Ayelet TOURS

THE MEMORIES LAST FOREVER!

Jewish Journey in LITHUANIA



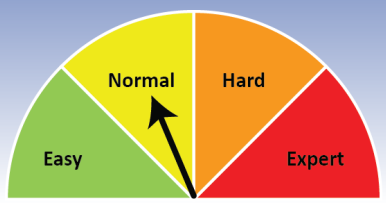
Led by Prof. Yale Strom
& Elizabeth Schwartz
May 2025

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as of 4/18/2024

The history of Jews in Lithuania stretches back to the 14th century. On this journey, we will delve into the rich and storied past of Litvak culture and heritage, interact with the Jewish communities of today, and enjoy unforgettable musical presentations by Prof. Yale Strom and Elizabeth Schwartz in collaboration with local Jewish musicians.

Physical Activity Scale



DAY 1

MONDAY, MAY 12, 2025
DEPARTURE

- We depart the United States on our overnight flight to **Lithuania.**

DAY 2

TUESDAY, MAY 13, 2025
ARRIVAL IN VILNIUS, LITHUANIA

- ***Sveiki!* Welcome to Lithuania!** An Ayelet Tours representative meets us at Vilnius International Airport and assists us through customs.
- We enjoy an overview tour of Lithuania's capital city, stopping at the **Gediminas Castle Tower** for a spectacular panorama of Vilnius (Vilna) and an overview historical introduction to Vilnius as the center of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania.
- We check into our hotel to refresh.
- **MUSICAL MOMENT:** Join together for our **welcome dinner.** Have an ear for music? Yale and Elizabeth will introduce us to some of the melodies we'll hear throughout the trip - a short musical taste of the soundscape we'll encounter together here in Lithuania, so you'll be ready to sing along!

Overnight in Vilnius



DAY 3

WEDNESDAY, MAY 14, 2025
JEWISH VILNIUS

- Breakfast at our hotel.
- Prior to WWII, Vilnius was known as the "Jerusalem of Lithuania" and was the most important educational and cultural center for Jews in the region. We begin our day with a walking tour of the medieval **Jewish Quarter**, located in the middle of **Vilnius Old Town**. During WWII, the small **Vilna ghetto** was established in this area, where approximately 11,000 Jews were kept for two months prior to October 1941. We also visit the **Jewish Labor Camp** on Subacius Street.
- The **Vilna Gaon Museum of Jewish History** is composed of several sites. First, we visit the **Green House** Holocaust exhibition (Pamėnkalnio str. 12), then the **Tolerance Center** (Naugarduko str. 10/2). The **Holocaust exhibition** covers the most important details of WWII Jewish history: the establishment of the Vilnius Ghetto, resistance in the Ghetto, and the saving of Jews. The exhibition also teaches how the Soviet government treated cultural heritage and historical Jewish sites in Vilnius. The **Tolerance Center** covers more of the cultural side of our history in the region. Part of the museum is dedicated to famous Litvak artist **Samuel Bak**, a prisoner of the Vilna Ghetto who survived the Holocaust.
- The Romanesque-Moorish **Choral Synagogue** (est. 1903) is the only synagogue in Vilnius that survived WWII without significant damage.
- **MUSICAL MOMENT:** We visit the choir loft and celebrate the heritage of Lithuanian Jewish music, led by Yale Strom and Elizabeth Schwartz.
- (Time permitting): We visit the **Užupis Jewish Cemetery** where the Vilna Gaon and his family are buried.
- We return to the hotel to refresh before dinner on our own.

Overnight in Vilnius

DAY 4

THURSDAY, MAY 15, 2025
TRAKAI ISLAND

- Breakfast at our hotel.
- This morning, we set out on a day trip to **Trakai Island**. On the way, we visit the **Memorial Museum of Paneriai**, the infamous killing grounds where 70,000 Jews were murdered by the Nazis during WWII.
- For centuries, **Trakai Island** was home to the **Turkic Karaites**, a Jewish minority community with their own independent traditions. Trakai also is known for the Gothic-style castle built in the latter half of the 14th century out of red brick and stone. We visit the **Museum of the Karaite people of S. Šapšal** and the **Island Castle**.
- **MUSICAL MOMENT:** We return to our hotel to refresh, then visit the **JCC** for **dinner** and a **Lag B'Omer concert by performed Yale Strom, Elizabeth Schwartz**, accompanied by top level local musicians.

Overnight in Vilnius





DAY 5

FRIDAY, MAY 16, 2025
KAUNAS (KOVNO)

- Breakfast and check out of our hotel.
- We drive west from Vilnius to **Kaunas**, Lithuania's 2nd largest city and once its temporary capital.
- En route, we visit the **Žiežmariai Synagogue**, one of the rare 19th century wooden synagogues that still exists in Europe.
- Upon arrival in Kaunas, we view the **Kaunas Cathedral** and visit **Old Town Hall and Square**.
- At **Kaunas Castle**, a 14th century Gothic fortress built on a hill overlooking the Nemunas River, we tour the museum and participate in a class to learn the basics of traditional **Lithuanian dances**. (https://kaunomuziejus.lt/edukacijos/grokim-sokim/)
- We check into our hotel to refresh, then join members of **Ohel Yaakov Synagogue** for **Kabbalat Shabbat** and a **festive Shabbat dinner**.

Overnight in Kaunas

DAY 6

SATURDAY, MAY 17, 2025
SHABBAT SHALOM

- Breakfast at our hotel.
- We drive to **Šeduva**, where we visit **The Lost Shtetl Museum**. The Lost Shtetl Museum presents the history, culture, religion, folklore, and daily life of the Jews of Lithuania's shtetls and their relations with their neighbors - an entire way of life that ended in Eastern Europe after WWII. The museum's exploration of daily shtetl life is based on the many stories of the Jews of Šeduva. Yale Strom is part of the "Lost Shtetl Museum's" film. He acted in and arranged the music for the "Jewish wedding scenes".
- **MUSICAL MOMENT:** After a musical **Havdalah** at our hotel, led by Yale Strom and Elizabeth Schwartz, we enjoy dinner on our own.

Overnight in Kaunas

DAY 7

SUNDAY, MAY 18, 2025
WE REMEMBER

- Breakfast at our hotel.
- Our day begins at the **Sugihara House** where we learn about the efforts of Chiune Sugihara, the first consul of Japan in Lithuania, and one of his colleagues from the Netherlands. Between July 31, 1939 and September 1, 1940, they saved approximately 6,000 Jews by issuing visas, against the orders from their superiors to let them out of the country. Sugihara stamped visas until the very moment his train left Kaunas for Berlin.
- Afterwards, we visit the **Ninth Fort of Kaunas Fortress**, a former stronghold with a paradoxical history. At the beginning of the 20th century it was built as a defensive fortification to save local people, but eventually was turned into prison and a place of mass murders for Kaunas's Jews and Jews from all around Lithuania and other European countries. We see the Occupation Exposition, the Ninth Fort, the mass murder side, the **Monument to the Victims of Nazism**, and the administration building.
- We visit the **memorial at the former Kaunas Jewish ghetto**, where thousands of Jews were murdered in 1941.
- As our day draws to an end, we stop by the **House of Perkunas,** a Gothic merchant house that dates to the 15th century.

Overnight in Kaunas

DAY 8

MONDAY, MAY 19, 2025
KLAIPEDA

- Breakfast and check out of our hotel.
- We drive to **Klaipėda**, founded in the 13th century, and is the only port city of Lithuania. The city's original name was Memeleburgh or, in short, Memel. Memel had a big influence on the Jewish world because the **Mussar Movement** was founded here by **Rabbi Israel Salanter**, who served as the rabbi of Memel. For centuries, it belonged to Prussia; its German background is evident in the style of houses and streets. The German army annexed the city during the Anschluss of Austria.
- We visit the **Klaipėda Castle Museum and Castle Ruins**. Exhibitions showcase the development of the Castle; the 16th century gold, gem-encrusted ring; the archeology in the northern curtain; and the history of Klaipėda during WWII.
- Tick tock, tick tock…we next visit the world-renown **Museum of Clocks** to learn about the history of clock construction and the evolution of clock shapes from the Renaissance to the present.
- Lunch is on our own in the area of the **Friedrich Passage**. Enjoy the quaint streets, cozy cafes, and stylish shops.
- This afternoon, we stop by the **Old Ferry Terminal** and visit the **Lithuanian Sea Museum.**
- **MUSICAL MOMENT:** We check into our hotel before **dinner and a concert by Yale Strom and Elizabeth Schwartz at the Jewish Community Center**.

Overnight in Klaipėda

DAY 9

TUESDAY, MAY 20, 2025
CURONIAN SPLIT

- Breakfast at our hotel.
- We embark on a day trip to explore the beautiful **Baltic coast**. We head south from Klaipėda along the **Curonian Spit**, a long, thin sand spit that runs 62 miles (100 km) between the Baltic Sea and the Curonian Lagoon. Dotting this narrow strip of land are quaint fishing villages, isolated pine forests, and endless sand dunes.
- We return to Klaipėda for dinner on our own.

Overnight in Klaipėda

DAY 10

WEDNESDAY, MAY 21, 2025
EXPLORING JEWISH KLAIPEDA AND *ATSISVEIKINK*

- Breakfast at our hotel.
- Today we explore Klaipėda's **Jewish heritage sites**, including the Synagogue of Klaipėda and the Old Jewish Cemetery, Beit HeChalutz ("pioneer house"), the Jewish Folk Bank, and the memorial plaques to Jewish journalist Rudolph Valsonok and Jewish philanthropist Julius Liudvikas Vyneris.
- The afternoon we transfer to Riga.

Overnight in Riga



DAY 11

THURSDAY, MAY 22, 2025
RIGA

- Today, we visit the **Peitav Synagogue**, built in 1905 and Riga's sole surviving synagogue.
- Next, we enjoy a **walking tour** of Riga's **Old Jewish Quarter**, then visit the **Memorial of the Burnt Synagogue** destroyed by the Nazis in 1941.
- We continue to the Jewish community museum "**Jews in Latvia**", the **Jewish cemetery** and the Jewish memorial in **Rumbula**.
- We continue to **Salaspils** to visit the memorial site of the concentration camp
- Take time on own this afternoon for last minute shopping or exploration on own.
- We join together for a **farewell dinner**, recalling all we have experienced on our Jewish journey through Lithuania.
- **MUSICAL MOMENT:** Yale and Elizabeth add a short musical interlude to our closing program.

Overnight in Riga

DAY 12

FRIDAY, MAY 23, 2025
WELCOME HOME!

- Breakfast and check out of our hotel.
- Transfer to the airport for our overnight flight to the United States.
- We arrive in the United States later today.

THE MEMORIES LAST FOREVER!

****Itinerary subject to change***



ABOUT PROF. STROM: *Professor Yale Strom is an acclaimed violinist, composer, filmmaker, writer, photographer, playwright and a pioneer among revivalists in conducting extensive field research in Central and Eastern Europe and the Balkans among the Jewish and Romani communities. Initially, his work focused primarily on the use and performance of klezmer music among these two groups. Gradually, his focus increased to examining all aspects of their culture, from post-World War II to the present. For more than 3 decades and 75 such research expeditions, Strom has become the world's leading ethnographer-artist of klezmer music and history. In addition to his klezmer research Strom has researched, composed and played Jewish music that was influenced by various Arab cultures. This influence can be heard even in klezmer music. Strom will have his thirteenth book published (Shloyml Boyml and His Purim Adventure) in spring 2023. It will be a children's illustrated book (English/Yiddish) based upon his ethnographic research he did in Romania. Strom has lectured extensively throughout the United States, Canada, Europe, Asia and taught at NYU for 4 years, where he created the course "Artist Ethnographer Expeditions". At present he is a professor in the Music Dept. at San Diego State.*

ABOUT ELIZABETH SCHWARTZ: *Elizabeth Schwartz has been called "The Edith Piaf of Yiddish" and "a revelation" with a superb mastery of klezmer ornamentations. As the vocalist for Yale Strom & Hot Pstromi and as a soloist, she has performed at festivals, synagogues and concert halls throughout Europe, Asia and North America. Her myriad acclaimed recordings of Yiddish, Ladino, Hebrew and English have been released on the Naxos World, Arc Music UK and Transcontinental Music record labels. On March 18, 2012, Schwartz was invited to become the first woman in history to sing at the 125-year-old Eldridge Street Synagogue in Manhattan, effectively breaking the ban of kol isha in this landmark cultural venue. Schwartz is the subject of the Romanian documentary film, "Searching for Schwartz", by Radu Gabrea (z"l). As a writer, Schwartz co-created the award-winning audio dramas "The Witches of Lublin" and "Debs in Canton" for Suemedia Productions. She contributed a chapter on klezmer vocal technique to "Shpil: The Art of Playing Klezmer" (Scarecrow Press). For more information, visit www.elizabeth-schwartz.com.*