Episode Book

EPISODE #6082

Brazen, Not Fraudulent: Hunting Staycation Deals in Israel

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SYNOPSIS

Daniel asks how to find last-minute getaways in a famously expensive country, and wants brazen tactics as well as websites. Hilbert, who books everything for the show, joins Corn and Herman with a laminated card of rules. The leverage is in the numbers: Israeli hotel occupancy averaged 44% in the first half of 2026, with Jerusalem at 31%, Tiberias at 29% and Nazareth at 19%. Herman covers the calendar (midweek, the post-holiday lull, and a 30% election-week deal for the 27 October vote), the last-minute zimmer sites, free hotel clubs, credit-card and workers' committee rates, and reservist discounts with form 3010. Then Hilbert phones a quiet hotel in Tiberias, asks twice, asks for things before money, and asks why it's cheap.

DANIEL'S PROMPT (Summary)



Daniel

Comedic practical guide: hacks, websites and brazen haggling tactics for last-minute staycation deals in Israel

TRANSCRIPT



Corn

Welcome to My Weird Prompts. I'm Corn. Today's question is from Daniel, and it's one that every Israeli has asked out loud at some point, usually while looking at a hotel website with one eye shut. Israel is a notoriously expensive country. Are there any hacks for finding last-minute getaways and staycations here? Websites we can actually recommend, and, his words, brazen tactics for asking for deals.



Herman

Herman Poppleberry. And a note before we start, because this one is full of prices. This script was written offline, by hand, from a research pass done today, the eighteenth of October twenty twenty-six. Every deal we name was live on that day, or we'll say it's expired. Deals in this country have the life expectancy of a fruit fly, so check the date on everything.



Corn

And Daniel asked for something specific in the cast list. He wanted Hilbert in the middle of this one, not at the end.



Hilbert

Hilbert Flumingtop, producer. I've been brought out from behind the desk because I'm the one who books everything for this show. The studio, the transport, the one time we did a retreat.



Herman

The retreat in Tiberias.



Hilbert

The retreat in Tiberias, which I got for forty percent off, and which nobody has thanked me for, because the pool was closed. The pool was why it was forty percent off. That's the first lesson. There's always a reason.



Corn

Hilbert has brought a laminated card.



Hilbert

I've brought a laminated card. We'll get to the card.



Corn

Let's do the depressing bit first and quickly, because we did the full economics back in March, in the episode about why a flight to Athens costs less than a hotel in the Galilee. Herman, the thirty-second version.



Herman

Thirty seconds. Israelis pay VAT on hotel rooms, eighteen percent since January twenty twenty-five, when it went up from seventeen. Foreign tourists generally don't. So the person in the next room, with the same view and the same buffet, may be paying almost a fifth less than you, just for having a different passport.



Hilbert

I'd like that on the record as the most Israeli sentence ever said.



Herman

The exception is Eilat. Eilat is a free-trade zone and there's no VAT there, for anybody. Which is part of why Eilat behaves differently from every other resort in the country, and we'll come back to that. The second thing is that Israel has a weekend problem. Everyone wants Thursday night to Saturday night, at the same handful of places, during the same eight weeks of holidays. Hotels price for that crush.



Corn

So the trick is not to be in the crush.



Herman

Almost the whole episode is a version of that. Don't be where everyone else is, when everyone else is there.



Corn

And this is where it gets a bit more cheerful, isn't it? Because this year, the hotels are not exactly overrun.



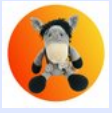
Herman

This is the most important number in the episode, and it's not a deal. It's leverage. The Israel Hotel Association published figures in July. National hotel occupancy for the first half of twenty twenty-six was forty-four percent. In the same period last year it was fifty. In twenty twenty-four it was sixty-two.



Corn

So more than half the rooms in the country were empty.



Herman

On average, yes. Foreign tourism has largely not come back since October seventh, and the war with Iran in March made it worse, with flights suspended. Israelis are still travelling at home, about seven point two million hotel nights in the first half of the year, but that was down about nine percent on last year. And the association said outright that domestic tourism can't fill the gap.



Hilbert

Which means somebody, somewhere, is sitting at a reception desk on a Tuesday, looking at a screen full of empty rooms, and that person is my best friend.



Herman

And the regional numbers are where it gets useful. Herzliya was at seventy percent. Eilat at sixty-six. The Dead Sea at forty-eight. Tel Aviv at forty. Haifa thirty-eight. Jerusalem thirty-one. Tiberias twenty-nine. And Nazareth, nineteen percent.



Corn

Nineteen.



Herman

Nineteen percent occupancy, across the first half of the year.



Hilbert

In Nazareth, you're not booking a room, you're adopting one.



Corn

So if I'm reading this right, the cheapest place to have a holiday in Israel is the place everyone else has stopped going.



Herman

Roughly, yes. Eilat is full because it was the only place left. This summer, with flights limited and Sinai off the table and the north still unsettled, Eilat had something like ninety percent occupancy, and it was the only city where occupancy improved year on year in the first half. So it's VAT-free, but it's also the one place where hotels don't need to give you anything.



Corn

And Tiberias at twenty-nine percent does.



Hilbert

Tiberias at twenty-nine percent will give you the pool. Assuming the pool is open.



Corn

Right. So, principle number one, the calendar. Herman.



Herman

The calendar is the biggest discount there is, and it's free. Three rules. One, Sunday to Thursday. Midweek is cheaper almost everywhere, and a lot of the smaller places only discount midweek. Two, the week after a holiday is dead. Everyone has just spent their money and their leave on Rosh Hashanah and Sukkot. Which, if you're listening to this today, is right now.



Corn

The great post-chagim exhale.



Herman

The great post-chagim exhale. And three, the holidays themselves are where hope goes to die. In July, the Jerusalem Post priced a Rosh Hashanah stay in advance. Herods Dead Sea, three nights, half board. Fourteen thousand seven hundred and twenty-eight shekels.



Corn

For three nights.



Herman

For three nights.



Hilbert

That's not a holiday. That's a down payment. For that, the Dead Sea should come to you.



Corn

And there's a bonus this month, isn't there? Something to do with the election.



Herman

There is, and I love it. The Knesset election is on the twenty-seventh of October, a Tuesday, and election day is a day off in Israel. The hotel chains have noticed. Fattal is running something it calls an election vacation. Thirty percent off at the NYX in Tel Aviv, for stays from Sunday the twenty-fifth of October to Sunday the first of November. Six hundred and eighty-five shekels down to four hundred and eighty a night for a couple, and four hundred and thirty-two if you're in their club.



Corn

So you vote in the morning and you're at the hotel bar by lunchtime.



Hilbert

Or you skip the bar, and watch the exit polls from a hotel bed you got at thirty percent off. I can't think of a more dignified way to watch democracy.



Herman

Do vote first, though. The polling station isn't going to come to the hotel.



Corn

Okay. So that's when. Now where, because Daniel asked specifically for websites. Herman, I believe you have the list.



Herman

I do, and I'll split it into two kinds. The zimmer sites, for cabins and bed and breakfasts, and the hotel sites. Zimmers first, because that's where the real last-minute market is in this country. A zimmer owner with an empty cabin on a Thursday afternoon is a motivated seller.



Corn

The man with the hot tub and the panic.



Herman

Exactly that man. The first site is Weekend dot co dot il. It has a page specifically for last-minute zimmers, and the rule on that page, according to the site, is that every place listed is offering at least fifteen percent off its regular price list for the night. It also has a coupons section, with midweek deals and a few student and soldier discounts.



Corn

Fifteen percent off, at least.



Herman

At least, off the list price. The second is Zimmer dot co dot il, which has a page for zimmers that are still free this coming weekend. That's literally its purpose. Prices on it started at around eight hundred shekels a night when I looked, which tells you something about what a full-price weekend costs. The third is HaPisga, which runs a last-minute section it calls the ninetieth minute, and quotes midweek prices from about six hundred and fifty shekels a night. And then there's Mako, the news site, which every week puts together a short list of five zimmers that are still free for the weekend, at reduced prices.



Hilbert

Five. Every week. Somebody at Mako rings around zimmers on a Tuesday. I'd like that job.



Corn

You already do that job. For free. For us.



Hilbert

I'd like to be paid for it.



Corn

And the hotels?



Herman

For hotels, the general advice is to go to the chain's own website before you go anywhere else, because that's where the club prices are. And most of the big chains have a club that costs nothing to join. Dan Hotels has E-DAN, which gives members an ongoing eight percent off, and joining is free. Fattal has its club, with ten percent off on top of whatever deal is running. Caesar hotels has a free VIP club that gives ten percent. Isrotel has a special offers page with discounts of ten and fifteen percent at several hotels, and money off a third night on longer stays.



Corn

So join every club.



Herman

Join every club. It takes three minutes, and it's an email address. Which brings us to the one trap I want to flag on the chain sites. When I looked at Isrotel's offers page, the prices shown were before the eighteen percent VAT that Israelis pay. That's not hidden, it's in the small print, but the number you fall in love with on the screen isn't the number on your credit card.



Hilbert

The number on the screen is the tourist price. You're not a tourist. You're the man in the next room.



Herman

And for the international sites, Kayak has last-minute pages for Tel Aviv and Jerusalem, built from recent bookings. They're useful as a sanity check. If Kayak is showing a three-star in Jerusalem for a few hundred shekels tonight, and the hotel's own website wants a thousand, something is going on.



Corn

Okay, that's the respectable half. Now the less respectable half. Hilbert, I believe you have opinions about plastic.



Hilbert

I have opinions about plastic, and paperwork. In this country, the discount isn't attached to the room. It's attached to who you are, and specifically to what's in your wallet. Exhibit one. Fattal's last-minute page, today. Twenty-five percent off at the NYX, exclusively for Isracard holders.



Corn

Exclusively for Isracard holders.



Hilbert

The hotel doesn't care who you are. It cares which bank you're with. CAL has its own vacation card, and Astral hotels accepts it for some of its deals. Max, the third card company, does its own thing. If you've got a card from all three, and I'm not saying I do, you can shop the same hotel three ways.



Herman

And people forget about work. If you work somewhere big enough to have a workers' committee, the va'ad, it very often has negotiated rates with hotel chains. Some of them are genuinely good, and nobody reads the email.



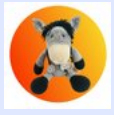
Hilbert

Nobody reads the email. The email is titled something like "updated benefits package, Q4," and it's sent at four fifty-five on a Thursday. I read the email. I'm the only person in Israel who reads the email.



Corn

And then there's the big one this year, which is reservists.



Herman

This is the largest discount category in the country right now, and it's real. After two years of very long reserve service, almost every chain has a deal for reservists, and the proof is usually form three thousand and ten, which is the army's confirmation of reserve days served. A few that were live today. Caesar hotels offers fifteen to twenty percent off for reservists who've done at least sixty days, until the end of twenty twenty-six. Prima hotels gives twenty-five percent off its full price list, fifteen at its music hotel in Eilat, when you show the form at check-in, and that's valid until the first of January twenty twenty-seven. Eshet Tours has a page of reservist deals for October, up to thirty percent off, again with a sixty-day minimum. And Fattal has thirty percent off at the NYX for reservists until the first of January.



Corn

And a lot of them have already expired.



Herman

A lot of them have. Fattal ran a free third night for reservists over the winter, which finished in March. The hotel association's twenty-four hour sale this summer, at least twenty-five percent off in about a hundred and fifty hotels, finished in July. Africa Israel and Gordonia had offers that have ended. So the thing to know isn't the deal, it's the pattern. If you've served, check every time.



Hilbert

And this is where I put my foot down, because Daniel used the word brazen, and I'd like to define it. Brazen is asking. Brazen is not faking a form three thousand and ten. If you didn't serve, you don't get the reservist rate, and the man at reception in Tiberias with the empty pool will know, because he's done sixty days of reserves himself, and he'll be very polite to you and very disappointed.



Corn

So brazen, not fraudulent.



Hilbert

It's on the card. Line one.



Corn

Go on then. Show us the card.



Hilbert

The card. Hilbert Flumingtop's rules for asking a hotel for a deal. Laminated, because I've used it in the bath.



Herman

Why are you on the phone to hotels in the bath?



Hilbert

Because that's where I'm reminded I want a better bath. Line one, brazen, not fraudulent. Line two, call the hotel. Don't book on the big booking sites. Phone the actual building.



Herman

And there's a sound reason for that. When you book a hotel through one of the big international booking sites, the hotel usually pays that site a commission on the room. So a booking that comes straight to them is worth more to them than the same booking through a third party. They often can't advertise a lower price than they show on those sites, but on the phone, nobody's advertising anything.



Hilbert

On the phone, nobody's advertising. On the phone, it's just two people and an empty room. Line three. Call late. If you want tonight, call at four in the afternoon. If you want the weekend, call on Wednesday. By then the room is either going to be sold to you, or it's going to be sold to nobody.



Corn

And what do you actually say?



Hilbert

Herman, you're reception at a hotel in Tiberias. Twenty-nine percent occupancy. It's a Tuesday.



Herman

Oh, I'm good at this. Hello, good afternoon, reception, how can I help?



Hilbert

Good afternoon. I'm looking at tonight, two adults, one night. What's the best price you can do on a room tonight?



Herman

Tonight. Let me look. For tonight we have a standard room at nine hundred and ninety shekels, with breakfast.



Hilbert

That's the price on the website. I can see the website. What's the best price you can do?



Herman

Well. I can do nine hundred.



Hilbert

Line four. The first number is the website. The second number is the real one. You always ask the second time, and you ask exactly the same way, as if you didn't hear the first.



Corn

You didn't argue at all.



Hilbert

I didn't argue. Arguing makes it personal. I'm not haggling, I'm asking what's possible, like a man who's interested in what's possible. Herman, nine hundred is very kind. Is there anything you could add at that price?



Herman

Add?



Hilbert

Line five. Ask for things, not money. A receptionist often can't move the price much, but he can move almost everything else. Breakfast, if it isn't included. A room upgrade, because the better room is also empty. Late check-out. Parking. A voucher for the spa.



Herman

I suppose, since it's quiet, I could give you a sea view at the same price.



Hilbert

And on a Saturday, I'd ask for check-out after Shabbat ends. A lot of hotels here already do a late Saturday check-out, sometimes for a fee, because so many guests can't travel until the evening. If the hotel's empty, that fee has a way of disappearing. A whole extra day by the pool, for the price of one polite question.



Corn

Again, assuming the pool's open.



Hilbert

I've learned to ask about the pool. That's line six. Ask why it's cheap. If they offer you forty percent off without being asked, there's a reason, and the reason is under construction.



Herman

You've clearly done this before.



Hilbert

Line seven. Mention the competition, and mean it. I'll say, I'm also looking at the place two doors down, and they've got a room at eight hundred. And I need that to be true, because sometimes he'll say fine, go there.



Corn

And then you've got to walk two doors down.



Hilbert

And then you walk two doors down, with your dignity and your bag.



Corn

What about the honeymoon trick? Everyone's heard of the honeymoon trick.



Hilbert

Line one, brazen, not fraudulent. If it's your anniversary, you say so. It doesn't hurt anyone to mention it, and a hotel with forty empty rooms likes having a reason to be generous. But I'm not going to tell anyone to fake a honeymoon. You will be found out, by the cake.



Herman

The cake?



Hilbert

They send a cake. Then they ask you questions. I know a man who invented a honeymoon in Eilat, and the staff were so delighted they came and sang to him at dinner, and he had to improvise a wedding. Venue, guest list, the first dance. His actual wife was furious, because she was sitting next to him, and in his version of the wedding she was the bride's aunt from Plovdiv.



Corn

That's a real person?



Hilbert

Line eight. Never ask who the man is.



Corn

Fine. Herman, does any of this actually work, or is it Hilbert's personality?



Herman

It works because of the forty-four percent. In a normal year, with tourists in every room, the receptionist has no reason to move. This year, almost everywhere outside Eilat and Herzliya, they've got rooms that are going to be empty tonight. An empty room tonight is worth nothing tomorrow. You can't sell last night's room. So anything above the cost of cleaning the room is better than nothing.



Hilbert

The room is a tomato. If they haven't sold it by tonight, it's soup.



Corn

That's very good.



Hilbert

Thank you. It's on the back of the card.



Corn

A couple more for the brave. Groups. Hilbert, you told me once you'd booked a whole floor.



Hilbert

I booked a whole floor of a guesthouse in the Galilee, for a cousin's birthday. Twelve rooms. Once you've got more than a handful of rooms, you're not a guest, you're an account. They'll talk to you differently, and they'll throw in a meal hall. So my advice is to make friends. Then book them.



Herman

The cheaper kind of accommodation is also worth a word. Kibbutz guesthouses, field schools run by the Society for the Protection of Nature, youth hostels. Simpler rooms, often in beautiful places, with a fraction of the marketing. I don't have reliable prices for those today, so check them yourself, but they're a different world from the resort hotels, and a lot of Israelis forget they exist.



Hilbert

The field school rooms are basic. I've been told the word is basic. You're not there for the room, you're there for the hike, and the fact that it's next to the sea, and that you didn't pay for a spa you weren't going to use.



Corn

And the Facebook groups? I know there are groups for this.



Herman

There are Hebrew Facebook and WhatsApp groups for deals on holidays in Israel, and they can be very good for a flash sale that shows up at nine in the morning and is gone by noon. I won't name a specific one, because they come and go and some of them are just advertising in a fake moustache. But if a deal is posted there, go to the hotel's own site, or call them, and check the price is real before you pay anything.



Hilbert

Never give your card number to a man named Shuki in a WhatsApp group. Line nine.



Corn

How many lines are on this card?



Hilbert

Eleven. Ten and eleven are about parking.



Corn

Let's leave parking. Herman, put it together for Daniel. A couple wants to get away, at short notice, without selling a kidney. What's the playbook?



Herman

Step one, pick a midweek night, and preferably a quiet week, like the one after the holidays, or around the election. Step two, pick the region with the most empty rooms, not the one everyone's posting from. This year that's somewhere like Tiberias, Jerusalem, Haifa or Nazareth, rather than Eilat. Step three, look at the last-minute pages, Weekend, Zimmer, HaPisga, the Mako list for the weekend, and the chain sites, so you know what the market price is. Step four, check your own cards. Your credit card, your workers' committee, your reserve days, and join every free club. And step five, with all that in front of you, pick up the phone.



Hilbert

And ask twice.



Herman

And ask twice. Ask for things before you ask for money, and ask why it's cheap before you say yes.



Corn

What I like about this is that none of it requires being a different kind of person. Except the phone call, which requires being Hilbert.



Hilbert

Anybody can be me for four minutes. It's being me for the rest of the day that's the work.



Corn

Before we go, does anybody want to correct anything? This is usually where Hilbert does it.



Hilbert

Just the one. Right at the start, Herman said the tourist in the next room pays almost a fifth less than you. He doesn't. The VAT is eighteen percent on top of the tourist's price, so the tourist pays about fifteen percent less than you. Not a fifth.



Herman

I did the sum the wrong way round.



Hilbert

You did it the wrong way round with great confidence.



Herman

It's still fifteen percent, Hilbert. It's still the most Israeli sentence ever said.



Corn

Fair. If you take one thing from this, it's that the empty room is the most perishable thing in a hotel, and this year there are a lot of them. You don't need a secret website. You need a Tuesday, a phone, and the nerve to ask a second time.



Herman

And check the date on every deal, including the ones in this episode.



Hilbert

And check the pool.



Corn

Thanks to Hilbert Flumingtop for producing this one, and for the card.



Hilbert

You can't keep the card.



Corn

This has been My Weird Prompts. If you're on Telegram, the channel has every new episode.



Herman

See you soon.