of Rhodes.

According to *A Guidebook to the Jewish Quarter of Rhodes*, "In the six rooms adjacent to the Kahal Shalom sanctuary is the Jewish Museum of Rhodes. The rooms were formerly used as the women's prayer rooms. After the Holocaust, the rooms were vacant until the museum was established in 1997.

"The museum was created in order to preserve the special heritage of the Jews of Rhodes, as well as to promote public awareness and appreciation of its unique history.

"It began as a photo exhibit illustrating Jewish life on Rhodes prior to World War II and in 2006, the first artifact was displayed."

Currently it is home for a "400 Year Old Torah of Rhodes", a copy of a 1426 Siddur of Rhodes from (the original being at Oxford University, in England), and various types of documents, and visual artifacts from "La Juderia".

Aron Hasson, attorney from Los Angeles and third-generation Rhodes resident, is the founder who inspired the idea of creating a museum.

He noticed the lack of awareness for the unique history of the community; a perfect example of one person taking an idea and making a difference.

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horizontal
Amaze Drapes

Two new items were added to the museum this year: a megillah and a 1930s Jewish newspaper

As Jews, we need to remember our history and not allow others to destroy our past. The Jewish Museum of Rhodes belongs to the Jewish Community of the island.

When asked, what his favorite exhibits are, Aron proudly spoke about two of the newest items added this year:

1 An ancient megillah which was written in Rhodes - This was written in 1862 and used for the Purim holiday. In 1920, it was brought to New York, when a Hasson family emigrated to the U.S. It later was transferred to Hawaii when the family moved there. It was recently donated to the Rhodes Jewish Historical Foundation.



Holocaust Memorial in the heart of the Juderia

2 “*El Boletin*” the Jewish Newspaper of Rhodes. In the 1930s, the Jewish newspaper on Rhodes was edited by Hizkia Franco and written in Judeo-Spanish (“Ladino”) with Latin characters.

After your visit, heading to the gift shop is a logical next step. Perhaps purchase a keepsake that will remind you of your experience, a memento to add to your collection, or an unusual souvenir of items made locally. All purchases help cover the expense of restoration and maintenance of the Museum and Synagogue.

Both the Synagogue and the Jewish Museum of Rhodes are open daily 10:00-15:00, from April to October but they are closed on Saturdays.

Annually, approximately 20,000 tourists experience the architectural shapes and

interior designs of the long-lost Sephardic community of the 16th Century. If you are planning any Bar/Bat mitzvah and weddings the synagogue is available for rent. However, for the period November - March, these venues are open only on request

In addition to the synagogue and museum, the homes, and the cemetery are there to remind us of a thriving, close-knit community that had lived on the island for centuries.

In the heart of the Jewish quarter, is the Holocaust Memorial, which is dedicated to the Jewish martyrs of Rhodes and Kos, who were killed in the concentration camps.

It is shaped as a six-sided figure with each side displaying text in various languages (Greek-French-Italian-English-Hebrew-Ladino): “Never forget. In eternal memory of the 1604 Jewish martyrs of Rhodes and Kos, who were murdered in Nazi death camps.”

Leaving the Old City of Rhodes and returning to the Golden Iris, I could not forget the picture of the “Angel Boy with the Star of David”.

He was not forced to wear the Yellow Star, but he did so proudly, only to be another innocent victim murdered by Hitler. It is up to us to remember and teach new generations of our history.

Traveling opens one’s eyes to new ideas, culture and history. No matter your age, enjoy your journey. Bon Voyage.



Picturesque ... the exterior of Kahal Shalom Synagogue, Rhodes