

THE JEWISH GUEST

Almost all countries in the world have Jewish communities, although these vary a lot when it comes to lifestyle. The following points highlight the importance of the shared laws that govern food and drink.

1. The will of God

To understand the world of Judaism one has to rid oneself of all preconceived ideas about the religion. In Judaism one does not encounter a philosophy or ideology, but rather the 'Will of God' in a group of humans, with all their miseries and joys.

The Jews stem from a small nation that came from the desert of Sinai to Canaan about 3000 years ago. They are called Jews because the tribe that survived the political downfall and collapse of the nation was called Juda. Although Jews live in all parts of the world, their political and religious centre is the State of Israel, which was founded in 1948.

If Judaism is not a theology, then how did God reveal himself to the Jews? Judaism is a duty, an activity, and the key thereto is the law. One law follows another, and there are no fewer than 613 of these. Religion therefore means the fulfilment of the prescribed laws. The Halacha is an exciting and passionate thing which is difficult for outsiders to understand. The following of the Halacha enabled the birth of a nation.

2. The Shabbat

If there is one law that has taken hold throughout civilisation, it is that of the Shabbat, which states that: 'every seventh day is a rest day, to allow for the honouring of the Lord'. A devout Jew retreats into his own world from sundown on a Friday to sundown on a Saturday. This sacred time is the fountain from which energy, relaxation and a lust for life is taken.

The Shabbat is considered to be a rest day and day of joy, and each Jew must adhere to various rules and tasks. It is therefore the duty of each devotee to celebrate this day with special ceremonies of songs during meals and visits to the synagogue. No productive work may be done during this day and no sorrow may permeate this day. In order to comply with these obligations, certain rules must be followed.

3. Rules of the Shabbat

On the Shabbat, a devout Jew may not travel, cook, use anything motorised or that runs with electricity, spend money, smoke or write. The world of work stands still. Almost all civilised mechanical comforts fall away: radios are silent and TVs stay off, the movies, soccer, theatre, highways, card games and ovens are non-operational. This is not about laying down tools, but rather the conscious decision not to do even the easiest, most mundane activities, in honour of the Lord.

The Shabbat is held in anticipation of the coming of the Messiah. It is a foretaste of the coming peace between humans, God and nature.

Given the choice, a practising Jew would ideally wish for a kosher restaurant which is overseen by a Mischgiach. On the Shabbat nothing would be cooked, instead everything would have been prepared in advance, and the guest could pay his bill before or after the

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Shabbat. A hotel would be fitted with a lift that automatically stops at each floor, or a lift-boy would be on duty to select the requested floor for the guest.

A bonus for Jews would be hotel room light switches set on a timer!

Forbidden activities:

There are 39 areas of activity that are forbidden during the Shabbat:

- Production of food (all agricultural activities, as well as cooking and baking)
- Production of textiles (including dyeing and sewing)
- Leatherwork
- Writing (including drawing and painting)
- Making of fire (e.g. smoking)
- Handcrafting (including repairs of all sorts)
- Carrying of loads and physical labour
- Goods and monetary transactions
- Transporting of goods outside the home
- Taking note of things that need doing
- All weekly chores (e.g. housework, gardening)
- The use of fire including the replenishing of fires
- Sports activities that require physical strain
- The manufacturing of electricity and use thereof in any form (switching on a car, switching lights on/off, use of appliances, using the buttons in a lift)
- All productive activities (photography, making music etc.)

Permissible activities:

- The carrying of private items within the home
- Taking a walk
- Personal hygiene
- The making of cold meals and the eating of meals that have been kept warm
- The use of electricity that was pre-programmed via a timer
- Should there be a danger to life, however, all forbidden activities are temporarily suspended

4. Resting and eating for the soul

There is no doubt that the adherence to Jewish eating rules – the Kashrut – can be quite troublesome, especially when travelling, when some discomfort may have to be endured. Confrontations with non-Jewish habits will prevail everywhere: in restaurants, planes, with friends, etc.

Jews live according to very strict dietary rules. According to the Torah all humans were vegetarians to start off with. Only after the great flood did Noah allow for meat and fish to be eaten. To avoid unnecessary bloodshed, strict rules need to be adhered to:

Kosher, i.e. what is allowed:



- All vegetables and fruits
- Eggs from kosher animals
- Ruminants that have split hooves and chew the cud

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- All kosher animals that have been slaughtered in the kosher way and have no residual blood in their meat
- Farm and tame birds (Geese, ducks, quails)
- Entrails of the permitted animals
- Lard made from the permitted birds
- All scaly fish with fins
- Sausage and meat products made from kosher animals

Strictly forbidden:

- Meat from sick animals
- Hunted animals or those caught by other animals
- Blood (except that of fishes)
- Non-kosher slaughtered meat (even that of permissible animals)
- Seafood (sturgeon, eel, oysters, shellfish etc.)
- Insects (except for locusts in the Middle East)
- The entrails of forbidden animals
- Lard (except from permitted birds) and certain sinews
- Fish that do not have fins and scales
- Sausages and meat products of forbidden animals
- Any mixture of dairy and animal products
- Gelatine from non-kosher animals

During the Passover holidays, in addition to the usual forbidden foods, the eating of any fermented foods is also strictly forbidden (chametz). Foods considered to be chametz are: grain products produced with flour/wheat and yeast, e.g. leavened breads, and food items that are able to 'rise' when combined with liquid.

5. Kosher Butchering

To ensure that meat is kosher and can be consumed by Jews, certain conditions must be fulfilled. Cattle, sheep and lambs must be healthy and without any injuries or bodily defects. Pork is forbidden and may not be consumed under any circumstances.

Animals are slaughtered according to the rules of the 'Shechtia'. These specify that the slaughtering may only be done by a certified Shochet, whose expertise and skill have been thoroughly checked. The animal is killed using an extremely sharp knife and with a single cut through the trachea, carotid artery and other blood vessels. In this way the blood flow to the brain is instantly stopped, causing unconsciousness and finally death. Quick exsanguinations and painless deaths must be guaranteed.

As blood is considered to be the seat of life, it may not be consumed in any form. To ensure that meat is kosher it must be entirely bled out, and the raw meat placed in water for half an hour. It is then covered with salt and laid out on a plank for three quarters of an hour to bleed out completely. The meat is then again washed in fresh water three times. Lastly, the liver is cut out, salted and fried until all the blood has been cooked away. Kosher meat can only be obtained from Jewish butcheries and permitted shops.

6. The separation of dairy and meat

Dairy products and meat products may not be prepared together or consumed at the same time. After the consumption of meat products a wait of four hours is required before dairy may be consumed. Dairy includes anything that contains milk products. Meat includes anything containing meat or animal fats.

To ensure that dairy and meat products do not come into contact the following measures must be adhered to:

- Two sets of everything: crockery, cutlery and cooking items.
- Separate table cloths for the two food types.
- Salt and sugar that are kept in open containers may not be used for both food types.
- Separate basins for washing up. Should there only be one basin, plastic containers must be used to keep items separate.
- Hands must be washed whenever changing over from working with one type to the other.
- As most people have only one oven, it must be cleaned and turned onto the highest setting for at least 20 minutes before cooking anything containing dairy.

Apart from dairy and meat products there is also a neutral group (Parev), which belongs to neither one nor the other and may be consumed with both. These include: vegetables, fruit, eggs, fish, plant oils and fats as well as sugar, honey, coffee, chocolate and tea.

Therefore, after a meal containing meat, the coffee served is not served with milk, but rather with powdered milk.

7. Beverages

The only forbidden beverages are those that could be used for non-Jewish ritual purposes (mainly wine). Kosher wine is wine that has only been handled by Jews, from the pressing of the grapes to the bottling process. These wines may also only be opened by an employee of the rabbinate.

Unless specifically manufactured in the kosher way, the following alcoholic beverages are considered non-kosher: e.g. brandy, Martini, cognac, Campari, Pernod and all beverages containing brandy.

8. Jewish celebrations in non-kosher hotels and restaurants

All meals consumed in public places such as restaurants, hospitals etc. must be prepared under the supervision of a Mashgiach, an employee of the Rabbinate.

Should a restaurant or hotel want to cater for Jewish festivities, the event must be supervised by a Mashgiach. All rules must be strictly adhered to. To discuss pending events it is recommended that staff who are Jewish or have dealt with the Jewish faith are present in order to ensure that the strict rules are adhered to. Most Jewish guests prefer the adherence to the rules when planning festivities such as weddings, birthdays and other celebrations.

As a rule, Jewish festivities can only be held in hotels and restaurants with a second kitchen, i.e. banqueting kitchen.

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9. Preparations for a Jewish celebration

Most festivities take place after completion of the Shabbat, i.e. on a Saturday evening. As no cooking is allowed after commencement of the Shabbat on a Friday evening, all preparations have to be completed before then. Before preparation can start however, the Rabbi or Mashgiach cleanses the kitchen. Thereafter all working surfaces are covered with tinfoil and the preparation of kosher food can begin. The kitchen may then only be used again after the end of the Shabbat. It is also vital that the kitchen is not used in the interim for the preparation of other meals.

The preparation of meals must be done according to the guidelines set out by the Mashgiach. The individual items, especially the kosher meat, may only be bought from authorised butcheries or other authorised suppliers.

Another point to remember is that separate crockery is to be used for Jewish celebrations. Many large hotels in the USA for example have crockery that is marked with a yellow star so as to avoid any confusion. Other hotels invest in a new range of crockery which is then stored separately and only used for Jewish functions. It should be noted that local Jewish parishes are always willing to assist hotels and restaurants with explanations of the necessary preparations and measures to be taken.

Jewish celebrations are merry and relaxed and are accompanied by music and dance. They usually include the whole family and many friends. Often, guests travel from all over the world to attend Bat-Mitzvahs (for girls reaching adulthood) and Bar-Mitzvahs (for boys reaching adulthood) as well as weddings.

Parties of several hundred people that want to be regaled and looked after are common, and the efforts that hotels and restaurants put into catering for Jewish festivities are much appreciated.

Every hotel and restaurant that hosts Jewish guests must ensure that the meaning and importance of these religious celebrations are respected and the various rules adhered to. Staff must be made aware of these Jewish laws and the religion of Jewish guests must be respected and honoured.

10. Summary of important tips

- Discuss the Jewish culture with staff
- Explain the importance of Jews fulfilling the Halacha
- Honour the seventh day, the Shabbat, as a day of rest and celebration
- Programme automatic stops into elevators
- Room lights to be put on timers
- Follow the Kashrut laws when preparing meals
- Only use kosher meat
- Follow the rules concerning the separation of dairy and meat products
- Keep separate crockery
- Have separate basins for washing dishes
- Discuss the preparation of food with the Mashgiach
- Have a separate kitchen for Jewish functions
- Offer milk powder to accompany coffee
- Explain to staff the meaning of the Jewish function and the hotel's responsibility