Jewish Heritage Tour in Southern Italy
Sicily to Calabria to Rome

An Exclusive 8-night Exploration of 2,000 years of History

2 Dates to choose from in 2009
June 1 - 9 ~ Oct. 12 - 20

Our Special Guides
Rabbi Barbara Aiello in Sicily and Calabria
Dr. Laura Supino in Rome

Click here to read a review of this tour in NY Jewish Week

Introduction

This ground-breaking itinerary is unique in the realm of Jewish Heritage travel. It focuses on the oldest places of Jewish presence in Italy, as well as on the rebirth, after 500 years, of Jewish life in remote parts of Calabria – the “toe” of the boot.

The tour begins in Sicily, in charming Ortigia, the famous island-district of the city of Siracusa. After 3 nights in Sicily we cross the straits of Messina to the region of Calabria; spend 2 nights based in Serrastretta, the home of Rabbi Barbara Aiello, then make our way to Rome for 3 nights. The tour is designed for a maximum of 14 participants, making it possible for us to provide a highly personalized, small-group experience.

In 2009 a visit to the Amalfi Coast will be offered as an optional 3 night extension to the 8 night tour. In Amalfi you can enjoy the fabulous atmosphere of Italy’s “Divine” Coast and visit unique points of Jewish presence dating back to the 12th century.

We are privileged to have Rabbi Barbara Aiello and Dr. Laura Supino as the principal scholars accompanying the tour. (see Bios below) Along the way you will also meet archeologists and local researchers with a passion for unearthing the heritage of the Jews in these regions.

Laurie Howell of “Amalfi Life” is the developer of this special tour. Laurie is a seasoned professional and expert in high quality tourism. The tours and services Amalfi Life offers have garnered years of rave reviews for their creativity and access to the local life.

This tour is an entirely unique journey through Jewish Heritage and the Italian-Jewish experience as it has flowed through two millennia. It is an equally wonderful culinary and cultural immersion into the authentic life of Southern Italy.

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Historical Overview

The Italian Jewish community is the oldest surviving minority in the known world and the oldest Diaspora community in world Jewry. The Jews’ first official presence on the Italian peninsula is documented to be in the year 161 BCE when a delegation from Judea arrived in Rome.

After the fall of Jerusalem and the destruction of the second Temple in 70 CE, 2,000 Hebrew slaves were carted off to Rome. What is not commonly known is that all during this period and throughout the first centuries of the Common Era Hebrew merchants, traders, and scholars crisscrossed the Mediterranean settling all along Southern Italy’s vast coastal regions.

Settlements grew and it is said, “there is no corner of Italy where the Jews were not”. In recent years archeologists and scholars have followed a trail of evidence pointing to a vast and vibrant Jewish presence in Southern Italy from ancient times to the Renaissance and in numbers that dwarf the size of the entire Jewish community in Italy today. Beginning in the early 16th century that presence all but disappears. But not entirely, and that’s what you will discover on this tour. The efforts of Laurie Howell, Laura Supino, and Rabbi Barbara Aiello are bringing this long-neglected heritage to light.

It will change your perspective on Jewish history forever.

Dr. Laura Supino

Laura was born in Northern Italy. Her family moved to Rome when she was a child and she has lived there ever since. She is a professional architect, historian, and special guide to the Museum in Rome’s Great Synagogue. She is a distinguished member of the Association of Jewish Women in Italy and lectures widely on issues important to European Jewry.

On this tour you will be the fortunate beneficiaries of her lifetime of research.

Rabbi Barbara Aiello

Rabbi Barbara is the first woman rabbi to hold a pulpit position in Italy. She is a first-generation American whose Jewish parents were born in Southern Italy; her father in a remote mountain village in Calabria and her mother in Sicily. She has traced her roots even further back to a small group of Jewish families expelled from Sicily during the Inquisition. Rabbi Barbara’s story holds the key to the Jewish heritage in the southernmost regions of Italy. Her research will astound you.

Click here to read Hadassah Magazine’s Interview with Rabbi Barbara Aiello

“We can’t stop talking about the wonderful trip. It couldn’t have been better. We truly enjoyed ourselves.”

Ed & Myrna W., NJ
Tour Highlights

- Ortigia - Jewish Quarter and ancient Mikveh
- Taormina - Greek, Roman, and Jewish History
- Catania’s Jewish past
- 4th century synagogue site at the “toe” of the boot
- “Il Timpone” Jewish Quarter in Nicastro
- “WWII Concentration Camp at Ferramonti di Tarsia
- Rome’s Great Synagogue, Jewish Quarter, and Museum
- Jewish “memories” in the Roman Forum
- Hebrew Catacombs at Appia Pignatelli
- Ostia Antica and its 1st century synagogue
- Charming hotels and sumptuous cuisine!

[Diagram of Italy with overnights highlighted in orange]
Jewish Heritage Tour
Day-by-Day Itinerary

DAY 1: MONDAY, Ortigia, Sicily - The tour begins in Ortigia, the charming island-zone of the city of Siracusa. In the late afternoon we enjoy an historical walking tour of this wondrous locale that has been host to 3,000 years of history. Welcome dinner of Sicilian delights. (overnight in Ortigia)

DAY 2: TUESDAY, Ortigia and Siracusa – In the morning we start by going way back in history to Siracusa’s Greco-Roman foundations, with a guided walking tour of its famed Archeological Zone. After a fascinating few hours we return to Ortigia for lunch. Later we visit the ancient Mikveh, which was established around the 6th century and remained in continuous use until the day the Jewish community was expelled from the city in the middle of the 1500’s. It is in miraculous condition, has 3 large baths and 2 smaller ones, and is the oldest extant in Western Europe. Followed by a walking tour through what was Ortigia’s Jewish Quarter. Lunch, Dinner (overnight in Ortigia)

DAY 3: WEDNESDAY, Taormina and Catania – Today we take a driving excursion to the famously charming and historic town of Taormina, also the birthplace of Rabbi Aiello’s mother. We enjoy a guided walking tour including a visit to one of history’s most impressive Greco-Roman theatres. We move on to the vibrant and complex city of Catania, where surprising traces of its significant Jewish past still exist. We tour Catania with a native of the city who connects his own Jewish past to Sicily’s exiled community. Lunch included. Dinner on your own. (overnight in Ortigia)

DAY 4: THURSDAY, Reggio di Calabria, Bova Marina, and Serrastretta – These names may not be familiar to you, but they hold the keys to understanding the Jewish presence in this region—from the 4th century through the medieval period, all the way to modern times! Today we start early and drive up the Sicilian coastline, cross the straits of Messina by ferry, and arrive at the “toe” of the boot. Our first stop is the town of Reggio di Calabria where we visit the Archeological Museum to see precious items linking the ancient Hebrews to this region. The museum is also home to the two fabulous ancient Greek statues known as the “Bronzi di Riacce”; two life-size bronzes found in a fisherman’s net 20 years ago.

From Reggio we travel 15 miles east along the coastline to the small village of Bova Marina where we visit the extensive and uniquely important site of a 4th century synagogue center discovered here about 20 years ago during road construction. We have an in-depth tour of the site with the archeologist in charge of the research and then visit the new museum built to house the marvelous mosaic floor extracted from the ruins.

After this inspiring visit we travel 60 miles north through Calabria to the small village of Serrastretta, the birthplace and ancestral home of Rabbi Aiello’s father, and where she lives now. We spend 2 nights here in a lovely and relaxing country inn near the Rabbi’s home and synagogue. Lunch, Dinner (overnight in Serrastretta)

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DAY 5: FRIDAY, Nicastro, Ferramonti di Tarsia – This morning we start early and take a driving excursion with Rabbi Aiello to two fascinating points of Jewish interest. First we explore the old Jewish Quarter of “Il Timpone” in the nearby town of Nicastro. A Jewish community existed here for over 300 years but was driven out in the 16th century. Rabbi Aiello has her own personal connection to Il Timpone, which we will learn about during our visit.

In the afternoon we travel further north into the Calabrian countryside to visit the site of one of Italy’s largest WWII Concentration Camps where about 4,000 Jews from Italy, the Balkans, and Eastern Europe were interred during the war. This was not an extermination camp. In fact, not one inmate died, other than from natural causes. Still standing are a few of the old structures, now in various stages of restoration, including two police administration buildings. One has been transformed into a conference center and the other into a small museum with a moving exhibit of artifacts, photographs, books and letters.

We return to Serrastretta to “welcome Shabbat” with an intimate Friday evening service of candle-lighting and song with Rabbi Aiello in her synagogue. Followed by Shabbat dinner with a few Calabrese-Jewish foods included! Lunch, Dinner (overnight in Serrastretta)

DAY 6: SATURDAY, To Rome! – Today we enjoy a relaxing ride to Rome on a Eurostar Italia Train. We say “arrivederci” to Rabbi Aiello in the morning and leave Serrastretta by minivan for the 45 minute ride to the train station at Lamezia-Terme. The journey to Rome is about 4 ½ hours and we arrive in mid-afternoon. We check into the lovely Hotel Rose Garden Palace for our 3 night stay, and then give you the rest of the afternoon free. We meet again in the evening for dinner. Lunch. Dinner. (overnight in Rome)

DAY 7: SUNDAY, Jewish Rome with Dr. Laura Supino – This morning we begin our two-day “intensive” on the Jewish presence in Rome with Laura Supino as our guide and scholar-par-excellence. Laura is an architect, historian, esteemed member of Rome’s Jewish Community, and all-around unique person.

We visit Rome’s Great Synagogue, the Museo Ebraico, and tour the former Ghetto area now known as the Jewish Quarter. We conclude the day with Laura’s singular version of a walking tour in the Forum, when she makes history come alive with fascinating Jewish “memories” woven into its Roman past. Lunch included. Dinner on your own. (overnight in Rome)

DAY 8: MONDAY, Ancient evidence of the Jews of Rome – On this last day of the trip, we take a driving excursion to the outskirts of Rome, and start with a private visit to the Hebrew Catacombs at Appia Pignatelli, followed by a visit to the awesome (and little known) WWII Memorial of Fosse Ardeatine. We then move on toward the seacoast for an in-depth visit of the archeological site known as Ostia Antica. A fitting end to our touring comes when we reach the ruins of Ostia’s 1st century synagogue. Lunch. Farewell Dinner. (overnight in Rome)

DAY 9: TUESDAY, Departure.

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Jewish Heritage Tour
3 Night Amalfi Coast Optional Extension

DAY 9: TUESDAY, Rome to the “Divine” Coast -
We depart Rome in the morning by Eurostar Italia train to the city of Salerno, where we board a deluxe minivan for our excursion and drive along the Amalfi Coast. On the way to Amalfi Village we stop for two fascinating points of Jewish heritage. First, in Salerno’s Archdiocese Museum, we see a remnant of a tombstone dating from the year 1278, inscribed in Hebrew in the same format that we use today, documenting the death of the Jewish Community’s beloved Rabbi. As far as we know, this is the only piece of incunabula remaining of Salerno’s large Jewish population that was present here from the middle ages to the 16th century. Now we travel on to the Amalfi Coast itself, where in the oldest section of the town of Maiori there is a cluster of buildings identified as the site of a small Jewish community in the 12th to 14th centuries.

Lunch, Dinner
(overnight in Amalfi)

DAY 10: WEDNESDAY, Amalfi Village Walking Tour – Amalfi Village is one of the most charismatic small towns in all of Italy. Aside from being visually stunning from every angle, it has a long and dramatic history. In the medieval period Amalfi was one of the 4 great Maritime Republics of the Italian peninsula, along with Venice, Pisa, and Genoa. Its very impressive Cathedral of Sant’Andrea and adjoining Cloister of Paradise are among the most important in all of Southern Italy. From a Jewish point of view, another of Amalfi’s unique aspects is of particular interest to us. Amalfi was the first place in Western Europe to manufacture handmade paper from old cloth, an industry dating back to the 11th century. For hundreds of years the rushing waters of the Amalfi River powered a multitude of busy papermills, the last of which has been transformed into an excellent museum. We will visit this museum and learn about its fascinating connection to the Jewish heritage of this region. Lunch included. Dinner on your own. (overnight in Amalfi)

DAY 11: THURSDAY, Enjoy the Amalfi Coast at Leisure – There is much to experience on the legendary Amalfi Coast. You can explore the other wonderful villages renowned for their charm and romance. There are beaches, boat-rides, hikes, and shopping. With all of the possibilities to choose from we’ve made no specific plans for you today. If you need advice or if you would like us to organize something, you can count on us to make the perfect arrangements. Lunch on your own. Dinner included. (overnight in Amalfi)

DAY 12: FRIDAY, Departure

Click here to read the recent Interview with Rabbi Aiello in Hadassah Magazine
General Information & Costs

First, A Word About Flight Arrangements
The closest airport to Ortigia (Siracusa), the starting point of the tour, is the Catania airport about 1 hour away. At the end of the 8-nights the departure airport would be Rome. For participants opting for the 3-night extension in Amalfi, the closest airport is Naples.

If you want to visit other destinations in Italy before or after the tour please let us know. Please note – for your convenience, we can make all your airline arrangements. Just ask.

About Meals
We pride ourselves on the high level of food and wine we offer. We are uniquely knowledgable about the cuisine of Italy and we share this passion with you by providing terrific gastronomic experiences.

Unlike most other tour companies, we include nearly ALL meals in the program and in the price of the tour. We eat together as a group and use our mealtimes to share thoughts on the interesting and unusual experiences we’ve had each day.

Please Note – this is not a kosher tour. We cannot provide strictly kosher meals. However, most of our menus are planned in advance and are in kosher-style; meaning they are comprised of kosher fishes, vegetables, cheese, eggs, and vegetarian pastas. There will also be meals at which you may order whatever you like. We make every effort to honor special requests or dietary needs whenever possible.

Summary of 8-night Itinerary
- Ortigia, Sicily – 3 nights
- Serrastretta, Calabria – 2 nights
- Rome – 3 nights

Costs & Inclusions
For the 8-night Tour - $4395 per person based on double occupancy
Single supplement $775 (double room for single use)

Includes:
- 8 nights in charming, personalized, well-located hotels
- All breakfasts, All Lunches, 6 Dinners - including wine
- Airport transfers in Catania (Sicily) and in Rome on the start-date and end-date
- Entrance fees, Guide services
- Hotel taxes, Gratuities

For the 3-night Amalfi Coast Optional Extension
$795 per person plus your choice of hotel in the following price ranges:
- $305 per person in double occupancy, Single Supplement of $185
- $480 per person in double occupancy, Single Supplement of $355
- $615 per person in double occupancy, Single Supplement of $435

Includes:
- 3 nights in charming, personalized, well-located hotel
- 3 breakfasts, 2 lunches, 2 dinners – including wine
- Transfer from Rome to the hotel in Amalfi Village
- Transfer from Amalfi to the Naples Airport or Train Station
- Guide and entrance fees pertaining to the tour program.

“Once again, you exceeded our expectations and created a magical, memorable travel experience for all of us. Everything was executed perfectly — the variety of activities, hotels, food, wine and companionship.”
Sue D., NYC
Exclusions
Airfare (We can help you.)
Travel Insurance (see more below)
Bar-drinks, beer, liquor
Room service, Laundry, Telephone
Airport transfers other than on specified days

Other Arrangements
If you would like to arrive in advance of the tour or extend your stay at the end we would be happy to make these arrangements for you. We are highly experienced in all aspects of travel to Italy and other parts of Europe.

Travel Insurance
We highly recommend the purchase of Trip Cancellation/Interruption Insurance. There are many reasons to opt for it including the peace of mind it provides. After evaluating various companies we have chosen to offer the policies of Travelex. We can answer some basic questions for you and also send you their folios. You can find them on the web at http://www.travelexinsurance.com/
Or you can phone them directly at 800-228-9792.
When enrolling please insert our location # 32-0245 in the designated box.

Download a printer-friendly PDF version of this tour.
(you must have Adobe Acrobat Reader to be able to download it)

Contact AmalfiLife
The best way to learn about this Tour of Jewish Heritage in Southern Italy is to call Laurie Howell at 347-240-1244. Laurie will share her knowledge on this fascinating subject with you, and communicate the passion she and her colleagues have for offering this tour to you.

We invite you to visit our website: www.AmalfiLife.com to learn more about AmalfiLife and the unique collection of tours and services we offer.

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