

SLEEPOVER: STYLISH IN SEATTLE

An arty boutique, without the attitude

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HOTEL MAX

620 Stewart St., Seattle; 206-728-6299; <http://www.hotelmaxseattle.com> .

ROOMS AND RATES

163 rooms from \$174 to \$263.



A hipster haven, Hotel Max is a true boutique hotel with a strong emphasis on art. The lobby itself is a trip, with offerings from the likes of David Hockney, Jay Backstrand and Gregory Grenon. Behind huge black-and-white, blown-up photographs on each room door (a different artist and theme are featured on each floor), you will find more art - and not your typical hotel-room variety, either. There are more than 350 original works of art here, almost all by Seattle artists.

Housed in what was once the Vance Hotel - a 1920s landmark built by lumber magnate Joseph Vance - the hotel recently reopened after an extensive renovation. LOCATION The hotel is downtown, a short walk to the main shopping district. It's about a 20-minute walk to the Pike Place Market or, in a different direction, to the touristy area where you'll find the Space Needle (you can also get there by hopping on the monorail, which stops nearby).

For those in search of a true Seattle experience, note that there are two Starbucks steps away.

AMBIENCE From the contemporary art to the sleek furnishings to the dripping-with- attitude, fashionably attired clientele, this place screams trendy. Though guests who, ahem, feel less than hip won't feel uncomfortable. (The

classic rock playing in the

lobby helps to take the

attitude down a peg.)

CLIENTELE The hotel's efforts to emanate cool appear to have paid off: A large percentage of the young guests seem to belong firmly to the hipster set. You're not likely to find a breakfast buffet-loving, our-last-vacation-was-Disney World type of family.

DESIGN The feel throughout is sleek and contemporary - from the furniture to the art to the strategic lighting. Dark wood on the lobby walls and floors accentuate the art, which is what you're meant to be paying attention to.

Even the little touches are consistent with the hotel's contemporary, irreverent feel. Room key cards feature black-and-white, full-length portraits, to be inserted into the door feet first. Instead of a Do Not Disturb sign to hang from your door handle, you're given a sign that says "Nope" on one side and "Yep" on the other.

ROOMS The rooms range from small to not so small (200 to 375 square feet), dominated by (very comfortable) beds, LCD TVs and an abundance of windows. The views don't always deliver, though. Some rooms (lower floors, facing north) are too close to a residential building next door and in particular its rooftop ventilation system, which is loud and unsightly.

Bathrooms range from tiny to not so tiny, but they're nicely done, and offer Aveda products. The water pressure is good too (although if you get a smaller room, you might need to cut your shower short because of an onset of claustrophobia in the teeny stall).

You won't find a Bible by your bed, but a spiritual menu offering everything from the Bhagavad Gita to the Book of Mormon. There's also a pillow menu, featuring soft to extra firm options for your tucked-out head. They even have body pillows. Hanging in the closet or armoire: luxurious terry-cloth-on-the-inside robes by Telegraph Hill.

AMENITIES The hotel has a business centre with two computer terminals. It's open 24/7 and completely free (including printing). There's also a gym with treadmills, elliptical machines and free weights.

SERVICE Erase any fears of a too-hip-to-be-helpful staff; the service here is generally excellent and staff do everything they can to make guests feel comfortable.

FOOD AND DRINK Red Fin, an Asian fusion bar/restaurant connected to the lobby, is definitely worth checking out. The food is good, and the prices reasonable - especially if you go during the daily happy hours, when you can order dishes for as low as \$2 and sake or draft beer from \$3 a glass. Try the Togarishi Fries with ginger ketchup (from \$4 during happy hour) and the shitake mushroom dumplings with *san bai su*, a soy-rice and vinegar-plum wine sauce (\$6 during happy hour).

Where the food at this hotel falls down is in the room-service department. Much of the menu becomes unavailable after 11. And if you decide you're a bit peckish anywhere near 11, you might have to fight the operator to get your order in.

THINGS TO DO It may be crawling with tourists, but the Pike Place Market should not be missed - for the view of the bay, the gorgeous flower stalls, and the world's first Starbucks, right across the street. The Seattle Art Museum, currently featuring the exhibition Edward Hopper's Women, is a short walk south.

Hotel vitals

TOP DRAW

The art, including works from the hotel owner's private collection.

NEEDS WORK

Additional sound insulation might help detract from the ventilation system next door.

BOTTOM LINE

A funky experience in the city that launched a gazillion lattes.