

(dispatches)

EZUZ, ISRAEL
BUS STOP

The arid stretch of Israel's Negev Desert bordering Egypt looks more like a moonscape than a vacation destination. There are no sprawling resorts or trendy restaurants, only miles of sand and stars. British filmmaker Nick Breakspear—on hiatus from filming *Valerie's Orchard*, a Holocaust survival story, nearby—is staying in a hotel room that doesn't even have a key. In fact, it's not even a room. It's a bus.

Breakspear's digs are part of Exodia, a "bus and breakfast" dreamed up by former scuba instructor Eyal Hirschfeld. Upon retiring, Hirschfeld collected three vehicles—a Tel Aviv city bus, a concertina-style "bendy" bus and a wide-bodied airport shuttle—and outfitted each with hot water, a kitchenette and a full bathroom. The larger buses, which can sleep a family, even have playrooms

built around the original steering wheels. Locals, says Hirschfeld, have welcomed the fleet and have even adapted shipping containers and railroad cars for their own similarly recycled digs. "It's all rather bizarre," he admits.

The resort was successful enough to spark a mini tourism industry in Ezuz. The tiny village, which has produced wine for 2,000 years, now offers an outdoor café, archeological expeditions and camel tours.

Back at the bus, Breakspear befriends geckos that reside in the buses' thatched roofs and even tries his hand at milking the Hirschfeld goats. "I'm not sure what the nannies think of it, but the human kids thought my sad attempt was hilarious," he says. Meanwhile, off in his own bus, Hirschfeld dreams of adding the ultimate suite: a double-decker London Roadmaster.

—CHRISTINE H. O'TOOLE



SANTHIA, ITALY
Plot Twist



As is often the case in Piedmont, the Ferraris family farm looks as it did a century ago. Around the central courtyard lean patched-up stucco buildings topped with russet tiles, and in the garden, bamboo poles support tomato

plants while cabbages spread their ruffled leaves. But this organic, GMO-free farm is far from a throwback to Nonna's garden plot. It's a modern enterprise that manages to blend video games with community-supported agriculture—much like a real-world FarmVille.

"The idea we started with was to put together traditional agricultural techniques with innovation and the web," says Giovanni Ferraris, one of three siblings who started *Le Verdure del Mio Orto* (The Vegetables from My Garden) on their family's 60-year-old farm in 2009. Just as in the popular Facebook game and iPhone app, customers sign up at a colorful, cartoony website, choose the size of their plot and click to fill it with any combination of 39 varieties of fruits and vegetables. But unlike the game, everything here is actually planted, harvested and delivered to mainly urban customers. "We wanted to satisfy all those people who are sick and tired of perfect, polished and tasteless vegetables," Ferraris says.

Right now, the family is tending 50 individual plots for customers who pay around \$25 a week to have their produce cultivated and delivered. Orto offers insurance, so if a summer thunderstorm wipes out the week's harvest, customers receive produce from other farms. For an extra fee, subscribers can add herbs or flowers to the delivery, or (this being Italy) accessories to the garden. A mere \$26, for instance, buys a wooden sign; for just \$53, the Ferraris family will erect a scarecrow customized with your photo to stand guard over your plot.

—SARA CLEMENCE

