



# Love letter to The Farmhouse – Bat Shlomo

• By LAUREN GUMPORT

Full back in love with Israel at a luxury boutique hotel stay atop a vineyard.

What do you get when you mix a serial entrepreneur and investor with a deep love for his country? The Farmhouse at Bat Shlomo Vineyards, which happens to be your next must-see luxe destination, less than an hour outside of Tel Aviv. It will have you wondering if you're even in Israel at all.

Founded by Elie Wurtman, co-founder and managing partner at PICO Venture Partners, The Farmhouse – Bat Shlomo captures his deep pride for Israel, from the land to the food to the art to the wine. In fact in 2010, Wurtman partnered with the Napa Valley winemaker, Ari Erle, to found the new Bat Shlomo Vineyards, replanting the fields with his children and community, to revive the ethos of Baron Edmond de Rothschild: Work the land, be connected to it, prosper.

## Home away from home

Located on the southern slopes of Mount Carmel, near Zichron Ya'akov, the historic Bat Shlomo moshav's cobblestoned main street is reminiscent of a different time. That stone carries over to The Farmhouse, dripping in romance as it brings to life understated luxury, offering



THE WRITER in The Farmhouse – Bat Shlomo wine garden. (Lauren Gumport)

guests a multi-sensory set of experiences.

The interior is an ode to the more refined, elegant side of the country (a rarity). Works from artists including Mosh Kashi, Nitzan Mintz, Gal Weinstein, and Ella Lit-twitz adorn the walls, while ceramics and sculptures from local creators are placed carefully throughout. The property's handful of rooms (five of which you can book separately or all at once if you're

traveling as a big group) are outfitted in commissioned art and photography by Israel's best creatives, all of which complement Wurtman's goal of translating the pioneering values of the country into contemporary times.

There are a handful of stylish rooms to choose from, each with a waterfall shower and cozy reading nooks. A one-night stay midweek starting in September will cost you a minimum of NIS



THE POOL AND exterior of The Farmhouse – Bat Shlomo. (The Farmhouse – Bat Shlomo)

2,500 a night (\$658), including breakfast. For the weekend, it's a two-night minimum, which can come to NIS 5,000 (\$1,315), including breakfast. Go for The master suite, the largest of the rooms at NIS 3,500 a night (\$920), features a charming private outdoor area, perfect for your morning coffee. It's worth it.

You will find yourself so at home at The Farmhouse that you won't even feel the need to lock your door. The property's approachable warmth shines through, not just in the design but in the staff who clearly share Wurtman's devotion and passion for bringing to life a different type of stay that cannot be found anywhere else in the country.

When you do step outside your suite to enjoy the property, you will discover a plethora of activities to relish in.

The outdoor infinity pool is a show-stopper. Sit poolside sipping on Bat Shlomo rosé as you take in your surroundings. And when you're done getting some sun, enjoy hiking, horseback riding, bicycling, pilates, yoga, or even head out on an off roading Jeep tour.

## Food and wine

Of course, not to be missed is the food and wine. A huge part of your stay at The Farmhouse is spent indulging in the best of both that the country has to offer. And head chef Daniel Misan does no favors for your waistline with tempting seasonal dishes that bring their farm-to-table concept to life. You'll notice the mouthwatering aromas wafting through the property from the moment you arrive.

Book the exclusive, private chef's dinner in the dining room by Misan and his team in which Bat Shlomo Vineyards' wines are expertly paired with the freshest local ingredients, crafting a multi-course tasting menu that celebrates the flavors of land and sea. You'll savor fresh fish, local cheeses, and vegetables from their organic farm, concluding with a decadent dessert that will have you reaching for your most comfortable sweatpants.

Each menu can be tailored to your preferences and represents exactly what The Farmhouse stands for: Reap the rewards of the land you tend to.

## Slice of heaven

If you're not able to snag a room (they are getting booked up quickly), you've still got options to come for a visit.

Whether staying at The Farmhouse or visiting, book a wine tasting that begins with a stroll along the historic main street overlooking the vineyards, organic garden, Hurshan nature reserve, and the Dalya River. Then, head to the tasting room to savor Bat Shlomo's white, rosé, and red wines paired with local bread, cheeses, fresh vegetables, and appetizers. Throughout the experience, you'll learn about The Farmhouse's history, the winemaking process, and what makes Bat Shlomo

wines unique.

If you're lucky, Vadim Tron, general manager and sommelier, will be the one hosting you. The winery is kosher and doesn't operate on Shabbat. Book a stay via the website, at +97254-2651889 or by email: wine@batshlomo.com.

In addition, The Farmhouse has begun to host boutique events at its newly opened wine garden behind the property. You can head there for evenings of vino and oven-baked pizza, surrounded by lush greenery and colorful bougainvillea. Follow the property on Instagram at @the\_farmhouse\_batshlomo.

## The magic of Bat Shlomo

It only takes one new experience, or meeting one new person, such as Wurtman (whose devotion to Israel is intoxicating), to reignite your passion for this country, its people, and the history and strength upon which it was built. I hope you enjoy the magic of The Farmhouse – Bat Shlomo as much as I did and walk away with a sense of optimism for the future of the nation.

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## Flowering poison

• Photos and text by ITSIIK MAROM

The big brown is here. Summer in Israel means harsh life for living things – including plants. Most plants are now dry and coloring the “big brown” with even more brown, while other plants are in survival mode.

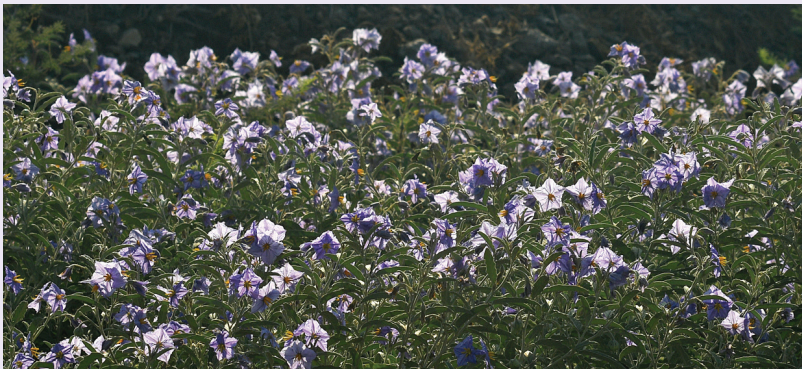
Not to be boring or mundane, nature has a variety of solutions to every condition and every type of weather. Sometimes nature is even unintentionally helped along by humans in the form of invasive species unknowingly being brought by air, sea, and land, from far away countries.

The Silverleaf Nightshade (*Solanum Zitani* in Hebrew) was brought to Israel from America as seeds in imported cattle food. The Silverleaf grows in large groups mostly in agricultural lands creating big patches that produce plenty of flowers.

The Silverleaf flowers can be seen from far because they have colorful purple petals and long yellow stamens full of pollen. They are beautiful flowers, attractive and inviting to both smell and touch. But don't.

This invasive plant is poisonous and toxic to livestock. The toxic ingredients are found in all parts of the plant, including the innocent looking flowers. The poisonous elements are concentrated mainly in the round fruits of the Silverleaf Nightshade.

The ripe fruits can be eaten by bats and birds without harm. However, for us humans, eating parts of the plant can prove very harmful, and can even be fatal. So, with your safety in mind, when you encounter a patch of the pretty Silverleaf, look but don't touch.



## No need to say ‘Open Sesame,’ the smartphone will do it for you



### HOTELS

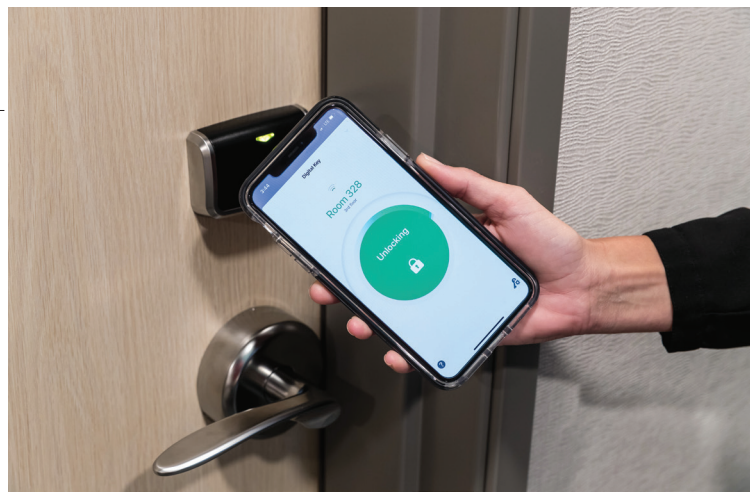
• BY MOTTI VERES

More and more consumers are enjoying the benefit of using their mobile phone to make contactless payments, leaving their wallets and credit cards at home. Paying for goods and services by simply getting the smartphone close to a contactless card reader, became a daily convenient routine all around the globe. Our mobile phones are now a key factor in almost every move we make in our daily routine. Even during the pandemic it was the gate to show authorities we got the necessary vaccines. Nowadays we present our purchased tickets to movies, theater, shows and concerts via our devices. In most airports our flight tickets are presented digitally at the terminal gate with our paper passports. Traveling became convenient and simple.

Hotels are now taking the extra step to join this convenient technology to pass reception and walk straight to the guest room. “Hotels mobile check-in achieves four objectives,” explains Max Starkov, an American Travel & Hospitality Tech consultant and adjunct Prof. of Hospitality Technology at New York University. “It provides contactless experience preferred by the majority of today's customers. It significantly reduces the number of front desk personnel needed to check-in guests. It optimizes the utilization of housekeeping staff and it allows hotels to generate, in an automated fashion, additional revenues via cross-sells services.”

As part of this technological journey the concept of using a mobile phone to unlock a hotel room door gets positive vibes. Although this option has been in existence for several years, nowadays it has become extremely trendy in the world of hospitality. While it's easy to misplace a traditional keycard, one rarely loses their mobile phone. Promising more security will always be popular, while non-sustainable plastic key cards are on a path to become obsolete in the modern lodging industry. Offering fewer key cards saves hotels money, cuts down on plastic use and, when used properly, saves travelers time.

While this technology is indeed fascinating, its implementation presents certain challenges. “Mobile key adoption is still relatively low in the hotel industry



A SMARTPHONE OPENS a hotel guest room door. (2024 Hilton)

outside of major brands,” says Jordan Hollander, cofounder of HotelTechReport.com, a hospitality technology leader. “The low adoption rate is a byproduct of two issues: Mobile keys could historically only be deployed via a mobile app and hotels have historically only been able to offer mobile key when upgrading expensive lock hardware. Both of these barriers have been broken down in the last couple of years which we believe will lead to this technology becoming ubiquitous across most midscale hotels globally in the next five years. Independent hotel app download rates have historically been extremely low, but now solutions like Tel Aviv-based Duve enable hotels to deliver mobile keys within a web app with no download required, which drives adoption rates amongst guests higher,” reveals Hollander.

DUVE IS apparently a leader in the field and the company developed a system for managing a personalized guest experience for hotels, including opening digitally the guest room door. Childhood friends David Mazuman and Jeremy Atlan led a vacation apartment management company in Tel Aviv in 2016. The two teamed up with technology talent Shai Bar in favor of the development of the unique technology. “Nowadays our comprehensive hospitality technology is implemented in thousands of hotels around the globe and we are a certified supplier of middle east hotels associated with IHG, the Intercontinental group and Accor mega brand. But we are proud to lead a change here in Israel” says Atlan, Duve cofounder.

Global brands like Marriott and Hilton have been offering mobile keys for quite some time, but their guests in Israel face a

challenge. The legal procedure in the country is to manually check Passports upon arrival at the hotel in order to monitor who needs to add VAT for the hotel services. Tourists are exempt from this additional charge that locals must pay.

Visitors holding both Israeli and foreign passports must also pay this tax. A stamp for that specific purpose is marked in passports in the border control stations. So far, only humans in most hotels handle this procedure and not technology, which led to a delay in smartphone keys implementation and the resulting skipping reception queues.

The number of tourists visiting Israel since October 7th dropped dramatically and the issue sounds out of context to some. But a change to overcome this obstacle is making its way even nowadays thanks to Duve, justifying Israel's reputation as a “start-up nation.”

Surprisingly numerous Israeli brands are the front runners. Fattal hotels, the biggest in Israel with 63 properties – 41 active and 22 in building stages – is a brand set to adopt Duve's digital key challenge in some of its hotels. “Guests who booked online have an option to pre-check-in through “Fattal welcome” guest app, or check-in when arriving at the hotels through a designated human-less kiosk. Our customers are requested to scan a QR code and enjoy an option to receive a plastic key or to download a designated app to their smartphone which leads to transforming their phone into a digital key,” says Gil Einy, head of the company's Information Technology Systems. “The technology allows tourists to scan their passports and enjoy the zero vat benefit without physically meeting a reception employee. The system already functions in 12 of

our hotels, but is currently operational in Herod's Eilat, Hotel Botanica Haifa, Leonardo Plaza Tiberias Hotel. I believe that in the near future the rest of the hotels will also offer smartphone digital keys,” he says.

AFRICA ISRAEL Hotels that operate four properties under the Vert brand and 2 urban hotels in Tel Aviv under the Poli name are another Israeli group that adopted Duve creativity. “Guests are offered to scan a QR code appearing on a tent card on the reception counter and download the relevant app to their phones in order to complete their human-less check in and open the guest room door with their device,” says Alexandra Eliyahu, the group Digital Marketing Manager. “Non-Israeli tourists that scanned their passport as part of the process enjoy hassle-free check-in and enjoy a rate without VAT. However, during the war we increased security and tourists do have to show their passport physically to a reception employee. Our statistics indicate that more than half of the guests choose the smartphone key option and this is thanks to an instant marketing campaign aimed directly to customers that booked online. Our Tel Aviv-based global brands hotels, Crowne Plaza and Indigo will join during 2025,” she explains.

“Duve has recently advanced to totally skip passport scanning by creating an interface with Israel's immigration authority. Duve can identify online if the tourist is exempted from paying the VAT in the hotel after he arrived physically in Israel. Our hotel customers will be offered to upgrade their systems accordingly,” says Atlan. “But the biggest challenge is expected next year when technology will allow hotel guests to order a key card directly with Apple Pay and Google Wallet, just like paying in a local supermarket. This will be the real revolution,” he reveals.

The phrase “open sesame” is derived from the magical words used by Ali Baba in the Arabic folk tales *One Thousand and One Nights* to open a sealed cave door. Over the years it became synonymous with successfully achieving results and this guest management platform certainly is on the right track. Will Israeli Duve technology market leader succeed in paving the way for all Israel's hotels with smartphone keys? Time will tell.

•The writer is the Travel Flash Tips publisher