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BY SOPHIA STUART FEBRUARY 28, 2017 06:57PM EST 1 COMMENT

While in NYC, I found two tech-savvy hotels, CitizenM and Yotel, and split my time between them.

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On a recent trip to Manhattan, I couldn't decide where to stay. I was in town for a week, which is too long to impose on friends. Having lived there for seven years, I knew the city was phenomenally expensive. But after all the legal scuffles between the city and Airbnb, paying to crash at a stranger's pad just didn't feel as cool or safe an option as it once did. I locked through the listings, but everything in my price range was either miles outside the city or looked super scary.

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Then I remembered I'd had a similar issue when booking a trip to Silicon Valley, and found a very reasonably priced boutique hotel chain called aloft. It's a younger offshoot of the Starwood group and is part of a growing trend of hotels fighting back against Airbnb with a tech-centric stay: work/sleep mini lofts with basic kitchen facilities, pervasive Wi-Fi, lounge areas with communal seating setups, and a NASDAQ ticker tape feed above the elevator bays, so you can check your startup's valuation before heading to a meeting on Sand Hill Road. (We tried out its "emoji room service" back in 2015.)

For my New York stay, I found two similarly tech-savvy hotels—CitizenM (above) and Yotel—and decided to split my time between them.

CitizenM

CitizenM is conveniently located on E 50th Street near Times Square. But my first thought was, is this a hotel or a cafe? Because there's no check-in desk, just a small set of screens to the left of a communal dining table situated near comfortable squishy sofas, bookcases with color-coded Penguin paperbacks, contemporary graphic art on the walls, and chic baristas.

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There are friendly people to assist, but only if you need them. Otherwise, it's pretty much self service; tap, swipe, and select a room, and your room key is discharged.



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CitizenM started in The Netherlands and, as you might expect, is serious about smart design, energy efficiency, its global carbon footprint, forward-thinking technology, and a futuristic feel. The brand is aimed at "the type who crosses continents the way others cross streets" to quote their press kit; in other words, the same global nomad Airbnb wants to attract.

So what are the rooms like? In a word: clever. Tiny but brilliantly put together, the bed is large and stretches horizontally from one wall to the other, but it's not claustrophobic. The bathroom is encased inside an ergonomic plastic pod, which also acts as a light source. The room is dominated by a flat screen entirely controlled from an iPad with several fun pre-sets, including movie night (lights power down, blackout blind slides into place, multiple movie choices appear; two free per day), and a rosier glow and subtle background ambient audio in case you're not traveling alone (ahem).

What's not included? No snacks, no mini bar, no coffee machine, no room service, no turn-down or shoe shine. But if you need to iron your shirts, there's a communal ironing room, which is a nice touch for the weary road warrior.

The best part? The wake-up pre-set. I set an alarm for 6 a.m. and when that time arrived, the blinds cranked up, revealing the Manhattan skyline, while sunny light settings came on via an automatic dimmer control (which helped, as it was dark, cold, and snowing outside), and a soft female voice gently counted down via the multi-room hidden speakers; a delightful audio/visual alarm clock.

Yotel



Like, CitizenM, Yotel aims to meet the needs of the new international traveler, but it's imaginatively inspired by Tokyo Pop airport design.

Created by Simon Woodroffe (who brought sushi carousel restaurant chain YO! to London in 1997) and Gerard Greene, it's the airline cabin lifestyle writ large. In fact, Woodroffe's latest venture is Yo! Home, bringing Japanese style dwellings to highly populated urban areas.

At Yotel, the airline motif is carried throughout from Ground Control (lobby) self-service check-in terminals to Mission Control (concierge floor and communal areas on the fourth floor) and right into the cabins themselves. If you're a fan of napping inside zero-gravity pods in Asian airports, or envied Bruce Willis' suspended animation setup in *The Fifth Element*, you'll enjoy Yotel. It does the Hotel of the Future concept very well, right down to the robot called YOBOT, which deftly tackles luggage storage and retrieval.



The rooms are super efficient: beds retract into sofas with trays hidden in the flexible frame. A built-in, well-appointed writing surface with a 60s-era plastic chair is all you need. Pin-prick reading lights on moveable arms provide enough illumination, and there are power outlets everywhere, most notably in Yotel's signature "techno wall" centered around a flat-screen TV.

The hallways are designed like a spaceship with purple lettering on glowing white LED room signs. Vending machines on each floor offer necessities like chocolate, condoms, and chargers.

Again, like CitizenM, the rooms are purely functional sleep and shower spaces, so guests are encouraged to head to the main floor for communal eating, lounging, and business interconnectedness activities.





In the morning, PCMag had coffee with Claes Landberg, General Manager New York, who came to the Yotel brand four years ago. Originally from Sweden, Landberg has spent 20 years in the hotel business, with prior experience in Las Vegas, Atlantic City, and New York, at MGM Resorts International, Caesars Entertainment, and Hilton group.



"Today's society is very different and time is a big commodity," he told PCMag. "Yotel is about the future, putting the guest first, giving them a little more freedom and more control, for example, with the self-service check-in, that takes 90 seconds, so they don't have to stand in line."

Landberg pointed out that Yotel's efficient design is not retro-fitting. "There are a lot of hotels in this city with small rooms, but they try to fit all the traditional hotel furniture into them. We've specifically designed the cabins for the footprint, drawing on our inspiration from the airline world. Luxury travel with design for smart use.



"We like to be tech-forward here, starting with our super-speed Wi-Fi, to enhance the guest experience," said Landberg. "We want to make it possible for you to use your own device, and not have to use ours. There will be even more power outlets in the new cabins, as well as more USB, for international travelers. And, soon, you'll be able to use HDMI transmitters, Bluetooth, or Wi-Fi to directly stream movies from your own device to the newer, smarter, TVs in our cabins."



For the geek traveler, Yotel is definitely a reasonably priced hotel, mainly because it automated much of its services, but also because it's quite far west on 10th Avenue. However, Yotel has street cred, due to the number of people who stay there during Comic Con.

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As I posted shots of my Yotel stay on Instagram, the artist known as [Dub Williams](#) commented with a story about his brush with a geek icon on his last visit: "It's close to Javits, so I stayed there a few nights for NY Comic Con with a buddy who had gotten a room. Anyway, in the lobby I was on my way into the elevator and Stan Lee was coming out. I looked down at him and my jaw dropped, he looked up at me, chuckled and smiled, shook my hand and went on his way before I could stammer out a word."



With affordable rooms (for Manhattan, anyway, about \$200-\$300 per night), a tech focus, and the possibility of a Stan Lee sighting, hotels like CitizenM and Yotel are encroaching on Airbnb's territory in 2017. Not many Airbnb hosts have robots, after all.