

# citizenM Hotels Take Time Square

By Jenna Intersimone





There was a time when luxury travel was defined by white Egyptian cotton sheets, accented, suited concierge personnel and martinis delivered to your door. However, in the era of technology, efficiency and mobility, those standards seem archaic and obsolete, especially to a generation of chic, modernistic young professionals.

citizenM, an Amsterdam-based hotel chain that stands for "citizen mobility," thought so too. Catering to cutting-edge and on-the-go business travelers who love their luxury and technology yet like to keep their wallets full, citizenM aims to democratize the high-life by providing extravagant and tech-cool accommodations to their hotels.

Accompanying their five European locations in Amsterdam, Rotterdam, Glasgow, London and Paris, a new 230-room location in Times Square, New York City has made its debut on March 18, making it the first American citizenM of more to come. Another NYC hotel is planned for the Bowery on the Lower East Side in 2016.

However, there was no stereotypical ribbon cutting in Times Square on March 18. Instead, citizenM's grand opening included parking a black stretch limo outside some of the top five-star hotels of Manhattan including Trump International Hotel, the Grand Hyatt and The Plaza. Inscribed upon the vehicle read, "Luxury is free WiFi and XL beds, not a stupidly long car."

"Luxury today is not about material things but efficiency and emotion," Robin Chadha, chief marketing officer of citizenM, said in an interview with Elaine Glusac of The New York Times. "We took out things that used to frustrate us, like long lines at check-in."

It's taking out these high-overhead hidden amenities, such as room service and concierge check-in, which allows citizenM to stay cost-efficient while remaining a state-of-the-art, modern hotel. With bookings starting at \$199, the New York City newbie is equipped with tons of cool perks such as a rooftop bar, canteenM, the 24-hour grab-and-go open-style cafeteria and bar, complimentary iMac usage on the Mezzanine, and 24-hour check-in and check-out kiosks.

According to their website, the very today-business traveler who appreciates these types of



customized, modernistic yet affordable luxuries is "a smart new breed of international traveler, the type who crosses continents the way others cross streets. This includes the weekenders, the suits, fashion baggers and affair havers. The explorers, adventurers and dreamers. Those who travel the world with big hearts and wide eyes. Those who are independent, yet united by a love of the five continents. Those in search of business, shopping or art. In short, everyone who is a mobile citizen of the world. Most likely, that also means you."

The European style and feel of the hotel chain was brought over the Atlantic along with their international clientele – the lobby, designed to serve as the central point of the hotel, resonates as a large, over-sized living room – friendly, inviting, and human. However, similar to many European homes, the living room is one of the few attributes that are over-sized as the rooms remain a bit smaller than the typical American hotel room, (with the prices to match) yet every inch is used wisely. This is evident from the wall-to-wall windows as well as the



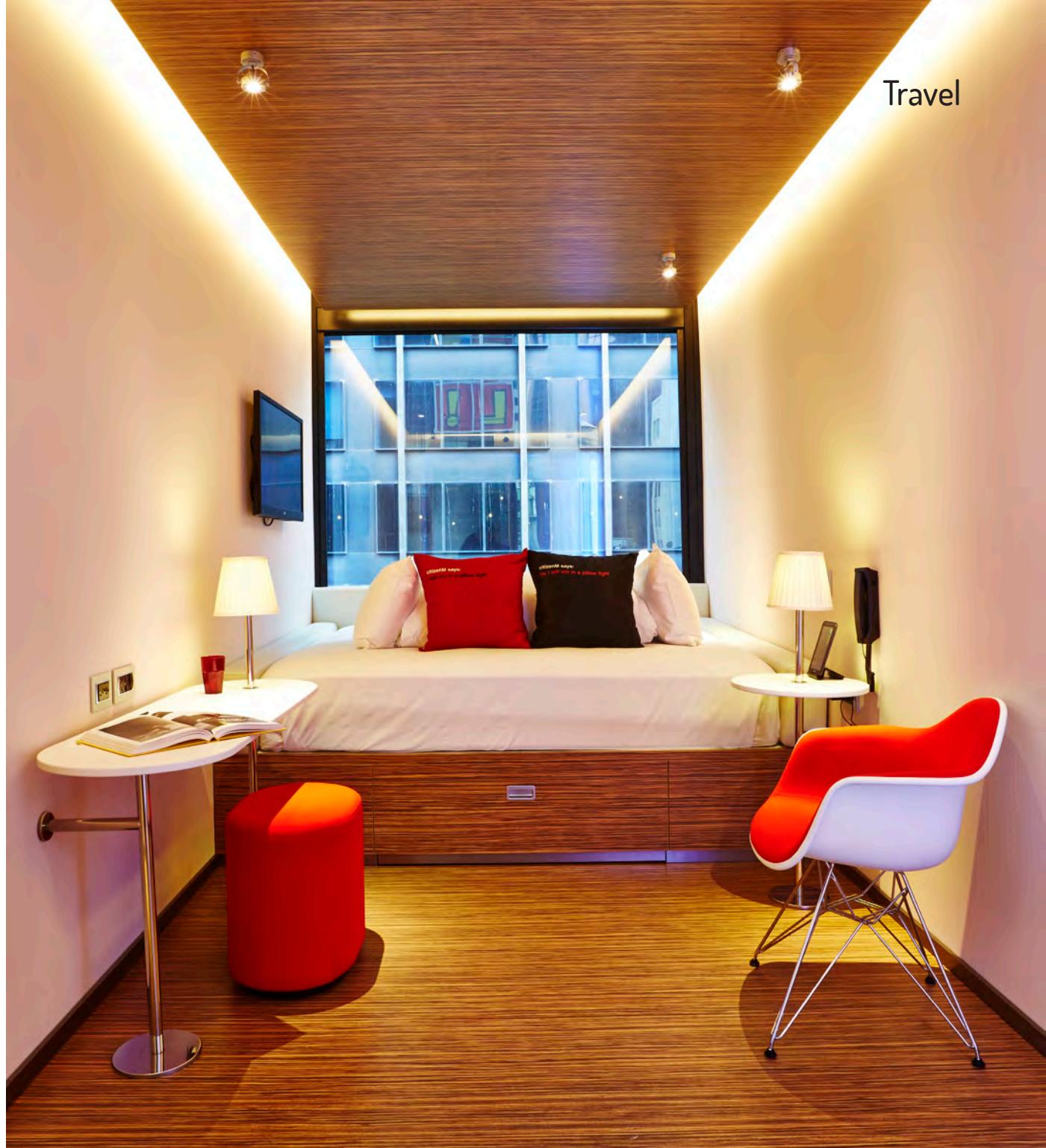
large drawer placed under the beds, fit to hold luggage. Also, Italian products are set in the bathrooms and available in-room music was selected by DJs from Amsterdam, Brussels, London and Paris.

Of course, it wasn't just DJs who were brought in to achieve the cool – to keep the minimalist chic feel in place, citizenM cooperated with European artists to attain a 26-foot installation, Walking in Times Square, by British artist Julian Opie, hotel shop books curated by MENDO of Amsterdam, austere Swiss Vitra furniture, and a vast collection of contemporary art and photography. Mackenzie Allison of wheretraveler.com described the flair of the hotel as "a retro '70s version of the Bauhaus style."

Doreen Cramer, guest of the original citizenM Amsterdam location, said, "I can't say it compares to anywhere I've stayed before. Right from check-in everything was different from an ordinary hotel. Walking through the red glass entrance you're greeted by a self check-in computer station. A bank of computers greets you in a very unique atmosphere of black bookshelves, funky chandeliers and comfy living rooms. The computer gives you your room number on a piece of paper, you swipe your room key at the computer to activate it and your room key doubles as a luggage tag."

The cool, collect style purveys into the 230 rooms of the hotel alongside that luggage tag key. At 170 square feet, they feature king-size beds, Hansgrohe rain showers with colored ceiling lights, Samsung touch-screen

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MoodPads to customize all aspects of the room including lighting hue, temperature, blinds, wake-up alarm music and digital art displays, wall-to-wall windows, complimentary stocked bottled water, free WiFi, and Skype phone rates.

"Just walking down the hall to get to your room is an experience," said Cramer. "Flat white walls with just the door knobs for texture, travel quotes printed at different angles on the walls and doors, a life size mural of a suited man with an elephant's head on the wall at the end of our hall."

Don't think that this personalized experience comes with your run-of-the-mill concierge desk either. Instead of suited employees, citizenM employs multilingual Ambassadors, who serve as jacks-of-all-trades for hotel guests.

Cramer said that the staff was "great, young. When we first arrived, they happily helped us check in at the computer banks. We had also been trying to figure out what to do in Amsterdam in the short time we had on our layover, so we asked out new friends. We showed him the tour brochure we had picked up at the airport and when he saw the prices of the tours his reactions was, 'Why pay all that money when you can take the train downtown and I will tell you exactly where to go and what to do!' And he did and we did and had a great time and spent less than half of what the tour would have cost us."

So where did these innovative hospitable ideas stem from? Rattan Chadha of the Mexx clothing empire founded the chain in 2008 with his first hotel in Amsterdam, where it

quickly started picking up tons of international travel awards including Most Cutting-Edge Boutique Awards by Fodor's in 2011 and Trendiest Hotel in the World by TripAdvisor in both 2010 and 2011, to name a few. Cramer summed up citizenM in one sentence: "Unique, priced right, clean, friendly and fun, not for everyone, but if you want to try something different, this is it."

It will always pay to see things differently, to do what has never been done, to break rules and even redefine the meaning of luxury. Once upon a time, someone decided that what was beautiful and luxurious was crisp white sheets and bowing personnel. With the emergence of a new generation of smart, conscious and quick travelers, luxury is being rethought by the moment.

