

Israel & Portugal

Great Travel Destinations

"It wasn't until years after the Holocaust that the government of Portugal awarded Sousa Mendes, the Ambassador of Portugal to France during WWII who issued thousands of visas to Jewish people on the brink of being sent to the Nazi death camps, their highest honors, the Order of Liberty medal and the Grand Cross Order of Christ. He was also honored by Yad Vashem as a Righteous Among the Nations, the first diplomat to be honored so in 1966."

By Henry Levy

Israel and Portugal have something in common and Jewish tourists are the beneficiaries. At a recent evening for the sophisticated globetrotter, hosted by Herrick Feinstein LLP at 2 Park Avenue in Manhattan, both countries highlighted the reasons they are among the most popular destinations for the North American traveler. Israel's Tourism Commissioner for North America, Chad Martin spoke about the "Miracle on the Mediterranean" and the Director of Visit Portugal, Celina Tavares reported on "A Depth of Jewish Legacy".

As if that wasn't enough to whet one's appetite to travel, they provided an impressive selection of Israeli and Portuguese wines and appetizers for their guests, including journalists and tour operators.

Event host, Michelle Dixon, Fox 12 anchor who grew up as a secular Israeli, spoke of her recent trip to Portugal, including some fascinating Jewish heritage sites as well as some of her favorite hidden gems to visit in Israel.

She spoke of the 1300 Jews living in Portugal and marveled that you could find more Jews in Bloomingdale's. She enjoyed the Abraham Zacuto Museum in Lisbon, the cities of Tomar and Belmonte, but Porto, that boasted of having both Ashkenazi and Sefardi Rabbis, stole her heart. She called Portugal Europe's hidden gem and home of Jewish history.

Maria Mendez, Portugal's Consul General in New York, reminisced about her relative, Sousa Mendes, who was the Ambassador of Portugal to France during World War Two and who issued thousands of visas to Jewish people on the brink of being sent to the Nazi death camps.

In saving their lives, against his government's direct orders, he was stripped of his rank and status, had to sell all his possessions and died penniless. It wasn't until years later that the government of Portugal awarded him their highest honors, the Order of Liberty medal and the Grand Cross Order of Christ. He was also honored by Yad Vashem as a Righteous Among the Nations, the first diplomat to be so honored in 1966. Since 2015, as a result of Portugal's law to recover Jewish heritage, over 5,000 people applied and 2,200 have secured Portuguese citizenship.

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TAP, the airline of Portugal, announced that it will have direct flights to Tel Aviv daily starting in March 2020.

Since being privatized in 2015, there has been 63% growth in travel from North America and they opened 11 new gateways. They have been getting recognized for exploration, wellness, LGBTQ, golf, wedding and cruise destinations.

El Al airline has ordered fleet of 16 new Dreamliners and Israel has been named the best LGBTQ travel destination and tourism continues to boom as more people change their preconceptions of the country. It does feature the Holy City of Jerusalem, Tel-Aviv's white-sandy beaches, a burgeoning wine industry, bars, restaurants, cafes, night life for young travelers and new biking and hiking trails across the country.

To enjoy the best of all world's, book a trip encompassing both countries to double your pleasure and double your fun while keeping the blues on the run.

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For more information please check out: visitportugal.com and goisrel.com.



Top: Michelle Dixon, FOX 12 anchor. Center: Consul General of Portugal in New York, Maria De Fatima Mendes. Bottom: Celina Tavares, Director, Turismo de Portugal.