

Prague, 30 April, 2019

Press release

The Spanish Synagogue – part of the tour of the Jewish Museum in Prague – will be temporarily closed from 1 June 2019 for planned revitalization

Visitors to the Jewish Museum in Prague still have until the end of May 2019 to view the Spanish Synagogue and its exhibition on the history of Jews in Bohemia and Moravia in the 19th–20th centuries. The synagogue will then undergo partial repair and restoration work. It will reopen to the public in the last quarter of 2020 with a new permanent exhibition, including interactive elements and modern visitor facilities.

The Spanish Synagogue is the most recent synagogue in the Prague Jewish Town. It was built in 1868 for the local Reform congregation on the site of the 12th-century Altschul (Old Shul), which was the oldest synagogue in the Prague ghetto. It is called “Spanish” for its impressive Moorish interior design, influenced by the famous Alhambra. The building was designed by Josef Niklas and Jan Bělský, the remarkable interior (from 1882–83) by Antonín Baum and Bedřich Münzberger. František Škroup, the composer of the Czech national anthem, served as organist in the previous synagogue on this site in 1836-45.

The Spanish Synagogue currently houses the Jewish Museum’s exhibition The History of the Jews in Bohemia and Moravia in the 19th–20th Centuries, which was installed during the first major reconstruction of the building in 1994-1998. The exhibition deals with the history of the Jews in the Bohemian lands from the reforms of Joseph II in the 1780s to the period after the Second World War. It highlights the gradual advancement toward greater equality and emancipation for Jews in AustriaHungary, describes the foundation of the Czech-Jewish and Zionist movements, and profiles the most important Jewish entrepreneurs, scientists, writers, musicians and artists. It also deals with the redevelopment of the Prague Jewish Town, Jewish sites of Bohemia and Moravia, and the history of the Jewish Museum in Prague. Special focus is put on the Shoah of Jews from Bohemia and Moravia in 1939- 1945, and the Terezín /Theresienstadt ghetto.

The new exhibition, which has the working title Jewish Emancipation, Shoah and Postwar Czechoslovakia from 1780 to the Present, will be thematically linked to the current exhibition. Above all, it will change the means and style of the presentation, as well as its technical and design aspects, which will be sensitively incorporated into the architecture of the building, and will include multimedia and interactive elements. In addition to a thematic selection of rare items from the Jewish Museum’s collections, which will be placed in new arrangements and contexts, there will be touch screens for browsing through historical documents, photographs and artworks. Visitors will also be able to look up information in a database of prominent Jewish figures.

The new exhibition will require building alterations, including the construction of new technological and visitor facilities and barrier-free access. The planned revitalization of the synagogue and its exhibition was preceded by curatorial and technical preparations in 2017-2018. The framework concept for the new permanent exhibition was devised by Arno Pařík, and the individual topics have been further elaborated by the Jewish Museum’s research staff, partly with the help of external experts. The architectural design for the project has been prepared by the architectural firm Petr Franta architekti s.r.o., which is also the general planner for the project. The main contractor will be KONSIT a.s., a company with experience of delivering

comprehensive construction services for particularly complex buildings, such as heritage sites. Implementation work will begin in July 2019 and will continue until the last quarter of 2020.

After the renovation of the Pinkas Synagogue (2018) and Maisel Synagogue (2015) and the opening of the Information and Reservation Centre (2014), this is the fourth of the Jewish Museum's revitalization projects. The Jewish Museum is overhauling its permanent exhibitions so as to better reflect current trends in museum displays, to make full use of technical possibilities, and to meet visitor expectations, all while fully respecting the architectural integrity of the historical synagogues that house the exhibitions.



The modernisation of the permanent exhibition at the Spanish Synagogue was supported in 2018-2019 by the Foundation for Holocaust Victims.

Jewish Museum in Prague

Spanish Synagogue, Věžeňská 1, Prague 1 – closed to the public from 1 June 2019

The Jewish Museum's other exhibitions will remain on display.

For more information, see www.jewishmuseum.cz

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Photographs for downloading:

<https://drive.google.com/open?id=16-wHz2JDGdMRdUdXIMjawq2BShEL5zWX>