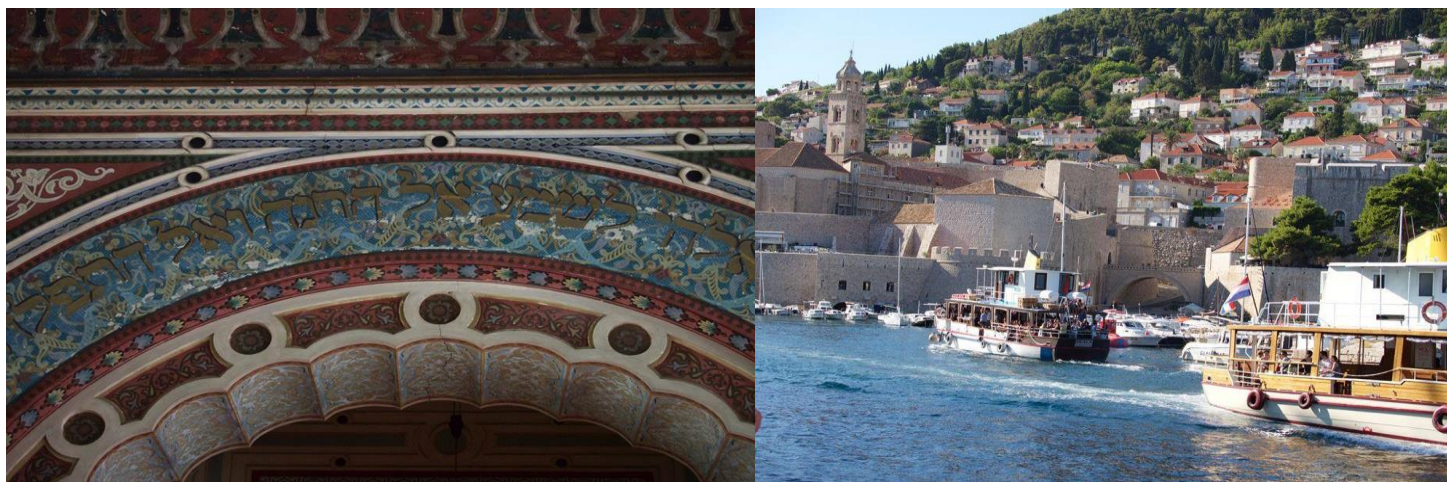


Purim in the Balkans!
Jewish Croatia, Slovenia, and Trieste (Italy)
Jewish Spiritual Adventures
with Rabbi Rayzel Raphael
March 4—13, 2026



**Travel program organized by Sephardic Balkans LLC & Dr. Joseph Benatov
of the University of Pennsylvania**

Join me for an adventure in meeting the Jews of the Balkans, learning and feasting!

MAIN CORE ITINERARY AT A GLANCE:

Dubrovnik – 2 nights
Split – 2 nights
Zagreb – 2 nights
Ljubljana – 3 nights

All accommodation in excellent 4* and 5* hotels.

Delicious food throughout the tour!

Save \$100 when you book by April 21, 2025!

Detailed Itinerary

DAY 1, WEDNESDAY, 4 MARCH: DUBROVNIK AIRPORT—DUBROVNIK, CROATIA

Your tour leader and private bus will meet you at the airport and take you to your Dubrovnik hotel. Initial orientation around Dubrovnik. Stroll through the beautiful Babin Kuk and Lapad neighborhoods. Festive welcome dinner. **Overnight in Dubrovnik. Hotel More 5***

Delicacies: Fresh Adriatic fish with Swiss chard; Rožata (Croatian crème caramel)
Wines: Placav Mali (red), Pošip (white)

DAY 2, THURSDAY, 5 MARCH: DUBROVNIK AND ENVIRONS

Until the Napoleonic conquest of 1808, for over four centuries **Dubrovnik** was coterminous with the autonomous maritime Republic of **Ragusa**, reaching its commercial zenith during the 15th and 16th centuries. Sephardi Jews settled here – and across Dalmatia – in large numbers after the Expulsion. They mostly traded in silk, leather, spices, wool, and textiles. In 1556, Dubrovnik also welcomed a significant number of Jews expelled from Ancona by Pope Paul IV. Dubrovnik's 1532 **synagogue** is particularly enchanting. After Prague, it is the second-oldest active synagogue in Europe.

In the 16th and 17th centuries, the most prominent Jewish family was that of the illustrious rabbi Aaron ben David ha-Koen (from Florence). We'll walk along Dubrovnik's **Stradun** thoroughfare, the town's enchanting **alleyways**, and the romantic **port**. During your free time you can walk along the city walls, take a short boat ride to nearby Lokrum islet, or enjoy the charm of the old town. **Overnight in Dubrovnik. Hotel More 5***.

Delicacies: Dalmatian pašticada beef stew with gnocchi; grilled seabass with vegetables; Dubrovnik almond cake with lemon zest.

Wines: Dingač (red), Malvasia (white)

Note: One of Croatia's Michelin-star restaurants is located in Dubrovnik. It's called 360°.

DAY 3, FRIDAY, 6 MARCH: THE ADRIATIC COAST—SPLIT

Our drive today takes us on the famed Jadranska seaside road, along Dalmatia's breathtaking southern **Adriatic coast**. We'll pass by medieval **Ston**, whose defense walls are sometimes likened to the Great Wall of China. The scenic region we'll be traversing is home to sunny vineyards, Franciscan monasteries,

craggy cliffs, and oyster farms. From the northern coast of the picturesque Pelješac peninsula, we will cross the famed newly built Pelješac Bridge (thus avoiding the Neum border crossing with Bosnia & Herzegovina).

Our final destination today is **Split**, Dalmatia's undisputed hub. After we check into our hotel, you will have some free time in the afternoon to start exploring what bustling Split has to offer. The Ivan Meštrović Gallery, for example, is dedicated to the work of Croatia's internationally renowned sculptor. In the evening we'll attend Kabbalat Shabbat services at the Split Synagogue. **Overnight in Split. Santa Lucia Heritage Hotel 4*.**

Delicacies: Handmade vegetarian Dalmatian pasta; *Peka*, a slow-cooked meat-and-vegetables dish roasted under a cast iron bell. Smokvenjak – fig cake with aromatic spices.

Drink: Prošek – Dalmatian dessert wine.

DAY 4, SATURDAY, 7 MARCH: SPLIT ON FOOT

Romaniote Jews lived in nearby Salona (no connection to Salonica) in the 3rd century. In the middle of the 7th century they moved to the court of Diocletian, soon to become the town of Split. During the Middle Ages the Jewish merchants of Split and Ragusa (Dubrovnik) served as trade brokers between Dalmatia, Italy, and regions along the Danube. In the 16th century there were two distinct Sephardi communities in Split: the Eastern/Levantine from Ottoman lands and the Western – or Ponentine – Sephardim from Italy.

One of the most prominent Ashkenazi families were the Morpurgos of Maribor. The historic Morpurgo bookstore still stands in the heart of the old town (though currently closed). Our walking tour includes **Diocletian's Palace**, where menorah engravings are clearly visible on the walls; the spectacular **synagogue** dating back to the early 1500s; and the historic Jewish neighborhood, converted into a ghetto from the mid-1700s until Napoleon's arrival in 1806. We will also stop by the fish market, walk up to the enchanting **Jewish cemetery**, and enjoy a panoramic vista of the city and its port. **Overnight in Split. Santa Lucia Heritage Hotel 4*.**

Delicacies: Explore Split's vibrant restaurant scene. Watch *Somebody Feed Phil*, Season 6, Episode 2 – set in Croatia. These are the locations featured in Split: Kriscic Bakery, St. Burek (traditional Balkan pastries), Kantun Paulina (grilled meat stuffed in pita), Gelateria Emiliana – the best gelato in town.

DAY 5, SUNDAY, 8 MARCH: SPLIT—PLITVICE LAKES—ZAGREB

Our drive this morning takes us through central Croatia, or Croatia proper, where you can take in the natural beauty of the country's inland geography, dotted by mountain chains and castles perched on hilltops. The Plitvice Lakes are the most spectacular natural formation in the region – and arguably in the entire country. The natural park is one of Europe's top UNESCO World Heritage sites. Plitvice comprises sixteen turquoise, crystal-clear lakes, a series of stunning waterfalls, dense forests, and a system of wooden bridges and boardwalks. From Plitvice we continue on to Zagreb, Croatia's capital city and largest metropolitan center. **Overnight in Zagreb. Amadria Park Hotel Capital 4*.**

Delicacies: Zagreb štrukli – baked layered dough sheets with cottage cheese, eggs, and sour cream. Sweets: Cherry strudel and madjarica (Croatian layered cake).

DAY 6, MONDAY, 9 MARCH: ZAGREB

The earliest Jewish settlers here date back to the 10th century and include two prominent Jewish emissaries, Mar Saul and Mar Joseph, to the king of the Khazars. In the late medieval period, Jews arrived from lands as disparate as Albania, Malta, France, Hungary, and Moravia. From the mid 18th century, the Jewish community was comprised of settlers from Hungary, Moravia, Bohemia.

Today Zagreb is home to the country's largest Jewish community, whose 1867 synagogue was demolished by the Ustashe in 1941. You are likely to fall in love with the city's unique vibe, a particular blend of Central European and Mediterranean charm. Our walking tour of the city includes the iconic **Jelačića Square**, the **Dolac marketplace**, the **historic 19th century Tkalčićeva street**, the **arrestingly baroque Upper Town**, and much more. **Overnight in Zagreb. Amadria Park Hotel Capital 4*.**

Make sure you visit the Amélie sweetshop, home to some of the best dessert in Croatia. Stop by the vibrant Dolac fruit and vegetable market and enjoy some delicious street food.

DAY 7, TUESDAY, 10 MARCH: LAKE BLEĐ—LJUBLJANA (SLOVENIA)

As we depart Zagreb, we'll soon leave Croatia and enter into neighboring Slovenia. Our morning drive will take us to **Lake Bled** and **Bled Castle**, Slovenia's pristine and most romantic spot. In the middle of the lake stands a charming island topped with a Baroque church. The medieval castle, placid waters, and the steep Julian Alps contribute to Bled's harmony. The region is also renowned for its *cremeschnitte*, a calorie-rich cream delicacy. We will end the day in **Ljubljana**, Slovenia's lovely capital city. **Overnight in Ljubljana. Grand Hotel Union 4*.**

Delicacies: Gibanica – a sweet layered pastry with poppy seeds, walnuts, apples, raisins, and cottage cheese.

**DAY 8, WEDNESDAY, 11 MARCH: POSTOJNA CAVE—TRIESTE (ITALY)—
LJUBLJANA**

We start the morning with a short bus ride to the miraculous Postojna Cave. An intricate karst system of caves, it was formed by the Pivka river and is one of Slovenia's most spectacular natural sites. Postojna is home to the endemic *olm*, a cave-dwelling aquatic salamander. Our drive through Istria will soon take us into neighboring Italy, where we'll spend a few hours in beautiful Trieste. In the 15th century, one of the town's prominent Jews was the influential banker Isacco da Trieste.

Notable 18th-century Jewish families included the Parente, Morpurgo, Luzzatto, and Levi. The town came to be known as *Gateway to Zion* due to its central role in the post-WWI emigration to Palestine. Trieste's rich Jewish heritage is tangible in the town's imposing Israelite Temple, one of Europe's largest synagogues. James Joyce and his wife Nora arrived to Trieste in 1905 from nearby Pula, and ten years later Joyce started working on *Ulysses*. We'll return to Ljubljana in the early evening. Overnight in Ljubljana. Grand Hotel Union 4*.

Have an authentic Italian espresso and cake at Caffe Degli Specchi on the Piazza Unita in Trieste. The pizza and gelato in town are also superb.

DAY 9, THURSDAY, 12 MARCH: LJUBLJANA ON FOOT

Ljubljana is one of the most captivating cities in Europe. The quaint city center, overlooked by an old castle, with the Ljubljanica river slowly flowing through it, offers its visitors an abundance of architectural and cultural monuments and a uniquely laid-back atmosphere. Walk through the historic Jewish neighborhood, stop at the plaque at the intersection of the Jewish Street and the Jewish Path, located at the heart of the medieval Jewish quarter.

Go up to the hill to the medieval Ljubljana Castle and enjoy breathtaking panoramic views of the city. **Enjoy free time in the afternoon for last-minute gift shopping and packing. We'll end the day with a special farewell dinner. Overnight in Ljubljana. Grand Hotel Union 4*.**

Enjoy a festive dinner with traditional Slovenian dances, songs, and a folklore performance.

DAY 10, FRIDAY, 13 MARCH: LJUBLJANA—AIRPORT

Free time and departure.

PRICE INCLUDES:

Hotel accommodation.

Full-size air-conditioned bus.

Professional English-speaking tour leader with specialized knowledge of the Jewish history of the region.

Professional English-speaking local guides with specialized knowledge of the Jewish history of their home town.

Airport transfers.

Porterage – one piece per traveler.

Daily breakfast. Four additional meals – lunch or dinner.

Entrance fees.

PRICE DOES NOT INCLUDE:

International airfare.

Tips.

**Wait there is MORE!
Begin your adventure early with the**

Pre-Tour

Jewish Bosnia: Purim in Sarajevo, Mostar, Stolac

27 February—4 March 2026

DAY 1, FRIDAY, 27 FEBRUARY 4: SARAJEVO, BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

Arrival in the capital of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Check into our centrally located hotel. Depending on your arrival time, get an initial feel of Sarajevo's vibrant, friendly atmosphere. Attend Kabbalat Shabbat services at the gorgeous Sarajevo Synagogue. **Overnight in Sarajevo. Hotel President 4*.**

Delicacies: Ćevapi – grilled meat links served with pita bread and fresh chopped onions. Stuffed vegetarian caramelized onions.

Sweets: Tufahija – Poached apples stuffed with walnuts, sugar, and cinnamon, served with whipped cream.

Wine: Blatina (red)

DAY 2, SATURDAY, 28 FEBRUARY: SARAJEVO

Explore the wealth of attractions that Bosnia's capital has to offer. Visit the vibrant Oriental **Old Bazaar**, the Gazi Husev-beg Mosque (1531), the **Latin Bridge**

(Archduke Franz Ferdinand was assassinated nearby), and the array of lovely Austro-Hungarian buildings along the main promenade.

Additional stops include the iconic Sarajevo City Hall (Vijećnica), the Tunnel of Hope Museum, the Ottoman-era covered market, the Sarajevo Roses – a tribute to the siege of the city – and the ornate Sebilj water fountain. In the afternoon, ride the Sarajevo cable car to the top of Trebević Mountain overlooking the city.

Overnight in Sarajevo. Hotel President 4*.

Delicacies: Japrak & Sarma – stuffed vegetarian vine and cabbage leaves. Sweets: baklava.

Make sure to visit a family-run establishment called Baklava Dućan where recipes have been passed on over multiple generations.

DAY 3, SUNDAY, 1 MARCH: JAJCE & TRAVNIK

Take a day trip through the beautiful scenery of western Bosnia. Drive to 14th-century Jajce, Bosnia's medieval capital. Explore the Jajce Fortress, the catacombs, the Pliva lakes, waterfall, and watermills. Walk through Jajce's charming city center and natural surroundings.

Continue to Travnik, Bosnia's most important administrative center in the 18th and 19th century. Walk through the town's historic center, visit the Travnik Fortress and the house of Ivo Andrić, winner of the 1961 Nobel Prize for Literature. Late afternoon return to Sarajevo. **Overnight in Sarajevo. Hotel President 4*.**

Visit Barhana and sample Bosnia's national drink – *rakija*. A distilled brandy made of a wide variety of fruit: grapes, plums, quince, walnuts, cherry, pear, pomegranate, apple, apricot, blueberry, raspberry, and more.

DAY 4, MONDAY, 2 MARCH: JEWISH SARAJEVO & PURIM

The beginning of Sephardi presence in the city dates back to 1565, most Jews arriving via Salonica. Over the next decade they established their *cortijo* or *mahalla judia* (Jewish quarter) and built a synagogue, Il Kal Vjezu (the **Old Synagogue**). This fascinating pre-modern architectural masterpiece today serves as an active temple and also houses Sarajevo's splendid **Jewish Museum**.

We will also visit the ornate **Ashkenazi Synagogue** (1902), which serves as the main *shul* of the Jewish community; the **Grand Sephardi Synagogue** (Kal Grande); the **Old Sephardic cemetery**, established in 1630 and used by the Serbian military as a strategic firing position during the civil war; and the **National Museum**, where our group will be treated to a private viewing of the spectacular *Sarajevo Haggadah*. In the evening, celebrate Purim together with Sarajevo's vibrant Jewish community! You will surely forge some long-lasting friendships. **Overnight in Sarajevo. Hotel President 4*.**

Visit a local *buregdinica* and sample Bosnia's famous burek pastries. Stuffing options include spinach, feta, potatoes, onions, or meat.

DAY 5, TUESDAY, 3 MARCH: THE SARAJEVO HAGGADAH AND BOSNIAN COOKING

Start your morning with a viewing of the spectacular Sarajevo Haggadah at the National Museum. You will then be hosted by a local Bosnian family for a cooking lesson, and you will learn to make two signature dishes from Bosnia's national cuisine. In the afternoon, you can continue your authentic experiences with a visit to an Ottoman hammam (public bath). **Overnight in Sarajevo. Hotel President 4*.**

If you want to sample traditional Bosnian home cooking at its purest, stop by Ascinica ASDZ. Lots of vegetarian dishes on offer.

DAY 6, WEDNESDAY, 4 MARCH: MOSTAR—STOLAC—DUBROVNIK, CROATIA

As we leave Sarajevo, our scenic drive takes us through mountainous canyons and pristine ravines. We'll pass through Jablanica, a region famous for its spit-roasted lamb. Mostar was home to a sizable Jewish community, and the former synagogue today serves as the city's puppet theater. Located on both sides of the turquoise Neretva River, the East and West parts of the historic **Old Town** are connected by Mostar's most celebrated (and photographed) structure – the **Old Bridge** (*Stari Most*). Originally built in the 16th century, the bridge was destroyed in 1993 during the civil war and was impeccably rebuilt ten years later.

We continue to **Stolac** to the grave of Moshe Danon, the noted 19th-century Grand Rabbi of Sarajevo. Bosnia's Jewish community has renewed the pre-WWII tradition of a yearly pilgrimage to the site. Nearby lies the **Radimlja** medieval necropolis, whose ornate tombstones (or *Stećci*) are a unique regional phenomenon. We bid farewell to Bosnia and cross into gorgeous **Croatia**, arriving in **Dubrovnik** – the nation's crowning coastal gem. Meet the rest of the group at our welcome dinner. **Overnight in Dubrovnik. Hotel More 5*.**

PRICE FOR TOUR INCLUDES:

Accommodation in luxury 4* & 5* hotels.

Transportation in modern, air-conditioned, full-size bus with bathroom onboard.

Professional English-speaking tour leader with specialized knowledge of the Jewish history of the region.

Professional local guides with specialized knowledge of the Jewish history of their hometown.

Daily breakfast.

**Four additional meals on the main tour -- lunch or dinner.
Two meals on the 5-night pre-tour. One meal on the 4-night and 3-night pre-tour.**

Entrance fees.

Hotel portorage.

Arrival and departure airport transfers.

Complimentary bottled water on the bus.

Gas, road tolls, border crossing fees.

Hotel accommodation and per-diem for driver, tour leader, and local guides.

MAIN TOUR:

15-19 people -- \$4,190 per person in double room

20-25 people -- \$3,830 per person in double room

26-31 people -- \$3,580 per person in double room

32-36 people -- \$3,340 per person in double room

Single Supplement: \$750

Early Bird Save \$100 when you register by 21 April 2025!

PRE-TOUR:

5 nights -- \$1,740 per person in double room

4 nights -- \$1,440 per person in double room

3 nights -- \$1,260 per person in double room

Single Supplement: \$400 for all five nights (\$320 for 4 nights; \$240 for 3 nights)

Early Bird Save \$50 when you register by 21 April 2025!

Payment schedule:

\$1000 paid by check to reserve a spot.

Early Bird Register by April 21 and save \$100.

Remaining balance paid by check on 15 October 2025.

Cancellation policy:

Three months prior to departure – full refund; 45 days prior to departure – refund 50% of paid amount. Less than 45 days – no refund.

We strongly recommend travel insurance bought within two weeks of your deposit to insure you are covered for pre-existing conditions and cancel for any reason upgrade.

**Price does NOT include:
International airfare.
Tips.**

**And for those that want to extend the fun and adventure:
Post-Tour**

Enchanting Istria

13-17 March 2026

Join us for a memorable exploration of Istria – Croatia’s most idyllic and pristine region. Istria is renowned for its charming countryside, gourmet rustic cuisine, breathtaking coastline, azure waters, and picturesque hilltop villages. The region produces exquisite wines made from native grapes and delicious olive oils. But Istria is perhaps best known for its **truffles**, especially the white truffles from the Motovun forests, featured prominently in a number of delicious Istrian specialties.

Expect these cultural experiences:

- * Spend three nights in majestic **Rovinj** – a sun-drenched coastal town with historic Venetian charm and stunning sunsets.
- * Visit the medieval hilltop town of **Motovun**, overlooking rolling vineyards and lush meadows. Explore **Grožnjan**, an international artists’ colony.
- * Walk through beautiful **Pula**, home to a majestic Roman amphitheater.
- * Enjoy fascinating coastal **Poreč** and explore its historic old town.

Prepare for these gourmet adventures:

- * **Truffle-hunting followed by a truffle-rich homemade meal**
- * Wine tasting at a boutique winery producing native Teran and Malvazia wines
- * Olive oil sampling at an organic farm

* A gourmet meal at a traditional Istrian *konoba* featuring regional dishes and local ingredients

For more information contact me, Rabbi Rayzel at Rabbi@Shechinah.com