

Masada Bar/Bat Mitzvah Celebrations: Symbol and Ritual; History and a Vacation

A new trend: bar/bat mitzvah celebrations atop Masada, including a guided tour and a Dead Sea vacation.



Early one morning a bus stopped in the parking lot at Masada and an exuberant family alighted from it to accompany its eldest son, 13 years old, to his bar mitzvah ceremony. Dancing and singing, they took the cable car to the remains of the ancient synagogue at the top of the hill, where the boy attached ceremonial phylacteries to his forehead and arm for the first time in his life as an adult. Excited, he recited the morning prayer service texts together with the other male members of his family, and wrapped in warmth and love, he led the Torah scroll processional

from the ark and then made a speech.

Later, when all the tears had been wiped away, all the participants were treated to an emotion-filled play that depicted life at Masada, as well as the residents' dedication to their faith and beliefs.

Then, as a sign of blessing and success, the young man was called upon to add a calligraphic letter to the parchment scroll of a Torah (the first five books of the Old Testament) handwritten by a religious scribe for the Masada synagogue. The



family continued its day with a guided tour that traced the history of the place before returning to the Crowne Plaza Dead Sea for the weekend.

Masada, the hill that has become a symbol of the cultural identity of modern-day Israel, is a pinnacle of primordial loveliness and ancient majesty, where the ongoing human struggle between oppression and liberty was clearly defined and where a people fought for its principles, its heritage and its freedom. Here, against a background of memories of bygone eras, a growing number of Jewish men and women have been choosing to mark their bar/bat mitzvah - a rite of passage celebration of their having reached adulthood

- atop Masada, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, connecting the past and the future and family traditions with the dreams of youth.

Overlooking the breathtaking vistas of the Dead Sea, the Ein Gedi Oasis and Mt. Moab, Masada, site of ancient desert cliff-top palaces and fortifications built by King Herod more than 2000 years ago, stands out in the desert at a height of 400 meters from bottom to top. The hill may be accessed in three different ways: by cable car; by foot, up the Snake Path; or via the Western Battery Path, also by foot. Families choosing to hold their bar mitzvah ceremony atop Masada are free to decide how they would like their moving ceremony to commence



and how to adapt the entire ceremony, overseen by a representative of the local Chabad House, to family customs.

Bat mitzvah ceremonies are held there as well. They include a special prayer service held in the Bible Scrolls room, blessings, an emotionally charged performance and a

workshop in baking "Challot" (Jewish traditional braided Sabbath and holiday bread), in the course of which the young woman makes a blessing on the bread she will be baking. All the guests are invited to braid challot and to bake them in the oven. This exciting experience can be followed by a guided tour of the site, Israel's most famous mountain.

For information about organizing special events at Masada:

Rabbi Shimon Elharar

Tel: 054-7770695

masada1213@bezeqint.net

www.masada-barbatmitzvah



A True Oasis

The Crowne Plaza Dead Sea, nestled within the quiet of nature, offers an ideal vacation for both body and soul. Guests may choose from among a variety of rooms for couples and families, or else book a pampering suite. The hotel spa, one of the largest and most modern in the region, features a swimming pool, sulfur pools, Jacuzzi, sauna and a rich menu of treatments administered by very professional practitioners. The hotel's rooftop solarium, designed for people requiring the therapeutic rays of the sun, features separate men's and women's sections, along with sunbathing surfaces, a shaded area and drinks machines.

The hotel seashore is a real gem too, with a bridge leading out into the water and sunbathing beds and pleasant seating areas with special sun shades.