

Return, return
Contemporary Judaism in Colombia
Photographs by Laurence Salzmann

Febrero 21–Mayo 15, 2025



Centro Colombo Americano
Carrera 45 No. 53-24
Medellín, Antioquia, Colombia

Volver, volver
Judaísmo actual en Colombia
Fotografías de Laurence Salzmann



Envigado

The community in Envigado, one of Colombia's wealthiest municipalities. The town is home to a synagogue and a Jewish school, where businessmen gather each morning for prayer, followed by a communal breakfast of Colombian fruits, cheeses, cakes, and, occasionally, salmon from the U.S. The synagogue's former cantor, Cantor Paul Heller, later moved to London's Belsize Square Synagogue.

During Medellín's drug cartel violence, many Envigado Jews relocated to Boca Raton, Florida, forming a lasting diaspora. The synagogue also houses a Jewish high school named for Theodore Herzl.

Members of their synagogues' minyan most mornings for a shared breakfast. Late afternoons will find ladies who enjoy a game of Rummy (Rummycub or Rummikub). They reminded me of Turkish Jewish ladies who gather in the late afternoons to play their own version of Rummy on the island of Büyükada, near to Istanbul.





Bello

Our visit to the Bello synagogue coincided with the holiday of Purim, a joyous holiday that celebrates Jewish survival against adversity. On this special day, the synagogue was filled with the laughter of children, their costumes and masks reflecting both the festive spirit and the enduring cultural traditions of this tight-knit community.





Prado

Portraits of Faith: The Jewish Community of Prado

The photographs here were taken at the Comunidad Judía Darkei Torah. Its synagogue was founded in 2013 by Moreh Boaz Farinas-Eisenberg, who left the Jewish Community of Bello to establish a new Jewish community with its own synagogue. Over the past twelve years, it has grown significantly, now featuring a kosher kitchen, a bakery, a school, and many new members. Some its members like Moreh Boaz Farinas-Eisenberg are from Venezuela.





Barranquilla

Barranquilla has two synagogues, Sinagoga Shaare Sedek: An Orthodox synagogue established by Sephardic Jewish immigrants in the early 20th century; Javurá Nahariyah: A Conservative community of approximately 50 members, located in the old downtown area.

The newer congregation, led by Asher Edwing Gutierrez, focuses on the community's history, with gravestones tracing their presence back centuries.

Asher was very proud of the fact that Abraham Zacarías López Penha, born in Curaçao on March 18, 1865, grave was to be found in Barranquilla's old Sephardic cemetery.





Barranquilla

Sinagoga Shaare Sedek: An Orthodox synagogue established by Sephardic Jewish immigrants in the early 20th century is led by Rabbi Ilon Sultannik who has both Sephardic and Ashkenazi roots



Santa Marta



In Santa Marta, a city along Colombia's Caribbean coast, a diverse and growing Jewish community has taken root at Javura Shirat Hayam, a synagogue that serves as a home for these new Jews of Colombia. This group led by Moriah Noah is composed primarily of converts to Conservative Judaism, reflecting the increasing interest in Judaism across the country. Many members have roots along the Caribbean coast, bringing a rich cultural diversity to their practice.

The community gathers every Friday and Saturday for Shabbat services and Torah study, fostering a deep connection to Jewish tradition. They are also advised and mentored by Rabbi Juan Mejía, who has guided many Colombians in their Jewish journey.



Despite being a relatively new community, they have embraced Jewish learning, prayer, and communal life with dedication.

Their synagogue stands as a testament to the growing presence of Judaism in Colombia, offering a welcoming space for those seeking to deepen their faith and practice.

As their numbers and commitment continue to grow, Javura Shirat Hayam remains a symbol of spiritual renewal in Santa Marta.



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