

Updated: From Berlin to Birkenau: From Yesterday to Today

A Day-by-Day Field Guide for BFP's August 2026
Holocaust History & Jewish Heritage Study Tour

Germany & Poland | 9–20 August 2026

Prepared for Brian Schrauger

This update on 9 August 2026 at 18:19 reflects changes made in places to visit and people to meet, particularly today and tomorrow, 9-10 August. This should be helpful for record-keeping and preparations purposes—God willing!

How this guide is organized

This guide follows the tour's own day-by-day structure, but reads it as a deliberate progressive arc rather than a simple checklist of sites. Each day builds on the last: living memory and prewar Jewish civilization in Berlin; the bureaucratic planning of genocide alongside a contemporary activist's confrontation with its modern echo; the camp system built to carry that planning out; escalating, direct encounters with extermination and local complicity across Poland; individual rescue amid atrocity, and the regime that ordered it, in Kraków; and finally the culmination at Auschwitz-Birkenau on Day 10, followed by a deliberate return to the ordinary town of Oświęcim on Day 11.

For each day you will find a short framing note on its place in that arc, then for each stop a "Things to know" section covering essential background, and a "Look for" list of specific, observable details worth your attention and camera. Most days close with a brief "For your reporting" note connecting the material to broader historical or theological themes relevant to your audience, and an "In the world today" note connecting it to a live, verifiable parallel happening now — offered as starting points for reflection, not conclusions to adopt wholesale.

Why this still matters

Western audiences, including many Christians who support Israel, have heard the word "Holocaust" invoked for eight decades — but mostly as shorthand: a closing moral, a rhetorical comparison, a line in a fundraising appeal. That repetition produces a specific kind of fatigue, one that has almost nothing to do with actually knowing the history. It is the fatigue of a story treated as already fully told — cited so often that it feels exhausted, even though most of what made it true has never actually been learned.

A 2025 eight-country Claims Conference survey makes that gap measurable rather than anecdotal: nearly half of American respondents could not name a single concentration camp or ghetto, and 46% of French adults under 30 said they had not heard of the Holocaust or weren't sure they had.

In other words, people feel they've heard enough about something they don't, in fact, know much about. That combination — exhaustion without substance — is precisely what allows a new outbreak of the same underlying hatred to be misread as something new, or something confined to a distant war zone, rather than recognized for what it is.

This guide's case for relevance is specific, not general: the objective that drove the 1930s — the elimination of the Jewish people, pursued in Germany and increasingly tolerated in the United States through movements like America First and the German American Bund — has reemerged at global scale.

It no longer runs through one totalitarian state's bureaucracy alone. It is openly declared by Iran's regime and its regional proxy network, it drove the deadliest single-day massacre of Jews since the Holocaust, and it is echoed in a documented, worldwide surge in antisemitic incidents that trackers now describe as the most severe wave since the end of World War II.

The target has also expanded: not only Jews as individuals and Judaism as a faith, but the State of Israel itself — the sovereign place established, in living memory of the very sites on this itinerary, so that Jewish survival would never again depend on other nations' mercy.

Each day in this guide closes with an "In the world today" note connecting that day's history to this specific, current risk, and, where Scripture speaks directly to it, a biblical text long read as describing hostility toward Israel and Jerusalem. None of this claims that 2026 is 1933 replayed exactly, or that any single verse settles a live geopolitical question. What the historical and biblical record together suggest is a pattern worth taking seriously: this has happened before, in stages that felt survivable until they weren't, and Scripture repeatedly treats Israel's endurance under exactly this kind of pressure as neither accidental nor guaranteed by human effort alone.

Then and Now: A Pattern at Global Scale

In Germany, the pattern moved through traceable stages: legal marginalization (the 1933 boycott of Jewish businesses, the 1935 Nuremberg Laws stripping citizenship), propaganda saturating ordinary media, state violence escalating from harassment to Kristallnacht in 1938, and finally the bureaucratic machinery of extermination coordinated at Wannsee in 1942. Each stage tested how much the German public, and the watching world, would tolerate before the next one began.

Are you aware that the United States was not immune to the same current? Charles Lindbergh, America's most famous aviator and a leading voice of the America First Committee, told a Des Moines rally in September 1941 that Jews were among the groups pushing the country toward war — a speech even his own isolationist allies condemned as un-American.

On February 20, 1939, 22,000 members of the pro-Nazi German American Bund filled Madison Square Garden beneath a giant portrait of George Washington flanked by swastikas.

And in 1939, the United States — bound by restrictive 1924 immigration quotas — turned away the MS St. Louis and its 937 passengers, almost all Jewish refugees fleeing Germany; 254 of them were later murdered in the Holocaust.

Antisemitism in the 1930s was not a uniquely German pathology; it was a current running through the West that Germany simply organized to its furthest conclusion.

Today's version doesn't run through one government's bureaucracy. No single state yet holds the kind of monopoly on organized violence that Nazi Germany did. Instead, the threat is distributed. Iran is the state sponsor. Its leadership has repeatedly and publicly committed to Israel's destruction — reaffirmed by its current Supreme Leader, Mojtaba Khamenei, in June 2026, just months after his father was killed in that February's Israel-Iran war, and separately by senior Iranian military and security officials in November 2025 and May 2026.

Iran also coordinates a network of armed proxies — Hezbollah, Hamas, the Houthis, and allied militias in Iraq — explicitly organized to threaten Israel from multiple fronts at once.

Alongside that is an act of mass murder carried out for ideological reasons: the October 7, 2023 attack, the deadliest single day for Jews since the Holocaust, carried out under an ideology that, per Hamas's own founding charter, calls for killing Jews as Jews, not merely defeating a state.

And alongside both of those is a documented, worldwide surge in antisemitic incidents — up 107.7% globally in 2024 over 2023 alone, described by one tracking organization as the most severe wave since the end of World War II, spanning Europe, Australia, and the Americas, not confined to the Middle East. The scale is the difference from the 1930s. The objective is not.

A Biblical Lens on the Persecution of Israel and Jerusalem

Scripture repeatedly depicts the Jewish people and Jerusalem as recurring targets of national and international hostility, and repeatedly ties the nations' own standing before God to how they treat Israel. The texts below are offered as source material for your reporting, not as settled verdicts on any current event, and most reappear briefly in the "In the world today" note for the day where each is most relevant.

- Genesis 12:3 — God's covenant promise to Abraham: "I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse." The foundational text behind why Scripture treats the nations' treatment of Abraham's descendants as spiritually consequential, not incidental.
- Deuteronomy 28:37, 64–67 — Among the covenant curses for disobedience: Israel scattered among the nations, becoming "a horror, a proverb, and a byword" wherever driven. Long read as describing the historical fact of Jewish dispersion and the hostility that has often accompanied it.
- Esther 3:8–13 — Haman's decree across the Persian Empire: "to destroy, kill, and annihilate all the Jews, young and old, women and children, in one day." Scripture's clearest narrative account of an attempted empire-wide genocide of the Jewish people, and the origin of Purim, which commemorates its reversal.
- Psalm 83:3–5 — A coalition of named nations conspires "with one mind" against Israel: "Come, let us wipe them out as a nation, that Israel's name be remembered no more." Often cited for its unusually specific description of a multinational alliance united by nothing but the goal of erasing Israel.
- Jeremiah 30:7 — "Alas, that day is so great there is none like it; it is a time of trouble for Jacob, yet he shall be saved out of it." A prophecy of acute, near-total crisis for the Jewish people, paired immediately with a promise of deliverance rather than annihilation.
- Exodus 17:14 and Deuteronomy 25:17–19 — God's command to record, and never forget, Amalek's unprovoked attack on Israel's most vulnerable. The origin of Amalek's place in Jewish memory as the archetype of an enemy who seeks Israel's destruction without cause.
- Obadiah 1:10–14 — A prophetic indictment of Edom, Israel's own kinsman nation, for standing aloof, gloating, and joining in violence against Jacob "in the day of his disaster." A text about complicity by neighbors who could have helped and did not.
- Ezekiel 38–39 — The Gog and Magog prophecy: a great multinational coalition gathers against a regathered, resettled Israel, and is decisively defeated. Widely read across Christian traditions as describing a climactic future assault on Israel, though interpreters differ on its timing and literal referents.
- Zechariah 12:2–3 and 14:2 — Jerusalem described as "a cup of trembling" and "a heavy stone" to all the surrounding peoples, with "all the nations" gathered against it for battle. Among the most direct biblical texts naming Jerusalem specifically, rather than Israel generally, as a focal point of end-times conflict.
- Luke 21:24 — Jesus, in the Olivet Discourse, foretells that "Jerusalem will be trampled underfoot by the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled" — a text much discussed given Jerusalem's changing political control across the 20th and 21st centuries.
- Romans 11:25–29 — Paul's teaching that Israel's partial hardening is temporary, and that "the gifts and calling of God are irrevocable." The New Testament's central text for why the Jewish people's covenantal status is understood, across most Christian traditions, to endure despite historical suffering.

DAY 1 — A Living Witness, A Rebuilt Synagogue

Sunday, August 9 • Berlin

The itinerary now opens not with the machinery of the state but with people: the destroyed civilization the Jewish Museum documents, a synagogue that survived Kristallnacht through one police officer's quiet defiance, and, most directly, a conversation with a survivor who lived through what the rest of this tour can only study secondhand. An afternoon walking tour built around survivor testimony extends the same thread through the city itself. Everything this guide traces over the next eleven days has its human stakes established right here, on Day 1.

Jewish Museum Berlin

Things to know: Designed by Daniel Libeskind and opened in 2001. The building's zigzag "lightning bolt" floor plan and disorienting angles are meant to embody rupture — the destruction of German-Jewish history — rather than simply narrate it. Its "Axis of Exile," "Axis of Holocaust," and "Axis of Continuity" intersect physically, forcing visitors through dead ends.

Look for:

- The "Voids" — vertical, empty concrete chambers cutting through every floor, representing what cannot be exhibited or filled.
- "Fallen Leaves" (Shalechet): over 10,000 iron faces covering the floor of one void; visitors are invited to walk across them, and the clanging underfoot is intentional.
- The Garden of Exile: 49 tilting concrete columns on uneven ground, designed to induce mild disorientation — simulating the vertigo of exile.
- Galleries on centuries of German-Jewish contribution (Mendelssohn, Einstein, everyday life) — the "before" that the coming days will destroy.

New Synagogue Berlin – Centrum Judaicum

Things to know: Consecrated in 1866 on Oranienburger Strasse, the New Synagogue was, with roughly 3,200 seats, the largest and most architecturally ambitious synagogue in Germany — its gilded dome visible across the city skyline and a deliberate statement of Jewish civic confidence in the newly emancipated German Empire. On the night of the November 1938 pogrom, local police chief Wilhelm Krützfeld had firefighters extinguish the fire the SA had set, citing the building's protected landmark status — a rare instance of an official using bureaucracy itself to obstruct, rather than enable, Nazi violence. Allied bombing in 1943 destroyed most of the building; the ruined main sanctuary was demolished under Communist East Germany in 1958. A foundation established in 1988, the fiftieth anniversary of Kristallnacht, restored the facade and dome, which reopened in 1995 as Centrum Judaicum, a center for research, remembrance, and Jewish communal life.

Look for:

- The restored gilded dome and Moorish-style facade, visible from blocks away — a deliberate echo of the building's original purpose as a public assertion of Jewish presence in the city.
- The outline of the demolished main sanctuary, marked in the courtyard rather than rebuilt — a choice, like Berlin's other memorials this week, to mark absence rather than erase or fully restore it.
- If meeting Holocaust survivor Irene Bindle here: this is likely the most direct, unmediated encounter with living memory the entire trip offers. Consider what questions only a survivor, not a museum, can answer.
- This afternoon's guided walk, "Witness of the Shoah Survivors" with Kate Rudolph, extends the same thread through the city itself — treat the whole day as a single argument that history is best transmitted through direct witness, not only institutions.

For your reporting: Irene Bindle's testimony and Wilhelm Krützfeld's quiet act of bureaucratic defiance are the day's two strongest anchors for print: one shows what living memory can still convey directly, in a way no museum text panel can; the other shows that resistance to Nazism could look like paperwork and procedure rather than dramatic heroics.

In the world today: An estimated 196,600 Jewish Holocaust survivors remain alive worldwide as of early 2026, roughly half of them in Israel, and the Claims Conference projects seventy percent will be gone within a decade — meaning firsthand encounters like today's are a closing window, even as organized Holocaust distortion and denial are separately rising online. Deuteronomy 4:9 commands exactly the transmission this day models: "take care... lest you forget the things your eyes have seen... make them known to your children and your children's children" — a command not only to remember privately, but to actively hand memory to the next generation, which is what a survivor's testimony, and this trip itself, now exist to do.

DAY 2 — Planning Genocide, Meeting Its Opposite

Monday, August 10 • Berlin

Day 2 pairs the villa where the machinery of genocide was formally coordinated with an evening inside a German Jewish family's own confrontation with antisemitism today — the historical planning session and its living countertype, encountered on the same day less than an hour's drive apart.

House of the Wannsee Conference

Things to know: In this lakeside villa, on January 20, 1942, fifteen senior Nazi and state officials — chaired by Reinhard Heydrich, with Adolf Eichmann taking minutes — met for about ninety minutes to coordinate the deportation and murder of Europe's Jews, already underway in mass shootings in the East. The meeting made genocide an explicit, continent-wide, inter-agency program. The surviving minutes list a target population of over 11 million Jews across Europe, including neutral and Allied countries.

The 2001 movie, *Conspiracy*, features what happened here. See [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Conspiracy_\(2001_film\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Conspiracy_(2001_film))

Look for:

- The dining room where the conference was held — the mundane domesticity of the setting against the content of the discussion is the point of visiting.
- A facsimile of the Wannsee Protocol, with its coded bureaucratic language ("evacuation to the East," "final solution") — a case study in how atrocity is committed through euphemism.
- The country-by-country table of Jewish populations Eichmann prepared beforehand — a literal accounting ledger for murder.
- This morning's visit includes a meeting with Samuele Bennici at the site — worth noting his role and perspective directly in your own notes, since the itinerary doesn't spell it out further.

Shiur with Sacha Stawski — German Jewish Activist

Things to know: Sacha Stawski is the founder and chairman of Honestly Concerned e.V., a German organization established to monitor and counter biased and antisemitic media coverage of Israel and the Jewish community, and a founding member of Germany's Coordination Council of NGOs against antisemitism. A member of Frankfurt's Jewish community, Stawski has personally experienced the antisemitism surge documented throughout this guide, including being physically attacked while publicly displaying photographs of the Israeli hostages taken on October 7. This afternoon's meeting and the evening's dinner at Miki Weinberg's house, hosted in private homes rather than a synagogue or communal institution, are themselves a small data point in the broader argument the guide traces: normalized security concerns now shape where and how Jewish communal and religious life in Germany happens.

Look for:

- Ask Stawski how German media coverage of Israel and antisemitism has shifted since October 7, 2023, and what Honestly Concerned's monitoring work tracks day to day.
- Notice the venue itself — a private home rather than an institution — and ask whether that is a security choice, a hospitality choice, or both.
- Compare what you hear tonight against this morning's visit to Wannsee: one room planned the destruction of European Jewry in the language of bureaucracy; this room is where a private citizen now organizes, in real time, to document and resist its modern echo.

***For your reporting:** Wannsee is the natural anchor for a discussion of the "banality of evil" (Hannah Arendt): ordinary bureaucrats, a lakeside villa, coffee service, all in service of continental murder. Stawski's evening gathering is the natural counterpoint — an ordinary living room where one citizen has made resisting antisemitism his life's work. The two rooms, visited hours apart, make an argument about individual moral agency that neither could make alone.*

***In the world today:** Wannsee coordinated a genocide across government ministries in one room; today's coordination happens across borders. Iran directs a network of armed proxies — Hezbollah in Lebanon, Hamas in Gaza, the Houthis in Yemen, allied militias in Iraq and Syria — explicitly organized to pressure Israel from multiple fronts simultaneously, a strategy widely described as a "ring of fire." A senior Iranian security adviser publicly urged a "large collective operation against Israel" by this network as recently as May 2026. Psalm 83:5 describes the ancient template: nations that "form an alliance" for the specific purpose of erasing Israel.*

DAY 3 — The Camp System, and the Distance Between Cities

Tuesday, August 11 • Berlin to Warsaw

With planning and persecution both now established, Day 3 turns to the system built to enact them: Sachsenhausen, the administrative model for the entire concentration camp network. The day then becomes a border crossing, hours on a bus retracing part of the same geography the deportations once used — a physical experience of the distance that made moving millions of people to their deaths logistically possible.

Sachsenhausen Memorial

Things to know: Opened in 1936 just north of Berlin in Oranienburg, Sachsenhausen served as an administrative model for the entire SS camp system; the inspectorate of concentration camps was headquartered here. Roughly 200,000 people passed through; recent scholarship estimates 30,000–50,000 deaths from forced labor, medical experiments, executions, and a 1945 death march. Early prisoners were political opponents; the population later expanded to Jews, Roma and Sinti, Jehovah's Witnesses, gay men, and Soviet POWs.

Look for:

- The triangular camp layout, designed so a single machine-gun position at the gate could in theory cover the entire roll-call ground.
- "Station Z," the camp's purpose-built execution and cremation facility — a preview of the industrial-scale killing infrastructure at Auschwitz.
- The boot-testing track, where prisoners were forced to march daily testing military footwear for German industry — forced labor serving the war economy, not only punishment.

***For your reporting:** Sachsenhausen's role as an administrative model, rather than a single notorious camp, is worth stressing in print — it demonstrates that the entire camp system, not any one site, was the intended object of study*

this week. Consider pairing it with yesterday's Wannsee visit even though a day now separates them: together they move from bureaucratic plan (Day 2) to operational system (Day 3).

***In the world today:** Sachsenhausen mattered as a model, not only a place — the administrative template copied at every other camp on this trip. Its function has a decentralized echo today: antisemitism researchers now track how the same conspiracy narratives and imagery spread across dozens of countries within hours of a single triggering event, an infrastructure of coordinated hostility no 1940s camp inspectorate could have matched for speed. Deuteronomy's covenant curses foretold Israel "scattered among the nations, from one end of the earth to the other" (Deuteronomy 28:64) — a text about historical dispersion originally, but one that also names something a bus ride between Berlin and Warsaw makes physically felt: how far, and how systematically, this history moved people.*

DAY 4 — A Civilization, Its Walls, and What Was Hidden

Wednesday, August 12 • Warsaw

Arriving in Poland, Day 4 does for Polish Jewry what Day 1 did for German Jewry — establishing a thousand years of civilization before turning to its violent segregation in the Warsaw Ghetto, the largest ghetto the Nazis established anywhere. Today's route also traces the physical texture of that segregation and its aftermath in unusual detail: a surviving wall fragment, a design studio built from doorframes stripped of mezuzahs, a footbridge that once separated two halves of a sealed population, and the buried archive of a man determined that all of it be remembered accurately.

Złota Street & the Ghetto Wall

Things to know: A busy prewar commercial street lined with Jewish-owned shops and workshops, Złota Street fell within the boundary of the "small ghetto" the Germans sealed off in November 1940. In the courtyard of the building at 62 Złota Street stands one of the most substantial surviving fragments of the ghetto wall: roughly six meters of prewar brick that once marked the edge of the sealed district. A plaque here was unveiled in 1992 by Israeli President Chaim Herzog during his official visit to Poland — one head of state, decades later, formally marking where another state once walled off a fifth of a city's population.

Look for:

- The wall fragment itself, incorporated into an ordinary residential courtyard — much like the fragments near the Ghetto Memorial sites you'll see later today, it survives mostly by accident of postwar reconstruction, not deliberate preservation.
- The commemorative plaque and 2022 ghetto-boundary map installed nearby, marking the 82nd anniversary of the ghetto's closing.
- The ordinary modern street life around the wall fragment — a working residential courtyard, not a museum, worth noting for readers unfamiliar with how thoroughly Warsaw's wartime geography is now built over.

Mi Polin – Museum of Mezuzot

Things to know: Mi Polin is a Warsaw design studio and gallery whose founders cast mezuzah replicas directly from the doorframe indentations still visible on prewar buildings across Poland — the physical outlines left when Jewish residents' mezuzahs were torn down, by Nazi occupiers or postwar residents, and never replaced. Each cast preserves the exact shape of a specific, located absence rather than reproducing a generic mezuzah design. The studio and its associated collection function as an unusual kind of museum: one built entirely from the negative space of what was removed.

Look for:

- The cast mezuzah replicas themselves, each one traceable to a specific address and building still standing somewhere in Poland.
- Consider the parallel to Berlin's Jewish Museum "Voids" from Day 1 — absence rendered physically present — now applied to something as small and domestic as a doorframe rather than an entire building.

Chłodna Street Footbridge

Things to know: When the Germans divided the Warsaw Ghetto into a "large ghetto" and a "small ghetto" in 1941, Chłodna Street itself remained an "Aryan" thoroughfare bisecting the two, since the Germans wanted the tram line and cross-city traffic it carried to keep running. Jewish residents crossing between the two ghetto sections did so via a wooden footbridge built directly over the street, watched from below by German guards and passing traffic — one of the most photographed and filmed scenes of the ghetto period. A modern light-and-sound art installation, evoking the footbridge's outline after dark, was installed at the site in 2011.

Look for:

- The installation's illuminated cable outline, tracing where the original bridge once stood above the street.
- The street itself, still a functioning traffic corridor today — try to imagine ordinary Warsaw traffic passing directly beneath a bridge built solely to keep two halves of a starving, sealed population apart.

POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews

Things to know: Opened in 2013 in Muranów, the heart of the prewar Jewish district and former Ghetto, facing the Monument to the Ghetto Heroes. Eight galleries span a thousand years — from medieval settlement through the interwar "golden age" (Poland held the world's largest Jewish population, roughly 3.3 million, by 1939) to the Holocaust (90% of Polish Jews murdered) and postwar revival. The museum is built to show a full civilization, not only its destruction.

Look for:

- The recreated wooden ceiling and bimah of the 17th-century Gwoździec Synagogue, hand-built using historical techniques by a team of volunteers — a genuine artisanal recreation, not a scale model.
- The interwar Warsaw street-life gallery — cafes, Yiddish theater posters, sports clubs — the deliberately vibrant, "normal" prewar life the later galleries interrupt.
- The building's entrance itself: a deep, curving glass canyon evoking the parting of the Red Sea, per architect Rainer Mahlamäki's stated intent.

Warsaw Ghetto Memorial Sites (Umschlagplatz & Ghetto Heroes Monument)

Things to know: Established in November 1940, the Warsaw Ghetto confined roughly 400,000 Jews within a 1.3-square-mile walled district. It was the source of mass deportations to Treblinka in summer 1942 and the site of the April–May 1943 Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, the largest Jewish armed rebellion of the war. Umschlagplatz was the rail siding from which an estimated 250,000–300,000 Jews were deported to Treblinka. Only fragments of the ghetto wall survive amid postwar reconstruction.

The 2002 movie, [The Pianist](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Pianist_(2002_film)), features the Warsaw Ghetto. See [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Pianist_\(2002_film\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Pianist_(2002_film))

Look for:

- Surviving red-brick ghetto wall fragments, often unmarked and built into modern courtyards — your guide will likely need to point them out.
- The Umschlagplatz Monument's marble wall inscribed with first names, evoking a deportation manifest.
- Path of Remembrance granite markers tracing the route of the final ghetto transports.

Nowolipki 68 – The Ringelblum Archive, Kryisia Bunker & Sewer Exit Monument

Things to know: This address in the former ghetto is where historian Emanuel Ringelblum's secret Oyneg Shabbes ("Joy of Sabbath") archive — testimonies, ration cards, poems, and daily-life records gathered from November 1940 by dozens of contributors determined to leave a truthful record the Nazis could not erase or falsify — was buried in tin boxes and milk cans in 1942 and 1943. Two of the three caches were recovered from the rubble in 1946 and 1950; the third has never been found. This stop is also associated with two related but distinct sites: the "Kryisia" bunker on Grójecka Street, where Ringelblum and his family hid after the 1943 Uprising until they were betrayed and he was executed by the Gestapo in March 1944, and the Sewer Exit Monument on Prosta Street, marking where roughly forty ghetto fighters escaped through the sewers to the Aryan side on May 10, 1943, in one of the uprising's few successful rescues.

Look for:

- The site marker and, if displayed nearby, facsimiles of Oyneg Shabbes documents — the surviving originals are held today at the Jewish Historical Institute in Warsaw.
- Consider this the single most important act of resistance connected to this itinerary — not military, but historiographical: an insistence on truth against a regime built on lies, and on erasing evidence of its own crimes.
- The Sewer Exit Monument's more literal escape route: a rare successful rescue amid an uprising that ended, for most participants, in death or deportation.

***For your reporting:** Ringelblum's insistence on burying a truthful record, rather than trusting anyone else to tell it later, is a direct ancestor of your own work this week: Exodus 17:14 records God's command to Moses after Amalek's attack to "write this as a memorial in a book" specifically so it would not be forgotten (see also Deuteronomy 25:17–19) — a command to document precisely because forgetting is always the second stage of an attempted erasure.*

***In the world today:** Concealment is the connecting thread of several stops today, from mezuzahs stripped from doorframes to the walls you traced this morning. Segregation and concealment also have a voluntary, modern echo: a 2024–2025 survey of Jewish university students in more than 60 countries found 78% conceal their religious identity and 81% hide any Zionist identity on campus; separately, 56% of American Jews now report changing their behavior out of fear of antisemitism, with 40% avoiding visibly Jewish items in public — both figures the highest recorded since tracking began. No government ordered this. Esther faced the same calculation under a different empire: Mordecai advised her to conceal her Jewish identity at the Persian court (Esther 2:10, 2:20) until Haman's decree "to destroy, kill, and annihilate all the Jews" (Esther 3:13) made concealment no longer survivable.*

DAY 5 — The Killing Center

Thursday, August 13 • Treblinka & Warsaw

Day 5 is the tour's first encounter with a pure extermination camp — a facility built for one purpose only, with no significant labor or housing function. This is a deliberate escalation from Sachsenhausen's forced-labor model, and should be understood as such before Auschwitz, which combined both functions.

Treblinka Extermination Camp

Things to know: Opened in July 1942 as part of Operation Reinhard (with Belżec and Sobibór), sited deliberately in forest roughly 100 km northeast of Warsaw for concealment. Unlike Auschwitz, Treblinka had almost no forced-labor or housing function — most victims were murdered within hours of arrival. Estimates of the dead range from roughly 700,000 to 925,000, overwhelmingly Jews deported from the Warsaw Ghetto and other Polish ghettos. The Germans demolished the camp in late 1943 to hide the evidence and built a farmhouse on the site, so almost nothing of the original camp survives physically.

The 2017 documentary, [Treblinka: Hitler's Killing Machine](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c872K5BrBUw), is available on YouTube. See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c872K5BrBUw>

Look for:

- The memorial field of 17,000 jagged granite stones representing destroyed Jewish communities, around one large central monument — since no original buildings survive, the entire commemoration is symbolic, a sharp contrast with Auschwitz, Majdanek, and Sachsenhausen.
- Concrete markers tracing the former camp's fence line and the path of the "Himmelstrasse" ("Road to Heaven"), the corridor victims were forced to walk to the gas chambers.
- The near-total absence of physical evidence is itself the point — hold this in mind for contrast against Auschwitz's surviving structures on Day 10.

For your reporting: *Treblinka's almost complete physical absence — a farmhouse built over a killing field, a memorial made entirely of symbolic stone rather than surviving structures — is one of the sharpest contrasts on the whole trip. Hold this in mind specifically for Majdanek in a few days, where by contrast the gas chambers themselves still stand.*

In the world today: *Treblinka was built for one purpose: killing people for being Jewish. On October 7, 2023, roughly 1,200 people were murdered and 251 taken hostage in the deadliest single day for Jews since the Holocaust, nearly a third of the deaths occurring at the Nova music festival alone. Hamas's founding charter grounds its program in a hadith calling on Muslims to hunt down and kill Jews who "hide behind rocks and trees" — a stated religious objective, not merely a territorial or political one. Jeremiah 30:7 names exactly this kind of moment: "a time of trouble for Jacob" unlike any other, paired immediately with the promise that he "shall be saved out of it."*

DAY 6 — Living Faith, Rebuilt City

Friday, August 14 • Warsaw

With yesterday's archive now understood, Day 6 turns from what was hidden to what still, visibly, continues: an Orthodox synagogue with an active congregation, a cemetery still tended and visited, and a modern skyline built from a city that was almost entirely destroyed. The day closes with Shabbat dinner — not a museum exhibit but a weekly practice older than the state of Poland itself, observed tonight in the same city where so much of this guide's darkest material took place.

Nożyk Synagogue

Things to know: Built 1898–1902, the only Warsaw synagogue to survive WWII intact — the Germans used it as a stable and feed depot rather than destroying it, and it briefly reopened for services inside the "Small Ghetto" in 1941 before the deportations. Fully restored 1977–1983, it is today the seat of Poland's Chief Rabbi and an active Orthodox congregation.

Look for:

- The neo-Romanesque interior, seating roughly 350 across the ground floor and women's balcony.
- Its incongruous survival mid-block in a modern city — nearly all of Warsaw's roughly 400 prewar synagogues were destroyed; this is essentially the only architectural remnant of that religious infrastructure.
- If meeting Poland's Chief Rabbi, Michael Schudrich (American-born, leading the community since 2004): ask about his work protecting roughly 1,400 Jewish cemeteries and mass graves across Poland — a direct link to sites on this itinerary.

Okopowa Street Jewish Cemetery

Things to know: Founded in 1806, one of the largest surviving Jewish cemeteries in Europe — roughly 33 hectares and an estimated 200,000-plus graves, though records are incomplete due to wartime destruction and postwar neglect. It holds the graves of major figures in Polish-Jewish cultural, religious, and political life alongside a mass grave of ghetto victims.

Look for:

- Overgrown, forest-like sections where nature has partly reclaimed the graves — a visual argument about the scale of loss.
- Symbolic mass-grave markers for ghetto victims buried here when individual burial became impossible.
- Ohel tomb structures of prominent rabbis, still visited by pilgrims — evidence the cemetery remains a living site of practice, not only a ruin.

Varso Tower

Things to know: Completed in 2022, at 310 meters with its spire the tallest building in the European Union, standing near Warszawa Centralna station in the heart of a city that was roughly 85% destroyed by 1945 and rebuilt almost entirely from ruins.

Look for:

- If visiting the observation deck: the skyline of a city built back from near-total erasure — a visual argument for postwar Polish resilience, and a tonal counterpart to the living synagogue and tended cemetery you visited earlier today.

***For your reporting:** Ask whether Nożyk's small congregation feels like continuity or remnant to those who worship there — both readings are defensible, and the tension between them may be your strongest material for describing Jewish Warsaw today, on the eve of Shabbat, after several days focused mainly on destruction.*

***In the world today:** Warsaw's Jewish community today is a small fraction of the roughly 350,000 who lived here before the war; yet Nożyk Synagogue still holds services, the cemetery still receives visitors and pilgrims, and tonight's Shabbat dinner continues a weekly practice older than the state of Poland itself. Psalm 121:4's promise that "he who keeps Israel will neither slumber nor sleep" is not a claim that Jewish life here escaped catastrophe — it plainly did not — but a claim about what has, in fact, continued past it. Varso Tower's presence on today's skyline, in a city leveled by 1945, makes the same argument in concrete and glass rather than Scripture: destruction was not, in the end, the last word for this city, or for the people who still gather in it each Friday night.*

DAY 7 — The Hardest Question

Saturday, August 15 • Podlasie

Day 7 is the moral center of gravity for the whole trip, and its most difficult day. Jedwabne forces a confrontation with the fact that not all violence against Jews in Poland was committed by Germans — some was carried out by Polish neighbors. This does not equate to or excuse German responsibility for the Holocaust, but it complicates any simple perpetrator/bystander narrative before Auschwitz, where German administration is unambiguous.

Jedwabne

Things to know: On July 10, 1941, in this small town, Polish residents rounded up their Jewish neighbors and burned them alive in a barn. Poland's Institute of National Remembrance (IPN) documented at least 340 victims; other estimates run higher. The massacre came days after the German invasion of Soviet-occupied eastern Poland; a 2000–2002 IPN investigation found no evidence of a German unit present at the killing itself, concluding local Poles were the direct perpetrators, within a context of German occupation and encouragement. Historian Jan T. Gross's 2000 book "Neighbors" broke a long postwar silence and provoked an intense, still-unresolved national debate in Poland about memory and guilt.

Look for:

- The memorial stone at the site of the barn — its inscription was revised more than once as the officially acknowledged narrative shifted from the Communist-era claim that Germans alone were responsible to an acknowledgment of Polish participation.
- The quiet ordinariness of the town today — there is no museum infrastructure here comparable to the camps; the memory work is thinner, and more contested, than at official state sites.
- Consider asking your guide how younger Poles engage with this history differently than the wartime and Communist-era generations did.

Tykocin Synagogue

Things to know: Built in 1642, one of Poland's oldest surviving synagogues, now a museum of regional Jewish life rather than an active congregation — no Jewish community remains in Tykocin today. On August 25, 1941, virtually the entire Jewish population of the town, roughly 1,400–2,000 people, was rounded up in the square by German forces with local police assistance and transported to nearby Łopuchowo Forest, where they were shot at prepared pits over the following two days — a method of mass killing, sometimes called the "Holocaust by bullets," that predates and ran parallel to the gas-chamber camps you will see later this week.

Look for:

- The restored 17th-century interior, including painted prayer texts on the walls and the bimah — a rare surviving example of what hundreds of small-town Polish synagogues once looked like.
- The near-total absence of any Jewish presence in the town today, a stark contrast with Nożyk Synagogue's living congregation two days earlier.
- If your visit includes Łopuchowo Forest itself: the quiet, unadorned mass-grave mounds within the trees — face-to-face mass shooting by uniformed police, not anonymous industrial gassing, a distinct and in some ways more intimate form of atrocity worth naming precisely in your reporting.

***For your reporting:** This day resists easy resolution, and that is the point. Leviticus 19:16–18's command to love one's neighbor sits in obvious, painful tension with Jedwabne. Resist the urge to tidy this into a simple lesson for your readers — sit with the difficulty, as the day itself asks you to.*

***In the world today:** Neighbor-on-neighbor hostility has reemerged in Western cities, not only rural Poland. In November 2024, roving gangs on scooters hunted Maccabi Tel Aviv supporters through the streets of Amsterdam in coordinated "hit-and-run" attacks — condemned as antisemitic by the Dutch king and prime minister alike, even as investigators also documented provocations by some Maccabi fans the night before. The prophet Obadiah condemned Edom, Israel's own kinsman nation, for standing aloof and gloating "in the day of his brother's disaster," and for joining in when it looked safe to do so (Obadiah 1:10–14) — a text less about strangers than about neighbors who had every reason to know better.*

DAY 8 — A Camp Inside a City

Sunday, August 16 • Lublin

Day 8 introduces two ideas that prepare you directly for Auschwitz: a camp whose gas chambers and crematorium survive essentially intact, close enough to the city that no one could credibly claim not to know (Majdanek), and an organized, ongoing local effort to keep memory alive nearby (Grodzka Gate).

Majdanek State Museum

Things to know: Established in October 1941 on the outskirts of Lublin, visible from nearby neighborhoods and a tram line — unlike remote Treblinka or Auschwitz, Majdanek's proximity made its function an open secret to the city's population. It served as both a labor camp and, from 1942, an extermination site with gas chambers. Because the Germans evacuated hastily as Soviet forces approached in July 1944, much of the site — barracks, watchtowers, the crematorium, and both wooden and brick gas chambers — survived largely intact, making it the best-preserved former camp in Europe. Estimates of the dead run from roughly 80,000 to 110,000.

Look for:

- The gas chamber doors, fitted with airtight seals and observation peepholes the SS used to watch the killing — one of the very few places where original gas-chamber infrastructure survives for direct viewing (Auschwitz's original chambers were destroyed by the retreating Nazis; what you'll see there on Day 10 is substantially reconstructed).
- The domed mausoleum containing a mound of human ash and bone recovered from the camp.
- The camp's visibility from the city — stand at the fence line and look toward Lublin; the short distance makes the postwar "we didn't know" defense difficult to sustain.

Grodzka Gate & Old Town

Things to know: Historically called "the Jewish Gate," this medieval gate physically connected Lublin's Christian and Jewish quarters. Prewar Lublin was home to roughly 43,000 Jews — about a third of the city's population — and a major center of rabbinic scholarship. The Nazis destroyed the Jewish quarter and murdered nearly its entire population. Since 1992 the gate has housed the Grodzka Gate–NN Theatre center, whose core exhibition, "Lublin. Memory of the Place," reconstructs the prewar Jewish city, commemorates its murdered residents, and documents Poles who risked their lives to help Jews.

Look for:

- The "Memory of the Place" exhibit's household-object displays and building-by-building reconstruction of the destroyed Jewish quarter, using prewar photographs and oral histories.
- The Righteous Among the Nations section — a direct thematic counterpoint to Jedwabne yesterday: individual Poles who chose rescue over complicity or indifference.
- The gate's physical position, literally straddling old Christian and Jewish Lublin.

***For your reporting:** Majdanek is arguably the most direct, unresolved rebuke to the "ordinary people didn't know" narrative — proximity as evidence. A strong companion to Jedwabne's complicity question, and a setup for Auschwitz's scale.*

***In the world today:** Majdanek proved visibility doesn't guarantee response; the same is true of antisemitism today, now measured worldwide rather than in one region. Global antisemitic incidents rose 107.7% in 2024 over 2023 alone, a wave one tracking organization called the most severe since the end of World War II; twenty people were killed in antisemitic attacks globally in 2025; and sharp surges were separately documented in Germany, France, the UK, Italy, and Australia — a genuinely global spread the 1930s never had the infrastructure to achieve. Zechariah 2:8 records God's own description of the stakes: whoever touches Israel "touches the apple of his eye."*

DAY 9 — Rescue, Revival, and the Regime That Ordered It All

Monday, August 17 • Kraków

Day 9 introduces moral complexity of a different kind than Jedwabne's: individual choice within the machinery of atrocity, alongside a reminder of exactly who set that machinery's policy. Plaszów and the Schindler story show that even within a single SS-run camp, rescue was possible for those with the will and the means. Wawel Castle, a short walk from Kraków's Old Town, shows where the man who governed all of it — Hans Frank — actually lived and ruled, connecting Kraków's rescue story directly to the same administration responsible for Treblinka and Majdanek earlier this week.

Kazimierz (Jewish Quarter)

Things to know: Kraków's historic Jewish district, settled since the 14th–15th centuries and a major center of Jewish religious and cultural life before the war — roughly 65,000 Jews lived in Kraków in 1939, about a quarter of the city's population. Largely spared physical destruction (unlike Warsaw) because it wasn't a major battle site, so its historic synagogues and streetscape survive. Today it is a revived cultural district.

Look for:

- Multiple surviving historic synagogues (Old Synagogue, Remuh, Tempel, Izaak) within walking distance of one another — a density of surviving Jewish religious architecture rare anywhere in Poland.
- The Pharmacy Under the Eagle in Podgórze (across the river, the actual ghetto site), run during the war by Polish Catholic pharmacist Tadeusz Pankiewicz, who used his position to smuggle food, medicine, and information to Jewish residents.
- Plac Bohaterów Getta (Ghetto Heroes Square), with its installation of 70 empty bronze chairs representing furniture left behind during deportation.

JCC Kraków

Things to know: Opened in 2008 to rebuild communal Jewish life in Kraków after decades of Communist-era suppression and demographic devastation, with support from international philanthropy. It today serves Kraków's small but growing Jewish population, including many only now discovering or reclaiming Jewish heritage hidden by families during and after the war.

Look for:

- Ask staff about "hidden children" and rediscovered-heritage stories — a distinctly Polish postwar phenomenon in which people raised Catholic by rescuers, or by their own parents, discover Jewish ancestry decades later.
- The center's active social-service and volunteer programs, evidence of a living, functioning community rather than a memorial institution.

Plaszów Concentration Camp Memorial

Things to know: Established in December 1942 on the site of two former Jewish cemeteries on Kraków's outskirts, initially a forced-labor camp and later also used for executions. Commanded from February 1943 by Amon Göth, notorious for personally shooting prisoners from his villa's balcony overlooking the camp — dramatized in the film "Schindler's List." More than 150,000 people were held there over the camp's operation. Oskar Schindler, a German industrialist, used his relationship with Göth to relocate roughly 1,000 Jewish prisoners to his factory, sparing them from deportation to Auschwitz.

Spielberg's 1993 movie, *Schindler's List*, features this camp. See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Schindler%27s_List

Look for:

- The largely open, grassy site — few structures survive — built directly over the desecrated Jewish cemeteries; broken tombstones once used as paving are now displayed as memorial fragments.
- The site of Göth's villa (privately owned, viewable from outside), overlooking the camp grounds.
- The large gray memorial monument, and the fact that this camp is often overshadowed in popular memory by Auschwitz, despite its own scale and cruelty — worth naming directly for readers who may know it only through the film.

Mariacki Church (St. Mary's Basilica)

Things to know: St. Mary's Basilica has stood at the northeast corner of Kraków's Main Market Square for more than 700 years, its two mismatched Gothic towers the city's most recognizable silhouette. Its centerpiece, the Veit Stoss altarpiece — the largest Gothic altarpiece in the world, carved 1477–1489 — was dismantled and hidden by Poles just before the German invasion in 1939, only to be tracked down by a specialized Nazi looting unit and shipped to the Third Reich in 1941 on the direct order of Hans Frank, the German governor-general ruling occupied Poland from Wawel Castle, a few hundred meters from where you are standing. Recovered in 1946 in the bombed ruins of Nuremberg Castle, it was restored and reinstalled here in 1957.

Look for:

- The Veit Stoss altarpiece itself, restored to the position from which the occupying regime tried to permanently remove it.
- The two towers' famous mismatch — a medieval legend involving two rival builder brothers — a lighter historical note before Wawel's darker wartime chapter just up the hill.
- If timed on the hour: the Hejnał Mariacki trumpet call played from the taller tower, traditionally cut off mid-note in memory of a medieval trumpeter shot while sounding an invasion warning — a civic ritual of interrupted witness with an odd resonance for this week's themes.

Wawel Castle

Things to know: Wawel Castle and Cathedral, seat of Polish kings for centuries, was seized in 1939 by Hans Frank, who ruled the General Government — the rump Polish state carved out of German-occupied Poland, encompassing Kraków, Warsaw, and Lublin, and the killing centers at Treblinka and Majdanek you have already visited — from these rooms. Frank ordered the looting of Polish and Jewish cultural property across the territory he governed, including the Veit Stoss altarpiece, and after the war was convicted at Nuremberg and executed in 1946. The castle was restored to Polish civic and cultural use after liberation.

Look for:

- The state rooms Frank occupied and redecorated for his own residence — an uncomfortable but instructive juxtaposition of royal Polish history and Nazi occupation government inside the same walls.
- The view from Wawel Hill over the Vistula and the city — the literal high ground from which the administration responsible for Treblinka, Majdanek, and the Kraków ghetto operated.
- Consider the throughline from this room to the altarpiece two stops ago: Frank's rule combined mass murder with cultural theft, both aimed at erasing a nation's identity, not only its population.

***For your reporting:** Schindler's rescue, and Göth's simultaneous cruelty from the same camp, is the clearest illustration all week that individual choice mattered even within the machinery of the Holocaust — a bridge before Auschwitz, where scale can otherwise make individual agency feel like an abstraction. Wawel and Mariacki add a second, complementary story: Frank's looting of the Veit Stoss altarpiece shows that the same administration pursued cultural erasure alongside human murder — worth a paragraph of its own if you are writing about how occupation regimes target a people's identity as well as its lives.*

***In the world today:** Schindler's rescue draws on a principle older than the film: the Mishnah teaches that whoever saves a single life is considered to have saved an entire world (Sanhedrin 4:5). Modern Israel is, in one sense, the*

collective version of that rescue — a sovereign state founded specifically because statelessness had proven fatal, so that Jewish survival would never again depend solely on other nations' mercy. Ezekiel's vision of dry bones brought back to life and resettled "upon your own soil" (Ezekiel 37:12–14) is the text most directly tied to that founding idea — and precisely why a sovereign Jewish state, not only Jewish individuals, is now itself a stated target.

DAY 10 — The Culmination

Tuesday, August 18 • Oświęcim

This is the destination the entire tour has been building toward. Auschwitz-Birkenau represents the fusion of everything examined so far: Sachsenhausen's forced-labor system, Treblinka's dedicated gas chambers, Majdanek's proximity to ordinary civilian life, and Wannsee's bureaucratic, continent-wide ambition — combined at an industrial scale unmatched anywhere else.

Auschwitz-Birkenau Memorial & Museum

Things to know: Established in 1940 as a camp for Polish political prisoners (Auschwitz I), expanded from 1942 into the much larger Auschwitz II-Birkenau, purpose-built for mass extermination with multiple gas chambers and crematoria, plus a network of subcamps supplying forced labor to German industry, including IG Farben. An estimated 1.3 million people were deported here, of whom roughly 1.1 million were murdered — about 1 million of them Jews, along with tens of thousands of Poles, Roma and Sinti, Soviet POWs, and others. Liberated by Soviet forces on January 27, 1945, now International Holocaust Remembrance Day. A UNESCO World Heritage Site since 1979.

Look for:

- The "Arbeit Macht Frei" gate at Auschwitz I, and preserved barracks now housing exhibitions, including rooms of confiscated shoes, suitcases, and hair — physical evidence at a scale no earlier stop this week has matched.
- Block 11 ("the death block") and the adjacent execution wall.
- At Birkenau: the iconic guard tower and rail spur running directly into the camp, where new arrivals were selected between immediate death and forced labor.
- The ruins of Crematoria II and III, deliberately destroyed by the retreating SS in an unsuccessful attempt to hide the evidence — set this directly against Majdanek's intact gas chambers two days earlier, a study in what survives and why.
- Scale itself is the exhibit: allow time to stand at the far end of the Birkenau rail platform and look back at the size of the camp.

For your reporting: *Save extended reflection for tomorrow's closing discussion at the end of Day 11 — today calls for careful, accurate observation rather than immediate synthesis.*

In the world today: *Not exactly as it was under Hitler, but with the same objective — now declared openly rather than hidden, and pursued at global rather than continental scale. Iran's Supreme Leader, Mojtaba Khamenei, affirmed in June 2026 — four months after his father was killed in that February's Israel-Iran war — his father's 2015 vow that Israel would not survive past 2040. That is the fusion this camp represents, updated: a stated goal of eliminating the Jewish state, Judaism, and Jews as a people, advanced not by one country's secret bureaucracy but by a declared, multinational effort operating in the open. Ezekiel 38–39's prophecy of a great coalition of nations gathering against a resettled Israel, and failing, is the text most directly associated with a climactic assault of exactly this kind, though Christian traditions differ on its timing and literal referents.*

DAY 11 — The Town Before the Camp's Name

Wednesday, August 19 • Oświęcim

Day 11 deliberately steps back from the camp to the town itself — because Oświęcim existed, with its own Jewish community and centuries of history, long before "Auschwitz" became a name synonymous with genocide. Returning to that fact restores the victims' full humanity rather than letting the camp have the last word, and the day ends with the itinerary's own scheduled group discussion — the intended moment to turn eleven days of history into a framework for reflection and reporting.

Negatives of Memory Exhibition (Muzeum Pamięci Mieszkańców Ziemi Oświęcimskiej)

Things to know: Opened in 2018 inside the historic "Lagerhaus" warehouse building roughly 200 meters from the former Auschwitz I camp, this museum tells a story this itinerary has not yet told directly: local Polish residents of the Oświęcim region who risked their lives to help Auschwitz prisoners, at a time when doing so carried a death sentence under German occupation law. Its permanent multimedia exhibition, known in Polish as "Klische Pamięci" ("Negatives of Memory"), combines eyewitness-account films with artifacts including belongings of Helena Plotnicka, a local woman executed by the Germans for smuggling food to prisoners, and equipment from Maria Bobrzecka's pharmacy, used to smuggle medicine into the camp.

Look for:

- The eyewitness-testimony films, gathered directly from local residents and their descendants rather than camp survivors — a different category of witness than most of this trip has featured.
- Artifacts connected to Helena Plotnicka and Maria Bobrzecka specifically — both examples of the same individual moral choice you encountered in Kraków's Płaszów and Schindler story, exercised here by non-Jewish Polish neighbors living literally in the camp's shadow rather than by a wealthy industrialist.
- The museum's physical proximity to Auschwitz I itself — a reminder that an entire town of ordinary people lived within sight of the camp for its whole operation, and that response to that proximity was not uniform.

Auschwitz Jewish Center & Great Synagogue

Things to know: The Chevra Lomdei Mishnayot Synagogue, built in 1913, is the only Jewish house of prayer in Oświęcim to survive the war — the Nazis stripped it and used it as a munitions warehouse. (The town's larger Great Synagogue, dating to the 1860s, was burned by the Nazis on the night of November 29–30, 1939, and no longer exists.) The surviving synagogue was returned to Jewish ownership after the war, used briefly by survivors, then nationalized under Communism and used as a carpet warehouse for decades before restoration and reopening in 2000 as the centerpiece of the Auschwitz Jewish Center. Before the war, Jews made up over half the town's population.

Look for:

- The restored sanctuary itself — deliberately ordinary and human-scaled, in contrast to the camp two miles away.
- Museum photographs of prewar Oświęcim, in which Jewish life appears thoroughly local and unremarkable — the town's Jews were simply its residents, not a symbol.
- The Center's stated mission of combating antisemitism and radicalization through education — worth quoting directly if you write about it.

House 88 (Höss Villa / ARCHER Research Center)

Things to know: This house, directly outside the Auschwitz-Birkenau wall, was the family home of Rudolf Höss, the camp's longest-serving commandant, from 1940 to 1944 — the same house later depicted in the 2023 film "The Zone of Interest." Purchased by the Counter Extremism Project in partnership with the Auschwitz-Birkenau Museum and UNESCO, and redesigned with architect Daniel Libeskind, it opened to the public on January 27, 2025 (the 80th anniversary of the camp's liberation) as ARCHER — the Auschwitz Research Center on Hate, Extremism, and Radicalization. It now houses research, education, and fellowship programs on antisemitism and extremism, including AI-assisted tracking of extremist content, and there has been public discussion of reclaiming the property's number 88 — a numeral used in far-right circles to signal "Heil Hitler," since H is the eighth letter of the alphabet.

The house is depicted in the 2023 film [The Zone of Interest](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Zone_of_Interest_(film)). See [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Zone_of_Interest_\(film\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Zone_of_Interest_(film))

Look for:

- The house's ordinary, domestic scale and its garden, which Höss's family maintained immediately alongside the camp wall — the literal "zone of interest" the film's title refers to.
- Ask about the center's current research and education programming; this stop directly poses the question the whole tour has been building toward: not just what happened, but how ordinary people, and ordinary houses, become complicit — and what work is being done today to prevent it happening again.

***For your reporting:** This is the natural place to engage carefully with post-Holocaust theology: Israel's covenantal election and endurance (Romans 11:1–2, 28–29), the church's historical complicity in antisemitism that helped make the Holocaust possible, and the Second Vatican Council's 1965 Nostra Aetate, which repudiated the deicide charge against Jews as a turning point in Catholic-Jewish relations. Handle any comparison to the Suffering Servant of Isaiah 53 with care — many Jewish scholars rightly object to Christian appropriation of specifically Jewish suffering into Christian typology, and that tension is worth naming honestly rather than resolving too neatly. The Righteous Among the Nations thread now runs from Grodzka Gate (Day 8) through Płaszów and Schindler (Day 9) to Płotnicka and Bobrzecka here — worth tracing across the whole guide as a single sustained counter-narrative to complicity. Use the group's scheduled closing discussion this evening to let the week's material settle before drawing conclusions in print.*

***In the world today:** House 88/ARCHER exists because Jerusalem and the Jewish state, not only the Jewish people, remain live targets. Zechariah pictured this with unusual specificity: Jerusalem as "a cup of trembling" and "a heavy stone" to the peoples around it, with "all the nations of the earth" gathered against it (Zechariah 12:2–3, 14:2) — among the few biblical texts that name Jerusalem itself, not Israel generally, as the focal point. Jesus made a related prediction in the Olivet Discourse: "Jerusalem will be trampled underfoot by the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled" (Luke 21:24), much discussed given Jerusalem's contested status over the last century. Paired with Paul's assurance that "the gifts and calling of God are irrevocable" (Romans 11:29), these texts frame Jerusalem's persistence, not just the Jewish people's, as a subject Scripture treats as consequential rather than incidental.*

DAY 12 — Departure: What You Carry Forward

Thursday, August 20 • Kraków

The itinerary's own agenda for this final day is departure. This is the day for turning eleven days of history into an ongoing framework for reporting and reflection, not for adding new material.

Kraków Balice Airport

Things to know: John Paul II International Airport, Kraków's main airport and the group's departure point.

Look for:

- Little to specifically look for here — but the liminal, transitional quality of an airport, a place built for leaving, is a natural closing image for a piece about a trip built around confronting historical endings.

In the world today: The itinerary ends in transit, but the pattern this guide has traced does not pause when you land. Zephaniah's promise of regathering — "I will gather you... at the time I bring you home" (Zephaniah 3:19–20) — is one of several texts that pair Israel's historical vulnerability with an expectation of ultimate restoration rather than final defeat. What you carry forward is the specific, sourced case this week has built for why that pairing still matters as news, not only as doctrine.

The Arc, in Review

Across the twelve days, the itinerary moves from living memory and rare individual resistance in Berlin, through the exposure of both planning documents and prewar civilization, into escalating direct encounters with extermination and complicity across rural and urban Poland, to individual rescue amid atrocity — and the regime that ordered it — in Kraków, arriving finally at Auschwitz's industrial scale, then deliberately stepping back to the ordinary town and centuries of history that the camp's name has eclipsed. The structure argues, in effect, that both memory and forgetting are active choices that communities keep making. Grodzka Gate, POLIN, the JCC Kraków, the Negatives of Memory Exhibition, and the Auschwitz Jewish Center all represent chosen memory-work — likely the strongest single thread available for tying the whole trip together in print.

Making It Matter Now

Every "In the world today" note in this guide points to the same underlying claim, made specific rather than rhetorical: the objective that drove the 1930s — expressed then through Germany's state bureaucracy and tolerated in the United States through movements like America First and the German American Bund — has reemerged at a scale the twentieth century never saw. It is declared openly by Iran's current leadership and its armed proxy network; it produced the deadliest single day for Jews since the Holocaust on October 7, 2023; it is documented in a global surge of antisemitic incidents that trackers describe as the most severe since the end of World War II; and it now names the State of Israel itself, not only Jewish individuals and Jewish practice, as a target for elimination. None of this claims exact repetition — no single government today wields the totalizing bureaucratic machine you saw at Auschwitz — and each element deserves reporting with its own sourcing and care rather than as a single flattened narrative. What the historical pattern and the biblical texts in this guide share is a refusal to treat hostility toward the Jewish people and Jerusalem as background noise: both insist it recurs, both insist it is worth naming precisely, and both, in their own ways, insist it does not have the last word.