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## Where the Beds Are Stacked Against You

New Yorkers who stay at local hotels—the reasons can range from adventure, to romance, to a burst pipe or an apartment renovation—is an established tradition.

However, when my wife, Debbie, and I spent a night last week at the Jane Hotel, at the edge of the Meatpacking District, we had no discernible rationale.



**URBAN GARDNER**  
**RALPH GARDNER JR.**

Though I suppose adventure comes closest to describing the impulse.

I'd never visited the Jane, a boutique hotel originally built for sailors in the early 1900s, until we checked in Wednesday evening. However, I was aware of its party reputation.

My daughter Lucy, who joined us for cocktails and dinner, boasted of having danced on a table in its ballroom within recent memory and gaining access to its VIP area, until she was required to leave because of the arrival of actual celebrities, among them the actor Jonah Hill.

But the hope of rubbing shoulders with stars isn't what drove me to spend a night away from home either.

It was the challenge.

Anybody can enjoy himself or herself in a five-star hotel with a king-size bed, maid turndown service, minibar and marble bathroom. But how well can you endure a place that has none of those things? Where your room more closely resembles wagon-lit, a sleeping compartment on a European train? Including the bunk beds.

Though my recollection is that European train sleeping compartments sometimes come with toilets. "At a cozy 50 sq. ft.," to quote the Jane's website, its bunk-bed cabins don't. You're required to travel down the hall to a communal bathroom.

I've always been a fan of small spaces. I think it has something to do with being a Cold War child. One of my favorite photographs from that era came from Compton's Encyclopedia: it showed a family of four, happy as clams, in their private fallout shelter.

I wanted one, too.

My wife, unfortunately, had no such fantasies. As a matter of fact, she was ready to leave as soon as we checked in.

I don't know what her problem was. Admittedly, our room was so claustrophobic that we couldn't walk past each other without getting stuck. But there were fresh towels, bottled water, a TV for each bunk with a remote, and a fully



NATALIE KEYSAR FOR THE WALL STREET JOURNAL (3)

The reception area in the Jane Hotel, above, originally built for sailors; Ralph Gardner Jr., left, decides to try out a bunk bed.



functioning window. One of my pet peeves is hotel windows that don't open, or open only a crack.

Because she was cranky, I even agreed to give her the more desirable top bunk. Though altruism wasn't my primary motivation. I've been known to visit the bathroom in the middle of the night. And didn't want to compound the indignity of a 4 a.m. visit to the shared facility by falling off the upper bunk in the dark on my way to the floor.

Part of the pleasure of vacationing in your own city is that you get to act like a tourist. We had a drink at the Jane's appealing Café Gitane and then dinner in the West Village. (By the way, the hotel has room service and not all the rooms are as minuscule as our sleeping quarters.)

We thought better of asking friends to join us. Because, obviously, they'd have wanted to see our room. I wasn't ashamed. But if two people

was a tight fit, four or more would have constituted a fire hazard.

Then again, I recall in college a half-dozen of us happily fitting into dorm rooms not much larger.

However, the price was right—about \$100 a night for two. Where else are you going to find accommodations that affordable in a hip Manhattan neighborhood?

I'd by lying if I suggested romance was in the air when we returned from dinner. Bunk beds—and narrow ones at that—as well as running into strangers brushing their teeth in the bathroom.... Well, the combination has a way of destroying the mood.

Also, we fought over the remote. Or rather we fought over having two TVs within a few feet of each other, tuned to different stations. It didn't bother me at all, but it did Debbie. She settled our dispute by falling asleep, with me not far behind.

We joined our fellow guests for breakfast at the Café Gitane the next morning—I assumed the hotel would attract a young, tattooed crowd trailing cigarette smoke, but many of the guests seemed more the intrepid middle-aged traveler type—and then a lovely walk along Hudson River Park.

Upon our return, desk clerk Dwayne Campbell acknowledged, of our diminutive quarters: "We know it's slightly abnormal to people who aren't European or back packers—people who haven't been in college in years. We let people know exactly what the room is before they book."

I rarely manage to vacate hotel rooms by checkout time. But in this case it wasn't an issue—and not just because home was only a cab ride away. There seems little allure in lolling in bed all morning when it's a bunk bed.

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