

# JEWISH CEMETERY



The most valuable surviving relic of the former Jewish ghetto is its cemetery. With an area of 19,180 m<sup>2</sup> it is the largest in the republic, and the most important in Moravia. It was probably founded in the second half of the 15<sup>th</sup> century.

At the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century at the southern tip of the cemetery grounds a ceremonial hall was built by Viennese architect Max Fleischer, which today holds an exhibit by the Friends of Jewish Culture devoted to the history of the cemetery.

The cemetery contains some four thousand gravestones. Of these, the oldest legible gravestone dates from 1605. The original path to the oldest part of the cemetery leads between retaining walls made of piled-up, used headstones. It ends on the Rabbis' Hill with the graves of the Mikulov and Moravian rabbis.

Their opulent Renaissance and Baroque tombstones speak of the authority these figures enjoyed in their time. Probably the most famous of them was miraculous rabbi Mordechaj ben Abraham Benet (died 1829).

More recent historical events are commemorated in the memorial to 25 Jewish soldiers fallen in World War I, and the tombstone of 21 Jewish prisoners from Hungary murdered in Mikulov at the end of the Second World War.

The most beautiful gravestones are those from the 17<sup>th</sup> century. They are rectangular or square slabs with dual pilasters framing the inscription, and a segmented or triangular upper part. Their sculptural decoration tends to be very ornate. On gravestones from the 18<sup>th</sup> century are frequent motifs from Moravian folk culture (a heart, a rose, tulips); others are decorated with the relief of a shell, a typical Mikulov motif. The more modern gravestones from the late 19<sup>th</sup> century begin to resemble Christian tombstones.

Mikulov's Jewish cemetery is protected as an important cultural monument.



Texts and photographs: Regional Museum in Mikulov, and the Jewish Community in Brno, 2009

## IMPORTANT CONTACTS AND INFORMATION

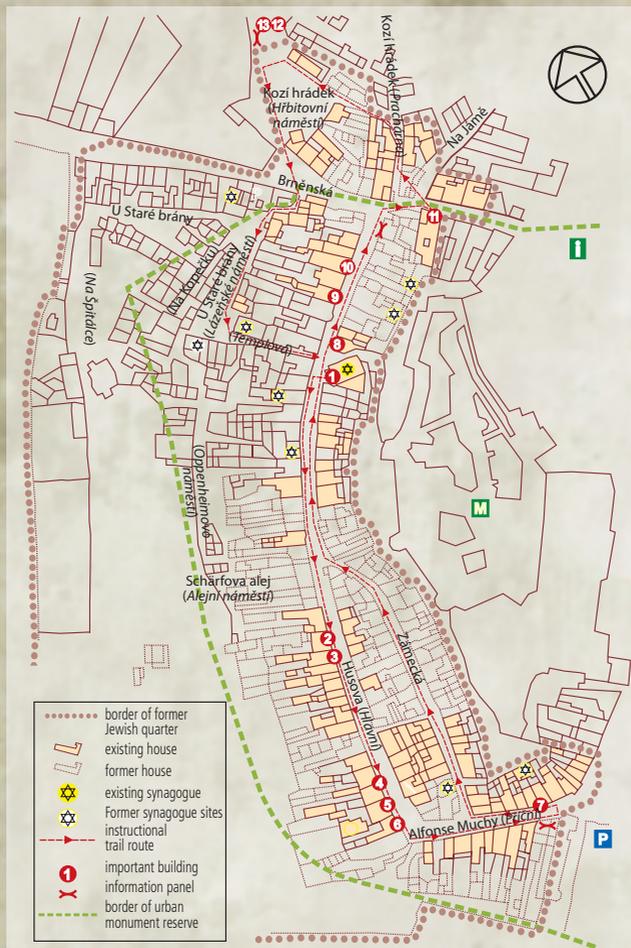
**Synagogue**  
Husova 11, 692 01 Mikulov  
tel.: +420 519 510 291, +420 519 309 019  
e-mail: rmm@rmm.cz, www.rmm.cz  
Open: May–September:  
Tuesday–Sunday 10.00–17.00

**Jewish Cemetery**  
Hřbitovní náměstí, 692 01 Mikulov  
e-mail: info@ckmerlin.cz, tic@mikulov.cz  
www.mikulov.cz

Open: July–August: Monday–Sunday  
10.00–12.00, 13.00–18.00  
During other months the keys can be borrowed at:  
Tourist Information Center Mikulov  
Náměstí 1, tel.: +420 519 510 855  
CK Merlin, s.r.o., Kostelní náměstí 2  
tel.: +420 519 510 388

**Friends of Jewish Culture in Mikulov**  
Zámek 1, 692 15 Mikulov  
tel.: +420 519 512 368

**Regional Museum in Mikulov**  
**Documentation Center of Moravian Judaism**  
Zámek 1, 692 15 Mikulov  
tel.: +420 519 309 019  
e-mail: rmm@rmm.cz  
www.rmm.cz



# The Jews in Mikulov

## History and monuments



Realized under the project "The Mikulov Region – Your Professional Partner in the Tourist Industry". This project is co-financed by the European Union.

NOT FOR SALE





# HISTORY

Mikulov's strategic location on the trade route from Vienna to Brno, and a receptive attitude on the part of the local rulers, led to the growth of a large Jewish community, which gradually became the most important in Moravia.

For three full centuries – from the mid-16<sup>th</sup> century until 1851 – Mikulov was the center of Judaism in Moravia, and the seat of the Moravian regional rabbinate. The Jews excelled as traders and artisans. They dealt in general goods, cattle, leather, wine, wool and down feathers, and above all in money. In their quarter they had their own schools, shops, baths, prayer houses, and cemetery. From the 16<sup>th</sup> century the Jewish community had its own elected



autonomous government and magistrate; and its Talmudic school (jeshiva) was one of the most important in Europe. For a long time the Jewish community in Mikulov was the largest and most important Jewish community in the country. At the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century 5,400 Jewish families had permits to live in Moravia, of which 620 were located in Mikulov. In the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century Jews made up 42 % of all town dwellers. With the gaining of full civil equality in 1848, however, the Jews began to migrate to the larger towns, and the Second World War brought to an end the chronicle of the Jews in Mikulov.

A number of secular personages also hailed from the Mikulov ghetto; for example Josef von Sonnenfels (1733–1817), professor of state and the law at Vienna University and the Imperial advisor who convinced Maria Theresa to prohibit the use of torture. Also connected with Mikulov is deaf, dumb, and blind poet Hieronymus Lorm (1821–1902), inventor of the hand-touch alphabet.



# JEWISH QUARTER

The Jewish community in Mikulov was concentrated in the area of the western slope of the castle hill. Its backbone was Hlavní Street, now Husova, to which further residential blocks and streets were gradually added. The original wooden buildings were later replaced by masonry. For reasons of space the Jewish quarter continued to grow down the hill to the so-called Jewish gardens and in the direction of Koží hrádek (Goat Tower). The size and area of Mikulov's Jewish settlement remained unchanged even after the fire of 1719, which claimed the entire ghetto. In the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century the Mikulov ghetto occupied an area of 13.5 hectares, with



317 houses. As of today only 90 of these houses have survived. Half of them have been declared cultural monuments because of the rare architectural elements they still bear. Some conceal a Renaissance core or Baroque ceiling vaults; others have Classicist or Art Nouveau facades with fine historical artistic detail. One Renaissance element typical for Mikulov is the corner arcade on the front of the house under a cross vault and supported by a Tuscan column. Besides the residential houses, the Jewish quarter contained public buildings important for the functioning of the community – town hall, rabbinate, hospital, orphanage, and poorhouse.



In the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century there were at least twelve synagogues and prayer houses, the most prominent of which were the Upper and Lower Synagogues, and the beth ha-midrash school. In the late 1960s and early 1970 most of the Jewish quarter was demolished. Fortunately, the change in the social situation has favored the new owners of the old Jewish houses, who have lovingly reconstructed a number of buildings from the former ghetto.



# UPPER SYNAGOGUE

The oldest and today the only remaining Jewish temple in Mikulov is the Upper Synagogue. The direct predecessor of today's structure was a masonry Renaissance synagogue built in 1550. After one of Mikulov's worst fires in 1719 the synagogue underwent major reconstruction. The ceiling of the main hall was raised into four Baroque cupolas, supported within by four pillars, which formed the baldachin of the covered podium. This unique architectural element was evidently brought by the Polish refugees who found sanctuary in Mikulov in the mid-17<sup>th</sup> century.



The renovation was carried out by Johann Christian Oedtl, an architect in the service of the ruling Dietrichstein family. Another important artist, sculptor Ignaz Lengelacher, crafted the imposing vessel for the Torah Ark – the Aron Kodesh. The interior of the synagogue was very ornate – besides ornaments and Hebrew texts, the sky-blue cupolas were decorated by stucco elements as well. Surviving of the interior furnishings is the stone wash basin in the entry room, and the stone pedestal with water basin in the main hall. The Upper Synagogue was used for worship until 1938. The synagogue was devastated during the years of Nazi occupation, and by the hostility of the past regime. Despite the

destruction of the gorgeous interior, the synagogue remains one of this country's most beautiful. It was the Mikulov Museum that saved the temple; after handing it over to the Jewish Community



in Brno, it is still being used as an exhibition and concert hall. Rare items from the collection of the Mikulov museum and the Jewish Museum in Prague document the history of Judaism in Moravia. The synagogue's silver and textile of Moravian provenience, scriptures and other valuable relics of Moravian

Jewish culture, such as its Moravian calligraphy school or its Moravian embroidery workshop, are exhibited and documented in the synagogue exhibit. The exhibit also describes the traditions of Jewish weddings and family events.

