

[The Washington Post]

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# Travel

P

SUNDAY, JUNE 1, 2008

**COMING AND GOING** » Securing an airfare refund... A pricing mystery... Checkout shocker... Page P2

## Bugged by Bag Fee? It Could Be Worse.

*Peved about shelling out 15 bucks to check a bag on American Airlines? We're not happy about it, either, but here's the good/bad news: It's still the cheapest method of getting your bag from here to there. Here's how \$15 compares with the cost of shipping one medium-size suitcase and its contents (total weight 35 pounds) one way from downtown Washington to downtown San Francisco.*

— Elissa Leibowitz Poma

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## Inside

### SPANISH STEPS

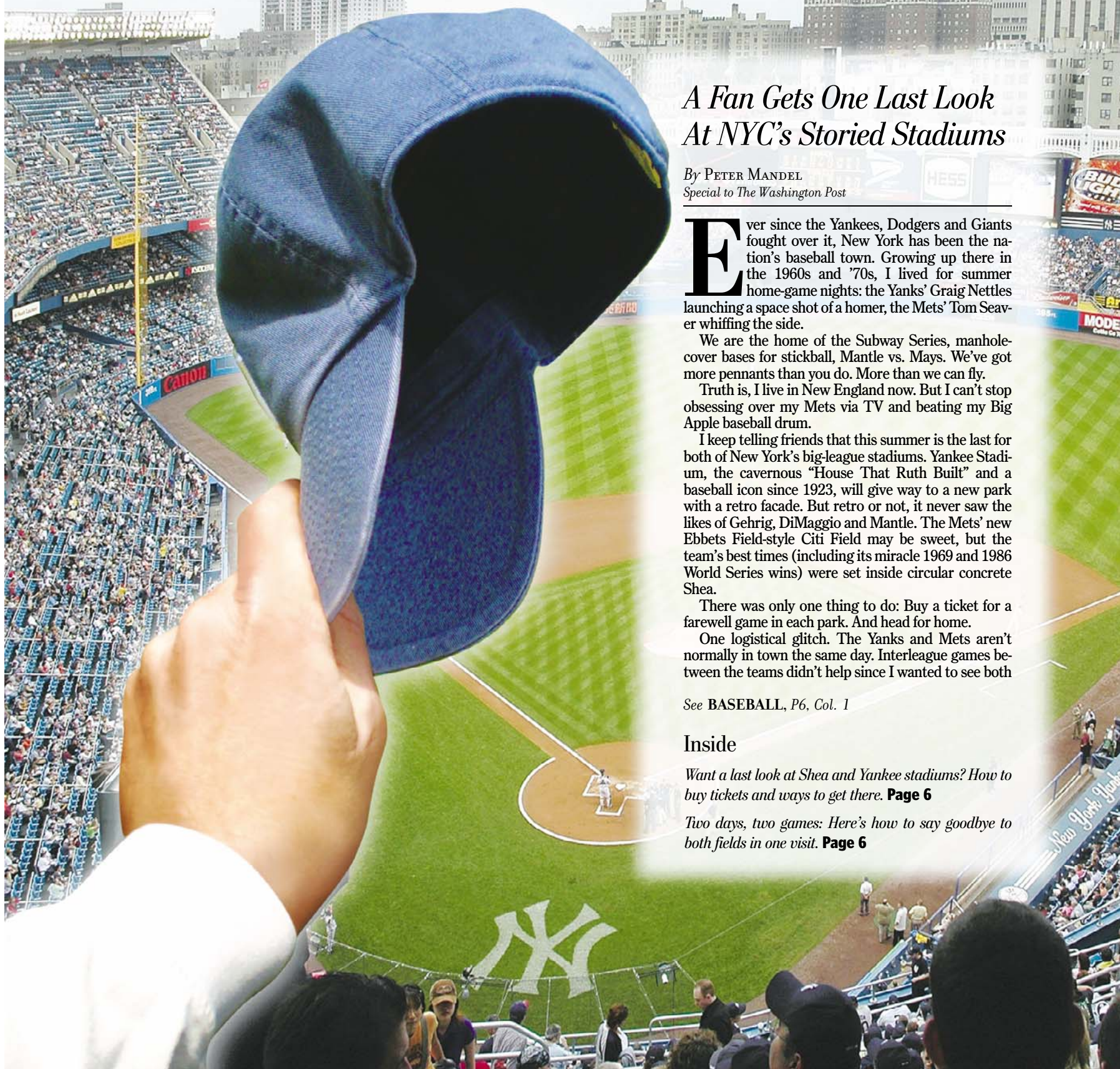
Our latest Vacation in Lights winner pays a visit to Spain. **P4**

### HELLO, KAREN

We visit a Hip Pocket outside the Kenyan capital of Nairobi. **P7**

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# Farewell, Old Friends



## A Fan Gets One Last Look At NYC's Storied Stadiums

By PETER MANDEL  
Special to The Washington Post

Ever since the Yankees, Dodgers and Giants fought over it, New York has been the nation's baseball town. Growing up there in the 1960s and '70s, I lived for summer home-game nights: the Yanks' Graig Nettles launching a space shot of a homer, the Mets' Tom Seaver whiffing the side.

We are the home of the Subway Series, manhole-cover bases for stickball, Mantle vs. Mays. We've got more pennants than you do. More than we can fly.

Truth is, I live in New England now. But I can't stop obsessing over my Mets via TV and beating my Big Apple baseball drum.

I keep telling friends that this summer is the last for both of New York's big-league stadiums. Yankee Stadium, the cavernous "House That Ruth Built" and a baseball icon since 1923, will give way to a new park with a retro facade. But retro or not, it never saw the likes of Gehrig, DiMaggio and Mantle. The Mets' new Ebbets Field-style Citi Field may be sweet, but the team's best times (including its miracle 1969 and 1986 World Series wins) were set inside circular concrete Shea.

There was only one thing to do: Buy a ticket for a farewell game in each park. And head for home.

One logistical glitch. The Yanks and Mets aren't normally in town the same day. Interleague games between the teams didn't help since I wanted to see both

See **BASEBALL**, P6, Col. 1

### Inside

Want a last look at Shea and Yankee stadiums? How to buy tickets and ways to get there. **Page 6**

Two days, two games: Here's how to say goodbye to both fields in one visit. **Page 6**

YANKEE STADIUM PHOTO BY DAVID RUDERMAN — BIGSTOCKPHOTO.COM; ILLUSTRATION BY STEVE MCCracken FOR THE WASHINGTON POST



BY MICHAEL DOUMA

## Amid the Turmoil of Israel, Guesthouses Offer Hospitality

By LISA SINGH  
Special to The Washington Post

Our hostess's exasperated voice crackled into the cellphone: "My husband will meet you at the gate." Click. For the past two hours, we'd been driving through Israel's Negev desert, on a pitch-black highway, searching for a guesthouse that had come highly recommended. But its address didn't register on our GPS, and our only landmark was a gas station, leaving us no choice but to call our hostess-to-be several times from the road. Her growing annoyance had begun to show.

Turning left at the station, we proceeded

down a narrow, unlighted road, looking for "the gate." Ahead, the road terminated at a severe metal gate illuminated by two floodlights that bathed our rental car in a stark-white glare. Peering through the windshield, we made out a compound complete with a guard's post, heightening the feeling that we'd arrived at the entrance to a prison rather than a gateway to a guesthouse.

We were about to turn around when a car appeared on the other side of the gate. The driver's-side window rolled down, an arm waved and the barrier slid open.

That was our introduction to the world of

See **ZIMMERS**, P5, Col. 2

A typical breakfast includes olives and cheeses at the Ken BaHula zimmer in the Galilee.



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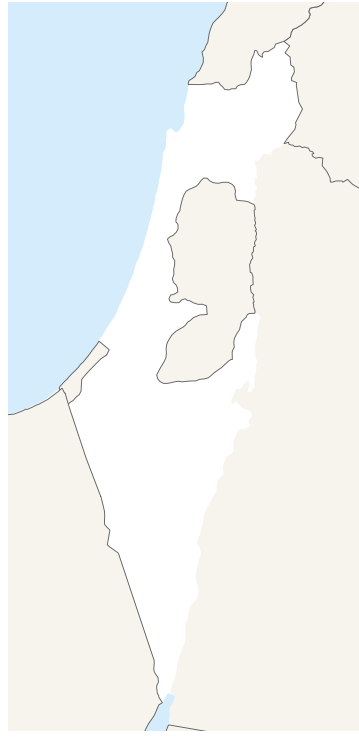
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# Zimmers Open Windows to Life in Israel



Israel's zimmers, or guesthouses, where you never know what you'll find until you show up.

Ever since a friend and I had arrived in Israel three days before, we'd been looking for something this land of flashpoints and falafel isn't exactly known for: down-home hospitality. But as Israel turns 60 this summer, something unexpected has happened: The country has quietly been shedding its image of yore — think "sabrah," the prickly desert pear after which native-born Israeli Jews are nicknamed — and brushing up on hospitality. Israel is now home to a booming cottage industry of zimmers — part bed-and-breakfast, part home stay — run by everyday Israelis. Named after the Yiddish word for "room," some zimmers are spectacular chambers in someone's house. But most of the 8,000 zimmers (pronounced "tsimmers") are rural cabins — sometimes one, sometimes multiples — built alongside the owner's main residence, with guests treated to such perks as shiatsu massage, homemade bread and jam, and Jacuzzis.

Our compound offered a fascinating glimpse into desert agriculture, but the zimmer itself was a little . . . cheesy: Fake rose petals lay scattered around the Jacuzzi, while air freshener hung heavy in the room. Meanwhile, our breakfast was awaiting us in a mini-fridge: packets of jam and butter, along with out-of-the-can tuna covered in plastic wrap and a store-bought baguette.

Had it really been worth braving a military-style checkpoint for this?

Military accoutrement, as I found on the way to another zimmer, is simply par for the course when driving around Israel. About three miles from an army base and missile batteries, a roadside sign read in Hebrew, "Naot Farm."

Surrounded by desert mountains, we drove down a gravel path. At the bottom were trailers, a dairy and pens filled with dozens of goats. Dogs barked up a storm nearby.

It hardly looked like the place for a guesthouse getaway. But nearly every weekend, several mom-and-pop farms in this central area of the Negev — scattered along a trail known as the wine route — are booked solid. In between harvesting grapes and olives and, in the case of Naot Farm, making goat cheese, these farms run zimmers.

A woman came toward us, tall and tan, her graying blond hair pulled back in a single braid. After a word or two of "Shalom," she invited us to our zimmer. "I will leave milk in your room," said Lea Nachimov, who runs the farm with her husband, Gadi. She directed us to a cabin on the other side of a hill.

The zimmer turned out to be rustic and charming, with windows through which the desert wind blew at night. In the morning, Nachimov brought us a cooler filled with fresh salad, challah and goat cheese, plus a basket with double-yoked eggs. They were labeled "self-made eggs," for us to cook on a hot plate in the cabin, then enjoy on a thatched-roofed porch overlooking timeless desert mountains.

The Negev — over half of Israel's entire area — holds a special place in the Israeli imagination. Israel's first prime minister, David Ben-Gurion, declared, "The State of Israel, to exist, must go south," and moved there. Few Israelis followed. Then, about 10 years ago, the government backed a project of farms in the region, Ramat Negev.

Nachimov said she and her family left behind a busy life in Jerusalem, where they ran a steakhouse chain, simply to realize their dream of life on a farm. "We are building, creating, producing and growing," she added. "All of us [farmers] see the Negev as home."

Gazing at the Negev's mountains, I realized that a few lone pioneers such as Nachimov had more in common with the Nabateans, Arab merchants who traversed the desert more than 2,000 years ago on their way to Mediterranean harbors, than



BY MICHAEL DOUMA

Samicha Nimer, a Druze woman who operates a guesthouse in the Galilee, pours coffee for visitors. Below, a Jacuzzi in a zimmer in the Negev desert.

with most Israelis, who have yet to settle the Negev in droves. So, where was the heart and soul of the country?

Zimmers aren't only in rural areas; many are on the outskirts of cities. After wandering Jerusalem's Old City — its ancient quarters packed with Arabs, Hassids and soldiers — we decompressed at a zimmer in Ein Kerem, a hilltop neighborhood a few miles from Jerusalem.

For the past year, Yona Sosner, a special-needs teacher, has run a zimmer in her home. The room was large and airy and a bit spartan — no Jacuzzi here — with only granola and yogurt for breakfast. But the conversation made up for the lack of amenities. Peace was on our host's mind; she said she tries to balance education with her deeply held belief in a Jewish state.

The vast majority of zimmers are run by Jews, the remaining oftentimes by Druze and, in a few cases, by Palestinian citizens of Israel such as Munir Mana. For the past two years, the 48-year-old father of three has run his zimmer, Nof Hawadi ("View of the Valley") in the lower section of his home in Abu Ghosh, an Israeli-Arab village just west of Jerusalem. When we showed up late at night, Mana answered the door in flip-flops and sweat pants, the TV in the background tuned to a European soccer match.

Mana asked about our last host. We mentioned Sosner's interest in



Jewish-Arab dialogue. Between drags of his cigarette, Mana wagged his finger: "Tomorrow you will get lecture from me . . . you are hed'you!" A nice way of saying uninformed.

What had our other hosts served for breakfast, he asked, a hint of competition in his eyes. He took another drag of his cigarette: "You want organic breakfast? Because tomorrow I will change everything! Everything!"

Sure enough, the next morning began with a generous spread of food under an arbor shielded by palm leaves, overlooking his herb garden. For a moment, my eyes rested on a dish of labane, or yogurt

cheese, on the table. Had I ever seen the dish before, asked Mana.

Yes, I said, at a previous zimmer. Wrong answer.

"But this is labane Aravi — it's from us!" he said defensively, and glided around the table. "Now, you see here," he added, "the omelets, I put in here parsley, oregano, thyme . . ." He cut off a corner with a fork: "Taste it, motek [sweetie]." Then came the tea, bursting with the flavor of mint leaves: "Please, taste it! Smell it!"

With that he waved us into our seats: "Now, begin before it will get cold!"

After breakfast, Mana came by

with Turkish coffee, fragrant with cardamom. He was ready for the lecture he'd promised the night before. For the next hour, he discussed Israel ("The dogs and the cats in Israel, the Jews respect more!"), and Gaza ("To shoot child in Gaza, you are animal!") and his family village ("You take my home, you take my land . . .").

Mana, who left a teaching career to run his zimmer, took a deep breath: "We here are the only zimmer in the area that is Arab," he said, his voice calmer, lower. "This is the first. . . Why? I want these meetings. I need these meetings."

The zimmers around Jerusalem had offered much in the way of thought-provoking conversation, but little in the way of relaxation. Weren't there any zimmers that balanced the two?

Up north, we hit gold. I knew as much the moment we arrived at a zimmer run by an architect, Uri Pelz, and his Dutch wife, Evelien. The zimmer was in Yesod HaMaala, a 125-year-old moshav, or farming community, in the northern region of Israel, otherwise known as the Galilee. Inside the log cabin, a home-baked apple cake awaited on the table ahead.

In the morning, one of the first things we heard was birds chirping outside. But nearly two years ago, it was a different story. During a war with Lebanon that lasted 34 days, the area, like much of the north, was hit by Katyusha rockets. "In this Hula, no birds were singing," said Evelien, referring to the Hula Valley, a region a short bike ride away, where migrating birds stop off on their way between Europe and Africa. (The Pelzes' zimmer is called Ken BaHula — "Nest in the Hula.")

Most zimmers in Israel — about 80 percent — are in the north; nearly all lay vacant during the war. Many residents of the area fled. But the Pelzes remained. At night, Evelien slept in a nearby shelter, while Uri, now 63, stayed behind, in the zimmer he had built a few years before. The walls, made of concrete, were the sturdiest around, he recalls, more so than those of his own bedroom next door. Besides, he added, "that's my place."

The area has since returned to relative calm, and zimmers throughout the area have rebounded. During the war, former guests of Ken BaHula sent payment in advance, for the day they could return. "Whom do you meet when you got a hotel?" asked Uri Pelz, about the ongoing appeal of zimmers. "Here, you are part of it . . . you have the connection."

What's a barbed-wire fence or two, when you can get all this?

Lisa Singh last wrote for Travel about village-hopping through rural India.



Munir Mana, one of the few Palestinians who run zimmers, feeds his guests while engaging them in political dialogue.