

New York's best new hotels

Wondering where to stay in the Big Apple? Fiona Duncan reviews the city's newly opened and recently revamped hotels.

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Dazed? Confused? Anyone trying to choose a hotel in Manhattan these days has every right to be. An unprecedented wave of recent openings has meant that picking what's good, and avoiding what's not, has never been trickier.



The Crosby Street Hotel is decorated with real flair, down to the smallest detail

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Around 5,500 new hotel rooms became available in 2009, with another 6,800 on schedule to open in 32 properties across the city this year. Though not every new hotel makes waves, many open with a buzz of anticipation and a fanfare of publicity, each one a self-proclaimed marvel, the place New York has been waiting for. But is it?

Pity the poor hoteliers. Their projects were largely conceived before the recession took hold and many have been born with more difficulty than they care to admit. Finally unleashed, each new hotel does its best to dazzle – and then the next new place opens and the spotlight moves on. Some will grow in reputation and stature; others, more run of the mill, will fade from view.

So which are New York's latest talked-about openings and do they live up to the hype? Are the costly revamps of old favourites a success? And which of the city's less expensive still hotels cut it? I went to investigate.

Prices given here are those quoted by the hotels, per night, without breakfast unless stated. However, in most cases much more favourable rates are likely to be available. Hotels are arranged north to south (see map overleaf).

THE MARK, UPPER EAST SIDE

Here is a famous old hotel, superbly located between Central Park and Madison, that's so in love with its new design that it seems to stifle the people inside it. In a red leather-bound book called *Assets*, I am gushingly informed that The Mark "has been transformed into a building of legend, whose public spaces will be as celebrated as its private ones and where it already seems great luminaries must have lived for years".

I'm not so sure. Though the names involved are all stellar, headed by charismatic general manager James Sherwin, formerly of The Carlyle, I wonder how much of a real mark the revamped Mark is making. Paris-based designer Jacques Granges, in his first hotel, is responsible for the hugely hyped, seriously expensive interior, which includes jewel-like Art Deco-style bathrooms. Yet, for all its startling originality (stunning black-and-white striped marble floor, specially designed furniture, beautiful central pendant lamp by Ron Arad) the glacial emptiness of the lobby and somewhat strained staff made me long to leave the great luminaries to their own devices and make for the warm embrace of the new Crosby Street hotel (see below).

However, the imminent opening of the bar and restaurant, under the aegis of New York darling Jean-Georges Vongerichten, may well make a dramatic improvement; without them the hotel feels only half born.

- 25 East 77th Street (001 212 744 4300; www.themarkhotel.com (<http://www.themarkhotel.com>)) Doubles from £511 per night.

THE SURREY, UPPER EAST SIDE

Around the (very smart) block from The Mark, The Surrey has also reopened with a fresh look, this time courtesy of a Texan designer who wanted to reflect the hotel's Twenties origins and create "traditional luxury with a modern twist". For me, however, it wasn't the rather odd, ephemeral design that held the appeal, but the beds. This is one of only five hotels in the United States to supply its lucky guests with Duxiana beds (retail price around £6,000) that mould to the contours of the body. Result: like floating on a cloud. A roof-top garden will open in the spring. Helpful, professional staff.

- 20 East 76th Street (212 288 3700; www.thesurrey.com (<http://www.thesurrey.com>)) Doubles from £527.

THE PIERRE, UPPER EAST SIDE

Named after its French founder, The Pierre has exuded European elegance and high-society manners since the Thirties and its current owners, Taj Hotels, have just lavished more than £60 million on its sympathetic refurbishment. On the ground floor, including the famous murals of the Rotunda, another British import: Le Caprice. The New York branch has a ravishing black-and-white interior and a familiar menu, though the clientele,

here an older, more patrician crowd, is not the same as in London.

- 2 East 61st Street (212 838 8000; www.tajhotels.com (<http://www.tajhotels.com>)) Doubles from £554.

INK48 HOTEL, MIDTOWN

People flocked here for the special introductory rates, slashed to half price; whether they'll flock quite so fast when the rates return to normal remains to be seen. The Hell's Kitchen location, west of the theatre district, is a turn-off as far as visitors are concerned, though it's quick to reach by cab along the fast riverside roads. Why Ink48? The hotel stands at 48th Street on the site of an old print works. Owned by Kimpton Hotels, it has particularly well-equipped, if standardised, bedrooms with fine river views.

- 653 11th Avenue at 48th Street (212 757 0088; www.ink48.com (<http://www.ink48.com>)) Doubles from £232.

THE STRAND, MIDTOWN

Sleek new hotel in a sleek new building, just opened off Fifth Avenue in the Garment District, featuring vintage fashion photographs from the archive of Condé Nast, complimentary copies of fashion bible *WWD* and a fabulous roof-top bar. Try for a room facing the Empire State Building. A good mid-price, Midtown choice.

- 33 West 37th Street (212 448 1024; www.thestrandnyc.com (<http://www.thestrandnyc.com>)) Doubles from £179, including breakfast.

ACE HOTEL, MIDTOWN

If action is what you want, plus the coolest hotel staff in town, then look no further than this new mid-price address. The location, dubbed NoMad, is a little offbeat for visitors but fast regenerating, and the feel inside the huge-pillared, shabby chic (more shabby than chic) hotel lobby – a popular hang-out – is redolent of New York 40 years ago, although now the beatniks are hunched over laptops rather than notebooks. The buzz spills over to the adjoining Breslin gastropub, a new showcase for the talents of British chef April Bloomfield. Staff are friendly, laid-back and dress how they want; a guy in a pork pie hat showed me to my room. The Ace used to be a grimy, long-stay hotel whose past has not, by the feel of it, been entirely eradicated, with dark, brick-walled rooms. About half have full-sized retro fridges as minibars, as well as Epiphone guitars, should you care to jam. Quirky, but it works.

- 20 West 29th Street (212 679 2222; www.acehotel.com (<http://www.acehotel.com>)) Doubles from £135.

THE MAVE, MIDTOWN

In a turn-of-the-20th-century building with original staircase, the MAve (named for Madison Avenue) nevertheless feels more practical than stylish, with small, neat rooms (showers only) and a cramped lobby. Good location in the Flatiron District.

- 62 Madison Avenue (212 532 7373; www.themavehotel.com (<http://www.themavehotel.com>)) Doubles from £154, including breakfast.

THE STANDARD, MEATPACKING DISTRICT

There are positives (the views and the comparatively kind prices) but negatives, too, at celebrity hotelier André

Balaz's latest address, an imposing new building that straddles the Highline, an elevated former freight line turned verdant public walkway. The ceiling-to-floor windows of the hotel's 337 bedrooms present a depressing sight for people strolling along the Highline (backs of curtains and televisions), while guests in the rooms may want to keep the curtains closed to avoid exposure, which is a shame because the views (as far as the Statue of Liberty in one direction) are electrifying. Lobby and sitting room are in typically uncanny designer mode, and the 18th-floor lounge and bar, with an amazing 360-degree panorama, is only available from 4pm to 9pm, when it becomes a nightclub.

- 848 Washington Street (212 645 4646; www.standardhotels.com (<http://www.standardhotels.com>)) Doubles from £120.

THE JANE, WEST VILLAGE

If it's history you want, then head for the Jane, built as a seamen's hotel, where surviving crew of the Titanic held a memorial service four days after the sinking. Until its resurgence as a hip hotel with faux-vintage interior, it had become seedy. Some of the former staff, including elderly bellhops, have stayed on, giving the place an air of authenticity. As well as small double rooms, there are minute cabins for solo travellers, with shared bathrooms. Interesting, but perhaps not for the faint-hearted.

- 112 Jane Street (212 924 6700; www.thejanenyc.com (<http://www.thejanenyc.com>)) Doubles from £155.

CROSBY STREET HOTEL, SOHO

This is the first international venture of Tim and Kit Kemp, owners of London-based Firmdale Hotels. If you like them, you will adore Crosby Street. Firmdale's hotels (notably Soho, Charlotte Street, Haymarket, Covent Garden) aren't just stylishly designed; Kit has personally decorated them, with real flair, down to the smallest detail. Underpinned by a remarkable collection of artworks, her classic yet contemporary spaces are also boldly coloured, eclectic, playful and executed to the highest standards.

Kit started out designing hotels in traditional country house style and while her flights of fancy and colour schemes have become more daring, her belief that interiors should also be reassuring, user-friendly and comfortable has never deserted her.

Set in a striking, purpose-designed building on the site of a former car park, Crosby Street has floor-to-ceiling windows in each of its 86 bedrooms. Step into the lobby, and a Jaume Plensa steel sculpture of a human head makes an arresting centrepiece, as do Justine Smith's charming *Beano* covered life-size dogs. To left and right are the Crosby Bar, for all-day food and drinks, and a guest-only drawing room that packs a decorative punch. Downstairs there's a cinema with orange Poltrona Frau chairs and violet wool walls.

Service, during my stay, was top notch (as it should be at these prices): prompt, kind, easy-going and professional (senior staff come from Firmdale's London hotels). Breakfast was excellent and in the evenings the bar was buzzing. This is New York's best new hotel, set to be a classic – and it's British.

- 79 Crosby Street (212 226 6400; www.crosbystreethotel.com (<http://www.crosbystreethotel.com>)) Doubles from £306.

THE BEST ON A BUDGET

Hotel Chelsea, Chelsea

More than a hotel, a New York cultural landmark. It's still gritty, but you'll certainly have some stories to tell.

- 222 West 23rd Street (001 212 243 3700; www.hotelchelsea.com (<http://www.hotelchelsea.com>)) Doubles from £80.

Chelsea Lodge, Chelsea

Elegant and homely European-style town house hotel in a fine brownstone on a tucked away block.

- 318 West 20th Street (212 243 4499; www.chelsealodge.com (<http://www.chelsealodge.com>)) Doubles from £80.

Washington Square, Greenwich Village

Try for a park view room in this low-key hotel that's like time travelling back to Thirties Paris.

- 103 Waverly Place (212 777 9515; www.washingtonsquarehotel.com (<http://www.washingtonsquarehotel.com>)) Doubles from £119.

Pod, Midtown East

Hip, hi-tech and convenient for the stylish but budget-conscious traveller.

- 230 East 51st Street (212 355 0300; www.thepodhotel.com (<http://www.thepodhotel.com>)) Doubles from £67.

Cosmopolitan, Tribeca

Fresh, pristine rooms, if small, in a refurbished classic 1845 railway hotel in a hip location.

- 95 West Broadway (212 566 1900; www.cosmohotel.com (<http://www.cosmohotel.com>)) Doubles from £86.

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