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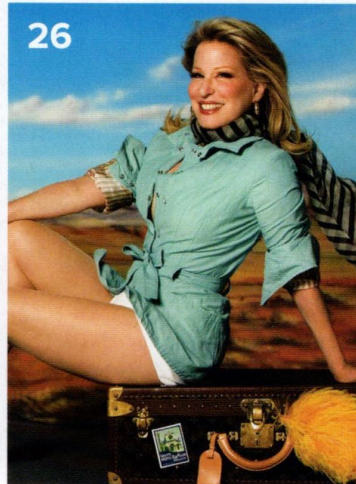
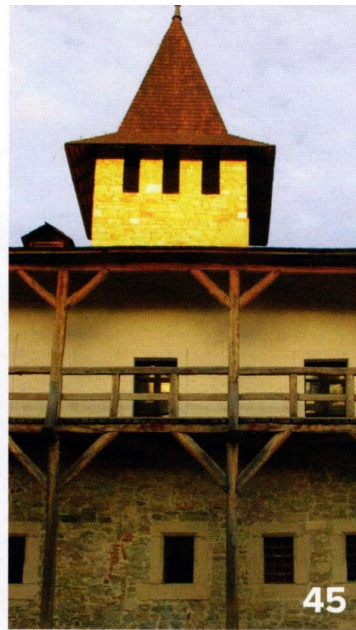
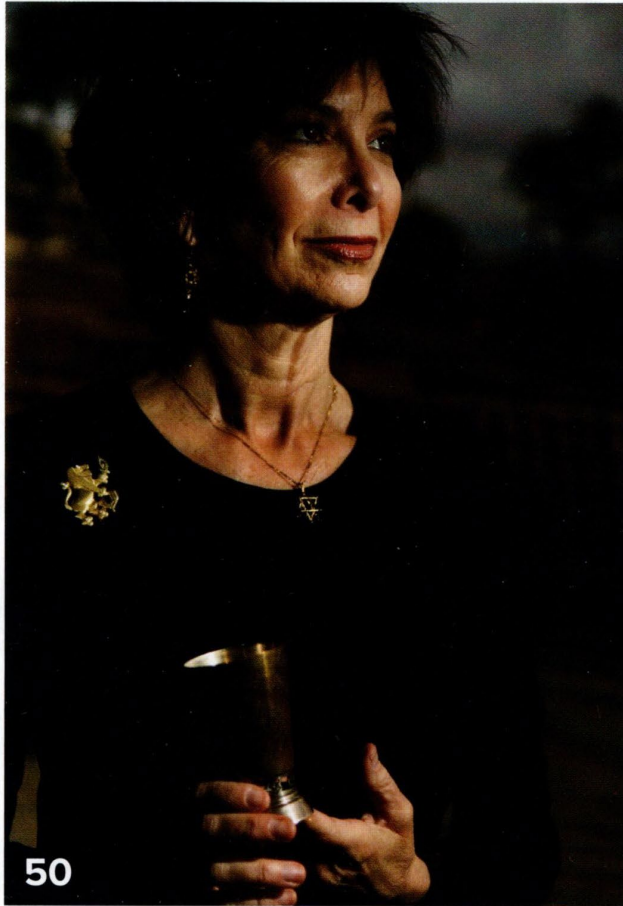
life in the
slow lane

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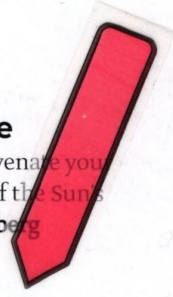
contents

spring/08



Features

- 40 Life in the slow lane**
Relax your mind and rejuvenate your body at one of the Valley of the Sun's top spas. **By Jennifer Goldberg**
- 45 Tracing history**
Genealogy vacations to the 'old country' open doors to the past. **By Beth Shapiro**
- 50 Wholly whole**
Local healers find strength and meaning in Jewish traditions. **By Vicki Cabot**



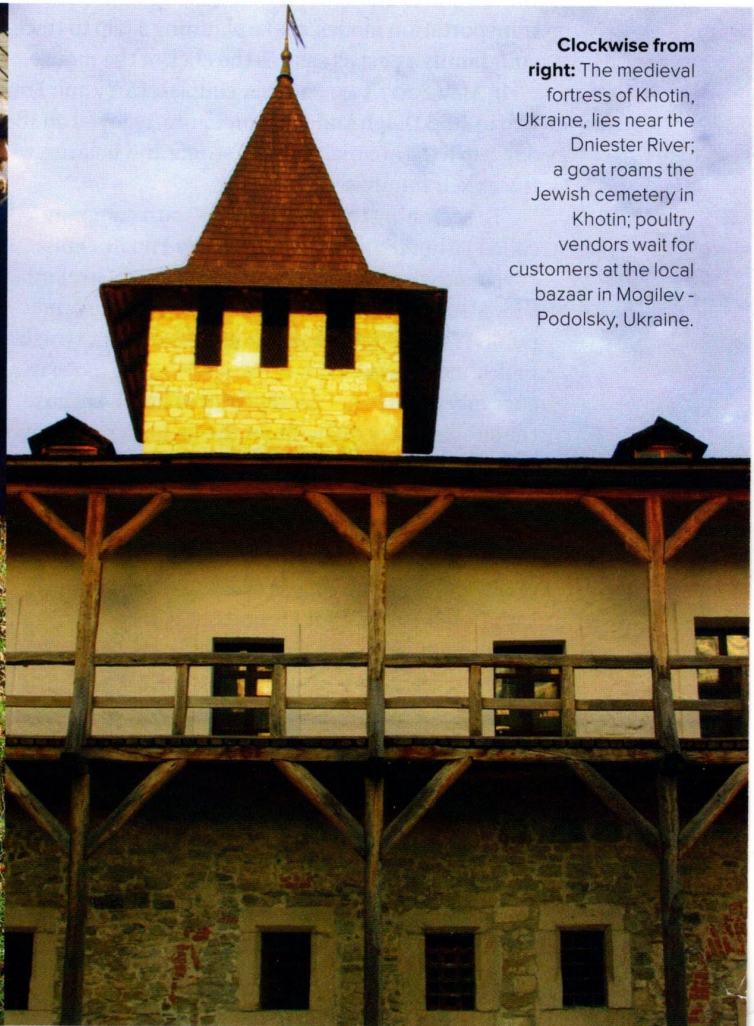
Departments

- | | | | |
|--|-----------|--|-----------|
| Chosen One | 8 | Travel | 24 |
| Christianne Meneses Jacobs | | Don't be a cruise potato; stay fit on vacation | |
| Boutique | 10 | Wellness | 28 |
| Our suggestions hit a hole-in-one with golfers | | Scottsdale yoga studio offers rejuvenation | |
| Culture | 12 | Home | 32 |
| Steve Weiss builds macro buzz with microcinema | | Builder ties design to desert landscape | |
| Style | 16 | Family | 34 |
| Mix-and-match suits get you in the swim | | Children's Museum coming | |
| Dining | 20 | Neighborhood | 38 |
| A little tweaking makes kosher for Passover easy | | The Radkes grow up with West Chandler | |

Society 54 • Calendar 56 • Parting Shot 60

Tracing History

GENEALOGY VACATIONS OPEN DOORS TO THE PAST



Clockwise from right: The medieval fortress of Khotin, Ukraine, lies near the Dniester River; a goat roams the Jewish cemetery in Khotin; poultry vendors wait for customers at the local bazaar in Mogilev - Podolsky, Ukraine.



We've heard ROMANTIC TALES of the 'old country' from our grandparents and have studied the black-and-white photos of DISTANT RELATIVES in hopes of trying to find a family resemblance. The stories tug at our hearts, beckoning us to VISIT the FOREIGN LANDS where our families lived for generations.

BY BETH SHAPIRO | STAFF WRITER

Facing page: Tourists take in a beautiful view of the Khotin fortress, left and Orthodox church, far right.

This page, from top: Bust of the Gaon of Vilnius, 17th- and 18th-century Talmudic scholar; red rooftops of Tallinn, Estonia; Paul and Phyllis Ruffer of New York City visited Khotin, Ukraine in October 2007, with the help of Miriam Weiner, owner of Routes to Roots.

database offers people an opportunity to make discoveries through links to millions of records.

“Once I got involved in genealogy, I realized I was really learning about myself and who I came from and why my mother was the way she was, because her mother was the way she was and so forth,” says Susan King, founder of the Web site. “It became a real socio-political-historical lesson in who I am.”

In 1997, King and several family members traveled to Lithuania to trace their roots. “It was one of the most life-changing experiences that I went through,” she recalls. “We were getting ready to leave Simnas, when this man comes running up to us with arms flailing. It turns out that his father worked for the town’s synagogue. He gave me the record player, which was used to play the records for High Holiday services at the synagogue. He felt that somebody needed to have it. How do you describe that kind of experience?”

Two years later, Shtetl Schleppers, Jewishgen.org’s travel program, was launched to provide group and independent genealogical tours in Eastern Europe with visits to ancestral villages. “I don’t think we’ve sent anybody over there who can’t come back saying, ‘Wow.’ It’s one thing to go to Paris. It’s another thing to go back and see where your family came from.”

King explains that signs of the old country are evident despite the modern cities. “Eastern Europe is changing very quickly now. Back in the 1980s and 1990s, it was still pretty backwards. Since I’ve been back more recently, there are three McDonald’s in Lviv, Ukraine. But you get out in the country and it’s still very much like the way it was.”

Shtetl Schleppers group tours, without airfare, start at \$2,500 for seven to eight days, with additional fees for independent *shtetl* visits.

FINDING ROUTES TO ROOTS

“My father, who died 25 years ago, came from Europe to the United States in 1929 when he was 6,” says Phyllis Ruffer of New York City. “He had some very romantic memories of the old country, unlike those



PHOTOS: VENDORS; MIRIAM WEINER; KHOTIN (ALL); PHYLLIS RUFFER; BUST, TALLINN; FRAN FRAZIN



start searching

Shtetl Schleppers:
jewishgen.org/shtetlschleppers

Routes to Roots: routestoroots.com

Amalfi Life: amalfilife.com
or (718) 797-9300

Lithuaniantours.com

Arizona Jewish Historical Society:
azjhs.org or 602-241-7870

LDS Family History Library:
familysearch.org or (866) 406-1830

Mesa Regional Family History Center:
mesarfhc.org or 480-964-1200



who left as adults. So I grew up with a very strong interest in where he lived, Khotin in southern Ukraine. As a result, I've been interested in genealogy and did some on my own but I didn't get very far."

One name that kept coming up during her search was Miriam Weiner, author of "Jewish Roots in Ukraine and Moldova" and "Jewish Roots in Poland." Weiner, the first Jewish genealogist to be certified by the Board for Certification of Genealogists, established Routes to Roots, a company that offers in-depth archival research and customized *shtetl* visits to Poland, Ukraine, Moldova and Belarus.

"She found a whole bunch of people who fit into the tree including the names Kitover and Krepostman, a Khotina name, which means fortress," says Ruffer, after she hired Weiner to do the research. "I really wanted to go because I wanted to touch this place. I was really tied into it because of my dad and the stories I heard as a kid."

Ruffer, whose maiden name is Nudelman, and her husband visited Khotin last October. It was an emotional and sad trip because she could not find specific signs of her father's family. "I saw Nudelmans everywhere in the cemetery but none of my Nudelmans. There are 29 Jews left in Khotin, not a very impressive place now. In the old days it was much more of a center of Jewish life and an intellectual center."

Weiner says "a natural outgrowth of knowing more about your family history is saying, 'I want to walk in the footsteps of my ancestors. I want to see what's left of these *shtetls*.'"

Weiner, who travels frequently from her home in New Jersey to another home in Mogilev-Podolsky, in southern Ukraine, says that the most important thing is to interview the oldest family members "even if it's a branch that's estranged and nobody remembers why they don't talk to that branch." She also suggests going through that old shoebox of old photos and asking family members to write down the names of the people pictured.

Another key bit of advice from Weiner is to determine the correct name and location of the town. "Many of the towns have the same name. One of my family branches comes from Seminovka, and I think there are 17 places with that name. It's just like Centerville in the States. So you need to make sure you're going to the right place."

The Routes to Roots fees for research and costs for customized trips are dependent upon each person's interest. Contact mweiner@routestoroots.com for more details.

ITALIAN CONNECTION

Amalfi Life (amalfilife.com) offers group and customized tours to people in search of their southern Italian roots.

"Jews were expelled from Spanish-held territory in southern Italy ... about 50 years after they were expelled from Spain and Portugal (in 1492)," says Laurie Howell, co-founder of Amalfi Life. "It is well documented that there were at least 30,000 Jews in Sicily alone and 100,000 Jews from Rome and south, including Sicily. And at that time, they only counted heads of households. There is evidence of Jews on the Amalfi coast since 1100 and probably earlier than that."



Left page, from top: Touring ancient Jewish Rome; trotting down the main street of Orinin, Ukraine

Above: Inside the Khotin synagogue

During an Amalfi Life tour, people will be guided through Sicily and Calabria by Rabbi Barbara Aiello, the first female rabbi in Italy and leader of Synagogue Lev Chadash in Milan, the first progressive/liberal synagogue in Italy. Dr. Laura Supino, an architect, historian and special guide to the Museum in Rome's Great Synagogue, leads the group in Rome. The trip includes visits to the archeological sites of ancient synagogues in Bova Marina and Ostia Antica as well as Il Timpone, the old Jewish quarter in Nicastro.

Cost of a seven-day, eight-night Amalfi Life group tour is \$4,885 per person based on double occupancy, excluding airfare. ©