

Winter **HOLIDAY** *Magazine*



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NOVEMBER 23, 2017

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JOSHUA RUNYAN

MANAGING EDITOR
ANDY GOTLIEB

SENIOR STAFF WRITER
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STAFF WRITERS
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Online JUDAICA Websites Let Your Fingers Do the Shopping

JON MARKS | JE FEATURE



Gifts available from Modern Tribe
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THE DAYS OF MACY'S and defunct department stores like Gimbels dominating retail are long gone.

See JUDAICA, page 8

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JUDAICA

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 7

Sure, some people still get a kick going to the mall where the search for that elusive parking spot begins, hopefully within reasonable walking distance. But more and more shoppers have decided the thrill of waiting in line to buy a pair of socks just isn't worth it, especially when they can choose whatever they want with a simple click of their mouse.

That goes for Judaica items like menorahs, candlesticks and kosher wines, too.



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Yes, online Jewish gift shops are filling the cyber market these days. From A (Amazon) to Z (Zingerman's), there's something for everybody, a far cry from the days when you had to go to the local synagogue gift shop if you needed a tallis or a kippah.

The problem with having so many to choose from is how do you know which sites are best? What if there's a problem with the order?

And, of course, what if you decide that once it arrives you don't like it or find something better?

Chances are, however, that due to the nature of what's become a consumer-friendly business, you'll wind up being satisfied.

"We're a family company who prides themselves on having excellent customer service," said Amy Kreitzer, who runs **moderntribe.com**. "I work really hard to find items they can't get anywhere else. I have a business background and a Jewish food blog, *What Jew Want to Eat?* Because of that, I became proficient in social media.

"Shopping online is a lot easier because you can have a larger selection than in person and don't have to leave



Ronne Hellman at the Beth Sholom
Congregation gift shop
Photo provided

your home. The way people shop today, it makes sense for us to have Judaica. We have some items no one else has — like handmade bagel earrings made of clay. We make some of our own items and work with smaller and larger artisans on some others.”

Being unique will set you apart from the rest. At the same time, it narrows the marketplace.

That’s what they’re discovering at **NMAJH.org**, the website for the National Museum of American Jewish History store. It takes in 20 percent of the store’s business.

“Our online store’s extremely successful,” said store manager Kristen Kreider, who owned brick-and-mortar stores featuring Judaica in the late 1980s. “Without it, we’d be taking a hit. But variety has disappeared over the years. Twenty years ago, it was a lot easier to find Judaica, but a lot of

See JUDAICA, page 10

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JUDAICA

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 9



Dreidels remain a popular gift.

Photo via traditionsjewishgifts.com

the artists creating ceremonial things have stopped or moved into other things.

"We're known for having a great selection of books, with a number of pieces handmade. Plus, people like to support us over Amazon or Bloomingdale's because we're nonprofit. So for a \$200 menorah where you'd normally pay sales tax, here there's no sales tax, museum members save 10 percent and every penny generated goes back into the museum."

Wendy Silver-Gordon of traditionsjewishgifts.com can somewhat relate.

"There are probably hundreds, if not thousands, of online sites selling Judaica," Silver-Gordon said. "A majority of them are probably people working out of old offices or spare bedrooms. Only a handful of us operate out of a warehouse and have a real store. Eventually, the consumer finds out. You get calls from people who need a tallis that weekend. They ordered it from some store but never got it. Tradition saves the day."

In time, going online might even save the day for synagogue gift shops, which are going the way of the dinosaur between plummeting synagogue memberships and the proliferation of online options.

That's why the gift shop at Beth Sholom Congregation in Elkins Park has its own website, no doubt figuring that if you can't beat 'em, join 'em.

"I think of it as a marketing necessity," said Ronne Hellman, who's worked in the shop nearly eight years. "We don't have many transactions because not many know about us, but at least this way people can do some preliminary shopping. I don't know of another synagogue gift shop that has a website, but it's a better use of our money than putting it into traditional advertising."

Like NMAJH.org, bscgiftshop.com has an ulterior motive for existing.

"Our hope is it's more meaningful to people to be making purchases from the synagogue than from Amazon," she said.

“We hope they appreciate the benefit to the synagogue. We consider ourselves a year-round fundraiser for the synagogue.”

But the harsh reality is that shoppers generally are either looking for the best deal — or something that no one else has available.

“One reason we’re so successful is we have so many different items,” said Silver-Gordon, who started the site in 2001. “At this point, we have over 800 mezuzahs and different menorahs. It’s hard to find that type of assortment anywhere. We do have some vendors create exclusive items

“Only a handful of us operate out of a warehouse and have a real store. Eventually, the consumer finds out.” —

WENDY SILVER-GORDON

for us, but not an entire line. And we make our own wedding glass keepsake items, because it’s nice to have something just a little bit different.”

That’s especially true since the holidays are approaching.

“Definitely, this is our busiest time,” Kreitzer said. “We have tons of new stuff from emoji dreidels to a menorah in brass or chrome that’s a monument to the modern bagel. I was writing the blog, with a new recipe every week, looking for a creative outlet. Last year, I found **moderntribe.com** was for sale, the perfect complement.”

There’s probably a similar story behind every Jewish website, something else you won’t find on Amazon.

“My mother-in-law started with a retail store, my husband opened this location in the mall and I opened the site,” Silver-Gordon said. “I’d come from a Jewish artist’s perspective because my father and I were in business together making Judaica when I met my future mother-in-law.

“The industry has consolidated. A lot of stores have closed over the years. But we rely on word-of-mouth and previous customer experience.

“That gives us the ability to offer all price points. The store’s in a good location, but online offers us a lot more growth.” •

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MARISSA STERN | JE STAFF

WINTERTIME IN THE CITY

is the most magical. This was probably not the intention of Philly's founders, but the picturesque old streets blanketed in fresh snow were basically made for Instagram.

And there are plenty of ways to enjoy the cold weather (well, hopefully it's cold weather given the track record so far this year) without feeling like you're just doing the same old thing every year to keep yourself occupied.

Between public menorah lightings in unexpected places to the consistently charming light shows around the city, here are a few suggestions to make Philadelphia your winter wonderland.

If you're more the "bah humbug," stay in and drink indoors type, there are endless options to find hot cocoa or hot cider around the city. Or Troegs Mad Elf is already back on shelves. You're welcome.

See TOP 10, page 14



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TOP 10

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 13

1 LIGHT UP (THE MENORAH)

Last year, the iconic Boathouse Row was transformed into a menorah as part of the city's effort to be more inclusive around the holidays. It was lit up in red, green, silver and gold for Christmas, and there was programming for Kwanzaa as well.

Boathouse Row will once again be lit as a menorah and the city will host an event on the first night to celebrate the holiday and light the "menorah." More details are forthcoming. Mayor Kenney joined the festivities on the sixth night last year.

Lubavitch of Center City also holds an annual giant menorah lighting in Rittenhouse Square. This year's lighting will take place on Dec. 17 at 5 p.m., per the Friends of Rittenhouse Square website.

2 CELEBRATE CHRISTMAS

OK, so maybe not actually, but there are ways to spend the holiday besides seeing *Star Wars* three times in a row (no judgment, though).

Here's a riddle for you: What rhymes with Christmas? Chinese food.

The Gershman Y will hold its staple Moo Shu Jew show on Christmas Eve at Ocean Harbor Restaurant. After chowing down on a multi-course Chinese meal (not kosher), digest with some laughs from this year's lineup of comedians: Moody McCarthy, Marla Schultz and Brad Zimmerman. Registration is required at gershmany.org or call 215-545-4400.

On Christmas itself, there are ways to spread Jewish joy and celebrate the holiday as well. The National Museum of American Jewish History will hold its annual "Being ___ at Christmas" program. Keep an eye on nmajh.org for a full schedule of events.

3 ALL OF THE LIGHTS, ALL OF THE LIGHTS

There's a reason the Macy's Light Show has been around for half a century. Watch reindeer, ballerinas and snowmen twirl and twinkle as 100,000 lights (energy-efficient LED lights, for those who care about the Earth) form a magical winter show on display beginning Nov. 24.

When you're done with the show, don't be a Scrooge and head on up to the third floor for Dickens Village, which brings the classic *A Christmas Carol* to life through Dec. 31.

You can even knock out your holiday shopping while you're there; win-win.

Or if you're worried you'll walk out with more sweaters and winter goodies than your bank account allows for, head to the Comcast Center for The Comcast Holiday Spectacular from Nov. 23 to Jan. 1.

Franklin Square will be lit for the holidays starting Nov. 9. Head there to check out the Electrical Spectacle Holiday Light Show with more than 50,000 lights dancing to holiday tunes.

A personal favorite is the "Season's Greetings" strung out in lights on Jeweler's Row, spreading along Eighth Street between Sansom, Walnut and Chestnut streets.

And of course, no winter in Philly would be complete without a stop at the Miracle on South 13th Street in South Philly. The homeowners on this street go all out to make it a must-see during the holidays.

4 TAKE A DAY TRIP

Longwood Gardens and Peddler's Village are so close and yet we don't always take advantage of it.

Change that this winter with a drive to the gardens to see the grounds, which are beautiful any time of year, but especially during the holidays.

A Longwood Christmas will be on display Nov. 23 through Jan. 7 and will be themed this year after France's Versailles. Ooh la la!

Top spots for pumpkin picking in the fall turn into prime places for winter fun, too. Linvilla Orchards (Nov. 19 through Dec. 23) and Shady Brook Farm (Nov. 18 through Jan. 7) will hold their annual light shows with more than 3 million lights (!) and give you the chance to sip on some apple cider while walking through "the North Pole."

The annual Peddler's Village Christmas Festival will take place on Dec. 2 and 3 from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. both days. While you're there, definitely check out the Gingerbread House Competition and Display.

Or if Bavaria in the winter is more your speed (who wouldn't want to warm up with a nice stein of beer?), check out Bavaria in Bucks at Peddler's Village for a series of dining events featuring German cuisine, wine, beer and entertainment on Jan. 12 to 14.

5 LAKE UP YOUR SKATES

As tempting as it is to curl up in a blanket and stay inside all day, don't let the winter stop you from being physically active. There are tons of ways to be outside, from skiing to ice skating, and there are plenty of spots to lace up your skates and take a turn around the rink.

The Rothman Ice Rink at Dilworth Park is now open and allows you to skate around next to City Hall, right by the giant lit-up tree — really, you can't miss it — and when you're done, walk around the little shops and booths set up in the park. Christmas Village is set up at Dilworth Plaza while renovations at LOVE Park continue.

The city claims it will be open for Christmas Village this year, but that remains to be seen.


Or head to Penn's Landing for Blue Cross RiverRink Winter-fest (November through March) to skate and warm up in The Lodge while you sip on cider and hot chocolate (adults can get some spiked winter cocktails).

See TOP 10, page 16

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TOP 10

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 15

6 A BALL AT THE MATZOBALL

Dreading another holiday season where your relatives greet you with a, “Hi, how’s your job? Are you eating enough? When are you going to find a nice Jewish boyfriend/girlfriend?”

Head to the MatzoBall on Christmas Eve to meet other singles in the same boat. This year’s party will take place at Rumor Nightclub.

7 ANNUAL AUTO SHOW

Looking to get dressed up fancy shmancy and look at some cars you can daydream about buying when you win the lottery?

Check out the Annual Auto Show Philadelphia at the Convention Center Jan. 27 to Feb. 4 (black-tie tailgate Jan. 26).

It’s a fun alternative to typical winter activities and has become a Philly staple for good reason.

8 TURN UP THE MUSIC

For music lovers who don’t mind bravely standing outside in frigid temperatures for some great live — and free! — music, the Radio 104.5 Winter Jawn at Xfinity Live (formerly known as Winter Jam but changed to Winter Jawn because Philly) is a winter staple. Former emo teens’ favorite band Dashboard Confessional headlines this year’s concert, which in the past has included stellar acts like Elle King and Nathaniel Rateliff and the Night Sweats.

Of course, there will still be concerts aplenty in the nice warmth of venues like the Wells Fargo Center and the Fillmore.

Some standouts in the next few months include: Q102’s Jingle Ball, aka every tween parent’s nightmare, featuring a mini One Direction reunion as Liam Payne and Niall Horan are both performers (Wells Fargo Center, Dec. 6); Andrea Bocelli (Wells Fargo Center, Dec. 8); The Killers (Wells Fargo Center, Jan. 13); LCD Soundsystem (The Fillmore Dec. 5 to 7); Ladies First: A Benefit for Hurricane Relief for Puerto Rico featuring Danielle and Jennifer, Mixed People, Prima Donna, Roxy Rollz and Sylvia Platypus (World Cafe Live, Jan. 27).

9 GO SEE A PERFORMANCE

Is it really the holidays if you don’t go see a performance of *The Nutcracker*? I think not.

The Pennsylvania Ballet will take you to the Land of Sweets this season from Dec. 8 to 31 at the Academy of Music.

Celebrate Leonard Bernstein with the Philadelphia Orchestra in December with artist-in-residence Hilary Hahn. The orchestra will celebrate the Jewish composer throughout December with *Serenade*, a musical retelling of Plato’s ode to love, written for Bernstein’s friend Isaac Stern (no relation). Or hear *The Glorious Sound of Christmas* from Dec. 14 to 17.

10 IF ALL ELSE FAILS...

There will be plenty of movies out this holiday season. So go bask in the warmth of the movie theater, grab some popcorn and see *Bad Moms 2* or *Star Wars: The Last Jedi* however many times you like. •

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Make Holiday Entertaining a Breeze with These tips

MARISSA STERN | JE STAFF

DECK
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HALLS
with boughs
of ... what's the
Jewish equivalent
of decking
the halls
with holly?

Photo: BananaStock/Thinkstock

With Chanukah around the corner, you might be starting to get into the holiday party frame of mind. And maybe this year you want to skip your second cousin twice removed's boring party with stale latkes and throw one of your own.

There are plenty of ways to throw a festive holiday party this season without breaking the bank or setting your kitchen ablaze with overcooked meatballs.

One tip for throwing the ultimate holiday get-together: Play to your strengths, said Keri White, who frequently writes the food column for the *Jewish Exponent* and its food blog, Philacatessen.

When you're preparing a party and you're not the greatest cook, don't try a super involved dish that those Tasty videos make look so easy.

"If you are really creative into cooking, then make that your focus. If you love to set a beautiful table, make that your focus and then simplify the meal. Don't try to do every single thing," White advised.

"Don't make a completely new recipe that has 4 million ingredients and 77 steps, and weave your own linen tablecloth, and grow your own flowers for your centerpiece," she added. "Focus on one really big priority and then make everything else manageable."

That includes making the cooking manageable.

As the host of the party, you don't want to miss the actual party because you're in the kitchen for two hours.

"Don't plan a meal that requires tons of last-minute preparation. Try to do something that you can do ahead, pop in the oven and then pull out and serve," she suggested.

(Or if you're like me and are not great at actually cooking, you could try a Crockpot meal.)

Make it something scalable, as well, to better increase the amount of food depending on how many guests you're expecting.

"Do a big braised lamb shoulder or a couple roasted chickens or something like a big casserole that you can do ahead and you can double and triple and make for a big crowd," she said.

If a big dinner isn't your thing, you can stick to appetizers — but make them mess-free and easy to eat.

Namely, skip the bruschetta. Yes, it's delicious, but it also falls apart as soon as you take a bite.

Instead, White said, make appetizers that are small and simple, no bigger than a quarter. If you make a cheese plate, cut the pieces up so they're easy for people to just take and eat.

"If it's something people have to work to eat or you do a crispini with a slice of filet on it, people are not going to take that because it seems like it's going to be messy," she said. "If you're doing a sit-down dinner, don't overdo the appetizers because people pig out on the appetizers, and then you cooked this beautiful dinner and nobody eats it."

You'll also need some drinks to go with your delicious meal, of course.

White suggests creating holiday-centric concoctions — skip the Manischewitz — but don't forget to create an accompanying non-alcoholic drink for your underage cousins or party guests who don't drink.

The Daily Meal has plenty of Chanukah-themed recipes that would surely provide some inspiration.

The Chocolate Gelt Cocktail, for instance, requires 3 ounces chocolate vodka, 1 ounce Goldschläger and cocoa powder for garnish. Put the ice in a cocktail shaker and add the chocolate vodka. Shake well, and strain it into a martini or cocktail glass. Add Goldschläger and gently stir.

Or the Chanukah Gift Cocktail, which uses 3 ounces chocolate vodka, 1/2 ounce Sabra (chocolate-orange flavored liqueur), and a small chocolate gelt coin, chocolate kiss or chocolate Baton (unwrapped).

Add the ice, vodka and Sabra in a cocktail shaker. Shake well, and strain it into a martini or cocktail glass. Garnish it with a chocolate candy.

Beyond the food — though that is arguably the most important — there are other ways to create a festive atmosphere.

Scan Spotify for some holiday playlists to have on to fill the awkward lulls in conversation or just provide some festive

background noise. Or if you're like White's family, you might end up just dancing, which is OK, too.

Some suggestions: The "Hanukkah" playlist by Spotify, which features holiday tunes by such artists as Carole King, Neil Diamond, Matisyahu, and, of course, Adam Sandler; PJ Library created a Hanukkah playlist there as well; fill the room with the cappella sounds of groups like the Maccabeats or Six13; the *Rugrats Chanukah* soundtrack, if that exists; or just Sandler's "The Chanukah Song" on repeat the whole time if you actually hate the people at your party.

Setting the table — and perhaps creating a seating chart to avoid an awkward game of musical chairs — is also a key element to a successful holiday party.

You could scatter some plastic dreidels and gelt across the table for aesthetics, or a mid-meal snack.

White outlined a few suggestions for a centerpiece: floating candles, a vase of flowers, or you could even create a bowl and have people write questions on pieces of paper and pull them out during the meal to get to know each other.

Ask open-ended questions like "Where would you like to travel this year?" or "What is the best film you've seen?"

Another suggestion was to have everyone bring a small gift and play a round of Yankee swap or white elephant, where you can swap or keep gifts (it is Chanukah, after all).

But no matter what, one key tip White suggests: Hire a cleanup crew.

After the party is over, having a cleanup service, even if it's just a local teenager out to make some extra money, clean up the party is a lifesaver, White said.

It helps the host enjoy the party without picking up trash the whole time or having to save it all for the next day.

Change around your budget if necessary — skip the Champagne and opt for prosecco or swap the filet for a pot roast to save some money for the cleanup service.

"It's like, the best holiday gift to yourself you can give," she said. ●



About 140 students will participate in the MEOR Poland trip in January. Photos provided



A few Temple Hillel Birthright members display the Israeli flag on Masada.



Temple University students participate in a winter Birthright trip.

WINTER

Trip Opportunities For C

JON MARKS | JE FEATURE

Just as cellphones, computers, answering machines and microwaves were mere figments of the imagination for the baby boom-generation growing up, so was the concept of college students using winter break for anything more than a reprieve from school.

Maybe there would be a family vacation to Florida or a tropical island. But those were usually costly and probably not all that exciting for teenagers who'd rather be anywhere than with mom, dad and their little brother and/or sister.

Going someplace meaningful, learning a bit of history while simultaneously gaining a deeper understanding of your heritage — that seldom happened.

It does now — and has for a while.

Programs like Birthright and Meor send thousands to Israel and other lands at either a fraction of the cost or none at all, so Jewish college students across the country are afforded the opportunity of their young lifetimes.

While summer is traditionally the busier time for these and other organizations, which are primarily donor-supported, there are plenty of winter trips, too.

Much has changed since Pamela Fertel Weinstein's parents allowed her to go where she'd always wanted — Israel — on one of the first Birthright trips in 2000.

"I had no idea what to expect, but it was finally fulfilling a dream of mine to go," said Fertel Weinstein, now Birthright Israel's vice president of marketing and communications.

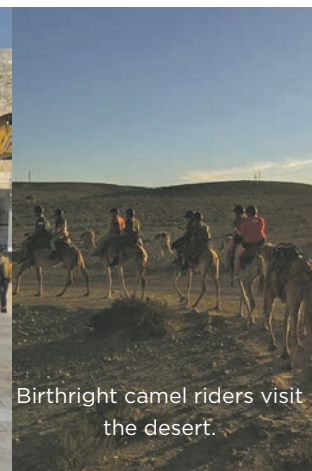
"It was still then very much word of mouth, and maybe 9,000 went that year. Now we're sending 48,000, and it's grown exponentially. It's becoming, in some circles, a rite of passage — something for Jewish kids to do when they get to college."



A Birthright participant enjoys a camel ride.



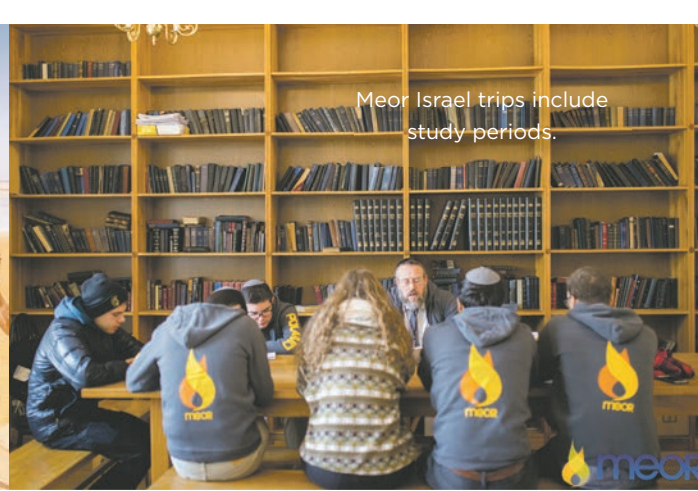
Temple Hillel gathers at the Wall.



Birthright camel riders visit the desert.



Temple Hillel Birthright members enjoy some sun at the Dead Sea.



Meor Israel trips include study periods.

BREAK

College Students Multiply

And it's hardly the only option.

While, unlike Birthright, it might not be free, Meor offers numerous trips to Jewish students who have an educational frame of mind. Not only do they get to experience a different place (and usually a different country), they learn in the classroom.

"Meor means to illuminate," said Rabbi Josef Lynn, who runs Meor from his home in Israel. "Basically, students come together from all the 22 Meor campuses in the U.S.

"The first week in January, 140 of them will be traveling to Poland, starting in Warsaw and going to many of the death camps. ... I've been involved from the beginning. My brother [Shmuel] got me involved, and I took over the Meor Poland trip three years ago. They visit a different town every night and are busy every day between touring the camps and having class and discussion groups.

"It's a trip about life and inspiring people to connect to their Jewish roots. It's not supposed to be about sadness. It's much more about the future and continuity of the Jewish people than remembering the past."

If going to Auschwitz, Treblinka and seeing the Warsaw Ghetto isn't for you, Meor probably has something else that might be.

For starters, there are two winter trips to Israel — Meor Israel and Meor Vision.

Meor Israel combines an introduction to the Holy Land with Jewish study. Meor Vision, which is open only to those who've completed Meor Israel, Birthright or something equivalent, goes deeper into Talmudic study and offers classes and other outdoor activities.

And then there's Olami, the annual international Jewish Summit. Some 1,200 delegates representing 100 organizations and 20 countries are expected to participate in the week-long event that will begin in Spain and end in London. A handful of those delegates will be coming from the Philadelphia area.

"It's hard to get in," said Shoshana Kay, executive director for Meor at both Temple and Drexel universities. "You have to be a student leader and be Jewish. The Poland trip is more heavily subsidized."

But there's even something for those who don't want to leave the country. Meor's Heritage Retreat in Sedona, Ariz., is a 10-day

See OPPORTUNITIES, **page 22**



Meor Israel travelers explore rocky terrain.



A few Temple Hillel members hit the beach.

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OPPORTUNITIES

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 21

trip with a heavy emphasis on the Torah. It also costs less than the others at just \$250.

Parents will find it hard to complain about that or the \$450 price tag for Meor Vision or \$450 for Olami, not including the flight cost.

Even the \$850 for Meor Poland isn't too steep.

To today's Jewish college students, this is the norm. Most are likely unaware how different it is from when their parents and

“Sometimes we don't seem to have much unity, but at the end of the day it's really one people, one nation, one heart.”

— SHOSHANA KAY

grandparents went to school.

“This is a much more entitled culture than 10 years ago — and I don't mean that in a bad way,” said Kay, who's been involved with Meor for 11 years. “Because of Birthright and other trips, they have such opportunities. And everyone's vying for their time and attention, so we have to recruit hard. ... A non-Jewish student or someone older who didn't have this would recognize this is a big deal. They'd say, ‘These people are so lucky.’”

What makes today's Jewish college students such “chosen people”?

“It's because Jews care so much about other Jews,” Kay said. “Sometimes we don't seem to have much unity, but at the end of the day it's really one people, one nation, one heart. Jews are willing to put millions and millions of dollars into young strangers just because they care about perpetuating their Judaism. That's quite remarkable.”

To Fertel Weinstein, though, it's simply the gift that gives again and again.

“Who knew 12 years later I'd come to work here?” she said. “But everything I'm doing now is helping pay back for an amazing experience that changed my life.” •

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What Keeps Sun-Hungry Snowbirds



Flocking Back to

FLORIDA

Each Year?

RACHEL KURLAND | JE STAFF

It's officially winter — holiday joy in the air, logs in the fireplace, snow on the horizon — which probably means it's time to flock south.

If you have reached the age where you can recite Roger Murtaugh's "I'm too old for this" *Lethal Weapon* line and mean it, I salute you. Why put up with shoveling snow and lugging around heavy boots when places like Florida exist?

See FLORIDA, page 24

Florida

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 23

Vacation and seasonal rentals are a common phenomenon for Philadelphia snowbirds going south, so unless you're a winter sports enthusiast, what's there to lose by moving toward a warmer climate?

Snowbirds occupy the Sunshine State usually three to four months out of the year, the busiest months between January and March.

More than 1 million make the trek to invade Florida towns — not to mention daily trips to Publix and Costco — raising the state's population during that season by 5 percent, which does not include tourists, as reported by *The Palm Beach Post*.

Interestingly, the percentage of snowbirds coming to Florida has decreased in recent years, reported JNS.org, but the amount of people actually there has plateaued as many baby boomer snowbirds eventually choose to permanently retire there.

Bernie Becker has vacationed in Boca Raton, Fla., with his wife, Lennie, for at least 15 years. They head down in mid-December and stay until mid-March.

They initially decided to head south for a number of reasons: "The weather is one thing. A change of pace," Bernie Becker said. "It allows me to play golf in the wintertime. Meet different people."

It doesn't hurt either that their daughter and grandson now live not too far in Naples, Fla.

They keep their routine simple: Whatever they usually do in their native Penn Valley, they do the same in Boca, except for Bernie Becker's year-round love of golf.

"If the weather is good, you can sit by a pool — something you can't do here [in Philadelphia] in the wintertime," he added. "It allows you to continue outdoor life as opposed to being in the house."

Spending time outdoors is important to the Beckers, but they also

make time for some local shows, movies and full-time Floridian friends. "It keeps our social life active," he said. "It's more of an outdoor life. ... It's just an easier and a more fun way to spend time."

When they're having that much fun, Philly turns into a distant memory, though they always return home.

Palm Beach County, in which Boca lies, is one of the top winter habitats for snowbirds, with roughly 145,000 who come to the area.

But there's more to Florida than just the notoriously Jewish Boca Raton or Miami Beach.

Snowbirds occupy the Sunshine State usually three to four months out of the year, the busiest months between January and March.

Many have opted for less-congested and cheaper locales — with the same amount of palm trees — like the quiet beach havens of Clearwater, Englewood, Bradenton or Venice, Fla.

Some cities, usually beach towns, are more popular for sun-hungry snowbirds than others, as they offer more seasonal rental properties. And if you would prefer an ocean view, there's no worry about hurricanes since the season ends Nov. 30, not to mention a slight decrease in that awful humidity.

But if you're not much of a beach person, Winter Park, Fla., offers a more relaxed environment inland. Just outside Orlando, Winter Park provides a quiet, small-town vibe just a short drive from neighboring theme parks, restaurants and shopping.

Orlando is rich in Jewish life as well — synagogues, JCCs, delis — minutes from the burbs of Winter Park.

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See FLORIDA, page 26



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Florida

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 25

And further northwest of Orlando and south of Ocala, Fla., lies The Villages, the best place for retirees to nosh and kvetch among other noshers and kvetchers.

Golf carts are about the only means of getting around town — not joking. It's basically Disney for adults.

But Linda and Arthur Scherr settled for Pompano Beach, Fla., as their getaway space, usually from January to April.

Florida mornings call for pickleball, a popular sport among snowbirds that combines elements of badminton, tennis and Ping-Pong.

"It's really big in Florida because it's an outdoor thing," Arthur Scherr said, but there's also indoor spots, and five are within a half-hour drive from their Pompano Beach home.

"It's also social," Linda Scherr said, "and exercise."

The Newtown Square couple met many friends through the activity, which they sometimes play up to three hours a day.

Linda Scherr also opts for mahjong, canasta and a monthly book club at the local library, and Arthur Scherr plays golf.

They rented a place about four years ago in Florida and fell in love with the idea of making it a longer annual stay. They bought a house some months later.

"But I decided I want to come home in the middle because I want to see my grandkids," Linda Scherr added. Otherwise, Arthur Scherr thinks their Florida home is perfect year-round (aside from craving a cheesesteak every now and then).

"Pompano Beach this day is not a particularly Jewish area, but when I went to the book club, somehow or another you meet the other Jews. And then I played mahjong — they're Jewish," she laughed.

There's also Venice, Fla., which offers great walk or bike lanes to the beaches from its historic downtown area, often full of annual arts festivals.

Even North Florida sites have become popular for the 'birds. Farther north are Fernandina Beach, Fla., or St. Augustine, Fla., both rich in history and outdoor life.

St. Augustine — technically the oldest city in the country, discovered by Juan Ponce de Leon in 1513 and declared a Spanish territory in 1565 — has plenty of campsites, historical attractions and beach life, all encompassed in a small-town feel.

Even North Florida sites have become popular for the 'birds. Farther north are Fernandina Beach, Fla., or St. Augustine, Fla., both rich in history and outdoor life.

Fernandina Beach is farther north, near the popular campsite attraction of Amelia Island, Fla., perfect for an afternoon stroll on a nature trail or birdwatching.

Regardless of where you choose to settle, the less-bundled life is the way to go.

"I really don't like the snow, the ice, the cold weather," Linda Scherr said. "I much prefer the beach, getting outside every day."

"Every day is like paradise in Florida," Arthur Scherr added. •

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Gifts

of
**Holidays Past:
Where Are They
Now?**

RACHEL KURLAND | JE STAFF

Ahh, holiday shopping. If there's one thing that truly puts me in the frenzy of gift giving and receiving, it's rewatching 1996 coverage of middle-aged mothers push and trample over each other to get their hands on the coveted Tickle Me Elmo just shy of the holidays.

"Why are parents suddenly acting like children in an attempt to get their children a doll that will make them act like parents?" narrated one archived CNN report on the Cabbage Patch craze of '83.

Perhaps the better question is: Is it really worth the time, money and energy for a toy your children will quickly grow out of and move on to the next fad?

Maybe that's too much of a Scrooge mentality, but in reality, where are all those popular toys of the past — and how much are people willing to pay for them now?



Elmo toy
Photo by Tiffany Terry via
Flickr Creative Commons

See GIFTS, **page 28**

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Gifts

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 27



Classic Star Wars figures

Photo by Richard Lewis via Flickr Creative Commons

STAR WARS FRANCHISE ACTION FIGURES, 1977

THEN: If you're unfamiliar with the *Star Wars* franchise, you must be living in a galaxy far, far away with no Wi-Fi.

After the surprise success of the first film, George Lucas moved as quickly as possible on the now-collectible action figures, making millions on "Early Bird Certificate Packages," which were vouchers many kids received for the holidays saying they would receive the almost 4-inch-tall toys in a few months by Kenner toy company, NBC News reported.

Starting at just \$2.79, it was easy to rack up hundreds of the mini classic figurines. More than 300 million were sold between 1978 and 1985, ranging in more than 100 characters.

NOW: It's the *Catch-22* of children's toys: Don't take them out of the package. One eBay seller has 80 figures from the Early Bird Certificate Package sealed in the original packaging for \$12,950. Ironically, the most valuable figures since their inception are the cause of a manufacturing flaw: a brown-haired Luke Skywalker and a Han Solo whose head is too small.

CABBAGE PATCH KIDS, 1983

THEN: Step aside, Care Bears: Before kids were tickled pink by Elmo, they learned that babies grew from cabbage. (Seri-

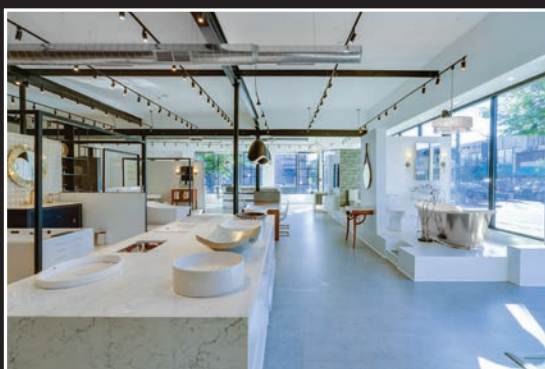


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ously, what repressed person thought of this?) Probably the biggest appeal of these creepy-eyed dolls was that fact that, for a time, they were unattainable. Toy stores were never fully stocked that year, making it even more difficult to find individual cabbage kids specifically with freckles, dimples and red plaits. The dolls were in such rapid demand that a Wisconsin radio announcer joked that a B-29 bomber would drop 2,000 dolls into Milwaukee County Stadium, Timeline reported. At least a dozen people showed up.

NOW: The Cabbage Patch brand lives on, though most dolls are collectibles or holiday-themed toys that are moderately priced. But an original 1983 one will cost you: One Amazon item is listed as “Exclusive Cabbage Patch Kids 25th Anniversary PREEMIE - Caucasian Girl - Hair and Eye Color Varies” for \$170. I’d love to be a fly on the wall of the UPS guy who delivers an “exclusive caucasian preemie” to someone’s door.



Nintendo Game Boy
Photo via Wikimedia Commons

GAME BOY, 1989

THEN : What’s more exciting than unwrapping a handheld, PORTABLE video game console with the choice of five different games? Think about it, where would the tech world be now without this

chunky pocket-sized game that you always forgot in Mom’s minivan? As exciting as Tetris and Super Mario Land were, the influx of Game Boys must be credited in part with the Pokémon craze, which has expanded from the simple video games, TV shows and playing cards to countless movies, costumes, spinoffs, augmented reality interactive apps and other merchandise.

NOW: Generations of the Game Boy were released — the Game Boy Pocket, Game Boy Color, Game Boy Advance, Nintendo DS — but the original will cost you today. Some eBay sellers price it as high as \$979.99, but just the console itself goes for \$1.17 — games not included. Play at your own risk.

See GIFTS, page 30



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Gifts

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Beanie Babies
Photo by Dominique
Godbout via Flickr

BEANIE BABIES, 1995

THEN: Why own one Beanie Baby when you could own 1,000? The fad started with the original nine beanies in 1993 (Legs the Frog, Squealer the Pig, Spot the Dog, Flash the Dolphin, Splash the Whale, Chocolate the Moose, Patti the Platypus, Brownie the Bear and Pinchers the Lobster), each with a birthday and short note on the Ty tag. Ty Warner of Chicago made a fortune from the beanie-stuffed animals. When Ty, Inc. retired the product in December 1999, consumers decided that wasn't an option and new generations were released.



NOW: The collectables still go for a steep price, though they don't actually do anything other than look cute on a shelf. At its peak, the \$5 beanies were flipped for 1,000 percent mark-ups on eBay, according to The Fiscal Times, making up 10 percent of eBay's sales. The fad that went for thousands of dollars has faded, though some sellers still have hope that buyers will bid on a set of three first edition glass-encased Princess Diana beanies — for \$652,200.

TICKLE ME ELMO, 1996

THEN: Tickle Me Elmo topped many young children's lists, though it was evident at glance that Elmo's laugh is quite possibly the most annoying and haunting sound of the holiday season (next to Furbies). After Thanksgiving, the 400,000 supply quickly ran out, which instigated violence over the furry red plushie. Some were scalped for thousands of dollars, *People* reported, as opposed to its \$29.99 retail price.



Elmo toy
Photo by Tiffany
Terry via Flickr
Creative Commons

Tickle Me Elmo made a second crazed appearance in 2006 for its 10th anniversary, which helped jump Mattel's profits that year by 6 percent, as reported by the Associated Press.

NOW: Searching through Amazon and eBay, a couple original Elmos, still harnessed in their boxes, go for just about the same amount, if not less. However, the hype of the doll still holds strong — or at least for a collector. One "vintage" Elmo on Amazon goes for \$109, but only one left in stock, so order soon.

FURBY, 1998

THEN: Does anyone else still wake up in the middle of the night feeling like you're being watched by a furry hamster-owl robot hybrid? Just me? Supposedly that was the appeal of the original Furby, with its "artificial intelligence"-like murmuring that developed more English than "Furbish" the more it "grew."



Furby
Photo via Wikimedia
Commons

Originally sold for \$35, the holiday craze rushed prices up to \$100 or more for some, reaching 1.8 million sold in 1998 and 14 million in '99, *TIME* wrote.

For those who may not remember, Furbies often "woke up" in the middle of the night squealing a high-pitched "I love you." They

HONORABLE MENTIONS THAT DIDN'T QUITE MAKE THE CUT:

Easy-Bake Oven: A personal-sized cake made out of powder and water, cooked by lightbulb? Sold.

Etch A Sketch: A gift for experts in the art of stick-figure drawings.

Legos: Obviously Legos are amazing and the brand continues to expand in merchandise, theme parks and movies, so detailing its entire rise and fall is near impossible.

Rubik's Cube: When you think back on the '80s, it's a combination of Molly Ringwald's red locks, neon aerobic jumpsuits and this cube.

Hot Wheels: These little cars were as close as kids could get to the real deal.

Super Soakers: Nerf's water guns dominated summers in the early '90s.

Tamagotchi: The handheld keychain-sized digital pets were somehow more captivating than real pets.

Hatchimals: This Furby-like toy dominated 2016. The premise: Kids had to rub a plastic "egg" to "hatch" a furry robot creature from it, and then it chirps for eternity. Starting price: \$50. Demanding price: \$498 and up.

even stirred enough controversy to be banned by the National Security Agency in 1999 for fear that they "contained an internal recording device" that "would spill secrets," Gizmodo wrote.

NOW: The interactive toy made a comeback in 2005 and again in 2012 with more complex facial movements, voice recognition and LCD eyes. The newest Furby Connect — paired with an app — goes for \$99.99, but first-generation creepy critters sit around a solid grand on eBay.

FROZEN MERCHANDISE, 2013

THEN: Oh, you haven't heard "Let it Go" before? Allow every child ever to serenade you with all 276 words, including shrieking — and sometimes cute — high notes. *Forbes* reported the film hit \$1.3 billion at the box office, but the licensing of the movie and its characters grossed \$107.2 billion in retail sales. This 2013 Disney hit starring MOTs Idina Menzel and Josh Gad has marketed every product under the sun with Anna and Elsa's faces on it, and with the second movie to be released in 2019, we'll be building a lot of snowmen for years to come.

NOW: It's hard to narrow down specific trends in *Frozen* merchandise, but in 2014 *Fortune* reported Walmart had more than 700 different *Frozen* items, Toys"R"Us had more than 300, and eBay claimed upward of 40,000 listings. Probably the biggest hit was the Snow Glow Elsa doll, which retailed for around \$30 and often sold online for double the price. •



Frozen dolls at Toys"R"Us
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BY DEBORAH FINEBLUM/JNS.ORG

Chanukah and children's books go together like latkes and applesauce.

In fact, Chanukahs of old often included a book, its pages spotted with droplets of candle wax. In its pages the brave Maccabees once again defeat the Syrian Greeks, a tiny cruse of oil keeps the temple's menorah aglow for a miraculous eight days, children spin dreidels for chocolate gelt (money) and you can almost smell the sizzling latkes.

These days, the marketplace overflows with books that can warm up the coldest Chanukah night. The books reflect both the holiday's miracles and the nuances of growing up Jewish in the 21st century.

"We're seeing an exciting diversity in kids' Chanukah books now," said Joy Getnick, director of Jewish life at the Louis S. Wolk Jewish Community Center of Greater Rochester. One of the best parts of her job: funneling children's books into the JCC's preschool, books Getnick test-drives with her 2-year-old son.

Experts say there's a certain quality of magic in the best of these books — making them the kinds of gifts that keep giving.

"They have to celebrate being Jewish in a diverse world and transmit powerful values to the new generation," Getnick said.

"They have to make the child wonder what's going to happen next," said Lyncall Miller, who directs the Jewish Early Childhood Education Leadership Institute, where the Jewish Theological Seminary and Hebrew Union College - Jewish Institute of Religion provide leadership training and Jewish learning to directors of early childhood centers.

"They have to give Jewish children a sense of pride and inclusion," said Rachel Kamin, a book reviewer, judge and editor who directs the Joseph and Mae Gray Cultural & Learning Center at North Suburban Synagogue Beth El in Highland Park, Ill.

Chanukah-themed children's books "help us see how the miracles in our own lives reflect the miracle" of the holiday, said Mer-

edith Lewis, director of content and engagement for the Harold Grinspoon Foundation's PJ Library program, which distributes nearly 200,000 Jewish children's books to families in the U.S., Canada and elsewhere.



Joy Getnick reading a Chanukah story book to her son, Benjamin.
Photo by Jonathan Getnick

As of press time, publishers were still rolling out new Chanukah releases, but several titles had already surfaced. Among them are *Little Red Ruthie: A Hanukkah Tale*, by Gloria Koster, a spin on *Little Red Riding Hood*; and *Queen of the Hanukkah Dosas*, by Pamela Ehrenberg, featuring a family celebrating with spicy Indian food.

"You can smell the curry coming off this wonderful new book," Lewis said, noting that *Queen of the Hanukkah Dosas* and *Little Red Ruthie* made it into PJ Library's fall lineup. Other notable new releases include *Judah Maccabee Goes to the Doctor*, by Ann Koffsky; *Way Too Many Latkes: A Hanukkah in Chelm*, by Linda Glaser; and *The Missing Letters: A Dreidel Story*, by Renee Londner.

But tried-and-true Chanukah classics continue to delight.

"If I had to pick one Chanukah book to read to my kids every night, it would be Eric Kimmel's brilliant *Hershel and the Hanukkah Goblins*," Kamin said. She also loves Kimmel's lesser-known goblin story, *Zigazak! A Magical Hanukkah Night* and his *The Hanukkah Bear*, in which an elderly latke-maker mistakes a bear for her rabbi.

For those looking for a dramatic children's book, Louise Borden's *The Journey That Saved Curious George* features Hans and Margret Rey's escape on bicycles from the Nazis during World War II — taking children's book manuscripts along for the journey.

Meanwhile, for interfaith families, Chanukah can be a delicate time when it comes to reading.

"Parents and grandparents say, 'A book about Christmas and Chanukah? That's great!' But they need to read it first," Kamin warned. "Is it patronizing or insulting? Or does it sensitively reflect the message of Chanukah for an interfaith family?"

"In what can be a confusing time of year," she said, "it's often the grandparents who become the portal to tradition and play a key role in shaping identity." •

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