

Singapore: Jews and Chinese Food Go Together

Singapore boasts some of the best *not-in-China* Chinese food, so I don't know why I was so surprised to find a vibrant local Jewish community there.

"Is there a synagogue?" I enquired. Yes there was. In fact, the synagogue even has its own kosher restaurant. I asked if we could visit on my last day and my hosts eagerly acquiesced.

On a recent trip to Singapore, Moses, Lai Hoon and Ewan drove me to the other side of the country—*15 minutes!*—to have lunch at the Singaporean Synagogue. I was expecting something quite small—how many Jews could be here? The place was massive!

Magan Avot (Shield of our Fathers) was built in 1878, for the nearly 200 Jews living in Singapore, making it the oldest synagogue in Southeast Asia. It is on Waterloo Street, but then it was called Church Street because of the close proximity to the Church of St. Peter and St. Paul. Ironically, neither the Jewish fisherman nor the learned rabbi ever even entered a church building, but would have been at home in a synagogue.

Extensive renovations have been done, including the erection of the eight-story Jacob Ballas (community) Centre in 2007, making it a beautiful testimony to Jewish life in Singapore.

Synagogue Security

You know you are not at just any historical monument the moment you seek to enter. A guard situated by the gate at the

street takes your ID, asks you a few questions and then allows you to enter. There is no question that *Magan Avot* is just the type of target that Al Qaeda would love to blow up.

While photography was discouraged, I couldn't help myself. At my core, I am a reporter and I wanted to tell this story. Once inside things were more relaxed. In fact, a couple of orthodox Jewish young men from Brooklyn posed with me for photographs (see main photo above). Chabad, a large Orthodox Jewish group based in Brooklyn, sends students every year to work with the Singaporean Jewish community.

After lunch in the kosher restaurant we took a tour. They have a tiny grocery store with tons of frozen meat. It is nearly impossible to obtain kosher beef in much of Asia, so it is frozen and shipped. In 2007, however, when the Jewish Community Center opened up next to the synagogue, they built a kosher slaughtering room for chickens.

Who are the Jews of Singapore?

In the early 1800s Jews from Iraq, via India, migrated to Singapore looking for new economic opportunities. By 1931, 832 Jews were living in Singapore according to a census. That number nearly doubled over the next decade as World War II broke out.

Over the years Jews have had much influence in the tiny city-state. In 1955 David Marshall, an Iraqi Jew, became the first chief minister and Dr. Yayan Cohen became surgeon general.

Numbers have fallen in recent years and now there is thought to be roughly 300 local Jews in Singapore. However, when you count foreign workers and expatriates, the number soars to 1,000.

It is clear they are seeking to maintain Jewish life and identity in Singapore. While we were there, a large *sukka* (tabernacle) was being built for the Feast of Tabernacles.

Maybe one of the reasons, despite having no natural resources, that Singapore is the third richest nation in the world (per capita) is because of its kind treatment to its Jewish population. God is not blind and His word is true. He will bless those that bless Abraham.

God bless Singapore.

For the original article, visit .

Ron Cantor is the director and founder of **Messiah's Mandate International** in Israel, a Messianic Ministry dedicated to taking the message of Jesus from Israel to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8). In addition, MMI serves as an international teaching ministry to the believing community worldwide, teaching on the Jewish Roots of the faith.