



The Hanukkah celebration in Pudong features a day of family activities that includes lighting a menorah carved out of ice (right).



'At a party like this, all cultures come together'



Traditional Hanukkah food includes doughnuts, potato pancakes and Star of David cookies.

Sam Riley

There was a menorah carved from ice, a doughnut-stuffing contest and an old Jewish soldier posing for photos when Shanghai's Jewish community celebrated one of the biggest festivals on its religious calendar.

The 2,000-strong Jewish community gathered in Pudong last Sunday for an early celebration of Hanukkah or Chanukah, which is also known as the Festival of Lights.

A major event is planned for this Sunday at the Ohel Rachel Synagogue in Puxi, which will be opened to celebrate the beginning of the eight-night festival.

Members of the Shanghai Municipal Government are expected to attend, along with many members of the community, the Israeli Consul General in Shanghai Jackie Eldan says.

Eldan says the city recently agreed to a major restoration of the synagogue, which opens a few times a year to celebrate major Jewish events.

"Hanukkah is a very merry festival and feast and it also a festival for children," he says. "So, as well as a lot of light and happiness, the children eat lots of sweets and special cakes and everyone gets fat and eats a lot. The kids have fun, there are occasions to play and it is a joyous event."

While the Jewish holiday officially starts this Sunday, the community in Pudong gathered at the Season Villa's Clubhouse a week early to celebrate before many of their members returned to their home countries for the holiday.

The festival commemorates the rededication of the Second Temple in Jerusalem after a struggle for religious freedom against the Greek Emperor Antiochus IV.

In what is known as the Maccabean Revolt, Jews rose up and defeated the much larger army of the Greek ruler who had attempted to forcefully convert them to Hellenism.

The event holds great symbolism for Jews because it ushered in a period of independence for the Jewish State that was not realized again for another 2,000 years until the formation of the modern State of Israel.

More than 140 members of Pudong's Jewish community had a day of family activities that included lighting a menorah

carved out of ice.

Lighting the menorah, a special candelabrum with nine branches, marks each night of the festival. The ninth candle is used to light the others.

The lighting commemorates the rededication of the Second Temple in Jerusalem. When it was reclaimed there was only enough consecrated olive oil to keep the candles alight for one day.

It took eight days produce the special oil required to light the menorah (then with seven branches); legend has it that the candles miraculously stayed alight until new oil was produced.

One candle is lit on each night of the holiday, progressing to eight on the final night. An extra light, a *shamash*, which in Hebrew means guard or servant, is given a special location usually higher or lower than the others.

Festival foods, such as *latkes* or potato pancakes, are traditionally fried in olive oil.

Rabbi Avraham Greenberg who leads the Chabad Jewish Center of Pudong, oversaw the festival on Sunday and said the event had a special atmosphere in Shanghai. "This festival has a special feeling in Shanghai because we have Jews from all over the world and there are Jews singing songs from Poland, Israel and America. There's a very unique feeling when you are at a party like this and you see all of these cultures coming together," he says.

Rabbi Greenberg says the tight-knit Jewish community in Pudong holds a range of regular events, from weekly and monthly dinners to mark the Sabbath to a women's circle that regularly meets for activities.

The center also runs a Hebrew school attended by 25 students; it teaches language, history and Jewish customs.

Rabbi Greenberg says the center aims to give Jews from all branches of Judaism and levels of observance a chance to come together.

Reouven Perez attended the Pudong event with his family. He says it was a good opportunity to give his two young daughters, two-month Ella and two-year-old Mia, an early introduction to the Jewish traditions he experienced in Montreal, Canada.

"This is a very important festival," he says, "and I want to expose my children to some of the traditions and memories that I grew up with."

