

NOTES FOR VISITORS TO SYNAGOGUES AND JEWISH BURIAL GROUNDS

Access

Historic synagogues may not generally be open to the public, although Bevis Marks in the City of London, Britain's oldest synagogue, does have regular opening times (www.bevismarks.org), as does the former Spanish & Portuguese Synagogue in Manchester, now the city's Jewish Museum (www.manchesterjewishmuseum.com). Other historic synagogues open at least occasionally, for example on Heritage Open Days in September. Most synagogues, like churches, are not normally kept open (other than for services), for security reasons.

Jewish visitors are always welcome to attend services, especially in small communities that struggle to raise a *Minyan* [quorum of ten men for public prayer]. You will first need to check days and times of services with the congregation. Small communities may only manage to hold services on *Shabbat* [the Jewish Sabbath], often just on Saturday morning. Historic synagogues in particular welcome tourists who telephone first to make an appointment to view the building. Note: Do not 'phone on Friday afternoon or Saturday (*Shabbat*) as you will only get an answering machine!

Jewish burial grounds may often be locked up or difficult to reach. Sadly, vandalism, whether racist or simply malicious in intent, is a fact of life (and of Jewish life in particular, even in England). Making Jewish sites better known and attracting more visitors to them may be the best antidote. Neglected sites, about which nobody apparently cares, are the most vulnerable to attack. On the other hand, many Jewish plots are located within the boundaries of municipal cemeteries and are therefore open (or at least the key is available) during general cemetery hours.

Detailed practical information on routes, transport or opening hours is available from many sources. The annual *Anglo-Jewish Year Book* and *Jewish Travel Guide*, both published by Vallentine Mitchell, will assist you in planning your trip. Do bear in mind that printed information can quickly get out of date. However, Jewish communal and tourist information websites now proliferate and in many cases are frequently updated. Some synagogues have their own websites. It would be impractical to attempt a comprehensive list of links on this website, which is aimed chiefly at architectural and conservation specialists and enthusiasts and has [links](#) to other websites with similar interests.

Food and Accommodation

Internet sources are also best consulted for essential information on food and hotels. Jewish visitors are often concerned to locate kosher food suppliers. A word of warning: there are few kosher outlets in England, once you get outside London. Even in London such facilities are largely confined to specific neighbourhoods: mainly Stamford Hill in north London and at points "up the North West Passage", Golders Green, Hendon and Edgware. There is a dearth of supervised kosher eateries in central London. I mention here only the excellent establishment recently opened at the historic Bevis Marks Synagogue, an ideal place for lunch during your tour of the City of London. In general, it pays to telephone restaurants to check opening hours, book tables and even to find out if they are still in business, before making your - invariably hungry - journey there!

In the regions, make for Manchester. However, even in England's second Jewish city there are no kosher restaurants in the city centre, only in the northern suburbs. Even relatively large Jewish communities don't necessarily support a kosher deli, let alone a butcher or baker.

Kosher hotels are few, confined to Golders Green and Stamford Hill in London. At time of writing, there is one kosher hotel in Manchester and two in Bournemouth, on the south coast.

Conduct at Jewish Sites

Most of the sites listed on this website are sacred places and, as such, should be treated with appropriate respect in matters relating to behaviour and dress. Please be kind enough to dress modestly when visiting a synagogue or Jewish cemetery. Less Orthodox congregations, and those belonging to the Reform and Liberal movements, may take a more relaxed attitude, but it is always best to err on the side of caution!

Men: Please wear a head covering inside the building or burial grounds; long sleeves and no shorts.

Women: Married women should cover their heads; long sleeves and skirts below the knee. Please note: trousers and jeans are not considered suitable clothing for synagogue or cemetery visits.

It is forbidden to eat, drink or smoke in the synagogue proper or in a Jewish burial ground. Please do not bring food or drink onto synagogue premises, or inside a cemetery. Always go out for refreshments. However, you may by all means accept the hospitality of the synagogue secretary or other official for tea or coffee in the office.

Other points to note:

The Torah Ark (Aron HaKodesh) in a synagogue: This is the focal point of the synagogue because it houses the *Sifrei Torah* [the "Scrolls of the Law"], which are the most sacred objects in the possession of the congregation. Usually, the Ark is kept locked when not in use, for security. Never try to open the Ark, nor attempt to remove a Torah Scroll from the Ark. If you wish to take photographs, ask for permission. Photography is forbidden on *Shabbat* [the Jewish Sabbath].

In a cemetery: It is strictly forbidden to walk over or step on any grave. It is the custom amongst Jews to wash their hands on leaving a cemetery. [However, running water is not always available at older burial grounds].

Thank you for your consideration!