

The Melting Pot

What's happening in Israel



Talking heads
Photo by Anatoli Michaelo

#Pop Culture Israel

by Brian Schaefer

1 R.I.P. On September 18, Israel bid farewell to one of its cultural icons, Haim Hefer, who died at the age of 86, was a prolific songwriter who penned the Israeli songbook that defined a new nation and gave voice to Israel's emerging identity. "Over the course of a career that lasted more than six decades, he wrote for everyone who was anyone," wrote Asher Schechter in Haaretz. "It is hard to even imagine a universe without Hefer. If he hadn't lived, we'd have almost nothing of Israeli culture...as we know it today."

2 Sports Here in Israel, baseball never really caught on. The country actually has only one playable baseball field. But that's not stopping Israel from being one of 12 new teams competing in the 2013 World Baseball Classic, an effort of the Major League Baseball organization to grow internationally. Only three players on the Israeli team are Israeli-born and raised, reports YNet. The 25 others are Jewish Americans playing in the minor leagues. "As long as they are eligible for Israeli citizenship, they are allowed to play for Israel."

3 Film "Fill the Void," a film about love and obligation in the ultra-Orthodox world, by director Rama Burshtein, recently swept the Ophir Awards (Israel's version of the Oscars), winning Best Picture as well as Best Director, Screenplay, and Actress – securing it as Israel's submission for this year's Academy Award for Best Foreign Language film.

Local language

Use this guide to Hebrew slang often and wisely...and you may just get fed/laid/safely home, etc etc.

Whether you want to impress the gorgeous Israeli girl at the bar or show your annoying cab driver that you understand more than he thinks, use these key words not otherwise taught in Hebrew school. (But take note, most of these words have dual and even quadruple meanings depending on how they are expressed and in which context they are given.) Your next lesson? Lose the accent and add some aggressive hand gestures.

Al HaPanim (al-ha-panim)
Literally: 'on the face' – means, awful.

Achia (ach-la) Great!
Achi (a-chi) Dude, bro
Basa (ba-sa) Bummer, lame
Barur (ba-rur) Of course
Capara (ca-para) someone you would do anything for, babe, friend

Chaval al Hazman (chaval-al-ha-zman) Literally: a waste of time. Figuratively: amazing. (Just for confusion, this phrase may also in fact be used literally).

Chatich (cha-tich) A total hottie (male)

Gever (ge-ver) Man
Gadol (ga-dol) Huge, awesome

Sababa (sa-ba-ba) Chill, cool
Ars (ars) In Arabic, a pimp.

In Hebrew, it's a hoodlum of the Middle Eastern variety. Think of the guy you saw barbecuing meat in the park with heavy gold chains, an ounce of gel in his hair and Middle Eastern music blaring from his car radio.

Frecha (fre-cha) The female version of the 'Ars'. The Israeli cousin of the American 'skank,' aka Jersey Shore cast members.

Kusit (ku-sit) A hot piece (female). This is a surprisingly acceptable variation on the slang term for a woman's unspeakable.

Balagan (ba-la-gan)
A mess. This can describe your finances, hotel room, your relationship with your girlfriend or Israel's politics.

bles, which we won't speak about here...

Mastool (mas-tool) Stoned, drunk or just generally dazed and confused.

Sof Haderech (sof-ha-derech) Literally: end of the road. Means, absolutely fantastic!
Walla (walla) Really? Seriously?

Combina (kom-bina)

More than a good deal. Using all of your connections, creativity and chutzpa to make something happen.

Ein Matzav (ein-ma-zav)

It's not gonna happen, no way

Yalla (yalla) Let's go!

Magniv (mag-niv) Cool

Tachles (tach-les) Word

Zorem (zo-rem) It's flowing,

cool

Neshama (ne-shama) soul, beloved one

Lapanim (la-panim) literally:

to the face, something good

Satlan (sat-lan) A stoner,

hippie

Tarimi (ta-ri-mi) (gay slang)

literally: lift it up, to show off.

Sachi (sa-chi) preppie

Ganoov (ga-noov) crazy,

flipped out

Tambol (tam-bal) dumb,

acting funny

*(ch denotes the guttural Hebrew letter chet)

OVERHEARD "It's not a question of celebration or criticism – it's a window into this world," Ultra-Orthodox director Rama Burshtein

What to Expect When You're in Israel

For first-time visitors, and maybe even those who have been to Israel before (but are still dumbfounded), this sliver of land and its people undoubtedly leave a lasting impression. Some things are a bit backwards, others majorly progressive, and some just downright inexplicable unless you experience them first hand. *Time Out's* writers did you a favor and gathered their finest local anecdotes, wisdom and tips for making your Israeli experience as authentic as possible



ISRAELI HOSPITALITY

When invited to Shabbat dinner or the like, almost nothing is expected of guests, especially if you're a tourist. If you offer to help make the coffee or clean up afterwards, you will be instantly waved away. Also, there's a strong focus on family life. The country is small enough that family members are never too far away. Regular family gatherings for weekend Shabbat dinners or lunches are common across the board. Since everything is so inherently familial in Israel, it doesn't take much to instantly feel at home here, even with people you just met on the beach.



IT'S A SMALL ISRAEL

Yes, Israel is a sliver of a country, but for the 7.8 million people who call it home, it feels even teensier. Most daily outings consist of running into three or more familiar faces, and Israelis have a tendency of finding other Israelis in some of the most remote places in the world.

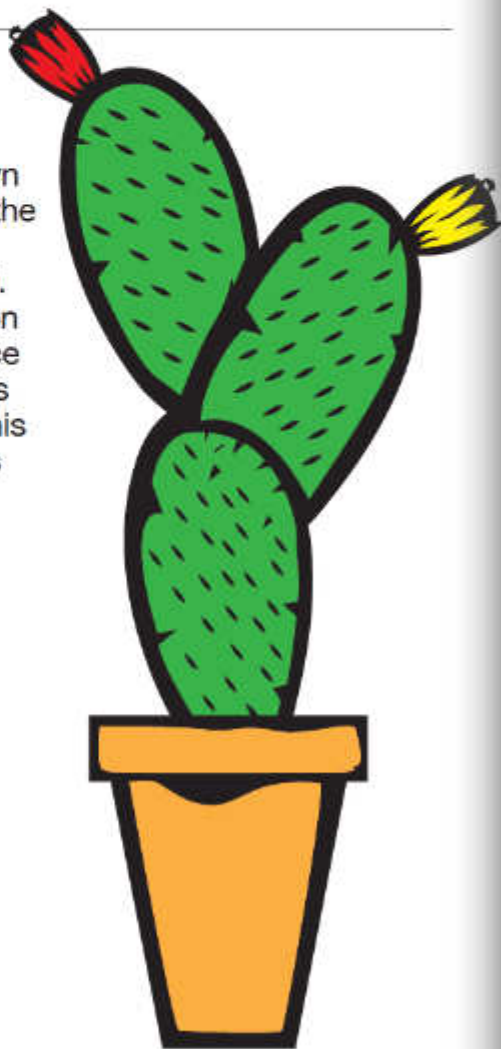
PRICKLY PEAR

Israelis born in the country are affectionately known as *tzabras*, after the prickly *sabras* fruit that grows on cacti. The fruit is thorny on the outside but once opened, its inside is sweet and tasty. This known analogy has stuck for good reason.



FLAMING LIPS

Locals are all about talking. Whether it's the produce available in the *shuk*, the deal you got on your couch or how much your rent costs, there is no boundary uncrossed by the sheer nature of being Israeli. What could be considered invasive is the norm here, so speak up. Everyone is doing it.





BREAKFAST FOR DINNER

The Israeli breakfast is one of the ultimate staples in Israel, and so adored that it's ordered at all times of day in any cafe worth its salt. Go for an authentic Tunisian dish known as shakshuka (spicy tomato sauce and peppers topped with eggs). Add a chopped Israeli salad, and you've got yourself a no-hassle, very Israeli meal. Go egg for dinner at Benedict (171 Ben Yehuda St, Tel Aviv) or Dr. Shakshuka (3 Beit Eshel St, Jaffa)

HONK HONK

In Israel, drivers are generally aggressive, so don't take offense. Israelis are famous for expressing their disapproval and on the road they freely show their dissatisfaction at the choices made by fellow motorists through the use of their horn. Here, a honk is essentially the highway's finger-wag. That old lady driving too slowly? Pass her and blare your horn as you speed by. Guy forgot to signal? Honk, loud and proud.



EAT JACHNUN ON SATURDAYS

You've likely heard of cholent, that overnight-simmering bean and meat stew eaten on Shabbat, but how about jachnun? This traditional Yemenite Jewish food is a buttery dough rolled up and slowly baked overnight, then served with hardboiled eggs, grated tomato and a spicy Yemenite sauce called schug. Gobble some yourself at Jachnun Bar (28 Hillel St, Jerusalem) or Jachnun Shel Ima (47 Allenby St, Tel Aviv)



HUMMUS WARS

Discourses on hummus can be as heated as those on the policies of Bibi Netanyahu. From the desired softness of the whole chickpea, to the creaminess to the amount of tahini added, everyone has an opinion on who does it best. For a taste of the frontrunners: Abu Hassan (1 Ha'Dolphin St, Jaffa), Pinati (13 King George St, Jerusalem) and HaHalil (6 Kehilat Detroit St, Ramle)



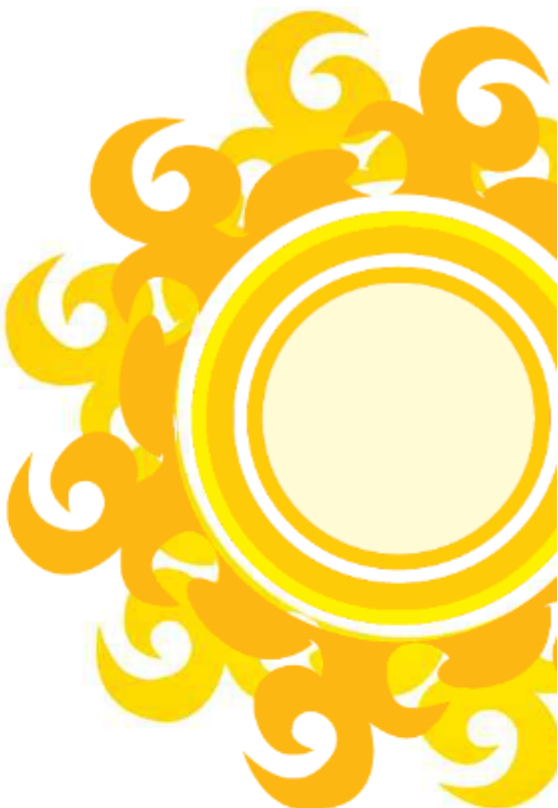
LINE UP? BAH!

Israelis are not very good at queuing. As in – they simply don't. Even when there is a 'take a number' machine at every local post office. Even when there are thoughtfully displayed boundary lines in front of every bank teller. People cut in line as a rule (assuming there is a line and not just a mob of people) and "I got here first" gets you nothing except perhaps an argument (see the aforementioned 'disagreements').



'LAST CALL' DOESN'T EXIST

Bars in Israel don't stop til you do. Tel Aviv's nightlife is off the hook, from cozy bars to brazen nightclubs. The Minzar (60 Allenby St) is always open, as is Brasserie (70 Ibn Gevrol St). On weekends, head to the Block Club (35 Salame St) for underground sounds 'til sunrise.



300 DAYS OF SUMMER

For all its conflicts, nothing comes close to the peace one can find while walking Israel's coastline, revelling in its 300 annual days of sunshine. With nearly 200 km of beaches sprawling from north to south, Israel's 8.5 million annual beach-goers are a testament to just how essential the Mediterranean is to Israelis. After all, at the time of establishing a Jewish State, Theodore Herzl was in talks with Great Britain in settling for land in Uganda as a temporary refuge! So drink in the sunshine and enjoy the coast like a local – ice coffee in one hand and a matkot paddle in the other.



DATING

Contrary to other places in the world, Israelis fly by the seat of their pants. That is, don't be surprised if you get a call to meet up in an hour for drinks. The collective spontaneity that reigns in Israel is both exciting and inexplicable. Just go with it. And expect to pay Dutch.

GOIN' STEADY

The Talk? It doesn't happen here. There is a sort of 'unspoken understanding' that if you've made it to a 3rd date, you're an item. Which is good (as long as everyone is on the same page) and bad (if you aren't). So here is fair warning. If you aren't in it to win it, let him or her know after the second date. Don't string the poor sucker along.



NESTING

Moving in Israel is expensive. So it regularly happens that couples join housing forces and start nesting sooner than later, whether it's a good idea or not. Did we mention this place is expensive? 'Nuff said.

MEN, WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW:

On the surface, women here are strong with seemingly endless confidence. But they are also fragile and live for attention. Dole out a compliment, buy her a drink and let her talk a bit. But don't be too easy to please from the start. This type of chick will eat you alive. In Tel Aviv, in particular, even the air is sexy and if it's true that body language accounts for 90% of the messages we put out into the world, then Israeli chicks are all about hooking up. But there is one very big exception: she has to be interested first. So if she's playing a staring game while suggestively dancing to the latest Eyal Golan hit, then she wants you to make the first move.



WOMEN, WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW:

Don't be surprised if Israeli men come off a tad too strong. Like the Italian Guido, the Israeli male set on the prowl has no problem undressing you with their eyes, and telling you exactly what they think. This is a double-edged sword, ladies. They are straightforward, but they need to be put in their place. Israeli guys love confidence. After all, Israel is a place full of strong opinions and personalities – and we all are attracted to what we know. So don't be shy to speak your mind. These guys have an army instinct imbedded in their DNA. For independent women, this can come off as chauvinistic. There is no ill will on his part. He was born to protect you, so let him.

WEDDINGS

If you haven't yet been to an Israeli wedding, try to get yourself invited to one. It isn't a difficult task considering most couples invite nearly everyone they know, and barely ask for strict RSVPs. The numbers usually hover around 300 guests, but can top 800, and the abundance of drink, food, and pure, unbridled joy is simply not to be missed.



JEANS TO A WEDDING? ANYTHING GOES

The rumors are true – it is not uncommon for folks, men especially, to don a "nice" pair of denim to a wedding. But what's with the profusion of mini-dresses, mini-skirts, and five inch heels found at Israeli weddings – often on the bride herself? This is impressively accomplished via convertible dresses: long and modest during the ceremony, the new Missus need only undertake a bit of unsnapping and BAM, her bridal gown becomes a bridal mini-dress and she's ready for serious dancing.



Wedding gifts = Cash money Forget all about high-end espresso machines. Here, the way of the land is cash money. Forgot a card? No worries, envelopes are provided. Just slip those shekels inside and you're good to go.

COMMUNICATION

Israelis are on their phones anywhere, anytime. At a meeting or lunch, an Israeli may take calls, but don't take it as rudeness or arrogance. It's just how things are.

FRANKLY, DARLING

Need an honest opinion while trying on a dress at Castro? Want to know if that tzimmer (Israeli bed & breakfast) is worth the money? Not sure if he/she is just not that into you? Ask a local. Israelis will tell you exactly what they think. But beware you may just get more than you bargained for.



WORD OF MOUTH

Israel is a small country and word of mouth goes far around here. In this sense, many become addicted to recommendations from their "trusted sources" and, simply put, banish the thought of walking into an unknown or unvetted restaurant. Many will even take this a step farther and insist on only ordering dishes others have given their seal of approval to. Don't be shocked if you recommend a place to someone and they demand to know exactly what you ate, or if they call you up a few nights later from the restaurant, requesting you remind them of what "was good" so they can order it, too. Some of our recommendations? Topolino (62 Agripas St, Jerusalem) for authentic Italian, MachneYuda (10 Bet Yaakov St, Jerusalem, reservations required) for high-end "shuk" food, and Shila (182 Ben Yehuda St, Tel Aviv) for tapas.



TOUCHY FEELY

Israelis are an extremely warm breed. Handshakes feel foreign here. Big bear hugs, huge kisses on the cheeks, strong eye contact and an overall sense of affection, on the other hand, can be regularly seen on the streets when running into friends, when meeting for coffee dates, etc. This is a very touchy-feely society. Even male friends offer up full body hugs and call each other 'motek' (honey in Hebrew). This camaraderie is prevalent across the board and is one of the Israeli people's most distinctive and lovable traits.



DISAGREEMENTS

Arguing is a national pastime and is not considered to be confrontational; just a form of healthy debate. Ever hear the saying, "If you have three Jews in a room, you have four opinions"? Well, now you'll get to experience it first hand.

PARENTING

How different is it being a parent in Tel Aviv than in, say, Toronto? One finds out early. Within a couple of days of signing the Ketubah, you'll hear the musical refrain 'Nu, t'ase yeled kvar!' (i.e., So when are you having a kid?). Everyone asks. And if you think that procreating gets you off the hook, think again. 'Nu, t'ase od yeled!' (i.e., Your child needs a sibling. Get on that stat!)



CHILD REARING 101

Talking about community: You know that old saying, "It takes a village to raise a child"? Well, Israel is that village. And sometimes, it seems that every one of its 8 million inhabitants has an opinion. The baby is overdressed, underdressed, can't breathe in the baby sling...don't be surprised if you overhear a mother being told, "that's not the way you breastfeed...look, let me show you."

