



Hidden Histories of Jewish-Centric Tourism in the Caribbean

Alexia Narun
Tenenbaum Tutorials



Semiotics of Tourism

Neocolonial Habits

- Heritage tours commodifying Jewish culture
- Monetarily benefitting from declining communities

Inherent Christianization

- Colonialism as a proselytizing strategy

Inauthenticity

- Markets authenticity to the visitor without presenting full history
- “Unspoilt” destinations turned into “sites” and “attractions” (Li 250)



“Cultural Self-Determination”

- Who decides how the culture is portrayed? In Cuba’s case, the state.
- Hosting culture is impacted by the visitor’s mindset

Sephardic History in the Caribbean



The Alhambra Decree in 1492

King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella expel all Jews from Spain

“Their very prosperity.. [was] resented by an uneducated mass whose all-consuming religious beliefs could be inflamed by virulent anti-Semitism”
(Kritzler 2)

Jewish Pirates

Experience as maritime traders

Pioneering buccaneers, creating intricate trade networks spanning
the New World

Christopher Columbus in Jamaica

Jews in Cuba



1906

Jewish officers of Liberation
Army open United Hebrew
Congregation

1908: Chevet Achim Hebrew
Union



**U.S. Quota Acts of
1921 and 1924**

Akhsanie Kuba – Hotel Cuba

Sephardim from Turkey and
Syria, Eastern European Jews



**After 1959,
Revolution**

~ 90% migrate

15,000 Jews in 1959, only
2,400 in 1965

Jews in Jamaica



Port Royal

Most thriving moment-
1600s

Hotspot for Pirates, highest
concentration of Hebrew
tombstones in New World

Great Earthquake of 1692



1881- 1974

1881: 8 synagogues, 2,535
Jews

1911: 1,487 Jews

1949: 1,300 Jews

1974: 500 Jews



Causes of Decline

Today: 125 subscribing
members

High intermarriage and
conversion rates

High emigration

Phasing out of trade as revenue

Tourism in Cuba and Jamaica

Cuba

- State-sponsored/controlled tourism
- Pressure to migrate
- Illusioned “private” sector tourism – in-home restaurants
- Western “discovery”

Jamaica

- Available to public and private sector
- Jamaica Tourist Board: John Lynch, promotion...
- “scruffy capital city”

The Hotel Raquel in Havana, Cuba



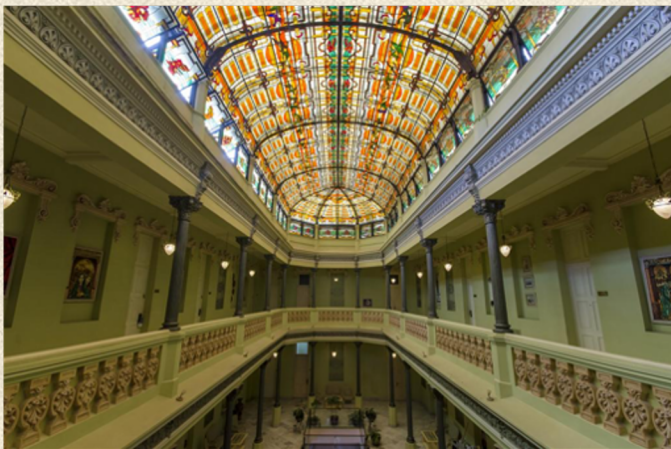
“Jewish Cuban Diasporaland”

“so much seductively marked Jewishness”
is offered to a “potentially lucrative tourist
market”

Ruth Behar, who as a Cuban-born Jew
found herself “[trying] not to think too
much about all this -- [she] who [has] spent
years searching for a way to return to
Cuba as a Jew”

From a member of the community: “We all
feel a little funny in our uniforms”

(Behar 246-53)



The Hotel Raquel

- Jewish-themed hotel
- Lorient Brothers Trading Company – 1905
- National Institute of Fisheries of Cuba – 1968
- Public Utility of the Food Industry - 1970s
- Art installation and rebuilding – 2003

Conclusions

Benefits

- Awareness
- Money
- Conservation

Outweighed by commodification

- Stereotypes
- Victimized hosting community
- Fetishized and romanticized Jewishness



Questions?

Thank You!

References

August, Thomas G. "An Historical Profile of the Jewish Community of Jamaica." *Jewish Social Studies*, vol. 49, no. 3/4, 1987, pp. 303–16, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4467393>. Accessed 20 Apr. 2022.

Behar, Ruth. *An Island Called Home: Returning to Jewish Cuba*. Rutgers University Press, 2009.

Cova, Antonio de la. *A Brief History of the Sephardic Presence in Cuba*, <https://www.latinamericanstudies.org/religion/sephardic.htm>.

Culler, Jonathan. "The Semiotics of Tourism," Framing the Sign: Criticism and Its Institutions. *University of Oklahoma Press*, 1990.

"El Decreto De La Alhambra 1492 - Edicto De La Expulsión De Los Judios De España." *FAU | Hispanic Heritage Month Resources*, Florida Atlantic University , <https://www.fau.edu/artsandletters/pjhr/chhre/pdf/hh-alhambra-1492-spanish.pdf>.

Extra Credits. *Jewish Pirates - Fleeing the Inquisition*. Extra Credits, Mar. 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZDvmzPlmra8>. Accessed 7 Apr. 2022.

"Hotel Raquel." *Hotel Raquel | Habaguanex Hotels*, ADG Travel, 2021, <https://www.gaviotahotels.com/en/hotels-in-cuba/havana/hotel-raquel>.

Howell, Benita J. "Weighing the Risks and Rewards of Involvement in Cultural Conservation and Heritage Tourism." *Human Organization*, vol. 53, no. 2, Society for Applied Anthropology, 1994, pp. 150–59, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/44126878>.

Hunt, Nigel Alexander. "History." *Hotel Raquel -- A Jewish Hotel in Old Havana*, <https://hotelraquel.nigelhunt.uk/hotel-raquel-history-facts.htm>.

“Jewish City Tour in La Havana, Cuba.” *Turismojudaico.com*, <https://en.turismojudaico.com/tour/37/Jewish-city-tour-in-la-havana---cuba>.

Kritzler, Edward. “Prologue, Introduction.” *Jewish Pirates of the Caribbean: How a Generation of Swashbuckling Jews Carved out an Empire in the New World in Their Quest for Treasure, Religious Freedom--and Revenge*, Anchor Books, New York, 2009, pp. vi-256.

Li, Yiping. “Heritage Tourism: The Contradictions between Conservation and Change.” *Tourism and Hospitality Research*, vol. 4, no. 3, 2003, pp. 247–61, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23743841>. Accessed 26 Apr. 2022.