

For the Disabled, Birthright Trips are Extra Special

By Gil Shefler

NEW YORK (JTA) — Pamela Saeks thought her daughter Karly, who has Asperger's syndrome, would never be able to go on Birthright Israel, the program that offers Diaspora Jews free trips to Israel.

"For years she has been so frustrated that she can't be like other kids and go on an organized trip to Israel," Saeks said.

But in December, Karly will embark on a 10-day Birthright trip tailored for individuals with Asperger's, a form of high-functioning autism. The trip will take her from the shores of the Dead Sea to the verdant plateau of the Golan Heights.

The trip is organized in partnership with Shorashim, an organization aimed at strengthening ties between the Diaspora and Israel, and Koach, the college outreach group of the Conservative movement.

It will be the fourth Birthright trip suited to meet the needs of people with Asperger's.

The Asperger's trip is one of a number of specially tailored Birthright programs for those with

disabilities. Birthright, which has brought some 220,000 Jews aged 18 to 26 to Israel since its inception in 2000, also runs trips for the hearing impaired, the developmentally disabled and wheelchair users, and has had one trip for blind participants.

By the end of 2009, at least 28 groups of people with special needs will have traveled to Israel on Birthright since 2003, according to Birthright.

The Birthright trips for the disabled visit all the major sites of a typical Birthright trip, but changes are made to suit the participants' unique needs.

At Masada, they do not ascend to the ancient citadel via the rigorous serpentine trail. Instead, they tour the Roman ramparts at the bottom of the hill and take the cable car to the top.

At Yad Vashem, the Holocaust museum in Jerusalem, organizers highlight the persecution by the Nazis of people with disabilities. And Asperger's trips hold discussions about the Nazis' persecution of Eastern European Jewry in classrooms located next to the museum to provide a better



Staff and participants on a Birthright Israel trip for people with Asperger's syndrome socializing at Jerusalem's Beit Ekstein. (Bruce Sharon)

environment for participants to absorb the information.

Despite their popularity, the frequency of Birthright trips for the disabled is limited due to budgetary constraints.

"It's an expensive trip to run, and we can't do it again," Hillel's director

of immersion, Andrea Hoffman, said of a trip for the mobile impaired. "People have asked us if we could get private funding and we have a lot of requests."

The costs of the trips for the disabled are higher for several

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Jewish Community Calendar

Nov. 15 — Sun.
Beth Judah Men's Club — Ronald M. Shapiro, sports agent, author, attorney, educator, civic leader and expert negotiator will address the Beth Judah Men's Club at an open meeting and breakfast at the synagogue. 9 a.m. The event is open to anyone wishing to attend. Minyan will be at 9 a.m. followed by a full breakfast at which Shapiro will speak. \$10 for non-members; children under 12 will be admitted free.

Fashion Show & Luncheon — Beth Judah Temple, Spencer and Pacific Avenues, Wildwood. 12:00 noon. Fashions provided by Talk of the Walk. Door prizes, Chinese Auction. Call 522-7541.

Beth El Coffee House — With Cantor Ralph Goren and talented members of Beth El. 4:00 p.m. Light snacks will be served. \$5.00. Contact 823-2725.

Nov. 18 — Wed.
Gold Meir Hadassah Luncheon Program — "Challenges to Israel Today." Beth El Synagogue. Jerome Ave., Margate. Speaker: Rabbi Aaron Krauss. \$3.00. 11:30 a.m. All are welcome. Reservations a must. Call Ruth Kleiner at 822-5370.


Nov. 22 — Sun.
Beth El Holiday Bazaar — 9:30 a.m. to 3 p.m. There is room for a few more vendors. Call 823-2725 to reserve your spot. Six-foot tables are available for \$50. Discount for more than one table.

Nov. 24 — Tues.
ORT trip to Rices Market — New Hope, Pa., shop till you drop. \$32. Leaving Ventnor Plaza at 8 a.m. and returning 5 p.m. Call Bunny, 402-8404.

Nov. 30 — Mon.
BJE Book Club and friends — with guest speaker Bertram Korn, Jr. speaking about the history of the Jews during the Civil War period — he will also speak about his late father, Rabbi Bertram Korn and his book *American Jewry & the Civil War*. Event led by facilitator, Meryl Rodgers. On Monday, November 30, from 10:00 a.m. until 11:30 a.m. at the Katz JCC. Includes bagels and coffee. No charge but reservations requested. Limited number of gently-used rare copies of this out-of-print book are available at the BJE for \$10 each. Call 822-1854 for reservations.

Dec. 6 — Sun.
Beth Judah Hanukkah Bazaar — 11:00 am to 2:00 p.m. The event, sponsored by the Beth Judah Sisterhood, raises funds for youth programs and activities in the synagogue and surrounding communities. The Beth Judah Gift Shop will also be open, offering a fine array of Judaica and holiday items. A delicious kosher lunch will be for sale. Kids will enjoy hands-on crafts, video games and even face painting. Ample parking is available.

Dec. 16 — Wed.
Holiday Cocktail Party — 6:30 - 8:30 p.m. This event, hosted by the Sea Singles Networking Group for the serious-minded Single; 35-60 will be held at the Sandi Pointe Restaurant, Somers Point. This prepaid event is \$20.00. Send your check by 12/12 to Riana Milne, 7028 Ridge Ave., Egg Harbor Twp., NJ 08234. Upcoming events include Speed Dating Sat. Jan 16th and Valentine's Party, Wed. 2/10. For more information, please call Host Riana Milne, MA LPC at (609) 631-7884.



JEWISH FEDERATION
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To view the Calendar, go to
www.jewishbytheshore.org & click on calendar