Start Spadin’ the News.

A relaxing, busy time in mid-town Manhattan

Story by Christine Peets. Photography by Jim Peets.

I had the song “New York, New York” in my head almost the whole time on the train from Syracuse to New York City. My husband and I had five days to see and do as much as we could in mid-town Manhattan, and we needed some relaxation time too after the Christmas holidays. If that seems like a contradiction—to relax in, and whiz around The Big Apple—it wasn’t. We managed to do both quite well. Staying in the four hotels belonging to the HK Hotel group made it a lot easier. I’ve been “spreadin’ the news” every chance I get.

From Central Park to the Empire State building, Times Square to Rockefeller Center, the luxury boutique hotels belonging to the HK Hotels group—the Library Hotel, Hotel Elysée, Hotel Giraffe, and the Casablanca Hotel—have mid-town Manhattan covered. Their intimate surroundings will have you feeling like royalty, and you’ll be treated that way too. Each staff member in the hotel has been carefully selected and is trained to be an hotelier regardless of their job title and description.

Following a relaxing train trip through the Hudson River Valley, we arrived at Penn Station and took a quick cab ride to The Library Hotel. After settling in our lovely corner suite we went to the comfortable yet elegant Reading Room to have some tea and coffee along with some fruit and cookies. These snacks are complimentary throughout the day at each of the HK Hotels. Most evenings they also offer free wine and cheese receptions.

The friendly staff was more than happy to accommodate my special diet needs by adding some goat cheese and gluten-free crackers to the already generous selection of European and domestic cheese and wide array of breads and crackers. That evening we skated at CitiPond at Bryant Park, just a few blocks from the hotel behind the iconic main branch of the New York City Library. After skating, we enjoyed a lovely meal at the Madison & Vine restaurant back at the hotel.

The next morning, after devouring the complimentary European-style buffet breakfast, complete with International coffees, and catching up on the news from the local newspapers provided for us, we headed out for some sightseeing. Visiting the International Center of Photography, and walking to enjoy the sights kept us busy until it was time to check into the next hotel.

If Old World style and décor is to your liking, you’ll love the Hotel Elysée. Once home to literary giants like Tennessee Williams, movie stars, artists, and intellectuals the hotel still provides facilities for longer term stays. Suites feature kitchenettes, living and dining rooms, walk-in closets, and all of the comforts you’d expect in a world-class luxury boutique hotel. Rich woods, plush upholstery, comfortable linens, and timeless classic decorating evoke a seemingly gone-by era. Yet the hotel is equipped with state-of-the-art modern technology.

We checked out St. Patrick’s Cathedral, Radio City Music Hall, and Rockefeller Center. Of course a trip to New York City wouldn’t be the same without a stroll (and since it was winter, some skating) in Central Park, and shopping on 5th Avenue.
The Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) is not that far. In fact, no matter what you want to see or do, it is within walking distance of these hotels. It was only a short walk to Times Square for a Broadway show—another NYC must-do!

We so enjoyed the theatre experience that we did it again the next night. After a lovely meal at the simple yet elegant Park Street Bistro—I highly recommend the French Onion soup—we took a short cab ride from the Hotel Giraffe to the theatre on 48th Street. “Broadway” is a bit of a misnomer, because it is a street as well as a district with theatres on a few different streets in the neighbourhood. Broadway itself is a street to be experienced with its neon lights, and various attractions—so after the show we decided to walk, and before we knew it, we’d walked the 22 blocks back to the hotel. We thought about seeing the city lights from the Empire State Building but decided that it would be too windy to really enjoy it. Relaxing back at the hotel was easy to do in the very comfortable, yet cozy lobby, and then in our luxurious room.

We stepped out into sunshine the next morning, and headed back to the Empire State Building. It was definitely a “king of the hill, top of the heap” moment, as we could see for miles! We took time to explore the lobby of the building too, which in the last few years has undergone a major restoration to its Art Deco days of the 1930s. I think we spent as much time in the lobby as we had on the observation deck, and I came home with a small crystal apple from the jewellery store—my souvenir of The Big Apple.

Our final destination was the Casablanca Hotel. The comfortable rattan furniture, colourful mosaics, and distinctive artwork are all evocative of Morocco, and each room is so artfully decorated, you’ll almost feel those desert breezes. The hustle, bright lights, and noise of Times Square is literally less than a block away, so describing this hotel as an oasis is not a stretch. You feel like you’ve stepped into another time and place, especially in Rick’s Café. Things liven up in the evening with the wine and cheese reception with live entertainment at the piano on Friday nights. Not connected to the hotel, but very close by is the Brooklyn Diner—you won’t believe how high they stack the meat on their sandwiches! It was so hearty that I saved some of the sandwich for lunch the next day.

Our trip was over too soon, so “these vagabond shoes” will want to head to New York, New York again very soon.

Christine Peets is a freelance writer from Napanee, Ontario who loves to travel. She is very lucky her husband loves travelling too, and is able to capture their adventures so well. More stories and photos are on Christine’s blog, http://christinepeets.wordpress.com

The Library Hotel,
299 Madison at 41st Street
212-983-4500

Hotel Giraffe,
365 Park Avenue South at 26th Street
212-685-7700

Hotel Elysée
60 East 54th Street
212-753-1066

Casablanca Hotel,
147 West 43rd Street
212-869-1212,
Toll Free (US and Canada) at 888-922-7225