



How to Plan and Execute the Most Effective Jewish Travel Experience – Before The Travel Experience

PRINCIPLES & BEST PRACTICES

Start with the End in Mind

As with the best education in general, don't forget to start your Jewish travel plans by thinking of your goals. What do you really want to achieve by traveling with your students? What are the messages you want them to learn and the experiences you want them to have? Try to be as specific as you can, and then check back when you made your plans to ensure that you meet your goals.

Consider Jewish Travel Close to Home

You don't have to go far to have a powerful and meaningful Jewish travel experience. While it may be wonderful (and recommended) to take your students away from home for an immersive experience, it isn't the only way to think about Jewish travel. Consider the potential Jewish sites in your

city by thinking broadly, both geographically and historically.

Think back in time – where did Jews live when they first arrived in your city? (Usually downtown or near the commercial area.) Are there old synagogues or neighborhoods that used to be Jewish? Where can you go to explore the history of the Jews who settled in your area?

Additionally, you don't have to focus on Jewish sites. Are there other sites in your city that have interest from a Jewish perspective? For example, a visit to the National Mall in Washington DC could include a visit to the Martin Luther King Jr Memorial with a focus on the role of Jews in the civil rights movement, the notion of freedom in Jewish texts, etc.

A bus tour of Hollywood sites in LA could focus on stories of Jews in the movie industry in

the past or present. Who were they? Why did they come to LA? How did they learn from and influence contemporary culture?

Lay the Foundations

Help your students prepare for their experience by creating the context in which their actual trip will occur in order to make it more powerful and meaningful. This is particularly true of historical context.

If you are planning a visit the Southern United States for a tour on Jewish/Black relations, for example, it is extremely helpful to teach some of that material in advance. Similarly, before a trip to Eastern Europe or any trip for which history is relevant, it is important to provide historical context. The geographical context is also important, as is language and preparation for the culture in which students will encounter during their travels.

DURING THE TRAVEL EXPERIENCE

Focus on the People

Some Jewish travel focuses heavily on the historical events and cultural developments associated with particular places, to the point that it overlooks mentioning the people who lived there. As Jewish Peoplehood educators, our focus is on the people behind the places, the individuals and communities who brought life to a particular place at a particular time. We want to “meet” them, either imaginatively or in real life.

Wherever you go, ask yourself, ‘who are the people who live/d here?’, ‘what can we learn from them?’, ‘how can we connect to them?’ and ‘what

is similar or different between their experiences and ours?’

If you are visiting a place in which Jews still live, find ways to meet them and interact. Can you visit a Jewish school? A synagogue or old-age home? If there are no Jews in that place any more, what can you find out about them, through books, movies and other texts? The more specific you get, the better. Try to find details on individuals or groups who were involved in different kinds of activism and Jewish communal organization.

If you can, we highly recommend arranging a live Mifgash with people in the city or community you are visiting. For best practices on organizing a mifgash check here.

Use All Your Senses

Travel experiences are most powerful when you use all your senses to experience them. This is one benefit of using travel as an educational tool; it’s experiential qualities are very powerful, and often more effective than the traditional “formal” education that we do most of the time. Think of ways to involve all the students’ senses in a travel experience. Incorporate some of the following ideas into your program:

- Eat the local/ethnic/Jewish food.
- Make sure to talk to as many local people as possible.
- Listen to the music (on the bus, in advance in class).
- Learn a few words or phrases in the local language.
- Walk or hike in the foreign landscape or city.
- Let students “touch” the new place by giving

them some time to explore independently (depending on their age, of course). For example, include scavenger hunts, making photo or video documentaries, conducting street interviews and small-group projects that involve independent preparation and exploration at the site.

Emphasize that you are away from home

One of the main benefits of travel as an educational experience is that by taking a student away from his or her home environment, the opportunities for learning expand. Something happens to us when we are away from home. We see the world in new ways, we relax and separate from the daily routine that often keeps us tied to old ways of doing and thinking, and we make new connections to people.

Maximize this by making a deliberate effort to differentiate between the student's home reality and the reality of the Jewish travel experience. If you are traveling by bus, play music to create a new atmosphere, encourage students to minimize phone calls and texting with their friends and family at home. (You could even insist that they turn their phones off!)

Create new group norms and culture that distinguishes between their "normal" learning reality and this traveling reality. Create time for group discussion and reflection, encourage new friendships and make sure you talk to each student individually to find out what they are doing and thinking.

AFTER THE TRAVEL EXPERIENCE

Reflection

One of the most important components of successful experiential education is the process of reflection. Without giving your students time to think about and process their experience, it can easily disappear and fade into the background of their lives and consciousness. It is worthwhile to provide reflection time during the trip itself, but often the pressures of time don't allow for it.

Make sure that when you get home, you offer opportunities for students to process what they learned: make an exhibition of what you did; have students write or create artistic representations of their experience; encourage them to think about what the experience meant to them.

Keep Connecting

When you get home, consider ways to strengthen connections you made with people you met on the way. Set up Skype meetings with the people you met and find ways to continue the relationship.

Can you develop a joint project with a school or community you visited? Are there other people who you didn't have time to meet who you can meet now? What else do you want to learn about the place and the people you met on your trip?