

JEWISHLINK

Issue #365

January 14, 2021 | 1 Shevat 5781

‘Go Kasher Panama’ Can Help Plan Your Next Tropical Vacation

By Jill Kirsch

For those who love to travel, exciting new vacation destinations are always welcome. A getaway location that has gotten a lot of buzz in recent years is Panama, but for observant travelers, the necessities and amenities needed have made visiting the tropical paradise complicated at best. Enter Go Kasher Panama, a new company which provides information on the easiest and best kosher options for those who are looking to travel to this beautiful Central American country.

Esther Zebede Schwartz, owner and creator of Go Kasher Panama, is a native of Panama. She fondly remembers the tight-knit, yet small, Jewish community in which she grew up and happily speaks of how that community has grown and flourished since then.

“I was born and raised in Panama. Back then, the country had a strong, but limited, Jewish community, mostly Sephardic, with a single Solomon Schechter-type school for Jewish learning,” Schwartz wrote on the gokosherpanama website. “Today, things have changed greatly. Panama now has yeshivas, kollels and a much larger observant Jewish population.”

Due to her knowledge of the country, she became a resource for friends and acquaintances seeking travel tips, including where to find kosher food, where to stay, which sites to visit, where the shuls are and more. Recognizing that Panama had become a go-to vacation spot, Schwartz and her husband,



Simi, created a comprehensive document that included all of this information, and posted it on her Facebook page. Then, in December 2019, she started a private Facebook group, Go Kasher Panama

Travel and Tips, which currently has close to 500 members. The site provided members with references, recommendations and the ability to directly chat with people who had visited Panama.

“I wanted to make Panama accessible to people who wanted to visit, and this allowed me to

share my knowledge and help people plan their vacations,” she said, in a telephone interview with The Jewish Link.

In January 2020, Esther visited Panama, and upon her return she and Simi decided to take it a step further and create a website, which would allow potential travelers to more easily access the information and tips they had collected over the years.

“This website will help the English speaker navigate where they want to go and what they want to do in Panama,” she said, noting that most travel information for Panama is in Spanish. “The site can even help people connect with a domestic travel agent who can assist them from here.”

Gokosherpanama.com is a “one stop shop for people who want to go to Panama,” Esther continued.

Timing, as they say, is everything, and the Schwartzes began development of the website around Purim, just before the novel coronavirus was declared a worldwide pandemic and things shut-

tered across the globe.

Rather than viewing it as a sign to give up, the couple decided to use the time to flesh out the website so it was ready to go as soon as borders opened to travelers.

The site went live on June 24, 2020, and traffic has been constant ever since, despite changing COVID-related travel restrictions in both countries. People planning visits to family, honeymoons and vacations have flocked to the site to learn about “the very nice and reasonable hotels, kosher food, reasonably priced supermarkets, shuls, beaches, island jaunts” and other attractions.



“There are more kosher restaurants there than in West Orange, Clifton and Teaneck,” said Simi.

He continued, “For years, you needed access to get into the shuls. There was a form to fill out in order to get in ... The website provides a link to the form, so people who want to go to shul can, especially those saying kaddish, of course keeping all COVID restrictions.”

The site offers information on food, hotels, places to visit, shopping, Jewish sites, transportation, Shabbat, tour guides and agencies and more. There is also a FAQ page, which includes everything a

traveler to Panama could need, including COVID-19 updates.

COVID regulations are continually changing, both in the US and Panama, and the gokosherpanama.com site is updated regularly to keep potential travelers abreast of the most current COVID-related requirements. All rules are easy to find at the top of the website, and simple to understand.

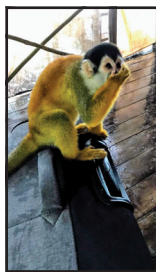
Gokosherpanama.com is not just helpful to potential tourists. “We wanted to help people and businesses in Panama bring tourists into the country, so we sell advertising space on the site,” Esther remarked. Kosher restaurants are all listed on the site, and they can purchase additional advertising if desired. Tour agencies and hotels also advertise their services.

“It’s a way to get your name out there, by advertising on the site,” added Simi.

There are direct flights to Panama from Newark Liberty International Airport, with a flight time of four and a half hours nonstop.

For more information about visiting Panama, or advertising your services on the site, email info@gokosherpanama.com, or click the contact button on the home page located at <https://www.gokosherpanama.com/contact>. The detailed website can be reached at [gokosherpanama.com](https://www.gokosherpanama.com), or visit Go Kasher Panama on Instagram at [@gokosherpanama](https://www.instagram.com/gokosherpanama) or

Facebook at [@gokosherpanama](https://www.facebook.com/gokosherpanama), and remember to join the Facebook group Go Kasher Panama Travel & Tips.



Go Kasher Panama