



Festa della Transumanza in Mendatica

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DREAM OF ITALY®



Volume 16, Issue 4

www.dreamofitaly.com

May 2017

AN ANCIENT TRADITION CONTINUES IN RURAL LIGURIA

Italy travel enthusiasts may occasionally feel there is not a single corner of the country that hasn't been trod upon, that every *strada*, *corso* and *piazza*; every monument, work of art, and geographical feature; and every city and town of any size has been written about and widely publicized. It's therefore refreshing to learn that there are still places in Italy that remain to be discovered and that are not far off the beaten path.



One of these is the tiny mountain hamlet of *Mendatica* (population: approximately 160, founded in 644

AD), located in the province of *Imperia* in *Liguria*. The *entroterra* (inland) areas of Liguria remain little explored by North Americans.

There are a number of small places in Italy like Mendatica — travelers who've spent time outside of Italy's major cities know that in plenty of lesser known towns and villages there are typically a handful of highlights — beautiful church interiors, architectural details, a culinary specialty, pretty vistas, or interesting historical footnotes.

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All photos by Domenico Pulice

Serrastrata

Discovering CALABRIA'S Ancient Jewish History

A young woman with curly, strawberry-blonde hair flowing from underneath a round, white *kippah* uses a silver *yad* to point to each

word in the Torah scroll as she reads aloud. In her other hand, she lightly grips the ornate, pink *tallit* (prayer shawl) draped over her shoulders while behind her, a female rabbi dressed similarly follows along as her student becomes a Bat Mitzvah.



Domenico Pulice

Bat Mitzvah

This may sound like a typical day in, say, New York City, but this scene is playing out with increasing frequency in a most unlikely place: a tiny, mountaintop village in rural *Calabria* called *Serrastrata*, which itself holds a special place in the history of southern Italian Judaism.

Yes, you read that correctly: southern Italian Judaism.

With Italy's strong connection to Roman Catholicism, it surprises even

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Mendatica is 62 miles southwest of *Genoa*.

TRANSUMANZA

Mendatica is unique, however, in that it's not only a charming village in a lovely setting in the Ligurian Alps but its very existence is entwined with the tradition of transhumance.

Transumanza, "crossing the land" as it's known in Italian, is, according to distinguished French historian Fernand Braudel (1902-1985), "one of the most distinctive characteristics of the Mediterranean world."



Piedmont and into the French region of Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur, and it's distinct from the rite elsewhere in Italy, notably in the southern regions of *Abruzzo, Molise and Puglia.*

As recently as the 1960s, there were six seasonal, alpine communities — known collectively as *Malghe* — located above Mendatica on *Monte Saccarello*, the highest peak in Liguria. These bungalow colonies (*Il Lago, Monesi, Piolarocca, Le Salse, Valcona Soprana and Valcona Sottana*) were home to the shepherds

and their families during the warmer months of the year. The shepherds spent the days with their sheep in fixed pastures while the wives looked after the children and made cheese (from sheep and goat milk) to eat and to sell. Children attended school if there was one in the Malga but otherwise they helped out with chores. Very few shepherds today are married with children,

and most of the *Malghe* are now uninhabited.

Monesi, however, is a ski area, known officially as *Monesi di Triora* at an elevation of 4,514 feet. It's one of only two ski areas in Liguria, the other being *Monte Bue* in the province of Genoa. Most days, skiers can see the Gulf of Genoa from its slopes, and for decades it was known as "Liguria's Little Switzerland."

CUCINA BIANCA AND A FESTA

To celebrate the joys and hardships of this pastoral heritage, along with its *cucina bianca* (white cuisine), the *Festa della Transumanza* was founded ten years ago to insure that future generations would continue to honor it. Italian cuisine authority Carol Field (who passed away in March 2017)



noted in her book *Celebrating Italy: The Tastes and Traditions of Italy as Revealed Through its Feasts, Festivals, and Sumptuous*

Foods that during her years of research she was not surprised to find that "Italy takes festivity so seriously that every day, somewhere in the country, people were celebrating...time stops, work stops, and the Italians indulge their profound talents for bringing the community together in events created with passion and vitality."

A weekend-long event held annually at the end of September, the celebration begins on Friday morning when tourists and 500 school kids visit booths where village residents

The tradition is ancient, and generally speaking it refers to the seasonal migration of shepherds and their flocks. In the late spring, the shepherds, the sheep, and several sheepdogs (and sometimes goats or cows) leave the lands at lower elevation and climb to higher elevation, where in the warmer weather months there is more for the flocks to eat; they make the trek in reverse in the late autumn. Though transhumance has existed in varying degrees on every continent, in most places today the livestock have been transported by vehicle for many years or the tradition has died out completely.

Mendatica is at the center of a *transumanza* pattern that has historically encompassed an area stretching from neighboring



Liguria is almost all mountains

May 2017
www.dreamofitaly.com

demonstrate typical activities related to the *transumanza*: making cheese, especially the local Brùsso, a creamy, fermented ricotta that is common in the *entroterra* of Imperia; making *pan fritu*, friendship bread; making herbal infusions; listening to old fairy tales; and knitting.



village, and this is truly a not-to-be-missed spectacle. The sheep are known as *Brigasca*, from La Brigue in Provence, and they have a ram-like

This last is more complex than it sounds as the shepherds' wives would card the wool from the sheared sheep and attach it to the top of a wooden stick about the height of a walking cane. Seated in front of this, they would pull off pieces of the wool and twist it with their fingers until strands would form, and they wrapped these strands around a wooden spindle. With these they would knit socks (each made from a single, continuous weave, not two pieces sewn together), shawls, and heavy capes with a hood; another useful item they made is a sort of cotton shawl with two open flaps, one in front and another in back, that shepherds wore over one shoulder to hold baby lambs, who couldn't keep pace with the sheep. There are only a few (elderly) women in Mendatica with this knitting knowledge, and they are eager to share it with some younger apprentices.



profile while males have spiral horns; their milk produces three cheeses that are endorsed by Slow Food: Sora, Toma and *Brus*.



Comparisons to the running of the bulls in Pamplona are inevitable, but while the sheer number of sheep could easily knock a person over,

there is no danger of being gored. The sheep are only interested in eating — they eat continuously! — and the only living thing in jeopardy is a plant that's within reach of a sheep's mouth. (I was standing in front of a house whose owner purposefully moved the overgrown branches of a flowering vine into the street, and sure enough, they were gobbled up by one of the passing sheep and the homeowner was quite pleased.)

A community dinner, prepared and served by village volunteers, is held that night and features *cucina bianca* specialties, so named for ingredients typical of the pastoral civilization in the Ligurian Alps: potatoes, turnips, garlic, leeks, cabbage, several pasta shapes and various cheeses.

Saturday's activities include the *Fiera di*

San Matteo, a street fair held in the same spot — around the Baroque *SS Nazario e Celso Church*, with a 14th-century Romanesque bell tower — as a former market where shepherds met to sell products and animals. Today vendors sell crafts, wine (I bought a bottle of *Gocce di Sereno's Ormeasco di Pornassio Superiore 2014*, a nice red that's similar to Dolcetto from Piedmont) and local culinary specialties.

A community lunch is followed by the Malghe parade, with participants donning traditional attire, and the *Palio delle Capre* (Goat Race): six goats representing the six Malghe of Mendatica compete in an obstacle course to steal the prize from the

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DREAM OF ITALY®

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Dream of Italy, the subscription travel newsletter covering Italian travel and culture, is published 10 times a year. Delivery by mail is \$87 in the U.S., Canada and abroad. A digital subscription (downloadable PDFs) costs \$77 per year. Subscriptions include online access to more than 140 back issues and regular e-mail updates.

Three ways to subscribe:

1. Send a check to *Dream of Italy*, P.O. Box 2025, Denver, CO 80201
2. Call 202-297-3708
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and hills plunging into the sea.

previous year's winner. It's a hilarious event as the goats do not care a whit about running or winning, so their handlers coax them as best they can to complete the course.

The community dinner that night is especially animated with music and singing that lasts well into the early morning hours. On Sunday, food stands open at noon and the shepherds

depart the village for higher elevation, where they will stay until their final return down the mountain in early November.

Mendatica is not fortified, so no walls hem the village in and obscure views of the surrounding mountains. It's blissfully free of souvenir shops and retail stores in general, though there are some nice items to buy at the San

Matteo Fiera, and English is not widely spoken. A series of large placards (in Italian) explain and illustrate the *transumanza*, and *La Casa del Pastore* is a small, ethnographic museum depicting a shepherd's house, the downstairs being where cheese was made and the upstairs for the bedroom and kitchen. Nearby is *I Lavatoi*, a permanent display of a public wash house where women used to do laundry.

THE DETAILS

WHERE TO STAY

Ca' da Cardella

via Giardino
(39) 0183.38.489
www.parks.it/rif/ca.da.cardella
Rates: 15€ per night

For the most immersive visit staying at this rifugio escursionistico is recommended. In an old building constructed of local stone, the recently renovated rifugio has four bedrooms (some with bunk beds) each with its own bathroom; a large living room and kitchen on the top floor. There's an outdoor picnic area with a grill — this area is connected to the kitchen by a bridge over a cobblestone street, so there are nice views over the valley, and as the sheep walk down Via Giardino for the festa, it's a good vantage spot. Open year-round.

Il Castagno

Via San Bernardo, 39
(39) 0183 328718
www.agriligurianet.it
Agriturismo Il Castagno is another typical and charming accommodation, which also has a restaurant

serving cucina bianca dishes. Contact proprietor Simona Pastorelli for rates.

Villa della Pergola

Via Privata Montagu, 9
Alassio
(39) 0182 646130
www.villadellapergola.com
Rates: Start at about 290€ per night

Alassio is about an hour's drive from Mendatica and Villa della Pergola is open from early April to the end of October. The villa's gardens cover nearly five and a half acres and are open to the public on weekends, by guided tour only, from 25 March to the end of October (reservations are required; www.giardinivilladellapergola.com). Ristorante NOVE (www.noveristorante.it) is open year-round and welcomes non-guests for lunch and dinner, and new this season are the Cene Quattro Mani (four hands dinners), a series of dinners with chef Servetto and Michelin-star chefs from other restaurants.

WHERE TO EAT

During the transumanza festival visitors should partake of the community meals, which are great fun; the dishes served differ from meal to meal and may include rabbit, tripe, chicken, or goat and bottles of wine and water are on every table. Other dining options are:

Ristorante La Campagnola

via San Bernardo 28 (just outside of the village center)
(39) 0183.328.745
La Campagnola serves a number of cucina bianca dishes year round; until recently, it was also an albergo (inn) but is now only a restaurant.

Pizzeria U Tecciu

Piazza Roma, 3
(39) 0183 328729

Alimentari Ascheri

piazza Roma 1
(39) 0183.328.713
Closed Monday morning.
Ascheri is a small grocery with local wines and some Ligurian specialties.

WHAT TO DO

Brigi Cooperativa di Comunità

Via San Bernardo, 11
(39) 0183 38489
brigi.cooperativa@gmail.com
The dynamic team at Brigi promotes sustainable tourism and supports the integrity of local culture. In addition to organizing Mendatica's festivals, the staff can recommend a number of walks and hikes for all levels of difficulty, donkey treks, snowshoeing, biking, and excursions of all kinds — they can essentially arrange just about anything visitors want to experience in the Alpi Liguri.

Note bene: there are no ATM machines in Mendatica, so visitors should plan on stopping in the larger village of nearby Pieve di Teco (www.turismoinliguria.it/en/liguria-en-holiday-areas-info/riviera-di-ponente-en/ligurian-alps/pieve-di-teco-en.html) for all banking needs.

L'entroterra is the sparsely

A ten-minute walk from the village is *La Chiesa di Santa Margherita*, a 16th-century church with a fragile fresco cycle by noted Ligurian painter Pietro Guido da Ranzo. Though in a state of disrepair, the church is lovely, and is also noteworthy for being where explorer Thor Heyerdahl wrote *Kon-Tiki*. Heyerdahl lived until 2002 in Colla Micheri, just above the Ligurian coastal town of *Laigueglia, uno dei borghi più belli d'Italia*.

Cinque Terre on the Riviera di Levante (of the rising sun).

The British have been coming to this coastline since the late 1800s, and the villa was originally the private home of General William Montagu Scott McMurdo, a distinguished British Army veteran; in the early 20th century it was the home of Virginia Woolf's cousin, Sir Walter Hamilton Dalrymple.

Edward Lear and Carlo Levi, author of *Christ Stopped at Eboli*. The number of American guests may be counted on one hand, but with the Villa's inclusion in the SLH group this may (happily) change.

The entire coastline between *Ventimiglia* and Genoa (itself under-appreciated!) deserves to be better known, and it's remarkable that only 40 minutes from this coast a place like Mendatica is still carrying on an ancient rural tradition. Though solidly of the 21st century (even the shepherds carry cell phones), Mendatica feels more like the 19th century and travelers who exit the A10 coast road at Imperia and head up into the hills on SS28 will find a corner of Italy that is utterly genuine and pleasantly old-fashioned.

—Barrie Kerper

Barrie Kerper is a frequent contributor to *Dream of Italy* and the author of *The Collected Traveler* series (*Vintage*). Her ebook on *Barcelona and Catalunya* has just been released.

A VILLA BEYOND MENDATICA

I am one of only a few Americans who've visited Mendatica, and without doubt attending the *transumanza* festival was the most amazing trip I've taken in 20 years; but Mendatica and the other villages in the Arroscia Valley are worth a detour at other times of year. There are beautiful churches, panoramic views, a grand *cascante* (waterfall) outside Mendatica (which means "bring water"), and great hiking and mountain biking — even donkey rides and guided excursions may be arranged.



Giorgio Servetto

Villa della Pergola is perched above its magnificent gardens, expanded upon by Daniel Hanbury, son of Sir Thomas Hanbury who created the Villa Hanbury botanical garden (*La Mortola*) in *Ventimiglia*. Over the years, the villa hosted a slew of illustrious guests, and today it's a new member of the Small Luxury Hotels of the World group and its restaurant, NOVE, under chef *Giorgio Servetto*, was named second best in Liguria, is on Italy's Top 50 list, and received *due forchette* (two forks) in the *Gambero Rosso* guide.



Villa della Pergola

Visiting the valley is also a great day out from the coast, where the *Villa della Pergola* is a truly special place to stay. The villa is in Alassio, a pretty town on the *Riviera di Ponente* (of the setting sun), which has been virtually unknown to Americans, who flock to the towns of Portofino, Santa Margherita and the



Villa della Pergola

Villa della Pergola has an overall vibe that's hard to achieve: classy, stylish, exacting but informal, not at all stuffy, and with a strong sense of place. Guestrooms are named after former family members or guests, and

throughout the inn are paintings and watercolors of *Alassio*, some by

THE FESTA AND MENDATICA

The 2017 *Transumanza Festival* will be held September 22 to 24. No reservations are needed and there is no cost to attend the *transumanza* events except for the community meals (prices range from 1€ for drinks to 9€ for main courses). Mendatica is on the Web at www.comune.mendatica.im.it/ and on a newly designed site, www.mendatica.com will debut soon.

Mendatica Tourist Office

Piazza Roma, 1
(behind the post office)
(39) 0183 328713
iat@mendatica.com

Some printed materials are in English and the director also speaks English.

populated hinterland of *Liguria*.

some Italians to learn that the *Bel Paese* has a deep tradition of Judaism that dates back centuries. But *Rabbi Barbara Aiello*—Italy’s sole woman rabbi—is determined to bring this history to the forefront and help descendants discover and reclaim their heritage.



Rabbi Barbara's family

trajectory, should help answer those questions.

Judaism in Southern Italy

Professor *Vincenzo Vilella*, author of the preeminent work on this subject, *Giudecche di Calabria* (The Jewish Quarters of Calabria), estimates that about half of the local population was Jewish before the Spanish Inquisition, which aimed to combat heresy against the Catholic Church and resulted in thousands of executions and forced conversions to Catholicism in the late 1400s and early 1500s.



Walls of original synagogue

The Spanish Inquisition reached deep into Calabria because at that time, the territory of Spain’s King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella included “The Kingdom of Two Sicilies,” which encompassed much of southern Italy, including Calabria, up to Naples.

Calabrian Jews who were able to escape arrest and torture founded their own settlements, but the horrors of the Spanish Inquisition effectively buried Judaism in Calabria for centuries. Although some remaining Jewish families embraced Catholicism as a spiritual path, countless others continued to observe Jewish traditions in secret; kosher dietary laws, Friday night candle-lighting, Passover, and New Year’s traditions became “family



Family Shabbat candelabra

traditions” and were practiced in secret.

Those who practiced in secret became known as “Crypto-Jews,” though the formal term is “*b’nei anusim*,” a Hebrew phrase that translates to “children of the forced ones,” meaning ancestors of those

who were forced to abandon Judaism and submit to Christian conversions.

Rabbi Barbara and Serrastretta

Those “family traditions” practiced in secret are among the clues that led Rabbi Barbara to discover more about her Jewish heritage—and what has allowed many of her clients to connect with their Jewish roots as well. The rabbi’s grandmother literally carried the family’s faith underground when she kindled the lights of her Shabbat candles in the cantina for the Jewish Sabbath.

But all of the buried secrets of Judaism in Calabria began to resurface with Rabbi Barbara’s first visit to her father’s village of Serrastretta in the mid-1970s. There she met *Dr. Enrico Mascaro*, her second cousin, who had maintained the house where her father and his nine siblings had been born. The young man was full of family stories that always had some Jewish flavor.

Rabbi knew from that initial visit that she would live there—though she could not have known that Dr. Mascaro would become her husband or that she would one day live in the house in which her great-grandfather led Jewish prayers in the *cantina*.

Of her choice to live and work in Calabria, Rabbi Barbara said, “My

The daughter of a Calabrian Jew, Italian-American Rabbi Barbara moved to Italy in 2003 and has made it her life’s mission to help southern Italians “discover and embrace a historical, cultural, and spiritual tradition that is so rightfully theirs.”

Soon after her arrival in Serrastretta, Rabbi Barbara opened the *Synagogue Ner Tamid del Sud*, named for a combination of Hebrew and Italian phrases; “Ner Tamid” means “eternal light” in Hebrew, and the Italian “del Sud” refers to the south of Italy.

Now, the Synagogue “Eternal Light of the South” offers a service unique to modern times: destination Jewish rites—weddings under the chuppah, vow renewals, and baby-naming and Bar and Bat Mitzvah ceremonies—all with Calabria’s breathtakingly beautiful scenery as a backdrop: its rolling, green, olive-tree-lined hills; the grapevine-covered pergolas; and the crystalline, pristine waters of the Tyrrhenian Sea.

But why would you want to celebrate an important Jewish rite in the middle of rural southern Italy and why with Rabbi Barbara? A closer look into the history of Judaism in southern Italy, particularly as it intersects with the rabbi’s personal history and life

Jews have lived in *Calabria*

heart and soul lives in these mountains and with these marvelous, spirited Calabrians, many of whom long to know more about their lost Jewish traditions.”

Many villages throughout the toe of the boot have storied Jewish pasts, but Serrastretta has one of Calabria’s most interesting, and Rabbi Barbara’s family plays an integral part. Hers was one of five founding families who fled to the Sila Mountains from their homes in *Scigliano* when they received word they were about to be persecuted.

As legend goes, an epidemic had coursed through the town, killing many more Christians than Jews, leading surviving Christians to believe that the Jews had somehow cursed them. In reality, it was certainly the Jewish once-a-week ritual bath called “*mikveh*” combined with hand-washing five times a day that had spared their lives.

Understanding what was about to occur, the Bruni family convinced four other families—including the Aiello—to escape to Serrastretta, which is isolated and protected by mountains on three sides.

Still, because Judaism could not be practiced openly, a formal place of worship wouldn’t appear in Calabria for another 500 years—when a direct descendant of one of those families would return “home” and dedicate her life to uncovering and revitalizing the Jewish heritage of southern Italy.

Today, Rabbi Barbara’s Synagogue Ner Tamud del Sud has over 80 members who come from as far north as Naples and as far south as Sicily. Over the next several months, the synagogue will welcome a Jewish tour from Israel, another from Canada, and Christian pilgrims from Turin.



Rabbi Barbara and Bar Mitzvah



Newly restored sanctuary

“Because Sinagoga Ner Tamid del Sud is pluralistic in that we embrace Jewish diversity and accept Jews of all denomination streams, along with interfaith families, gay and lesbian couples and their children, we offer a warm and welcoming spiritual community that can be a personal oasis in a troubled world,” said Rabbi Barbara

Synagogue services, held twice a month, are open to the community, so you’re more than welcome to stop in. But a visit to the synagogue is just one aspect of what an excursion to Serrastretta and the surrounding area can offer.

Calabrian Jewish Destination Travel

Rabbi Barbara’s synagogue has always been cutting edge, from its interfaith services to its pending application to become a member in the Reconstructionist (RRC) Jewish movement, which would make it just the second RRC synagogue in all of Europe. But perhaps nowhere is its embrace of the realities of the modern world more evident than in its offering

to host special religious events for travelers.

The most popular request among Jewish destination life cycle events is the Bar and Bat Mitzvah, and with testimonials on Rabbi Barbara’s website raving that the experience was “mind-blowing,” “awesome,” and “everything we had hoped for and more,” it’s easy to understand why.

This spring and summer, families from the United States, Canada, Australia, and the United Kingdom will arrive to see their sons and daughters become Bar and Bat Mitzvah.

Before the ceremonies—in her classic “outside the box” style—Rabbi Barbara works with the teens and their on-site tutors via Skype as they perfect their Torah reading in Hebrew. Rabbi Barbara is a former special educator and prides herself in offering the opportunity for children with special learning needs to participate fully in this Jewish rite of passage; earlier this season, the synagogue celebrated with a 16-year-old young man with autism who became a Bar Mitzvah.

“The intimate setting of the synagogue complete with handmade, hand-caned chairs and the joy of our congregants at seeing these young people read in Hebrew directly from the ancient scroll makes for an unforgettable experience,” said Rabbi Aiello.



First Jewish wedding in Calabria in 500 years

Aside from the ceremonies and a tour of the synagogue itself, Rabbi Barbara arranges several guided tours for guests. In Serrastretta, visitors can see

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for at least 1,600 years.

the remaining walls of the ancient synagogue and visit a small museum, which, in addition to traditional Jewish artifacts also features a silk-making exhibit in honor of the craft brought to Calabria by Inquisition-escaping Spanish Jews.



Timpone, the ancient synagogue

Calabrian families. Some examples include Friday night dinner tables covered in a white tablecloth and adorned with candles (vestiges of Shabbat); a red string over a baby's crib (a Kabbalistic tradition

to protect the child); a warning to never eat meat with dairy because it's bad for the stomach (kosher dietary law), and removing the blood spot from a broken egg (kosher tradition).

Connect with Rabbi Barbara

Quite simply, you can find Rabbi Aiello everywhere on the Internet and social media. She's on Facebook, Twitter, Google +, LinkedIn, Instagram, and more. You can read more in her book, *The Cat Who Ate the Cannoli: Tales of Hidden Jews in Southern Italy*, and watch her DVD, *The Secret Jews of Calabria*. Rabbi Aiello also does a weekly radio show—and yes, there's even an app for keeping up with all of her projects.

But the best way to get to know Rabbi Aiello is to go to Calabria and meet her in person. Whether you're interested in learning more about Jewish history in Italy, researching your own southern Italian Jewish heritage, attending services at the synagogue, or planning a destination Bar or Bat Mitzvah or other Jewish ceremony, there's no doubt that Rabbi Aiello is the woman you want over your shoulder guiding the way. For more information, visit www.rabbibarbara.com

—Michelle Fabio

Michelle Fabio is a freelance writer based in Calabria. She is the author of 52 Things to See & Do in Calabria and of the award-winning blog, Bleeding Espresso. For more, visit www.bleedingespresso.com

Destination Bar or Bat Mitzvah Travel Services

Rural Calabria is one of the least traveled areas of Italy, so it wouldn't have been surprising if Rabbi Barbara had stopped offering Bar and Bat Mitzvah services to far-off travelers in her Synagogue Ner Tamid del Sud for lack of interest. But just when she was considering doing so, divine intervention in the form of *Ellen Paderson* of *Smiles & Miles Travel* appeared.

As a veteran travel agent, Paderson was no stranger to arranging destination weddings for clients, so when she read that the St. Thomas Synagogue in the U.S. Virgin Islands hosted destination Bar and Bat Mitzvah services, she began researching other places that might want to offer something similar. Some of the most popular spots for Paderson's clients include Prague, the rainforest in Costa Rica, all-inclusive resorts in Mexico, the Caribbean Islands, Aruba—and, now, a small, ancient, Calabrian village a short drive from Lamezia Terme, the region's main international airport.

Since their initial meeting, Rabbi Barbara and Paderson have worked together to provide groups of parents, grandparents and teens comprehensive Bar or Bat Mitzvah services, which includes an itinerary to spend time in the surrounding area as well. Paderson connects clients to Rabbi Barbara to work out the details of the ceremony and can arrange group custom tours for two to as many people who would like to travel.

"It is a great source of pride for me," said Paderson regarding their partnership. "There is a lot of Jewish heritage in the Calabria area and working with Rabbi Aiello is a wonderful experience—not to mention the charming and historical synagogue."

At the latest count, there are 12 Bar or Bat Mizvah ceremonies scheduled at the Synagogue Ner for this spring and summer alone. For more information, call 508-238-4088 or visit www.barmitzvahvacations.com

Near Serrastretta is *Lamezia Terme's* Jewish quarter "Timpone," an important historical point of reference for Calabrian Jewish history. Other locations include *Bova Marina*, the museum and archeological site of the second oldest synagogue in all of Italy, and *Ferramonti*, the internment camp where 4,000 Jews were saved by the Italian soldiers and local *Tarsia* villagers.

Beyond these must-sees, there are also several Calabrian villages where Jewish quarters are still intact, most notably in *Nicotera* and *San Pietro Apostolo*.

Tracing Your Jewish Genealogy

For those interested in discovering whether they have Jewish heritage, Serrastretta and its surrounds provide the perfect atmosphere. The synagogue offers surname research through the *Italian Jewish Cultural Center of Calabria* (IJCCC), a team of three professionals who delve into Inquisition, tax, and other records. Although the researchers will not provide a blood line, they can help clients determine if the family surname was an identifiable Jewish name.

If you're wondering what you can do from home to further the search, Rabbi Aiello recommends thinking about whether your family has any traditions that seemed different from other

Calabria forms the toe of the Italian "boot."