

NEW YORK CITY PACKING IT IN

by Annette Gallagher Weisman

*"Our hotel is where?!", asks my husband.
"The Meatpacking District?
You've got to be kidding!"*

I'm not. My husband has a right to be skeptical. He was born in Manhattan and lived there as an adult so has always known a thing or two about where to stay. But not now.

If you want to stroll or jog in Central Park, shop at major department stores, visit the Empire State Building, tour the Metropolitan Museum of Art or any number of other famous landmarks, then midtown or uptown is the place to be. But for me, downtown is where it's all happening, evidenced by the influx of celebrities and movie stars who live in neighborhoods like Chelsea, Greenwich Village, SoHo and TriBeCa.

One of the hottest spots now is the Meatpacking District, where we find our hotel, The Standard. There's nothing standard about The Standard. Other than a splash of yellow, the revolving door entrance to this hip hotel is almost incognito. Once inside the contemporary lobby we are soon whisked to the elevator. Two lissome model-types, clutching colorful Hermes and Prada purses and wearing boots up to here, join us. As we ascend, I'm mesmerized by a televised screen in the walls depicting recurring 3D storylines of what looks like Dante's Inferno.

Our Queen room is small, a designer shoe-box in the sky. Yet I feel pampered as if on a luxury yacht where everything I need is provided in an artfully compact manner, such as a sleek, curved desk and seating area.

The piece de resistance is the spectacular floor-to-ceiling views of The Hudson River. Lolling on the bed after a "rain



Corner room at The Standard; New York, New York

Photo by Nicolas Koenig

shower," wearing one of The Standard's silky, black terry-lined robes, I gaze at this huge expanse of glass and can't help thinking it's like watching a private movie screen. In the violet-blue haze of dawn, it's a dream-like sensation to wake up to the twinkling lights of a flotilla of cruise ships sailing by. From our room, we can see Pier 54 below and a clear view across the Hudson to Hoboken and the New Jersey skyline.

The Standard offers several dining options and bars including a see-and-be-seen trendy restaurant The Standard Grill, a German Biergarten and Le Bain, a discotheque. We might use the 24-hour gym later or maybe ice skate on The Standard Plaza. But first we are eager to explore our surroundings.

We step out into the wintry air and climb the stairs next to The Standard leading up



Photo by Todd Eberle

Entrance to The Standard Grill

to one of New York City's newest attractions, the High Line. I am bowled over by this parkway in the sky. How the High Line, an abandoned, historic, freight rail line – an eyesore about to be demolished – was saved by a few local residents to become an elevated public park and promenade is truly inspiring. When complete it will run from Gansevoort Street north to W. 34 Street between 10th and 11th Avenues.

We walk a dozen blocks or so and enjoy every minute of this innovatively designed and landscaped structure. Different creative modes of seating encourage passersby to chat, lounge or eat. We pause to look down on the city or to wonder at some of the ultra modern architecture rising up alongside us.

The French bistro Pastis on West 9th is fun for brunch and later ideal for a late-night repast. Hard to beat for lunch or dinner is Barbuto on W. 12th owned by "Master Chef" Jonathan Waxman. Both are within walking distance of our hotel.

Buildings once associated with slaughter houses and related trades in the Meatpacking District have become restaurants and night clubs, as well as furniture, jewelry and clothing stores specializing in top designers such as Diane von Furstenberg, Alexander McQueen and Tory Burch. A testament to this burgeoning area, the Whitney Museum of American Art will open a branch here by 2015.

TriBeCa is also thriving, where huge lofts seem to be the habitat of choice. Thanks largely to movie producer/ restaurateur Robert De Niro, this triangle below Canal

Street has become synonymous with the film industry. We check out two of his restaurants, Locanda Verde and the TriBeCa Grill, and file them away for our next trip. But The Harrison, a warm, well-priced restaurant popular with locals, is perfect for a birthday celebration.

Greenwich Village is a favorite area of mine. If you want a small, attractive, affordable place to stay, you can't go wrong with the Washington Square Hotel. Breakfast is included in its bistro-style North Square restaurant. Close to New York University, it attracts an academic and artistic crowd for lunch and dinner. Across the street is the famous Babbo, Mario Batali's and partner Joe Bastianich's first restaurant together.



Photo by Annette Gallagher Weisman

Nearby is tiny Cornelia Street, harboring many restaurants including The Pearl Oyster Bar and The Cornelia Street Café, where you can dine and listen to various performance artists. After a literary event at the New School, we walk a block over to the arty, dimly lit Flex Mussels on West 13th. The menu lists about 20 different ways to prepare them, divine with truffle fries and a fine choice of wine or craft beer on tap.

Other than taking in a Broadway show, there isn't enough time to see the more typical holiday attractions the city has to offer such as the Christmas tree at Rockefeller Center. Instead, what the Irish call "watching the day" is entertainment enough.

New Yorkers themselves are a canvas for every type of look and fashion trend. To take license with a Shakespearean quote, *It's as if all of Manhattan is a stage and all the men and women in it are performers.* I can't wait for the encore.

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