

“They took everything, except for my memories”



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While it is difficult to sum up the Tribe trip to Poland in one word or even a sentence, it is clearly one of the most meaningful experiences. On our 5-day trip, we explored Poland as a group, and shared extremely solemn moments, moments which, despite our differences as individuals, united us in a feeling of sadness and discomfort. Nevertheless, we also shared an abundance of happy moments, which gave us a sense of pride, as we engaged with our Jewish identity.

We began our trip with a day of learning. We visited a Jewish cemetery and the Warsaw Ghetto Memorial. We also got a chance to learn together in a place that epitomised Jewish learning: Yeshivat Chachmei Lublin.

The following day, we got a mere glimpse of the suffering endured by both victims and survivors of the Holocaust, as we visited concentration and extermination camps, Majdanek and Belzec. It is here that I personally felt how privileged we all are. Standing in our coats, having eaten snacks on the coach, and most importantly, being surrounded by our friends, one becomes not only grateful to be alive, but grateful for the kind of life that we have. Some of the stories that we heard and places that we stood in will undoubtedly remain with us all.

“In Majdanek they took everything”, is a quote that still sends shivers down my spine. However, something that was not taken was our memories.

Therefore, describing Poland as unforgettable is possibly one of the most suitable descriptions, as we have the duty to ensure that each victim and survivor is never forgotten. Whether we had a personal connection or a broader Jewish connection or a desire to learn, we all have memories to share.

In line with the general hope of light at the end of the tunnel, we brought in Shabbat in Kazimierz, Krakow’s historic Jewish quarter, singing, dancing and laughing. This happiness was channelled through to Saturday night, ending with Havdallah at the historic Rema Shul.

On our final day, we went to Auschwitz, walked under the main gate “*Arbeit Macht Frei*” and proceeded to hear and see some of the horrors of the Holocaust through stories and exhibits. We continued to Auschwitz-Birkenau, walking along the train tracks. It is important to point out the heart-warming stories we heard, one being the story of two survivors finding each other post-liberation and starting their own family. We created our own heart-warming moment, walking out of Auschwitz-Birkenau not only alive, but waving Israeli flags and singing *Am Yisrael Chai*.

Each one of us possesses the power to make a difference by sharing our memories and experiences. However, as a group,

we have the power to have a widespread impact. While we continue to fuel our passion for life, we remember the six million murders and lives stolen from those who once also had a passion for life. Therefore, we must make every day count, not only for ourselves, but for those whom we remember.

