

Copyright 2002 Plain Dealer (Cleveland, Ohio)

March 24, 2002

BARGAINER'S SONG: NEW YORK, NEW YORK, MY KIND OF PRICE

Lisa Mullenneaux

New York - DO YOU REALLY need to spend \$250 a night for a bed in the city that never sleeps? These days, hotel bargains and promotional rates in New York are as plentiful as pigeons in Central Park. You can find terrific savings on hotel rooms, as well as on theater tickets, tours and restaurants.

You may choose to stay in a landmark hotel on Central Park West, a Greenwich Village bed-and-breakfast, an East Side designer hotel, and even a furnished apartment for less than \$150 a night, in some cases much less.

Here are some tips that will ensure you get the best deal:

When you have narrowed the field of choices to three or four hotels, check the hotel's rates on its Web site. They may be lower than what the reservations desk is quoting. Also, check hotel consolidators, such as [priceline.com](http://priceline.com) and [quikbook.com](http://quikbook.com).

When you call reservations, either to book or to confirm your booking, negotiate for the best bed size, view, amenities and price. Do you want a minifridge or microwave oven? Many hotels provide them at no extra cost.

A few hotels offer free local calls; otherwise, use your cell phone or buy a phone card unless you want to faint from shock at checkout.

Remember to add the 13.25 percent state and city taxes, plus a \$2-per-night occupancy charge, which means that a quoted rate of \$105 per night really is \$120.91.

Midtown Manhattan has the largest number of hotels convenient to the Theater District, Empire State Building, Rockefeller Center and the Museum of Modern Art. Midtown covers the area from Madison Square Garden at West 34th Street north to Central Park at 59th Street.

Apple Core Hotels (800-567-7720) owns five properties with standard rooms starting at \$89.99. Each serves a continental breakfast and provides guest services such as Internet access, exercise equipment, business centers and voice mail. Opened in June 2000, the Red Roof Inn is its best, a 17-story office building converted into a stylish, but functional, budget hotel. Other choices include the newly renovated Super 8 Hotel Times Square, the Best Western Manhattan, the Comfort Inn Midtown and the Quality Hotel East Side.

Gloria and Al Milner operate a bed-and-breakfast, the Broadway Inn (800-826-6300) at 264 West 46th St. Its living room-lobby is an oasis removed from the crush of theatergoers and traffic noise. Stretch out on a couch, read the dailies and chat with the young staff. Breakfast is on cafe tables in the lobby, where you're encouraged to sign the guest book and help yourself to a book from the library. Forty-one rooms start at \$99. "We will gladly upgrade guests to better rooms at the same rate when we can," said Gloria Milner.

South on Eighth Avenue in Greenwich Village is another cozy guesthouse designed to charm even the most jaded road warrior. Incentra Village House (212-206-0007) has 10 studio apartments (nine with working fireplaces) and two suites in adjoining red brick townhouses. Each room has a private bath, kitchenette, TV, phone and a doorbell attached to the main entrance. The Garden Suite has its own outdoor patio. At night, it's common to gather in the Victorian parlor, where someone might be playing the 1930 baby grand. Because of heavy demand, book as far ahead as possible and expect to pay for three nights on weekends. Singles start at \$119, doubles at \$169.

#### History in Greenwich Village

Most of Greenwich Village is landmarked for historic preservation, and its hotels are awash in legends about famous guests before they got famous. The Washington Square Hotel (800-222-0418, for example, is where Joan Baez and Bob Dylan hung out when they weren't jamming with other '60s folk singers in Washington Square. Though rates have more than doubled since those jam sessions, this art deco hotel offers a taste of the gracious past for \$126 single, \$148 double.

The Larchmont (212-989-9333), another Greenwich Village favorite, has 58 rooms, all with shared baths, in a beaux arts brownstone on residential West 11th Street. Rooms are bright and homey with no-frills rattan furniture, but there are amenities here one wouldn't expect. Bathrobes and slippers, extra pillows and blankets, a bellman, kitchenettes on each floor and continental breakfast are all part of the package. Singles start at \$70, doubles at \$90.

Another Euro-style hotel on East 17th Street near Stuyvesant Park offers bargain rates for those willing to share a bathroom. Hotel 17 (212-475-2845) has singles starting at \$55, doubles at \$60 in a well-maintained, 19th-century brownstone. Be prepared to pay with cash or traveler's checks and to use a pay phone in the lobby.

#### Boutique beauties

In New York, "boutique" hotels usually are small and fashionable. Their rates usually reflect an upscale clientele, but not always. The Marcel (888-664-6835) has the same elegant appeal of much higher-priced properties on the East Side, but its \$109 rate is a steal. Extras include room service from Spread restaurant, continental breakfast, turn-down service and meeting space. Guest rooms are small, but classy, with contemporary art, custom-designed furniture, climate control, marble bathrooms, Belgian linens, and picture windows. Look for works by famous Marceles - DuChamp and Proust - throughout the hotel.

Towering over the Queensborough Bridge at East 59th Street, the Bentley (888-664-6835), named for the luxury car, is tall, sleek and expensive-looking. Like the Marcel, it welcomes guests into a serene lobby with leather couches, floral bouquets, a mahogany-paneled library and instant-cappuccino machine. And like the Marcel, it rents a standard double for \$109. The doubles, and the junior suites that start at \$199, feature a cream-black-brown color scheme, phones with voice mail and data ports, marble bathrooms and lots of mirrors. The Bentley provides room service and continental breakfast, which is served in a glass-enclosed restaurant on the 21st floor. You can sip coffee and eat your bagels with a 360-degree view.

The Bentley's twin on Manhattan's West Side might be Astor on the Park (212-866-1880), which faces Central Park between 106th and 107th streets. Expect a hip, minimalist decor in the lobby and guest rooms and a courteous, professional staff. This boutique hotel lacks the amenities of the Marcel and Bentley - no room service, cable TV, or voice mail - but you'll sleep peacefully in queen-sized beds. Rooms have soothing mint green walls, with modern walnut and ash furniture. The hotel serves a continental breakfast. Currently, a standard double is \$99.

#### Budgets and hostels

If you can't book a trendy berth and still want to be on the Upper West Side, don't despair.

There's the Comfort Inn at Central Park West and 71st Street with doubles for \$99 (877-727-5236), the Hotel Belleclaire at 77th Street with shared-bath rooms for \$99 and private-bath rooms for \$139 (877-468-3522), the Hotel Newton at Broadway and 95th Street with singles for \$85 (888-468-3558), and the Milburn at 76th Street with studios for \$119 (800-833-9622). Two older hotels in this desirable neighborhood offer huge rooms (by New York standards), kitchenettes, and reasonable rates. Neither the Beacon (212-787-1100) nor the Hotel Olcott (212-877-4200) will win any design awards, but you can save serious bucks by cooking in your room. Studios start at \$840 a week; suites, which can sleep a family of five, start at \$980. Overnight rates range from \$130-\$155.

New York also offers clean, comfortable hostels and YMCAs in almost every neighborhood. The Y's are noted for their fitness facilities, the hostels for their social activities. The West Side YMCA (800-348-9622) is better maintained than many of the city's budget hotels and swamps a visitor with services. The concierge can arrange your airport pickup or a tour, and you can order dinner at the International Cafe after working out at the health club. Shared bathrooms start at \$85, private bathrooms at \$120.

No one could remain hostile to hostels after staying at Jazz on the Park (212-932-1600), named for its location on Duke Ellington Boulevard and Central Park West. It's a perfect place for young singles to connect with other young singles without the smoky bar scene. You can hear jazz musicians or a DJ in the downstairs lounge, enjoy summer barbecues on the outdoor terrace, and see free tapings of the "Ricki Lake Show." Bunk beds in dorms cost \$27 a night, a private room with shared bath costs \$68.

Close by, Hostelling International-New York (800-909-4776) is the world's largest hostel with 624 beds, a communal kitchen, concierge, Internet kiosk, coin-operated laundry, gift shop, rec room, coffee bar, cafeteria, and private garden. Its location on 103rd Street may be a drawback, but this hostel offers more conveniences than most midtown hotels. Dorm bed rates start at \$28, rooms with private bath at \$135.

In Harlem, the Urban Jem House (212-831-6029) is in a safe neighborhood that, like most of this area, has risen from the dead. Jane Alex Mendelson opened this B&B in her brownstone three years ago and is host to Columbia University alumni, scholars and jazz musicians. She rents two rooms with shared bath for \$90, two rooms with private bath for \$105.

If you're planning to stay long term and need someplace to hang your hat while you apartment hunt, consider a residence or university housing.

On the Upper East Side, the De Hirsch Residence at the 92nd Street YM-YWHA (212-415-5650) rents singles for \$1,045 monthly, doubles for \$725-\$845 per person with shared baths and communal kitchens.

The Penington Friends House (212-673-1730) is also coed and has the advantage of a location near Union Square on 14th Street.

The Salvation Army (212-677-6200) runs several women-only residences at very low rates that include two meals a day.

For a minimum one-month stay, you can rent a room (\$562-\$718) or apartment (\$1,126-\$1,543) at International House on Riverside Drive near Columbia University (212-316-8436). There are over 700 accommodations to choose from and use of a cafeteria, pub, laundry, gym, and daily social events.

New Yorker Lisa Mullenneaux is author of a new guidebook, "Sleep Cheap in New York: High-Quality Lodgings at Rock-Bottom Rates," (Penington Press; \$15.95, paperback).