

Lynn & Jorge Covarubias
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4 L'viv



conditions were extreme, with rationing of food and bread. Nothing much remains of the ghetto walls themselves, especially after an uprising organized by Jewish youth in 1943 (**photo above**).

In L'viv was also a concentration camp, which was a forced labor camp. In its walls is currently a prison that uses the same barracks and buildings as were used during occupation. The barbed wires remain as they were when the concentration camp was in use (**photo right**). This area was used as a transport area to Belzec extermination camp. We visited the train station where the cars full of Jews passed on their way to be gassed (**photo below**). Conditions in the cars were so bad often only one-half of those inside

lived to their destination within Poland.

On tour in L'viv The next morning, Alla Zimmerman put us on the train and we rode to L'viv with a breakfast packed from the hotel. Or rather, Lynn ate breakfast, and Jorge drank water to be gentle on his stomach. Our guide in L'viv, Olga, met our train and transported us to our hotel in the center of town. L'viv's old town feel was immediately apparent, with a western European charm. Olga wanted to begin our day's tour immediately, so we agreed to meet her and our translator at the hotel after we freshened up.

Our tour started with Olga showing us the large area where the Jewish ghetto had been. It was originally an area where about 20,000 inhabitants lived. Bridges made convenient closings points to seal off the gates and into the ghetto were moved 120,000 Jews. Living



Within the town of L'viv had been a thriving Jewish community with between 50 to 70 synagogues. Many buildings remain from Jewish areas of the town and we saw indentations of mezuzahs on one doorstep. Buildings were old and in disrepair, and were occupied currently by L'viv poor inhabitants. At periodic corners were plots of green, which Olga explained were sites of synagogues destroyed by Nazis. One wall of one synagogue remains plus the exterior of one synagogue currently used by the



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Hassidic community (**photo left**). Back in the center of town, we stopped in a lovely courtyard for refreshments and finished our day in a restaurant recommended by Olga.

Javkra Olga began the next day's tour by taking us to Javkra, a town approximately 25 kilometers outside L'viv, close to the Polish border. It used to be the county seat for its area and had a population of 16 thousand, seven thousand of which were Jews before 1939. The Jews inhabited all parts of town, were highly integrated into the society. One side of the town square that faced the palace was lined with Jewish shops with homes above. This would have been an upper class area.

We walked to see the remains of the Jewish synagogue that was built in 1698 but was in much disrepair (**photo right**). Nazis tried to blow it up before they left the town, but its walls were more than 2 meters thick so they withstood the attack. Private Jewish funds are being used to slowly begin restoration. Olga explained that all throughout the Ukraine, synagogues could never be taller than the tallest church in the area. When we entered the synagogue, steps lead down so the building could be high inside yet remain lower than the town churches. Gorgeous interior amid ruins (**photo below**), the ark could be made out, women's sections, some writing of prayers along the walls. Remarkable in its beauty and majesty.



Back outside, a flea market was set up on the corner of the synagogue. Tables, the ground, even cars were used to stack up goods for sale: toilet paper, soap, fruit, all sorts of items were available. Pedestrians, horse-drawn carts, cars and bicycles were used to carry people to the market for the day's shopping (**photo on next page**). Again, the similarity to such scenes in Mexico dawned on us.



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restored. Beautiful churches and government buildings adorned the main boulevards, all easily within a walkable area. We made our way back to the hotel and roamed the city over the next couple of days on our own, leaving by night train back to Kiev.



Back to L'viv On our way back we passed by a country Ukrainian church (photo below), unique in its architecture. As we rejoined the L'viv community, Olga continued our tour of Jewish history of the city. We were shown the once Jewish hospital building, still a hospital, but now not recognized for its Jewish history (bottom left photo), buildings used by Nazis for interrogations, selections, and headquarters. Walls still bore the scars of shooting executions. We also saw a synagogue being restored by the Hassidic community that had been vandalized the previous week with paint splattered on the walls and anti-Semitic drawings with swastikas. Several Jewish memorial plaques were desecrated with paint, an obvious remnant of anti-Jewish sentiment still rearing its ugly head.

The old town area was more heavily trafficked and restored. Beautiful churches and government buildings adorned the main boulevards, all easily within a walkable area. We made our way back to the hotel and roamed the city over the next couple of days on our own, leaving by night train back to Kiev.

