

Travel / Lisbon



A French couple's passion for Portuguese Jewish history is now the number one tour

Among the many stories that emerged during the week of Holocaust Remembrance was the New York Times feature on Portuguese diplomat Aristides de Sousa Mendes. Described as Portugal's 'Schindler', Sousa Mendes was appointed consul-general in Bordeaux in 1940 where he saved tens of thousands of lives by issuing visas only to then be punished by his own government after the war. He died in obscurity in 1954, poor and reduced to being fed by a local Jewish soup kitchen.



Aristides Sousa Mendes

Patricia Lustigman knows his story well and tells it in vivid colour to the tourists who join her Kosher Lisbon tour. As the owner and genial hostess of the only Kosher B&B, Patricia and husband Yosef are legends in Lisbon which has been their home for the past 30 years. "I actually met my husband in Lisbon on the first shabbat I visited," recalls Patricia. "We were neighbours in Paris, but incredibly had to go to Portugal to meet."

The couple lost many relatives in the Holocaust while others survived as members of the resistance and it is their own history that enthralls their passion for telling others about Jewish Portugal.

"With us you will pursue a road less travelled by tourists" says Patricia who describes their tour as 'one of a kind.' "They will hear extraordinary historical facts and unfamiliar stories, but the most important thing is that Jewish people get the warmest welcome. Did you know that there was a DNA national blood test for citizens that revealed one in four Portuguese have sephardi blood? It's amazing."

For the longest time visitors to Lisbon who kept kosher really struggled as there were no kosher options but the Lustigmans who are dedicated members of the small community changed all that when Patricia

started cooking kosher meals for the guests who stay in their two double-bedroom B&B.

"And not just any meals," adds Patricia with pride. "I am French and guests tell me they have never tasted Kosher food as good as mine. I also cook Portuguese dishes and give them a kosher spin."

Walking tours are known to increase hunger, but the couple don't believe in serving up history at speed. "Our tour happens at strolling pace," quips Patricia and it is

a delicious balance of history and anecdotes that begins in the 12th century taking in the first expulsion of Jews from Portugal by the Visigoths, through to the period of the 13th and 15th centuries and on to the Portuguese Inquisition."

The role the remarkably courageous and humble Jewish community of Lisbon played during the Second World War and Sousa Mendes is discussed as the tour passes the magnificent synagogue of Lisbon, and beautiful old quarters of Bairro Alto, Baixa, Carmo and Chiado. A Shabbat special with the Lustigmans includes Friday night dinner, Saturday lunch and gourmet take-away kosher meals on request and is unforgettable according to many.

"We got a real picture of what Jewish life was really like over the centuries as Patricia is a true investigative historian," aid Lydia Mitch from Israel who stayed at the B&B. "They planned our entire sight-seeing tour for us and we could have listened to their stories for another week."

If you want to stay with the Lustigmans book well in advance they have limited numbers and you will want to be one of them.

www.kosherinlisbon.com



Lisbon Jewish Memorial 2008 in memory of the Jewish Massacre of 1506



Lisbon's Grand Synagogue faces a courtyard



The historic trams are a popular attraction.