

From Kishinev to Bendery and Odessa – Jun/Jul 2013

My Personal Travel Recommendations

I had the opportunity to travel to Moldova and Odessa in Jun/July, 2013 – staying with family of friends of mine in three different cities. Thanks to JewishGen, I had excellent travel suggestions from Yefim Kogan and Michael Burke. I would like to share the names and contact information for some of the wonderful people in Moldova who made my trip a positive, memorable experience. And, I would like to encourage any and all who are thinking of making a similar trip to just bite the bullet and do it! And bring cash - - not many places accept credit cards! Here is some information to help you along the way – and a few institutions which could use our help!

Alla Chastina (archive researcher)

Email: chastinalla@gmail.com alenchii@rambler.ru and tabard@rambler.ru

Website: www.bessarabia.ru

Specialty: archives research including early Jewish records in the National Archive of Moldova and METRIC (rabbinical) BOOKS*. The latter turned out to be very helpful in her search for my family.

Coverage: Moldova

Languages: Russian, English, Romanian

Credentials: 20 years experience in archival research including nearly 13 years in the National Archive of Moldova.



*METRIC BOOKS: Record books kept by local rabbimates for Jews. Perhaps priests the Jewish community existed, a special Rabbi was of different Christian denominations (of the Russian Orthodox, Roman Catholics, Protestants) kept similar records for their communities. Every place where appointed (in Russian he was called "kazennyj ravvin", sounds like a state Rabbi, because he was appointed by the government or maybe by municipal power and should know both Russian and Hebrew). This Rabbi was charged with keeping the Metric Books of different types (birth, death, marriages and divorces). In every book one page was in Russian, and the neighboring - in Hebrew with the same content. Information provided includes status of the father and names of the parents, birthplace, and both the Jewish date and "Christian" date of birth and circumcision. If you receive a copy of the full page, you will see the signatures of the Rabbi and two members of the community board at the bottom. Thank you to SIG Member Eugenia Sheinman for this helpful information.

Natalia Alhazov (tour guide) (Natasha)

Email: nalhazov@gmail.com

Specialty: guide, interpreter

Coverage: From Moldova – Ukraine

Languages: Russian, Ukrainian, Romanian and English

Credentials: Natasha has a PhD in English and has been teaching at Moldova State University since 1972.

A Fulbright scholar in 1993-1994, Natasha has been a translator and interpreter for the American Jewish Joint



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Distribution Committee in Moldova since 1994. Though not Jewish, she has visited Israel five times and has extensive connections there. She has translated several books including *THE RED SHETEL: The Survival of a Jewish Town under Soviet Communism* by Charles E. Hoffman. She participated in the 28th IAJGS (International Association of Jewish Genealogical Societies) Conference held in Chicago, IL where she made two presentations: *Looking for Jewish Roots in Moldova* and *Where the Kishinev Pogrom of 1903 Was: Past and Present of Jewish Moldova*. She can plan a whole trip, order hotels, arrange transportation, give tours, arrange a private klezmer concert, and of course provide translations. She has connections with multiple resources that she can rope in as appropriate. Each tour is tailor made – every day long, her fee of 100 euro/day plus transportation is reasonable when you consider the advance planning that is typically involved, and – at least in my case – all the little “extra” surprises she comes up with. Natasha is a walking encyclopedia and can speak with authority on an endless variety of topics. She arranged for me to meet with Irina and Olga at the Kishinev Jewish Community Center (see below) who provided tours of their facilities on one of the extra days I spent in Kishinev.



Kishinev Jewish Community Campus

Website: <http://www.jewish.md/>

Located in Kishinev – founded in 2005 by the San Diego Jacobs family, the Campus is situated in the renovated historical building of the “Lemnaria”

(“Woodcutters”) synagogue built in 1835.

The Kishinev Jewish Community Campus website <http://www.jewish.md/> is

available in English – it has additional information about the programs they offer for all ages. Thanks to Natasha, we attended a delightful evening of song by

klezmer/Yiddish singer Slava Farber – who occasionally performs in the US (tel: 373 22/76-87-60). If you need a Sinatra style Jewish crooner for an event. . . he’s your man.

Kishinev Jewish Museum:

Irina Shihova

Title: Curator

Email: shihova@gmail.com

Cell: 37369119720

Located in the Jewish Community Campus
Specialty: Irina participated in the 2004 documentation of burials in the Kishinev Jewish Cemetery. While the Museum is small, Irina’s drive to enlarge it is not. She would welcome donations to the collection.



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Jewish Public Library - Kishinev

Olga Sivac – Librarian Title: Foreign Languages

Email: iuledik@yandex.ru

Website: : www.ebraika-bmangher.blogspot.com

Located in the Jewish Community Campus across the street from the “Lemnaria” synagogue.

Specialty: Opened in 1991, the Ytzik Manger Jewish Library offers its services to about 8000 persons per year, with number more than 135,000 visits per year. The Library collection numbers more than 50,000 units in Yiddish, Hebrew, Romanian, Russian, English, etc. See their website (click on English in the right block if you can't read Russian) for the excellent programs offered by the Library and Community Center. Their Summer Program for children is very impressive.



Bendery:

Ruslan Ravikovich: Bendery Writer – historian (author of Jewish Bendery page on ejwiki.org – the academic Wiki- encyclopedia on Jewish and Israeli topics in Russian language Internet). He also created a YouTube video of Jewish sites in Bendery – the first comment lists places shown:

http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=gdy6ECrHp0I#t=26

Languages: Russian

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Ruslan may be available for a tour of Bendery Fortress (see the hard to find/reach gate with the Jewish star – picture at left), the Bendery Jewish Cemetery, and other Bendery Jewish landmarks. Arrange to meet with Ruslan in collaboration with English speaking guide Natasha Alhazov (above).

Bendery Cemetery: A big thank you to Yefim Kogan and other volunteers and supporters of the Bendery Cemetery Project – for the information and photos now available on JOWBR. How Sergey, the photographer for JewishGen, was able to photograph all the stones that he did is nothing short of heroic. There is so much overgrowth in the cemetery – just walking down certain rows is next to impossible – in particular in the summer.

Vandalism over the decades, including more vandalism of some of the stones several years ago (acid and paint), make the project all the more important to preserve this information. With Ruslan's help, I have put together a photo-summary of a few of the memorial markers that exist (1917, 1941, 1960) in this

cemetery. It will also be posted on this and the Kehila page. There is more information about the

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Bendery Cemetery, its crucial needs for preservation, and its caretaker in Ruslan's article in the Russian Academic Jewish wiki encyclopedia on Jewish and Israeli themes:

<http://translate.google.com/translate?hl=en&sl=ru&tl=en&u=http://ejwiki.org/wiki/%25D0%2591%25D0%25B5%25D0%25BD%25D0%25B4%25D0%25B5%25D1%2580%25D1%258B%25D0%25B5%25D0%25B2%25D1%2580%25D0%25B5%25D0%25B9%25D1%2581%25D0%25BA%25D0%25B0%25D1%258F%25D0%25BE%25D0%25B1%25D1%2589%25D0%25B8%25D0%25BD%25D0%25B0>

Check out the references (with links) at the end of the article. They are from Russian publications with English translations available – information that does not come up in an English Google search. It would be helpful if someone could “clean up” the awkward English translation of this Jewish history of Bendery from Wiki-ru. There is much valuable information there about life over the years in Bendery – including names and occupations. The cleaned up version of this article should then be put on the Bendery Kehila page – Ruslan would no doubt happily provide the photos. <http://kehilalinks.jewishgen.org/bender/bendery.html>



Border Crossings: I received excellent advice from frequent traveler Ezra in Israel:

- “If you are going to travel from Chisinau to Odessa by bus or car, make sure you cross the border at Palanca and don't go through Kuchurgan and Transnistria. In this case you get proper border control stamps”
- Ezra recommended against crossing by train – due to onboard conditions and border issues – “The bus passengers benefit from more of an en masse process.”
- Transnistria & Moldova have very strict laws requiring registration with the police when staying anywhere OTHER than a hotel.



My own experience: we travelled from Kishinev to Odessa by taxi (hiring the driver for the day), and returned Odessa/Transnistria/Bendery/Kishinev by bus. Ezra was right on with his warnings! Enough said!

There is one more caution – bring your own TP if you travel in this area, especially in Transnistria. Avoid at all costs using the “facilities” when you cross from Ukraine into Transnistria at Rozdilnianskyi raion – coming from Odessa. The currency for Transnistria is different from the Moldova lei – and unwanted (in my experience, actually looked at with disdain) outside Transnistria, so exchange only what you expect to spend. You can change currency at the train station in Tiraspol. Be prepared to pay at the booth in the lobby to use the facilities there – that will also get you a small square of “paper” – but the place is clean.

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Public Transportation – very cheap and readily accessible everywhere. Trolleys and small buses in the big cities. You can even take a trolley for the short distance from Tiraspol to Bendery. Taxis – I paid \$10 an hour multiple times to book one driver to take me around to a variety of places. Perhaps some will say I paid too much! My favorite: Ivan Georgovich in Kishinev who drove us to Odessa, Criuleni and Cricova Winery, as well as picking me up at 4:30 a.m. to get to the airport for the flight out of Kishinev. Phone 068053514 Email: tatianaignat33@gmail.com (Ivan speaks Russian and Rumanian only – we used his taxi “radio” to his dispatcher for translation purposes). Yefim and Natasha also have other taxi drivers to recommend.



American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee: So much of Jewish life has been erased from Moldova. You will feel the void: the cemeteries that no longer exist, the synagogues with no members and no one to look after them. . . Fortunately, the **American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee** has been working with the local Jewish communities in Moldova for over 20 years in rebuilding Jewish life. They support the Jewish community in Kishinev, and its smaller offshoots in Beltsy, Tiraspol, and Rybnitsa. I found what they are doing at the Kishinev Jewish Community Center to be most impressive. The week I was there, social workers were brought in from Israel to train local social workers on homecare for the elderly. Close to 25% of Moldova’s Jews are elderly, while more than half of the Jewish population has been suffering significant economic hardship. The JDC is a major funding partner with the local community since the fall of the Soviet Union in the early 90s. JDC is helping the community to become self-sufficient in the future. The JDC program in the FSU (former Soviet Union), including Moldova, can be found on the JDC website:

<http://www.jdc.org/where-we-work/former-soviet-union/moldova.html>

Donations to the JDC can be made through their website

https://secure3.convio.net/jdc/site/Donation2?df_id=1581&1581.donation=form1

or by mailing a check to JDC with the note designating the region/program you would like the funds to be used for.

OTHER RECOMMENDATIONS RECEIVED:

Odessa State Archive - Lilia Belousova works as the vice director of Odessa State Archive. She is the best specialist on Jewish history of Odessa district State Archive of Odessa Region Zhukovskoho Str., 18, Odessa, 65026, Ukraine. Tel. (8-0482) 250910
e-mail art1@te.net.ua, gao@te.net.ua

Odessa Holocaust Museum

museum-holocaust@mail.ru

111, Mala Arnautska Str.,
Odessa, 65007 Ukraine

The Museum is only open several days a week
– check ahead to avoid disappointment.



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Per Michael B.: Nickolay there speaks English much better than Pavel. He took us on a walking tour of Odessa.

Note – I used the local OdessaWalks.com guide for an afternoon tour of Jewish sites in this VERY beautiful city. If I had it to do over again, I would have Natasha travel with me to Odessa from Bendery (as she offered). Next time!

Cricova Winery – This Moldavian winery, nine miles north of Kishinev is a must-see. It is the second largest in the country. Large casks of wine line many miles of the 70 miles of underground roads where limestone was mined for nearly 400 years for the building of Kishinev. The National Wine Gallery, restaurant, and tasting rooms, all underground – are very impressive and draw dignitaries from around the world.
<http://www.cricova.md/en/main.html>
Reservations for a tour are necessary – cricovavin@gmail.com While part of a tour group of about 25, I had an English speaking guide all to myself.



CAMERA! I bought a FujiFilm Finepix F770EXR camera off Groupon (sharply reduced to about \$160) before leaving. I worried that I might be making a mistake getting a new camera right before a trip – but it turned out to be a blessing.

This new but out of date model has a telescopic lens and GPS! I didn't realize the value till I got back. I uploaded to the pictures to Windows Live Photo Gallery and now when I go to EDIT, in the window where you would add a caption, it now also says "Geotag" and shows exactly where the picture was shot – down to the smallest towns in Moldova/Ukraine. Also, my son uploaded my photos to his Mac and was able to use an i-Photo mapping program to create a "show" almost instantly which organizes the pictures by location with maps provided and background music! The telescopic lens on this camera allowed great close-ups of the beautiful architectural details of all the very old buildings everywhere.

Gloria Green
Daughter of Jacob Moses Schwartzman of Bendery, Bessarabia

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SCHWARTZMAN, SPIWAK, LERNER