

Learning the lessons of the Holocaust

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SPECIAL TO THE JOURNAL

The lessons of the Holocaust are being taught daily to busloads of students at the Mauthausen Memorial on the grounds of the former Mauthausen Concentration Camp in Austria. The Memorial receives 200,000 Austrian and foreign visitors annually. The majority of the students are brought to Mauthausen by their teachers.

Linz is a city that is surrounded by many tourist and cultural attractions — opera houses, state theaters, musical festivals, botanical gardens, the Ars Electronic Center, an interactive museum of the future and the Schlossmuseum Linz, a museum with technology and nature collections.

It is also the destination where composer, Anton Bruckner, lived and influenced the world of music and Linz is one of the best places in the world to enjoy a Linzer Torte cake. Yet, this city is also the place where its inhabitants have to confront the horrors of the Holocaust.

And the Mauthausen Memorial is a daily effort by Austrians to portray this horrific period of history and hopefully prevent the Holocaust from happening again to any people from any



Students learn about the Holocaust at a tour of the Mauthausen memorial in Austria.

Photo/Phyllis Steinberg

nation.

The memorial is located 17 miles from Linz and 80 miles west of Vienna. My husband and I toured the camp during a Danube River cruise on the Uniworld River Beatrice. The riverboat navigated the waters from Budapest to Passau allowing us to explore our Jewish heritage by arranging tours in cities and towns on the Danube which flows through 10 European countries.

When we arrived at the memorial, we observed two busloads of students touring the camp. Audio guides to the memorial site are available in different

languages at the entrance. There is also a visitor's center that contains information about the camp and testimonies of the former inmates.

We opted for a guided tour which must be booked in advance at www.mauthausen-memorial.at. Our tour guide at the memorial was Daniel Tscholl, who was extremely knowledgeable about the history and daily occurrences of the camp as well as the lessons to be learned from the Holocaust.

"I take many school groups through the camp and I ask them questions," Tscholl said.

"How could this happen? Why did this evil take place?"

Tscholl pointed to an area of lush green grass at the Mauthausen Memorial.

"A soccer field was located here on the grounds of Mauthausen and hundreds, perhaps thousands of Austrians came here to cheer for their favorite team," Tscholl said. "They saw the inmates. What did they think was happening in this place?"

As I followed in the footsteps where more than 100,000 inmates perished at the camp, it was hard to imagine and even harder to write

about the evil that was perpetrated in this place.

Almost 200,000 people were deported to Mauthausen. They came from many nations and memorials from 18 countries have been erected on the grounds of the Mauthausen. The tour includes a visit to the prisoners' barracks, crematoriums, SS Headquarters and gas chamber. There are no gruesome photos of prisoners during the camp tour. You are asked to use your imagination concerning the events that occurred as you walk along the long camp corridors surrounded by stone walls and barbed wire fences.

The memorial is open daily from 9 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. It is closed on Dec. 24, 26, 31 and Jan. 1.

We also visited Jewish sites in Linz and received an outstanding tour by guide Johann Gutenbrunner, www.guide-taxi.at. Gutenbrunner, a Christian, was born 30 miles from Linz and is well informed about the Jewish community and the area.

Gutenbrunner made arrangements with the Jewish community for us to attend a special Shabbat service at Linz's only synagogue on Nov. 9, the anniversary of Kristallnacht, referred to in Austria as "Reich-Pogrom-Nacht." The

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national pogrom of death and destruction of Jewish property and the rounding up of Jews in Germany, Austria and other European countries occurred 74 years ago.

It took three congregants standing on the *bimah* of the Israelitische Kultusgemeinde Linz (IKL) synagogue several minutes to recite the long list of the names of Jews in the community who perished in the Holocaust at the commemoration service.

A gathering of approximately 30 men and women attended the service. The Jewish community of Linz now numbers about 50. George Wozasek, president of the Jewish community, talked about the

unfinished Austrian Jewish lives that were ended during the Holocaust.

Wozasek spoke in Austrian and although I don't understand the language, the sorrow in his voice echoed throughout the small synagogue and resonated in the hearts of those attending the service.

When we entered the synagogue, two policemen stood in front of the synagogue to ensure the safety of those attending the service.

"There were approximately 500 Jews living in Linz before the Holocaust," Gutenbrunner said. "The synagogue was built in 1877 and was destroyed during the pogrom on Nov. 9, 1938."

The synagogue where the services took place

was erected on the spot where the previous neo-Romanesque style house of worship had stood. The IKL synagogue built in 1968 has cement walls with no windows and plain wooden benches with separate seating for men and women. Not elaborate, but a place where the Jewish community can assemble and pray in peace in Linz in 2012.

For information on Linz, log on to: www.linz.at/tourismus.



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