

HOW TO GET GREAT ROOMS, PERKS, AND DEALS

TRAVEL + LEISURE

the hotels issue

WORLD'S BEST
SERVICE 2010-
AND WHO HAS IT

THE DOWNLOAD
ON HOTEL
REVIEW SITES

it list

Our 45 Favorite
New Hotels



Checking In Clockwise from top left: The entrance to the Palazzina Grassi from the Grand Canal, in Venice; outside the Peninsula Beverly Hills; the W Retreat & Spa, in the Maldives; high-tech check-in at the Andaz Wall Street, in downtown New York City.

Arriving in Style

INNOVATIVE HOTELS ARE RETHINKING THE CHECK-IN EXPERIENCE, MAKING IT MORE PERSONALIZED, MORE HIGH-TECH, MORE SEAMLESS—OR JUST MORE FUN.
CHARLES GANDEE REPORTS.

IT MAY NOT HAVE A FLEET OF 14 BESPOKE ROLLS-Royce Phantoms like its legendary 1928 namesake in Hong Kong, but the Peninsula Beverly Hills, designed by James Northcutt, prides itself on extraordinary service just the same. Like the monogrammed pillowcases, like the customized room scents, like most things at the luxe Los Angeles hotel, check-in is a flawless affair. From the moment you arrive you are in the hands of your >>

own guest relations manager, who will know your name, have your registration materials and keys, and escort you to your room, suite, or private villa in the garden—bypassing the front desk along the way. These days, check-in can start at the airport.

During the past 18 months, the hotel has expanded its reach to Los Angeles International Airport, permanently deploying five concierges to greet arriving guests. According to Gareth Roberts, a manager at the hotel, some

ceilings, dark stained-oak floors, and a long, transparent window between the bedroom and the bathtub (see the “It List,” page 165).

Or you can skip the pleasantries, not break your time-is-money Wall Street stride, and check in with your peripatetic host in the elevator. The 253-room Hyatt-owned property, which opened in February and was designed by David Rockwell, will be followed this month by the 184-room Andaz 5th Avenue, designed by Tony

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like going to the principal’s office,’ says architect David Rockwell, who was keen to ‘remove the formality from the experience.’

45 percent of guests arriving by air book a car and a driver through the hotel, which adds between \$134 and \$280 to their bills, depending on whether they specify a Lincoln Town Car, a BMW, Mercedes-Benz, or luxury SUV. Your Peninsula concierge will retrieve your luggage, lead you to your car idling at the curb, and present you with a menu so that you can order room service on your way to the hotel. “It is truly a stress-free and seamless process,” Roberts says. “We do not require guests to ‘line up and wait.’ Our front-door staff knows exactly who is arriving at what time.”

At the new Andaz hotel at 75 Wall Street, in lower Manhattan, check-in is also a breeze. There are no glacial queues to stand in, no tedious forms to fill out and sign, no scripted “How was your flight?” chitchat to endure. In lieu of a conventional check-in desk, a host greets you in the lobby, offers you a seat and a glass of wine, and enters your name into a handheld e-tablet that looks something like an iPad. After swiping your credit card and producing a key card, the host escorts you to your room—which, for around \$275, features 345 square feet of crisply designed and furnished space, 10-foot

Chi, on a high-profile site in midtown directly across from Carrère and Hastings’s 1911 New York Public Library. It, too, jettisons the conventional check-in desk in favor of an e-tablet-wielding host, as do the Andaz Hotels in London, San Diego, and West Hollywood, California. In terms of checking in, Hyatt is on to something with Andaz, which is Hindi for “personal style.” The experience is simultaneously high-tech and high-touch—efficient and personable. “To me, checking in feels a bit like going to the principal’s office,” says Rockwell, who was keen to “remove the formality from the experience.”

Rockwell has given check-in more thought than most. His current roster of projects includes the renovation of the restaurant and public spaces at the Hotel Bel-Air, in Los Angeles, and two new W Hotels: one adjacent to the Palais Garnier, in Paris, another in Vieques, Puerto Rico. He is also the architect responsible for Aloft, the fast-growing chain of hotels that parent company Starwood likes to bill as “style at a steal,” because the typical room rate is \$125.

Check-in at Aloft is via a circular Aloha kiosk reminiscent of the »

e-ticket machines at airports—only staffed. You also have the option of using smaller, unstaffed kiosks, which will not only check you in to the hotel but also print out airline boarding passes. Upping the technological ante, the Aloft in Lexington, Massachusetts, 20 minutes outside of Boston, is now testing a third protocol. Called Smart Check-In and developed in collaboration with VingCard Elsafe, a security technology company for the hospitality industry, it allows Starwood Preferred Guest members to be issued SPG/Aloft-branded

the new Palazzina Grassi, in Venice, a 26-room hotel designed by Philippe Starck with a rich material palette of stone, old brick, mirror, mahogany, and Murano glass and tile (see the “It List”). Guests can check in “anytime, anyplace” they choose. If you happen to come by water, for example, you can check in aboard the vintage 1962 Celli boat that transports guests to the renovated 16th-century palace’s private dock on the Grand Canal, where a stylized bull’s head on a wooden door is the sole sign that you have arrived. Or if you arrive by land, you can check in “at your

THERE ARE W WELCOME AMBASSADORS to greet you and direct you to the W Van that takes you to the W Lounge, where you are offered food, drinks, and, if you choose, a shower.

radio frequency identification (RFID) key cards. On the day of a planned stay, a text message with the guest’s room number is sent to his or her smart phone. Once at the hotel, the guest goes straight to the room, where the key card unlocks the door. If all goes according to Starwood’s plan, Smart Check-In could become an Aloft signature.

Technological wizardry, of course, is not for everyone. For those who consider state-of-the-art check-in too impersonal, there are a number of hotels at the opposite end of the spectrum that cater to those who, say, eschew the ATM in favor of a teller—not because they have forgotten their PIN, but because they want the face-to-face, “Have a nice day” interaction. “We only do guest-to-staff check-in,” says Vivian Deuschl, corporate vice president of public relations for Ritz-Carlton. “Kiosks and other such impersonal ways of checking in are not really our style.”

There is something both leisurely and luxurious about checking in to

leisure” in the bar over a glass of Prosecco, or in your room. “There is no ‘reception.’ It’s more like a private club than a hotel,” says owner Emanuele Garosci, a former car and motorcycle rally driver who did a stint, years back, working for hotelier Ian Schrager at Morgans and Paramount, in New York.

Check-in at the W Retreat & Spa—Maldives begins when guests arrive at Male International Airport, on Hulhule Island. There are W Welcome Ambassadors to greet them and direct them to the W Van that takes them to the W Lounge, where they are offered food, drinks, and, if they choose, a shower. Meanwhile, W Welcome Agents complete the check-in process before guests board a seaplane for the 25-minute flight to the private Fesdu Island, where the 78-villa resort is situated. Once guests arrive on the island, they are brought directly to their villas.

At AnaYela, in Marrakesh, Morocco, you do not check in at all. At least not in North Africa. Instead,

check-in is handled long-distance, before guests arrive in Marrakesh. They are transported by SUV from Menara International Airport to the ramparts of the medina, from which it is a five-minute walk to the five-room hotel. The owners, former Berliners Andrea and Bernd Kolb, designed the hotel in collaboration with Yannick Hervy, and it opened in 2008 after a yearlong renovation. Local artisans did all the work on the 200-year-old *riad* by hand—from the architecture and pool to the furniture and flatware.

The Kolbs greet their guests not with desks, forms, and credit-card swipes, but with milk and dates, a traditional Moroccan welcome. “It would disrupt the process of giving our guests the opportunity to dive in to Marrakesh,” says Andrea when asked about conventional check-in procedures. Which is not to say that the Kolbs don’t recognize the

importance of the moment of arrival, whether understated or formal or efficiently technological, just that it’s evolving. In this case, at AnaYela, the idea is to offer the most authentic Moroccan experience possible, from

the moment guests step out of the SUV into the throbbing medina and make their way to the front door. +

Charles Gandee is a T+L contributing editor.

ADDRESS BOOK

GREAT VALUE ALOFT LEXINGTON

727 Marrett Rd., Lexington, Mass.;
877/462-5638; alofthotels.com;
doubles from \$125.

ANAYELA

28 Derb Zerwal, Zaouira Abassia,
Marrakesh, Morocco; 212-524/386-969;
anayela.com; doubles from \$388.

ANDAZ 5TH AVENUE

485 Fifth Ave., New York City; 877/
875-5036; andaz.com; doubles from \$295.

ANDAZ WALL STREET

75 Wall St., New York City; 877/
875-5036; andaz.com; doubles from \$275.

PALAZZINA GRASSI

San Marco 3247, Venice; 39-041/528-4644;
palazzinagrassi.it; doubles from \$563.



Self-service check-in at Aloft.

PENINSULA BEVERLY HILLS

9882 S. Santa Monica Blvd., Beverly Hills; 800/
462-7889; peninsula.com; doubles from \$495.

W RETREAT & SPA—MALDIVES

Fesdu Island, North Ari Atoll,
the Maldives; 877/946-8357 or 011-960/666-
2222; whotels.com; doubles from \$760.