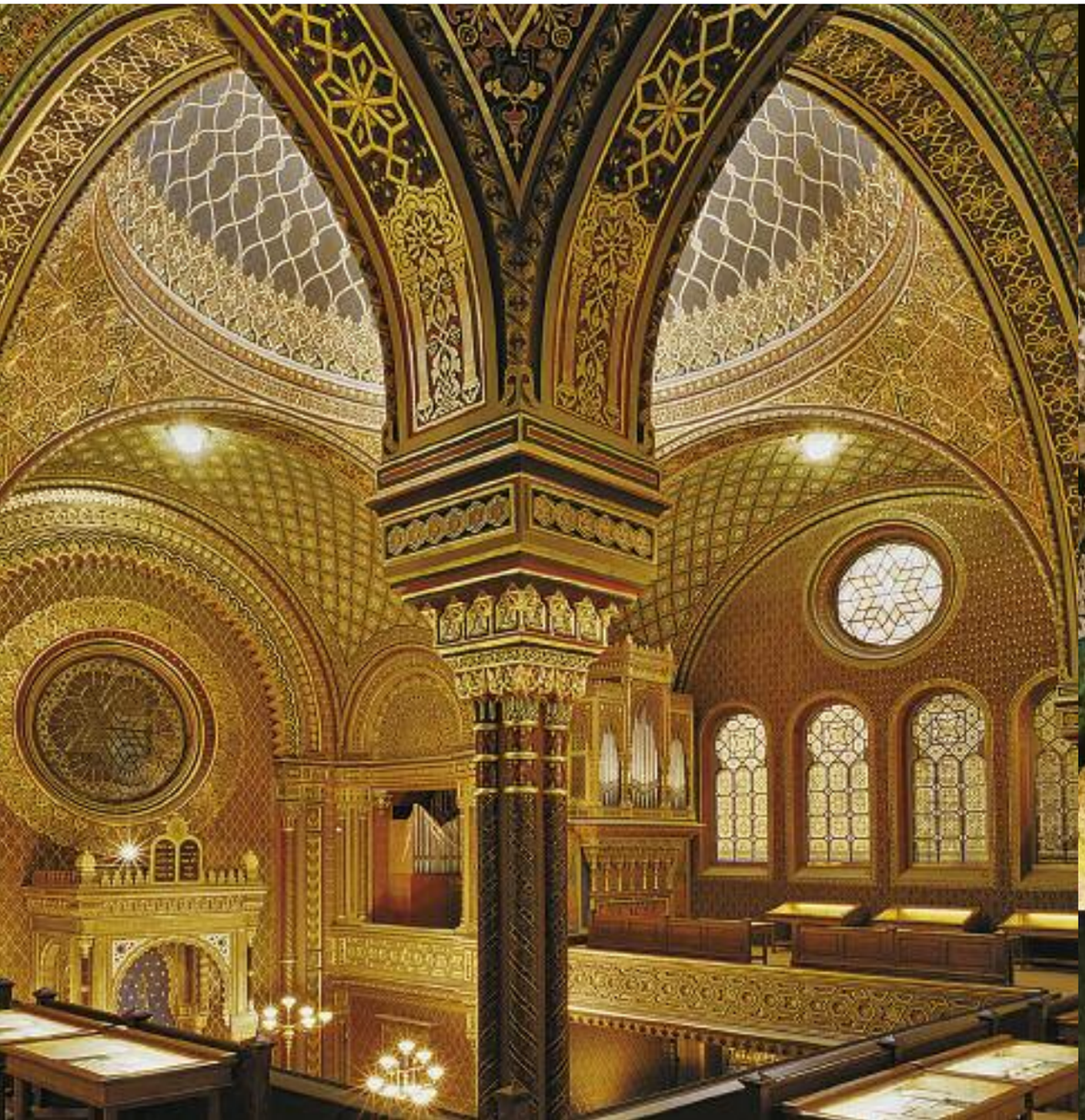
JEWISH MUSEUM IN PRAGUE

Jewish Museum in Prague















A European centre of Jewish culture

The Jewish Museum in Prague is a unique European institution – the most comprehensive of its kind. It oversees four historic synagogues and the Ceremonial Hall, which house unique exhibitions, as well as the world-famous Old Jewish Cemetery, its own gallery, several depositories, an archive, library with multimedia centre, restoration workshops and an educational and culture centre. It is also one of the most attractive points on the cultural map of Central Europe. The museum tour of its monuments with displays of wonderful Judaica in the unique area of the Prague Jewish Town – a UNESCO world heritage site since 1992 – is one of the most impressive experiences to be had in the Czech capital. This explains why the Jewish Museum in Prague is among the most visited museums in the whole of the Czech Republic.

The Jewish Museum in Prague has had a turbulent history since its founding in 1906. After the Nazi occupation of Bohemia and Moravia in March 1939, the then Central Jewish Museum became a place for gathering items from plundered synagogues, Jewish communities and many Jewish households in Bohemia and Moravia. The objects were loaded onto trains and trucks and sent to warehouses where they were subsequently numbered and registered. The same fate also befell their owners – they, too, were given numbers and were registered for processing, but for the purpose of liquidation.

As many as 120,000 Jews did not survive the Second World War. Their objects, however, were preserved. Some of them were returned to the few Jewish communities that could be revived; others were handed back to the original owners or their families. Thousands of immensely valuable objects, however, remained unretrieved at the Jewish Museum in Prague, thus giving rise to a unique collection. Nowhere in the world has such a large amount of Jewish artefacts relating to a single geographical region been gathered together.

The museum's collections and specialist activities suffered immensely during the Communist regime. This rare Jewish heritage, however, was returned to the Jewish community of Bohemia and Moravia in 1994. Since then the care of the collection pieces has fundamentally improved, new exhibitions and depositories have opened, and the museum has focused on publishing, awareness, educational, research and various cultural activities.

After 20 years as an independent organization, the museum is now launching a number of changes which will highlight its image as a modern, dynamic and visitor-friendly centre of Jewish culture. For the future, we want the museum's exhibitions to showcase the diversity of Jewish culture and to draw attention to its past and present in a more engaging and inspiring way. Modern technology enables us to come out from behind the synagogue walls and to tell the stories of the unique artefacts, photographs and documents – not only on display under glass but also out there in the online world.

You too can become part of our dedicated team to help us carry out our plans. This brochure will show you how. We would be glad to discuss with you the specific kinds of support, as well as your ideas and our possibilities.











Unique collections in our care

The collections of the Jewish Museum in Prague contain as many as 40,000 unique items, artworks, rare textiles and other artefacts. The museum also has about 100,000 books, in addition to a wealth of photographs and documents. These items are not only of interest to regular visitors but are also of great value to scholars and researchers. At the same time, however, they are often the only legacy and tangible reminder of their original owners.

The **visual art collection** contains artworks that were initially brought together to complement the Judaica collections. Most acquisitions to this collection were made in 1942–1945 on the basis of consignments of paintings, drawings and prints that had been confiscated from the private collections of Jewish deportees to the ghettoes in Lodz and Terezín.

This collection has about 18,000 items – paintings, drawings, prints, photographs and sculptures from the last third of the 18th century to the present, as well as a group of new media art. Among the completely unique groups of artworks in the collection are portraits from the period of Jewish emancipation in the Bohemian lands and children's drawings from the Terezín ghetto (1943–1944) – the largest group of children's drawings from the Shoah period in the world.

With more than 12,000 items, the **textile collection** is the world's most important group of Ashkenazi textiles from the late 16th century. The vast majority of these items are textiles for ritual use in the synagogue or for other purposes (e.g. decorative). They include rare Italian and French fabrics interwoven with gold and silver, silk velvet and damask, expensive and complex embroideries, pearls and precious stones. In their entirety, the Torah ark curtains, Torah mantles, bimah covers, Torah binders, tefillin, head coverings and garments constitute a unique assemblage of Jewish art over four centuries. The care with which these items were made and the beauty and complexity of their motifs still inspire respect for their makers and for their generous donors.

In the past, the textiles were kept in unsuitable conditions. They are now located in modern depositories and are being gradually repaired, restored and exhibited. Due to the high cost of such work and the large size of the collection, however, it is not possible to devote such care to all of the items in a short period of time.

The **collection of metal and three-dimensional objects** contains more than 8,000 items from Bohemian and Moravian synagogues, Jewish households, associations and other institutions. It includes objects for ritual use, as well as ordinary items that document the everyday life of Jewish communities.
The core of the collection mainly comprises silver adornments for the Torah scroll – shields, finials, crowns and pointers.











This collection also saw its largest expansion between 1942 and 1945, when nearly all the items from synagogues in what was then the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia, and a large amount of objects that had been confiscated from Jewish homes and associations were shipped to Prague. In addition to metal artefacts, the collection also has three-dimensional objects made of glass, ceramics and other materials, as well as period furniture.

The **collection of manuscripts and genizah papers** is the only large-scale collection of Jewish manuscripts in the Czech Republic. It contains more than 2,000 items of various origin and age, mostly from Bohemia, Moravia and Silesia but also from Germany, Italy and Holland.

The Jewish Museum in Prague also has an important **collection of rare books,** which are associated with the first Hebrew printing presses in Italy and Prague. It has 400 rare printed books, above all early Judaica and Hebraica from Bohemia, but also rare items produced by Hebrew printing houses in Italy, Germany, Holland, Poland and Switzerland, as well as early Christian literature on Jewish topics. The most remarkable item is the only preserved copy of *Seder birkat ha-mazon* (Shabbat Songs and Grace after Meals), dating from from 1514.

The **Archives** of the Jewish Museum in Prague comprises almost 550 linear metres of archival material – documents, photographs and testimonies from survivors and witnesses of the Shoah. The main section contains the archives of individual Jewish communities from Bohemia and Moravia. It also includes the holdings of a number of Jewish associations and organizations and a collection of personal papers and family archives.

The **Photo Archive** of the Jewish Museum in Prague contains about 50,000 digital images and 75,000 original photographs, slides and negatives. These include a unique group of several hundred portrait photographs of war-time staff of the Prague Jewish Community and their relatives, who we seek to identify as part of *The unKnown* project. The photographs of Jewish communities in Bohemia and Moravia provide visual testimony of Jewish monuments from the 1940s through to the present.

Your help will enable us to continue in our efforts to preserve, document and record the unique objects in our collections, to digitize our collections and to make them available online so that they can be seen by lay people and scholars alike throughout the world.











Restoring rare artefacts

Due to their size and to the fact that they document almost all areas of Jewish life over several centuries, the collections of the Jewish Museum in Prague are among the most important of their kind in the world. Caring for these collections mainly involves fixing the damage that was done in the past and restoring a conserving individual objects.

Every year the **metal** workshop restores several dozen objects made of metal but also of wood, glass, stone, porcelain and ceramics. The objects are usually cleaned and conserved during restoration, but some undergo complete reconstruction so as to bring back their original appearance. The restoration time depends on the level of damage, sometimes requiring several months.

We also have workshops for restoring **rare textiles** and objects made from **paper and parchment.** Restoring early manuscripts or textiles with rare embroideries is also a very time-consuming task. The results, however, can seem miraculous to the uninitiated.

Restoration work is very expensive, as are the workshop facilities. You can choose an object that you would like to see in its original beauty or provide general support for the work of our restoration staff. In so doing, you will be helping us to show these unique objects to the general public and to preserve them for future generations.











Caring for unique monuments

At first glance, the Old Jewish Cemetery resembles a sculpture garden. More than 12,000 tombstones are crammed into this space, which is not much bigger than a football field in area, and large trees provide a leafy canopy. This unique burial ground is rightfully designated as a national cultural monument.

The first person known to be buried here was the rabbi and poet Avigdor Kara, who died in 1439. Members of the entire Jewish community of Prague were buried here over the next few centuries – rich and poor, the famous and the forgotten. The most notable resting place here belongs to the renowned Rabbi Judah Loew ben Bezalel (Rabbi Loew), who died in 1609. His tombstone is a place of pilgrimage, attracting not only those who have read his treatises but also schoolchildren who know Rabbi Loew from the Golem legend and from the courses we organize for them.

The tombstones in the Old Jewish Cemetery are of incalculable historical value. After centuries of weathering from rain, snow and wind and damage from air pollutants, however, they are in need of restoration. We manage to treat about 20 of these tombstones every year.

We also devote considerable care to the historic buildings that house our permanent exhibitions. These are the 16th-century Pinkas Synagogue (the oldest of the sites), the Maisel Synagogue (originally Renaissance in style), the Baroque Klausen Synagogue, the 19th century Moorish-style Spanish Synagogue (the most recent of the sites) and the Romanesque Ceremonial Hall. In addition to representing various artistic styles, these monuments are also connected to the history of the unique Jewish Town of Prague.

All of the sacred buildings overseen by the museum were repaired and restored in 1994–1998 but they still need constant care. You can help us preserve these beautiful and unique artefacts of Jewish history.











Placing emphasis on education

A significant part of our work includes cultural and educational activities, which we develop not only in Prague but also – since 2006 – in Brno. As part of this work, we collaborate with leading universities and educational institutions, historians, Judaists, literary scholars, political scientists and teachers. On the basis of a decision by the Czech Ministry of Education, the Jewish Museum in Prague is included in the system of accredited educational facilities for teachers.

Our educational programmes are intended for the widest possible range of groups. For young children (with their parents) we hold regular **Sunday workshops,** which introduce them to Jewish culture, traditions and customs in a fun and playful manner. For teenagers we prepare exhibition tours, films, thematic DVDs and brochures. In **lectures, seminars, workshops and presentations**, we focus initially on Jewish history and culture and later move on to discuss the **Shoah** period. Meetings with survivors and witnesses of the Shoah can also be arranged for these programmes. In addition, we organize **educational events for the general public,** highlighting the diversity of Jewish culture, commemorating important anniversaries, and drawing attention to contemporary aspects of Jewish religious and cultural life.

Lay people and scholars alike have access to our specialized **library,** which has 130,000 volumes on the history and culture of the Jews in Bohemia and Moravia, the history of the Shoah and the Second World War, Judaism, Hebrew and the State of Israel. Books on museology, dictionaries, textbooks and encyclopaedias are available in the library reading room, which also provides access to specialized electronic databases and digitized Jewish periodicals.

The **Multimedia Centre,** which is part of the library, provides visitors with access to (among other things) the museum's audio/video recordings, Shoah victims database and transcribed testimonies from survivors and witnesses of the Shoah. After making a prior appointment, visitors can also view the USC Shoah Foundation's Visual History Archive online, which contains testimonies from survivors and witnesses of the Shoah from as many as 57 different countries.

Your contribution will help us to expand our educational programmes for schools and to facilitate teacher access to specialist seminars on the latest methodologies in teaching Jewish topics. Together we will be able to expand the general awareness and understanding of the history of the Jews and of their history, religion, traditions and customs, as well as increasing knowledge of the Shoah and drawing attention to the problem of anti-Semitism. Thanks to your support, we will be able to expand our library holdings and to continue organizing programmes for children, parents and all people interested in topics relating to relating to Jewish history.











Creating a centre of cultural events

The Jewish Museum in Prague also organizes various cultural events for the general public, both in Prague and Brno: thematic lectures, author readings, book presentations, discussions, concerts, film screenings, theatre shows and temporary exhibitions. Many of these events involve collaborations with other cultural institutions in the Czech Republic and abroad, as well as with writers, playwrights, journalists and composers.

Concerts by leading performers from the Czech Republic and abroad are held in the intimate atmosphere of the auditoriums at our departments for education and culture in Prague and Brno, but also – and above all – in the exquisite Spanish Synagogue with its wonderful acoustics. In addition to classical pieces with a Jewish emphasis by major composers, we also feature modern music genres that are associated with Jewish culture.

The Spanish Synagogue is also the regular venue for the successful **CINEGOGUE** series, which shows premieres of silent films on Jewish topics with live music performances in this unique architectural space. **Series dedicated to Jewish culture abroad** are a new feature that we have recently introduced. Following the successful Israeli and Polish seasons at the Jewish Museum in Prague, we would like in the next few years to focus on the Jewish past and present of other countries in the world by holding concerts, exhibitions, lectures and film screenings.

Temporary exhibitions are held in the museum's Robert Guttmann Gallery, which opened in 2001. These shows focus on our collections, Jewish traditions and customs, the fate of Bohemian and Moravian Jews during the Second World War and Jewish monuments in Bohemia and Moravia, but also draw attention to the Jewish presence in contemporary visual art. Smaller exhibitions on similar topics are also held in the auditoriums at our departments for education and culture in Prague and Brno. We also have touring exhibitions, which are available to schools and cultural institutions throughout the Czech Republic and abroad.

Your support will help us to prepare extraordinary cultural experiences and to carry out projects that will bring attention to the diversity of Jewish culture, thus making it possible to share its unique values with the general public.











Focusing on research

The Jewish Museum in Prague is an important centre for research and scholarly work. Its results are published in specialist papers and monographs (**Judaica Bohemiae,** the museum's peer-reviewed journal with impact factor) and presented at conferences and seminars. These projects focus on **research concerning collection pieces, written and pictorial documents, and Jewish monuments and tombstones,** and many involve collaborations with specialist institutions in the Czech Republic and abroad. We also provide popular lectures for the general public.

Another focus of our work is on the systematic development of historical memory. Of particular importance is our oral history project, which involves **recording interviews with survivors and witnesses of the Shoah.** We have the largest collection of such testimonies in the Czech Republic with 1,300 recorded interviews – testimonies from those who directly experienced the Shoah, as well as from the second and third generations after the Second World War.

Research on the ownership history, or **provenance,** of objects in the museum's collections is also a key priority in our work. In 1942–1945 a large number of unique items of Jewish culture from Bohemia and Moravia were sent to the Central Jewish Museum in Prague, where they were saved thanks to the selfless work of Jewish experts. We continue to search for the former owners of collection pieces that were confiscated by the Nazis during the war. In 2008, for example, we managed to return 32 artworks (including paintings by grand masters) to the American heirs of Dr. Emil Freund, who perished in the Lodz ghetto in 1942. Our provenance research devotes the same attention to all items in our collections. By gradually putting together a database of the original owners of books in our library collection and a donor database, we are able to trace the original owners of items in our collections.

By supporting this area of our work, you will be helping us to continue our research activities and to disseminate our results to the broader public and to scholars alike. With regards to provenance research, you can help us chart the stories of individual objects and the fate of their previous owners.

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Publications

The publishing of specialist, representative and thematic publications is another important area of our work. Our main specialist publication is **Judaica Bohemiae,** a biannual peer-reviewed journal with impact factor. Launched in 1965, it focuses on Jewish history and culture in Bohemia and Moravia from the Middle Ages through to the present. The texts are published in English and German.

Our publications on the individual **collections** are published at significant intervals to provide an overview about the current state of research. In 2003 we received the prestigious Gloria Musealis award for the book *Textiles from Bohemian and Moravian Synagogues*, and in 2012 we received the Special Jury Prize of the Academia Publishing House for *Hebrew Printing in Bohemia and Moravia*. We intend to cover the entire scope of our collections in selective catalogues with attractive graphic design. Our last publication to date (2012) is a selective English-language catalogue of silver objects, titled *Silver Judaica from the Collections of the Jewish Museum in Prague.*

We also publish regular **exhibition catalogues** – we received a special prize in the 2005 Gloria Musealis competition for the catalogue *The Man who Never Gave Up: The Story of Josef Polák (1886-1945).* In addition to printed publications, we also present audio-visual materials in digital form, such as film footage at the exhibition *Truth and Lies: Filming in the Ghetto Terezín, 1942-1945.*

Not only the **guidebooks** for our permanent exhibitions but also the museum's publications on various aspects of Jewish culture are still extremely popular with visitors and the general public. These include *Dictionary of Judaica, Jews – History and Culture, Jewish Prague, Prague Synagogues and Prague Jewish Cemeteries.*

We welcome your support in this area of our work in order to maintain the high standards of our publications.











Keeping up with current trends – Preparing new permanent exhibitions

The Jewish Museum in Prague aims to be open to current developments and to meet the high expectations of visitors. This is why, in 2014, we opened a new **Information and Reservation Centre,** which includes a multimedia information space and offers a range of additional services.

Above all, however, we are preparing for an **overhaul of our permanent exhibitions.** The first of the exhibitions to be overhauled – 19 years after its opening – is the Maisel Synagogue show, which is focused on the history of the Jews in Bohemia and Moravia from the first Jewish settlements through to the 18th century. Among other things, visitors will be able to look forward to an audio-visual 2D virtual tour of Prague's Jewish Town based on Langweil's famous 19th-century model of Prague. Touch screens will enable visitors to look through old Hebrew manuscripts and to view historical maps of Jewish settlements, or to search the museum's database for information about prominent Jewish figures. In the evening hours, the exhibition area will be transformed into an auditorium and used as a venue for concerts, recitals and solo theatre performances.

The next changes to be made will be in the Klausen Synagogue, the Pinkas Synagogue and the Ceremonial Hall. We are also planning another auditorium for the Spanish Synagogue, which will be used for a range of exhibition-related programmes and for screening documentary and feature films in the evening.

We are very hopeful about the *Friedl's Cabinet* project, which will feature one of our most unique collections – the world-famous group of children's drawings that were made in the Terezín ghetto between 1942 and 1944 under the supervision of the artist and teacher Friedl Dicker-Brandeis. The project's goal is to create a new permanent display that will serve as a space for experimental learning while giving the public access to the children's drawings – as a source of inspiration for creative life.

Your contribution will help us to make our permanent exhibitions more attractive, to incorporate more interactive and educational features, to place the museum tour in the real context of the historical Jewish Quarter (Josefov) and to emphasize the genius loci of Prague's Jewish Town.











What we offer for your support

If you decide to support the Jewish Museum in Prague, we trust that our selection of activities, projects and programmes has plenty for you to choose from. What can we offer you in return for your support? If you like, your name will be featured in any of the following (depending on the purpose of the support or donation):

- on the museum's website and in its quarterly newsletter
- alongside a restored object or tombstone (in an exhibition or in an online database)
- in the museum's promotional materials or in a press release for a specific project
- in the museum's annual report

We would also be delighted if you decide to take advantage of other services on offer. In return for your support, you can gain various benefits that apply to members of the museum's Society of Friends, or you can choose any of the following options:

- VIP visits accompanied by specialist staff of the museum
- free admission to the museum's sites and permanent/temporary exhibitions
- free admission to the museum's cultural and educational programmes
- guided tours of the museum's sites, permanent/temporary exhibitions and specialist workplaces
- museum publications and souvenirs

There are many ways for you to become involved in the good cause of supporting the museum. We will be happy to deal with all your requirements.