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A leap of faith-based travel

By Felicity Long



An interesting trend in faith-based travel to Europe is an expansion beyond tried-and-true group tours to holy sites, like Fatima in Portugal and Medjugorje in Bosnia Herzegovina, to options that include unique and customizable features.

For clients interested in Jewish travel, for example, [Jewish Travel Agency](#) in Palm Harbor, Fla., specializes in independent and private tours with

religious themes throughout Europe.

Sophia Kulich, who created Jewish Travel, an arm of EMCO Travel, LLC., in 2007, said the most popular destinations for Jewish travel have been the cities of Prague, Vienna, and Budapest, as well as Poland, the Baltics, Russia and Ukraine.

"I build my own products using local travel agencies in Europe, and I buy direct," Kulich said, adding that she creates itineraries with local guides, hotels and ground suppliers.

She also works with U.S. travel agents, offering 12% commissions on her tours, which include accommodations, transfers, and private tours with Jewish heritage specialists.

Like many people who specialize in faith-based travel, Kulich's niche is personal.

"That's where my expertise, interest and passion are," she said, adding that she is originally from Ukraine. "When I go to Europe, I always visit Jewish sites and keep coming back for more research."



Felicity Long

Kulich recently put together a two-week private Sepharad tour of Spain for four people that included Madrid, Toledo, Seville, Cordova, Granada, Barcelona and Girona. The accommodations were in five star hotels, and all transfers were via private car and driver. Other destinations she has booked recently include Portugal, Poland and Lithuania.

Christian travel, a huge segment of the faith-based travel market, gets a new twist with [Sceptre Tours](#) this year. In addition to the usual features, like spa treatments and romantic dinners, the company is adding a religious element to its honeymoon tours to Rome.

Sceptre, which specializes in Ireland, Britain and Italy, has come up with a Meet the Pope experience that allows newlyweds to have their union personally blessed by the Pope at the Vatican. "Sposi Novelli" tickets are available through church organizations, but Sceptre will make the arrangements for couples that book a honeymoon package through Sceptre and purchase the papal excursion add-on for \$330. Obviously, the company has to work around the pontiff's schedule to make it happen.

"He is usually at the Vatican on Wednesdays for the blessing, and his schedule is confirmed at least three weeks in advance," said Chris Accomando, president of Sceptre Tours. "Of course, if he happens to be traveling, the request cannot be confirmed, however, our staff will do everything possible to make this special event possible."

Given the rock-star popularity of the newly elected Pope Francis, this perk has the makings of a big

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