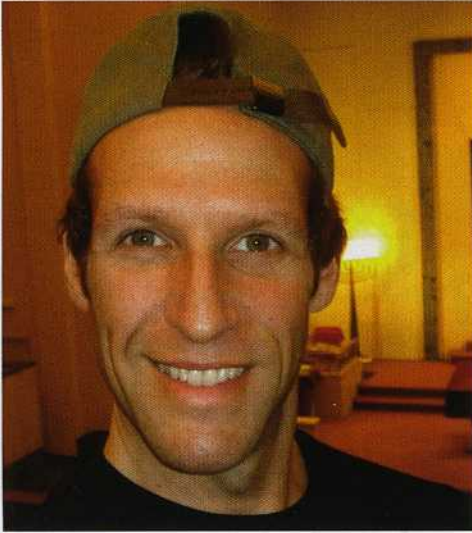


jewish photography in japan

sam zipursky



Jono David is a Jewish photographer. He was born in Stoke-on-Trent, an English town historically known as the Staffordshire Potteries for its former ceramics industry. "The area has long suffered from economic depression, perhaps because I left for America at the age of two," Jono jokes. Although it's not a particularly happening kind of place, Jono would like to return there in the future and it already has a special place in his life: "There is a little Jewish cemetery there in which several of my relatives are buried. It's a peaceful, green place. I had the honor of photographing it, and a newly built synagogue on the same grounds, in September 2006. In fact, a photo I took of the stained glass there is incorporated into my website's homepage. My logo is also based upon that image."

Jono arrived in Japan in 1994 and has been based in Osaka ever since. He teaches English at three universities in the area, but he also doubles as a Jewish photographer - a passion/profession that he has been indulging for the past 12 years. "It wasn't until 1997 that I really started taking Jewish photos," Jono recalls. "That summer, I rode the Trans-Siberian Railway from Beijing to London via Siberia and far eastern Europe. All along the way, I sought out Jewish communities. In each and every stop, I was warmly welcomed by complete strangers. That was impressive to me. In Poland, I somehow felt close to my great-grandmother, even though I had no idea which town she was from. In Russia, I wondered where my other relatives were from. So I felt a connection to both my ancestry and the communities I was

visiting. And I took photos along the way."

Jono has travelled all around the world to fulfil his personal quest - but are there even any Jewish communities here in Japan? "I would use term 'Jewish community' loosely here in Japan," Jono explains, "even though there are two synagogues and two Jewish cemeteries, both in Kobe and Tokyo (the cemetery is in Yokohama). I have photographed all those sights, and worked in Kobe on a few occasions. Frankly, I am not active in either community and cannot comment with any authority on the make-up of those congregations. But let's just say that they consist of ex-pats, a core of Israelis, and a number of non-Jewish friends, guests, and spouses. There are no ethnically Jewish Japanese, though I have heard a few have married Jews and converted."

From Jono's description of Jewish life in Japan - and my own experience of it - it's difficult to see how Jono is able to continue with this profession in Japan. Yet, in spite of the fact that there are so few Jewish people here, Jono has put together an online library that now contains more than 18,000 Jewish images. The key is that they were taken in 80 countries, not exclusively in Japan.

"Clearly Jewish life in Japan is limited in a number of ways," Jono admits. "With only two synagogues in the country and relatively little Jewish activity, photographic opportunities are few. But more than that, outlets for

jono david is running a unique business in osaka



this is the oldest synagogue in mumbai, india (it was built in 1796), as seen through jono david's camera

