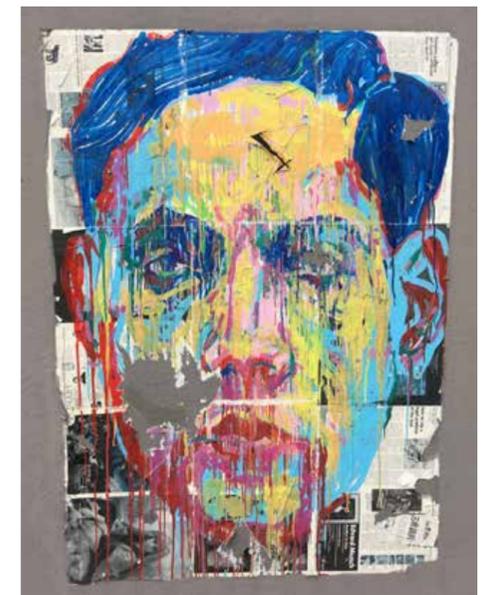




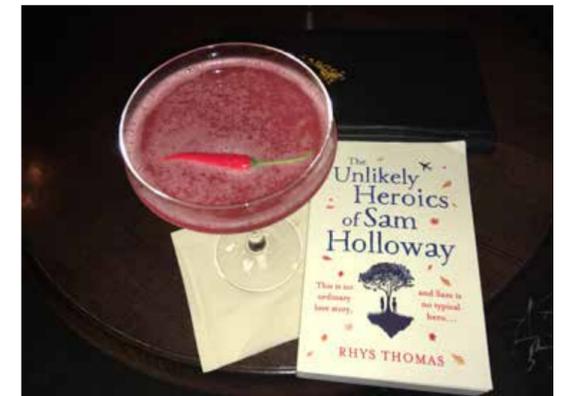
A FEW trees fall victim to yarn bombing by the Fløibanen funicular.



AN UNASSUMING tattoo parlor beside a literature store.



MULTIMEDIA EFFECTS add layers to the longstanding local scene.



CHILI MARTINIS and chill reads at 'No Stress' Cocktail Bar.

Finding Florentin in Bergen, Norway

• Text and photos: JENNIFER GREENBERG

After two planes, countless trains and luckily, no automobiles, I stumbled out of the train station in Bergen, Norway – my eyes half shut, yet mind fully awake. Exactly 24 hours had elapsed since ordering an early morning Gett taxi from my humble Tel Aviv abode. As the driver cruised down the main drags en route to Ben-Gurion Airport, the city that

(usually) never sleeps seemed to be taking a catnap: the infantry of barstools that spill onto Dizengoff Street were stacked in organized rows, their disposition as cold as their metallic makeup; Allenby Road's countless cafés were counting sheep; the doe-eyed street art characters protecting Florentin's bohemian fortress even seemed to droop just a tad.

At this most ungodly hour, I gathered hints to unlocking Tel Aviv's rich and resilient culture for the last time before heading off to Scandinavia in pur-

suit of happiness. Little did I know that an equally rich and similar culture awaited me on the other side of Europe.

As a young, proudly Jewish traveler with rabbinical lineage, I always make it my utmost mission to seek out at least a bite-sized rugelach of Jewish history in every city that I visit – whether that be the lively Jewish quarter in Prague or an unassuming synagogue once flooded, but never forgotten in Florence. Nonetheless, based on my preliminary

research, I was not expecting much Jewry in the coastal town of Bergen.

While Oslo houses The Center of Studies of Holocaust and Religious Minorities, and, of course, has shown notable Middle East peace efforts in the form of the Oslo Accords, Norway has a long history of Jewish resistance. Until the late 16th century, Denmark's Lutheran-based laws restricted Jewish settlement in the west, and although attitudes shifted in 1830 after Norway gained independence from its Danish sister, thereby encouraging a half-decent Jewish migration from Central and Eastern Europe, German occupation during World War II led to the handing over of almost 800 local Jews to German authorities.

And so, upon sidling through the quiet cobblestoned streets that surround Bergen Central Station, I could not pull away from the impressive display of stenciled figures locking eyes with mine. They

concealed a secret, though I had not yet understood what that secret was.

It came to me in fragments, as I passed more runners and ghost bikes than pedestrians, a culinary identity crisis consisting of equal parts Eritrean, Ethiopian, Thai and Indian cuisine and a 1:1 ratio of tattoo parlors to coffee shops. The runners took to lakes and mountain trails rather than seaside boardwalks, though they sported the same long underwear despite wildly disparate temperatures.

Deep into an evening at "No Stress," a zany cocktail bar with mismatched furniture and a "Wildely" satirical menu that may well have been written by Oscar himself, I pieced it all together. I was staring at a mirror image of Tel Aviv's Florentin area, and in doing so, I had found my rugelach of Judaism. Heck, I had found a baker's dozen, because Judaism is more than simply a religious practice, it is a cultural practice as well. For a millennial especial-

ly, gathering round the table to light candles and recite blessings every Friday is as much of a Jewish cultural practice as sipping a chili martini under a panoply of parasols. In fact, the display of hanging umbrellas bore a striking resemblance to those that currently paint a prominent White City walkway multicolor.

While I may have listened to Norwegian indie bands instead of Kabbalat Shabbat psalms and the only Jews I encountered in Bergen were a trio of American tourists at the cocktail bar, I felt a stronger sense of Jewish identity massaging my aching muscles after the steep hike up Fløyen than I had ever felt in Italy, Spain, France, the UK and North America combined – a soothing feeling that I will carry in my backpack for the rest of my time in Scandinavia, from spending Rosh Hashanah with a Jewish family in Stockholm to biking along the picturesque houses of Copenhagen. ■

