

# Travel

Spain, Poland, Latvia and Lithuania have a rich Jewish history which will be explored in upcoming tours. **Danny Gocs** speaks to the tour leaders.

**S**TEP into the fascinating world of the Jews in medieval Spain in an educational tour titled "In the footsteps of Sephardi Jewry" led by historian Paul Forgasz later this year.

Forgasz, who lectures in Jewish history at the Australian Centre for Jewish Civilisation at Monash University, has previously led five tours of Spain on behalf of Melbourne's Jewish Museum of Australia, but this year's tour (October 21 to November 5) is organised by the Shalom Institute and run in conjunction with FBI Travel.

The tour begins in Madrid, followed by Cordoba, where participants will explore the streets of the old Jewish Quarter, including the synagogue that bears the name of Maimonides.

The next city on the tour is Granada, home to the spectacular Alhambra Palace, followed by Seville which has a fascinating old Jewish Quarter. After exploring several other towns the tour ends in Barcelona.

"Part of the challenge of these tours is to enable people to imagine what life was like for Jews a long time ago," says Forgasz. "This is especially true in Spain because of the absence of Jews for such a long period after the Inquisition. When we are at an historic site we often read old documents or texts which helps people imagine what life used to be like."

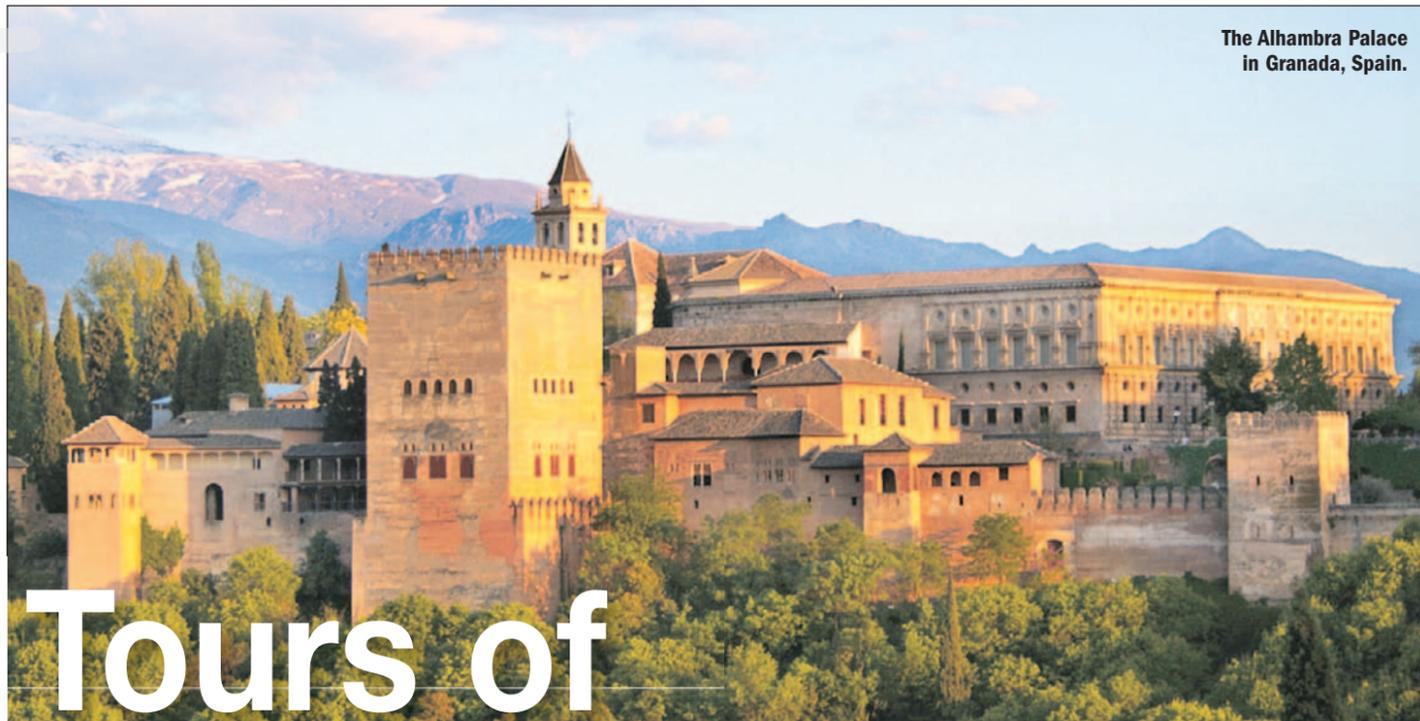
Forgasz loves the opportunity of combining travel with teaching Jewish history.

"With all my tours I first research the Jewish history and narrative of the country and then build the tour around it," he says.

"We plan for regular study sessions and activities. Everyone who joins my study tours gets a fairly intensive educational experience."

Forgasz is also leading a study tour of Jewish Poland and Lithuania from June 6-23 on behalf of the Jewish Museum of Australia.

The first part of the tour will be based in Vilnius, with visits to local attractions including



The Alhambra Palace in Granada, Spain.

# Tours of discovery

the old Jewish Quarter, the former site of the Great Synagogue of Vilna, the Jewish cemetery with the grave of the Vilna Gaon, and the Large Ghetto established by the Nazis in 1941.

There's also a day trip to Kaunas (Kovno), the second largest city in Lithuania, and the site of the Kovno Ghetto during World War II. The tour features visits to Bialystok, Warsaw, Lublin and Krakow, with visits to the Treblinka and Auschwitz extermination camps.

"In Poland and Lithuania we have a local Jewish family-run tour operator who knows the Jewish attractions very well," says Forgasz, who is leading his first tour of these countries.

Tour leader Eli Rabinowitz is leading a tour of Jewish Poland from August 12-20 and Jewish Litvak (Lithuania and Latvia) from August 20-31, organised in conjunction with FBI Travel.

Rabinowitz, a genealogist and photographer, has travelled extensively in Poland, Lithuania and Latvia, and will help tour participants connect with their roots and trace family histories.

The Jewish Poland tour starts in Warsaw, spending several days exploring local attractions including the city's only active synagogue and Jewish Ghetto before moving to Krakow, home to several synagogues and the Oskar Schindler factory museum.

The tour continues to Lodz, site of the famous ghetto, and the shtetl of Lezajsk, Lublin, Bialystok and the historic city of Vilnius. In

addition to visiting major tourist attractions and sites of Jewish interest, tour participants will meet leaders from the Polish Jewish community.

"Escorted tours give people the opportunity to make a personal connection with their family history," says Rabinowitz. "I can help people connect or start their research into their family history."

The Jewish Litvak tour starts in Vilnius and over several days visits the major local attractions including the old Jewish Quarter and cemetery.

With the help of knowledgeable local guides, participants spend several days travelling to fascinating places including Zezmariai, a former shtetl with one of the few wooden synagogues still standing in Eastern Europe, Kaunas and its

ghetto, Rokiskis for its Jewish remnants and the shtetl of Plunge.

The tour ends with several days in the Latvian capital of Riga, including a walking tour of the old town, visits to the ghettos and the ruins of the great Choral synagogue.

At the end of the Jewish Litvak tour there is an optional two-night extension where participants can visit the shtetl of their ancestors with a local guide.

"There is a large Polish and Litvak population in Australia, and many will be interested in learning more about the Jewish history in these countries on these tours," says Rabinowitz.

Enquiries: [www.fbitravel.com.au](http://www.fbitravel.com.au)



Tour leaders Paul Forgasz (left) and Eli Rabinowitz.

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