



The Jewish Communities of Medellín, Colombia

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Where is Medellín?



What is Medellín?



Medellín Refers to the metro area as well as the specific city just as “New York City” includes five boroughs, but “New York” generally means Manhattan.

Not surprisingly there is greater wealth and higher social class in Medellín proper than its neighbors, typically poorer as one goes north.

Where are the Jews?



The two Jewish communities in the Medellín area are in Medellín and Bello.

The Medellín community is more affluent and established, being approximately 90 years old.

Bello is relatively new as we will discuss shortly.

The Jews of Medellín



- Community around for at least 90 years
- Typically wealthy compared to rest of Colombia, income bracket 5-6 out of 6.
- Mostly self-employed, factory owners, importers
- Several Israelis – mixed reputation
- Had several leaders over the years including Conservative rabbi.

The Jewish Private School



- Coligio Theodoro Hertzl
- \$800 a month
- Teaches Zionism, Jewish Holidays, Hebrew, etc.
- Of 250 students, 30 are Jewish – school provides superior education.

The Jewish Private School



The Jewish Private School



The Jewish Private School



The Synagogue of Medellín



The Synagogue of Medellín



The Synagogue of Medellín



Bello



- Pronounced “Bayjoe”
- Population of 350,000 – 400,000
- Income level 2-3 of 6.
- Catholic and Evangelical Christian.

The Jewish Community of Bello

- Group of 300 Jews left Catholic community of 3,000
- Possibly went Evangelical first
- Carried love of Israel from Christian tradition
- Possible crypto-Jewish heritage.
- 30 converted with Rabbi in Miami, waiting for rest.

Why Choose Judaism?



- Community leader found Chilean Jew while on pilgrimage to Israel.
- Possible history of Marranos / Jewish traditions already present in community.
- Passionately following “Sephardi” tradition, learned through imitation.

Jewish Practice in Bello



- Copy Sephardic tradition – follows Yalkut Yosef
- Strong commitment to Shabbat, Kashrut, Taharat mishpacha, and continuing education for themselves and children.
- Strong desire to “be Jewish”, determine what Jews (Sephardim) do, and do that.

The Synagogue of Bello



The Synagogue of Bello



The Synagogue of Bello



Bello Day School



Kosher Food in Bello



The Mikvah of Bello



The Mikvah of Bello



The Mikvah of Bello



The Mikvah of Bello



What do the Jews in Bello Want?

- Money for infrastructure (shul, mikvah, etc).
- Guiding rabbi for conversions and continuing education.
- Recognition as a legitimate community, national and international subject to politics.
- Will continue even above are not met.

Colombian Jewish Politics (Surprise)

- Strong Conservative presence – impetus for re-conversions, despite controversies.
- Bello community not-accepted by Jews of Medellín or Bogota.
- Issues of social status/income level, public perceptions, possible religious insecurity.