



**MORE THAN
JUST A BED,
AN EXPERIENCE**

THE BUDGET TRAVELLER'S
GUIDE TO THE

**LUXURY
HOSTELS
OF EUROPE**

By Kash Bhattacharya
www.budgettraveller.org



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

It's been an amazing journey from the moment (one bitterly cold Scottish morning in December 2011) when the idea popped into my head to this moment- the book in your hands. There are a lot of people I am thankful to for making this project and book a reality.

Thank you to all the 40 Luxury Hostels I've had the pleasure of working with . Each hostel has a special memory in my heart and without your support and enthusiasm, this project would have never seen the light of day.

Special mention must go to all my 5 amazing sponsors; Busabout, Eurail, easyJet, Travellerspoint and Travelzoo for believing in my idea and supporting me.

Thank you to my copyeditor, Kate McCulley from; AdventurousKate.com (awesome blog) who fixed my hundreds of mistakes and was generous in donating her time to help me pull this e-book together.

Then there is the creative genius that is Martin Sweeny from Unstable Creations (www.unstablecreations.com) who has done an amazing job designing this e-book.

I'm incredibly grateful to my star contributors , ace travel bloggers- Peter Parkorr from Travelunmasked.com, Larissa Olenicoff from theBlonde-gypsy.com, Nina Hüpen-Bestendonk from Smaracuja.de, Ed Rexy from Rexyedventures.com, Nadine Pober from TheNadwork.com and Katie Bell for taking the time out to help me review some of the featured hostels.

Thank you to the amazing people who have been with me on this journey- Sijad Shah, Shona Maguire, Midlothian Voluntary Action, Janice Waugh , Melvin Boecher , Ruth Haffenden, Colm Hanratty, Steve Lowy, Nicholas Montemaggi, Gonçalo Castanho, Chris Richardson, Paul Smith, Roger Kerr, Graeme Ward, Jordi Sinclair, Louise Hodges , Sam Daams and last but not least, Sofia Vasconcelos.

To my sister Arpita Bhattacharya, Raja, my Ma and Baba Thank for your love and for always encouraging me to go after what I want.

Finally, thank you to you, the reader for downloading this book. I hope you enjoy reading about the hostels and it inspires you on your future travels.



BUDGET 
TRAVELLER
SEE THE WORLD ON
A SHOESTRING

Visit [BudgetTraveller.org](https://www.BudgetTraveller.org)

for the latest holiday inspiration,
accommodation reviews,
cheap eat guides and practical
money saving tips



[Facebook.com/BudgetTraveller](https://www.facebook.com/BudgetTraveller)



[Twitter.com/BudgetTraveller](https://www.twitter.com/BudgetTraveller)



[Instagram.com/BudgetTraveller](https://www.instagram.com/BudgetTraveller)

CONTENTS



INTRODUCTION

Introduction.....	5
How to use this Guide	8
Key to Facilities Icons	9

REVIEWS

Generator Hostel Copenhagen	12	Gallery Hostel Porto	93
Generator Hostel Hamburg	16	Lisbon Poets Hostel.....	97
Generator Hostel Dublin	21	Stay Inn Hostel Lisbon	101
Dream Hostel Tampere	26	Oasis Backpackers Lisbon	105
Plus Hostel Berlin	30	Lisbon Calling	109
Plus Hostel Prague	35	Goodmorning Hostel Lisbon	113
Plus Hostel Florence	39	U Hostels Madrid Spain	117
Wombats Hostel Vienna Naschmarkt	43	Purple Nest Hostel Valencia	121
Aventura Boutique Hostel Budapest	48	Fusion Hotel and Hostel Prague	125
Hostel Celica Slovenia	52	Grampa's Hostel Wrocław Poland.....	129
Cocomama Amsterdam	56	The Beehive Hotel & Hostel Rome	133
Casa Gracia Barcelona	61	Plas Curig Snowdonia Wales	137
Ostello Bello Milan	65	Oasis Backpackers Palace Seville	141
LOL Hostel Siracusa	69	Grand Hostel Berlin	145
Villa Saint Exupery Gardens Nice	73	Clink 78 London	149
Palmers Lodge Boutique Hostels		Hostel One Eighty Berlin	153
Swiss Cottage & Hillspring London	77	Kex Hostel Reykjavik.....	157
SYHA Edinburgh	81	Backpackers Villa Sonnenhof Interlaken	161
Safestay London	85	Granada Inn Backpackers Spain	165
Loft Mountain Hostel Bourg St Maurice	89	Independente Hostel Lisbon	169

RESOURCES

Busabout Europe Reviewed	174
Eurail and Interrail Passes	178
Savvy Tips from Travelzoo's Europe deal experts...	180
Travellerspoint's Community Wisdom on Budget Travel	183

DISCLAIMER

All maps are sourced from Google Maps. All my hostels stays were sponsored but the views and opinions expressed here are entirely my own.

INTRODUCTION



LUXURY HOSTELS OF EUROPE

by Kash Bhattacharya

INTRODUCTION

WHY A GUIDE TO LUXURY HOSTELS?

'I'm a hotel kind of girl. I backpacked Europe and stayed in hostels in my 20s. Now that I have a job, I can afford my own room. I can't bear the idea of slumming it now in a 10-bed dorm with a bunch of smelly backpackers.'

My date had been going really well until then. I had gone through a breakup recently and on the advice of a friend, had signed up for the dating site Match.com. I found my love for travel to be a great icebreaker on dates. Until they discovered that I wrote about budget travel, that is.

'Budget travel? Isn't that about staying in cheap hostels? Does that mean you sleep in dorms?' they asked me quizzically, their foreheads creased with discontent at the prospect of travelling the world with me in seedy establishments.

Hostels not only had a negative perception amongst my Match.com dates, but also amongst people within the travel industry. I attended numerous travel conferences to develop working relationships with various destination marketing organisations, but found there to be a huge lack of awareness about hostels and budget travel. The slick brochures were awash with decadent images of spas, Michelin gourmet dining experiences and the finest hotels that money could buy. Hostels? No sign of them at all. The general opinion was that hostelling and budget travel were not seen as a revenue generator for the tourism destination providers. I realised then that there was a need for the rebrand of the image of hostelling both within and outside the travel industry.

There is also a personal reason I undertook this project. I realised that as I was getting older, I was finding it more difficult to sleep in dorms. The more I travelled, the more

intolerant I had become of other people's travelling habits. I craved the luxury of having my own space, but I wasn't ready to graduate into the mundane, characterless, and insipid world of chain hotels.

Growing older had some benefits – increased wisdom taught me that I want a special experience when I travel. At 34, travel is no longer about sleeping in the cheapest bed available. I want more than that.

Every part of the journey can be an experience to cherish. Hence, I began my mission to find if there was a more grown-up and alternative way to backpack around Europe that wouldn't involve sacrificing comfort.

I started researching on the web, reading travel blogs, and speaking to the travel community via Facebook and Twitter to ask about their experiences of hostelling. I found, especially in my own age segment of travellers aged 30-39, that there was a trend of people 'travelling younger.' They were choosing hostels, previously thought to be mainstays of 20-somethings.

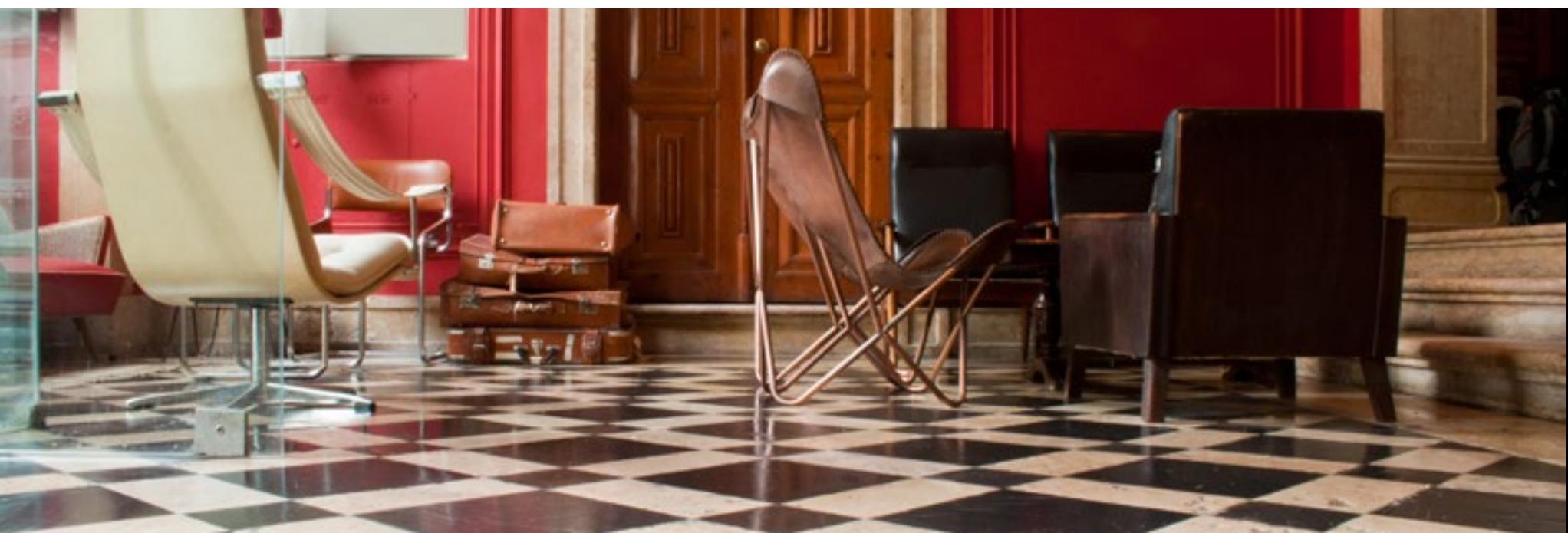
I then discovered the new breed of design hostels that had emerged in the last few years. These hostels were a step up from the usual hostel. They had dorms but also offered private ensuite rooms. The design of these hostels was on par with what you find in a boutique 4- or 5-star hotel. It was no surprise to me to find that many of these hostels are owned by artists.

The facilities are outstanding in these properties. From indoor swimming pools to rooftop bars, from stylish outdoor patios to parquet floors to in-house cinemas, from tango and Spanish cooking lessons to monthly exhibitions of local artists – there is a wealth of amazing experiences to savour and enjoy in each of the 40 luxury hostels within this book. I like to think of them as a home away from home. Once you stay there, you'll find it hard to leave. I promise.

What started as a project to discover a new way of travelling and rediscover my passion for backpacking also became a great way for me to meet some amazing people. I've had the pleasure of meeting some of the most passionate and hardworking people in travel through this project. For that reason, I hope that when you do decide to visit these hostels, you will have the same experience and meet these same people. In my opinion, they are leading the way in terms of hostelling and redefining the way we perceive them.

On BudgetTraveller.org, my aim has always been to find new ways to inspire people to travel, challenge the conventional ways we travel, and discover something new. It's my hope that this ebook will help inspire a new generation of travellers old and young to visit these amazing hostels and embrace this exciting new revolution in hostelling.

WELCOME TO THE FUTURE OF BUDGET TRAVEL.
WELCOME TO LUXURY HOSTELS OF EUROPE.



HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

Okay, a concise explanation.

I've created some icons to help you know more about each hostel at a glance (see over page). I've avoided ratings, as I believe all 40 hostels speak for themselves. The format of each review is easy to follow and self-explanatory:

LOCATION

Where the hostel is located.

ROOMS AND BATHROOMS

What can you expect in terms of rooms and bathrooms.

FACILITIES

I've tried to outline the various range of facilities you can expect in each hostel ranging from whether you have a locker facility, free wifi, self-catering facilities, cultural activities (free walking tours, activities within the hostel like dance or cooking classes) , whether there is a bar on-site, and what are the staff like.

VERDICT

I sum up my opinion of the hostel.

FACTBOX AND PRICES

This includes the address, primary telephone number, website, and rates. The rates are the cost per person to stay at the hostel and again, just an indication. Rates may vary according to season and type of room, so always check and book in advance to get the best rates possible. Some hostels featured may charge you an extra fee for supplying sheets and towels. I have created an icon which indicates whether bed linen is included in the price. In addition, some cities may also be liable for a tourist tax, so do keep that in mind.

GETTING THERE

How to reach the hostel by public transportation.

KEY TO FACILITIES ICONS

These are icons that I've created to help you know more about each hostel at a glance.

ROOM FACILITIES



EN-SUITE



SELF CATERING



**TOWELS
INCLUDED
IN PRICE**



**BED LINEN
INCLUDED
IN PRICE**

ADDITIONAL FACILITIES



**LOCKER
FACILITIES**



**LAUNDRY
FACILITIES**



**BAGGAGE
ROOM**

ADDITIONAL FACILITIES



FREE WI-FI



**COMMON
ROOM**



**BAR / PUB
ON SITE**



**CULTURAL
ACTIVITIES**

ADDITIONAL FACILITIES



**FAMILY
FRIENDLY**



OFF THE BEATEN TRACK

BUSABOUT
Freestyle Europe

HOP-ON HOP-OFF

EUROPE'S INDEPENDENT TRAVEL PASS



33 destinations,
9 countries,
door-to-door &
on-board guides

REVIEWS

GENERATOR HOSTEL COPENHAGEN

Adelgade 5-7, 1304, Copenhagen, Denmark

A great location and top-notch facilities, including a stunning outdoor patio, make Generator Copenhagen the hippest hostel in town.





LOCATION

Generator Hostel benefits from a superb central location in Kongens Nytorv, the main square, just a few hundred yards away from the metro station.

The hostel is just off Stroget, the high street and main artery of Copenhagen, so you're very well located.

TOP TIP

I highly recommend the private ensuite rooms on the sixth floor. You get great views of the city skyline and it's very peaceful – plus you can insulate yourself from the partying crowd downstairs and get a good night's sleep.

ROOMS & BATHROOMS

A signature of the Generator brand is the variety of lodging: you have the choice of private rooms, six-to-eight-bed dorms and also female-only dorms. The hostel caters well to the needs of female solo travellers, couples and larger groups.

The room comes with a separate shower and toilet cubicle, plus a washing basin in the room.

Beds are very comfortable and also have conveniently placed reading lamps and power points to charge your smartphone and gadgets.

FACILITIES

On the first floor, you have the hostel bar, which is huge and almost size of a full-size football pitch.

Towards the rear, it has lots of comfy chairs and beanies in which to lounge and relax. Towards the front, it has a bar and seating area that converts into a dance floor at night.

The hostel has a busy schedule of activities to keep guests entertained, from bar crawls to famous 'Pink Girls' Night' on Friday, where everyone dressed in pink gets cheap drinks, plus a 'Hangover Movie Night' on Sundays where you can watch a movie on their giant projector screen.

For 35 DKK (€5) you can load up on Coke and popcorn.

The bar is pretty reasonably priced with pints of Carlsberg around the 35 DKK (€5) mark.

Best feature of the hostel? The wooden outdoor patio – especially when the weather's warm. Guests were flowing out with their drinks. Often they'll have DJ sets here. There's no shortage of partying options at Generator Copenhagen.

Free wifi is available and signal strength is best in reception and the bar but was sporadic in my room on the sixth floor.

If you don't have an internet device, there are a few desktops at the reception to check your emails.

FACTBOX:

Address

Adelgade 5-7, 1304, Copenhagen, Denmark

Telephone

(+45) 7877 5400

Website

generatorhostels.com/en/destinations/copenhagen

PRICES:

Dorms from 127.50 DKK (€17) per person,

Triples & Quads from 150 DKK (€20) per person,

Singles and Doubles from 204.50 DKK (€27.43) per person

VERDICT:

Overall, I really enjoyed my stay at Generator Copenhagen. It's a very cool hostel with the perfect location for exploring the city. Highly recommended.

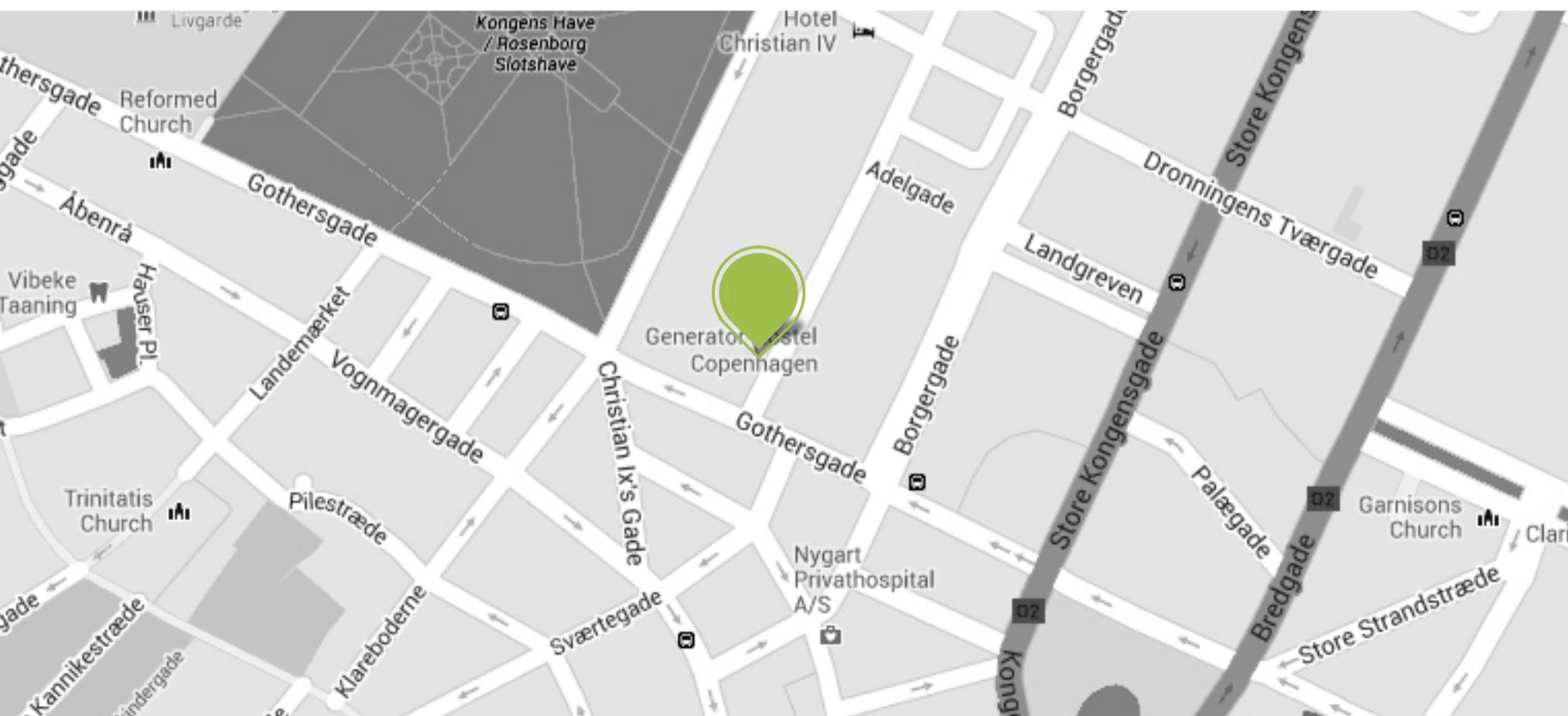
GETTING THERE:

From Copenhagen Airport: Take the M2 to Kongens Nytorv Station. The hostel is a six-minute walk from the station.

From Copenhagen Central Station: Take a train to Nørreport Station. The hostel is a seven-minute walk from the station.

From the ferry terminals: Take Bus 26 to Borgergade. The hostel is a 300-meter walk from the stop.

From the central bus station: take Bus 11A to Kronprinsessegade. The hostel is a three-minute walk from the stop.



GENERATOR HOSTEL HAMBURG

Steintorplatz 3, 20099 Hamburg, Germany

Generator Hamburg is a modern, clean, and very comfortable hostel in a superb central location.





LOCATION

This is one of the biggest strengths of Generator Hamburg: you walk out of the Hamburg Hauptbahnhof and literally across the road is the hostel. Superb location. The S-bahn and U-bahn station is right beside the entrance of the hostel.

Generator Hamburg is walking distance from some of the city's key sightseeing areas like the Deichtorhallen, the City Hall and Speicherstadt.

ROOMS & BATHROOMS

You have a good choice of lodging here, ranging from eight-bed dorms and female-only dorms to private rooms. The hostel caters well to groups, female solo travellers, and couples.

I stayed in one of their private room for two nights. The rooms are compact and not extremely spacious. You have a table, a bed, and a few coat hangers to hang your clothes.

The bathroom is tiny and pod-like, which was not a problem with my 5'5" frame, but could be an issue for taller people. The shower is powerful with excellent water pressure.

The beds are very comfortable and come with a private reading light and power socket. The dorm rooms also have USB sockets for charging your gadgets. Linen and sheets are free. Towels are free if you're staying in the private rooms but come with an extra charge if you're staying in the dorms.



FACILITIES:

Security is a great feature of this hostel. At the entrance you have a friendly security guard who lets guests in and checks to see their room keys. The entrance into the elevator is security card-operated.

The lobby bar area is a bright, welcoming area with lots of comfy furnishings where guests can relax and chat with fellow travellers.

The hostel has an excellent bar with lots of great drink offers including a happy hour where you can get beers for as little as one euro. They organise a whole bunch of activities from DJ nights to fancy dress parties and even Jagermeister parties – so if you're in the mood to socialize, there is always something to look forward to. Just like its Generator counterpart in Copenhagen, there is a nice outdoor patio area where guests can enjoy drinks on the long summer evenings ahead. However, this is not a typical loud party hostel. The age range is a good mix so travellers of all ages will feel comfortable here.

Breakfast is an extra €4.50, which is pretty decent, but there are plenty of other breakfast options around in the neighborhood.

There is free wifi with excellent reception in the lobby area. I was impressed with the strength in my second-floor room as well.

The staff are polite and helpful but could do with being a bit warmer and friendlier. I possibly caught them on a bad day.

FACTBOX:

Address

Steintorplatz 3, 20099 Hamburg, Germany

Phone

(+49) 40 226 358 460

Website

generatorhostels.com/en/destinations/hamburg/

PRICES:

Dorms from €9 per person,

Triples and Quads from €14.80 per person,

Singles and Doubles from €22.30 per person.

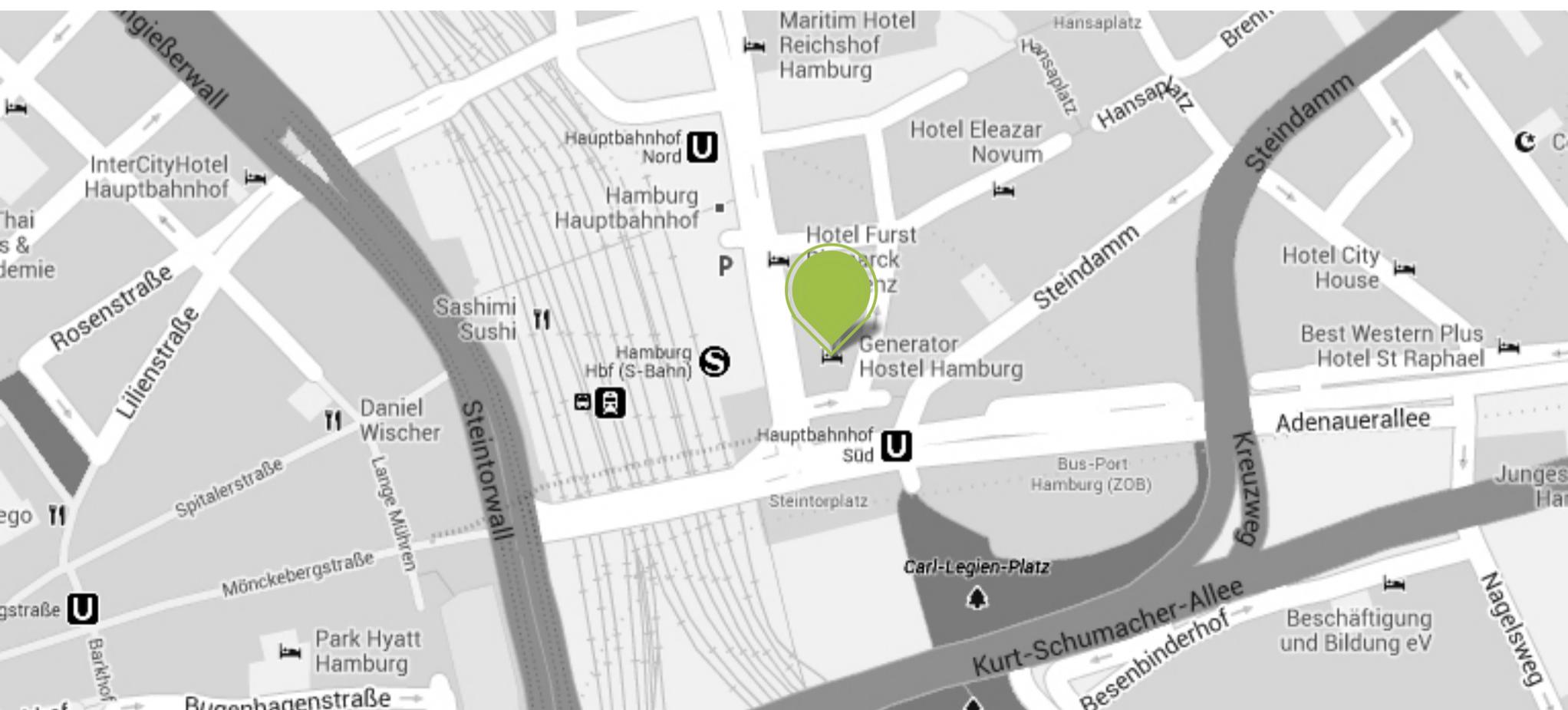
VERDICT:

Overall, I can't fault Generator Hamburg. A very pleasant and relaxed stay overall and perfect base if you're visiting Hamburg.

GETTING THERE:

From Hamburg Airport, take the S1 line to Hauptbahnhof. The hostel is across the street.

From Hamburg Hauptbahnhof, the hostel is across the street.





GREAT FUN.
GREAT SELECTION.
GREAT FOR YOUR WALLET.

Travelzoo's Deal Experts from London to Shanghai scour the globe for the very best travel and leisure deals, which we then share with our global audience of 26 million subscribers. We spend hours researching deals for hotels, resorts, restaurants and spas, and we don't rest until we've unearthed the best in the market. We're on a mission to get people off the sofa and out experiencing the world.

Visit www.travelzoo.co.uk today and prepare to be inspired.

TRAVELZOO[®]

WWW.TRAVELZOO.CO.UK

GENERATOR HOSTEL DUBLIN

Smithfield Square Dublin 7, Ireland

Have you ever looked at something online only to be utterly disappointed when you see it in real life? Well, happily Generator – Dublin is not one of those let downs, in fact it is one of the rare gems that lives up to the expectations built from online photos and representation.





LOCATION

The hostel is situated in the Northern section of Dublin while the main tourist attractions and nightlife hotspots are located on the south side including the famous Temple Bar. However, Generator is conveniently located between two bike hire stations, one block from the light rail tram (known as the Luas) and two blocks off the city's Hop On Hop Off Bus tour stops and the Town Buses (including the Airport Bus) stop on the main street a block beyond the end of the Square. The hostel itself backs onto the famous Old Jameson Whisky Distillery which in itself is a top tourist attraction with a café, restaurant and the famous 360 degree bar that gives you a beautiful panoramic view of the city.

Being away from the main tourist centre, the place is

quiet, perfect for a good night's sleep. A great little pub sits at the top of the Square called the Cobblestones, and features regular traditional music sessions while once a week, Generator also have musicians frequenting their bar, playing some tunes on their way to Cobblestones.

The walk from town to Generator is about 10-15 mins depending on your pace, but takes you past some many of Dublin's pretty bridges and also right by the oldest pub in Ireland, The Brazen Head. Often a desirable trait of a hostel is it's proximity to the action, but Generator manages to balance location with useful transport connections, walkable distance to the centre of the city



ROOMS & BATHROOMS

The décor in reception is bright, bubbly and trendy cool without being overwhelming, and the style and attention to décor detail is continued throughout the building and rooms with a stylized wall panel brightening up one wall and offsetting the cool blue tone of the ensuite walls.

My twin room was small but not cramped and perfect for two friends traveling together, though a couple might hope for a less linear layout. The hostel also offers a range of triple, quad and multi bunk dorms, with a large portion of female only 'Luxurious Ladies' dorms, depending on your needs. All rooms feature ensuites and full length mirrors.

The main pluses of the twin room were it's wonderful large windows letting in the sunshine, the ability to open the windows and let some fresh air in, comfortable and sturdy beds that don't sink as you sit on them, decent pillows and small but clean ensuite bathrooms complete with towels (not included for dorms).

The room also had two separate lights allowing two areas of the room to be lit separately, however it did lack a bed lamp as they had recently been removed and repurposed into funky new chandeliers in the lobby. I anticipate the lamps in rooms will eventually be replaced as the finishing touches to renovations and improvements are completed.

FACILITIES

Generator offer a range of excellent facilities that include large spacious common areas where guests can enjoy a pint from the bar or a meal from the pop up restaurant or onsite café.

The free wifi extends throughout the hostel and signal is strong on all the floors. The password changes weekly so if you stay over on a Sunday night, you'll need to pick up the new password or check the daily board where it is listed.

A free walking tour starts at the Hostel Lobby at 10.30am every morning. Generator also run a travel desk where you can book city tours and assistance with planning your travel itinerary. Options for entertainment in the hostel include movie nights and themed activities.

Early morning breakfast boxes are available to order for collection before usual breakfast hours and includes an excellent quality selection of roll and spread, piece of fruit, box of juice and a truly decadent almond croissant. It's a great way to make an early start that much more bearable.

Generator also cater really well to groups, be it hen parties, stag nights, tour groups, families or just groups of friends, with a variety of packages available, some of which can include breakfast in bed, or even your own DJ and cocktail lessons when booking the Ladies Jacuzzi suite.

FACTBOX:

Address

Smithfield Square Dublin 7, Ireland

Telephone

(+353) 1 9010222

Website

www.generatorhostels.com/en/destinations/dublin/

PRICES:

Dorms from €9 per person

Privates start at €22.50 per person, per night.

VERDICT:

Being further away from the hustle and bustle of the city centre, the hostel has a much more appealing atmosphere to cater to a wide variety of travelers and its quirky art and accents give the place a really positive energy. The staff are friendly and helpful whether they worked at reception, at the bar or in the café and pop up restaurant. The thing I noticed most about Generator was the look on people's faces as they entered the lobby, always looking around in slight awe or wonder, smiling at the uniqueness and appeal of this design hostel. It is incredibly female friendly, solo traveller friendly and even suitable for large groups. All in all, I would stay again and look forward to seeing what developments are implemented over the summer.

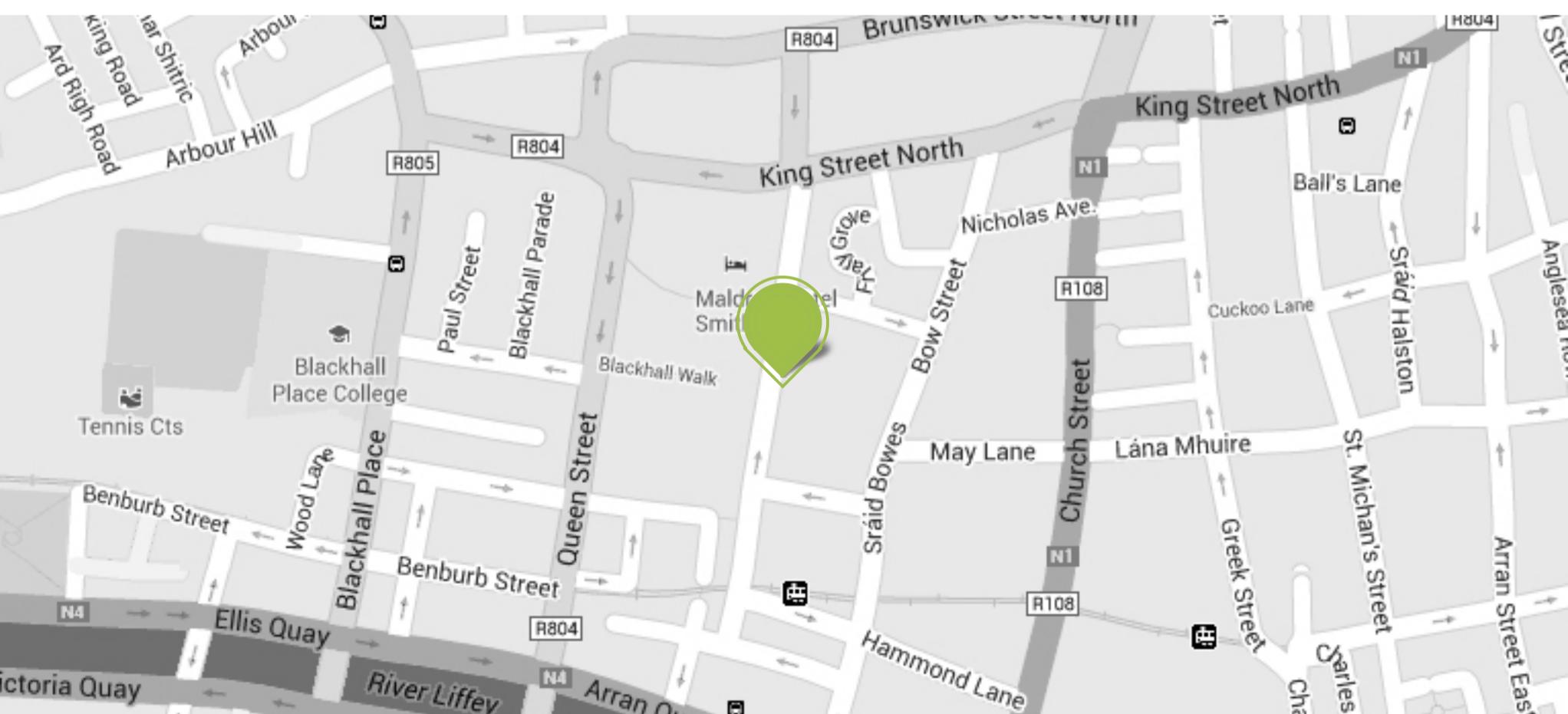
GETTING THERE:

Generator Dublin is right next to Jameson Distillery on Smithfield Square and less than a 3-minute walk from Smithfield Tram stop.

The links from the airport to the Dublin hostel are excellent and the Airlink 747 operates daily from 6am (7am Sunday) every 15 minutes for €6.

You can get on the Airlink express from outside both airport terminals every 15 mins for only €6 single €10 return. You need to get off at Ushers Quay and the hostel is right next to the stop.

The Airlink runs Monday to Saturday – 05:00 – 23:30
Sunday: 07:00 – 23:00



DREAM HOSTEL TAMPERE

Åkerlundinkatu 2, 33100 Tampere, Finland

A perfect blend of blue and white, warm hospitality, and Finnish design philosophy makes Dream Hostel the best hostel in Finland, and possibly the best in the rest of the Nordic countries.





LOCATION

Just a few minutes' walk from Tampere train station, Dream Hostel is in a great location near several well-known local landmarks like Tampere Hall, Tampere University, Pakkahuone and Sorsapuisto Park.

Situated in the university neighborhood of Tulli, the hostel is in the hub of the city's nightlife: trendy bars, local restaurants, an outdoor market, secondhand stores, and a grocery store are just a stone's throw away.

TOP TIP

One of the great Finnish traditions is to visit the sauna and Tampere has three public saunas to choose from. Costing as little as €5, it's a fantastic rejuvenating experience.

ROOMS & BATHROOMS

The rooms are air-conditioned and spacious with beds nicely spaced out.

Big heavy doors and thick walls keep it quiet and peaceful. The beds are sturdy and come equipped with discreet reading lights and power points to juice your gadgets.

Whilst the rooms are not ensuite, toilets and shower facilities are plentiful and cleaned on a regular basis. It's probably one of the most powerful showers I've ever experienced in a hostel. Awesome.

Guests can choose from twin rooms, four-bed private rooms, four-bed female-only dorms, and four-, 10- and 16-bed mixed dorms.

TOP TIP

For privacy and comfort, choose one of the twin rooms.

FACILITIES

The centerpiece of this hostel is the kitchen, which also doubles as a social space. There are lots of board games to play, there is a great selection of books to read, and also there is also a collection of maps and guides for you to get inspiration for your trip. Guests chill out on their tablets or laptops using the hostel's excellent free wifi.

Help yourself to unlimited refills of top-notch Colombian coffee from the filter coffee machine. Other perks include free pea soup on Thursdays and free popcorn when it rains (which it does a lot in Tampere, so your chances are good!) and on Friday nights.

The hostel does not offer breakfast, but there is a supermarket nearby and the hostel has a nice arrangement with the local café where you can enjoy a hearty breakfast for as little as €5.

For around €10, you have the option of renting bikes to explore the city and the great Finnish outdoors.

Ville and the rest of the team at Dream are very enthusiastic and passionate about the city and the beautiful surrounding countryside – feel free to ask them for any tips and recommendations, plus check out the noticeboard for the staff's daily tips. The hostel has excellent connections with local adventure sports tour operators, so if you're looking to go mountain biking, hiking or canoeing, you've got plenty of cool options.

FACTBOX:

Address:

Åkerlundinkatu 2, 33100 Tampere, Finland

Phone:

(+358) 45 2360517

Website:

dreamhostel.fi/fi/etusivu/

PRICES:

Dorms from €19.80 per person

Quads from €89 per room,

Twins from €62 per room.

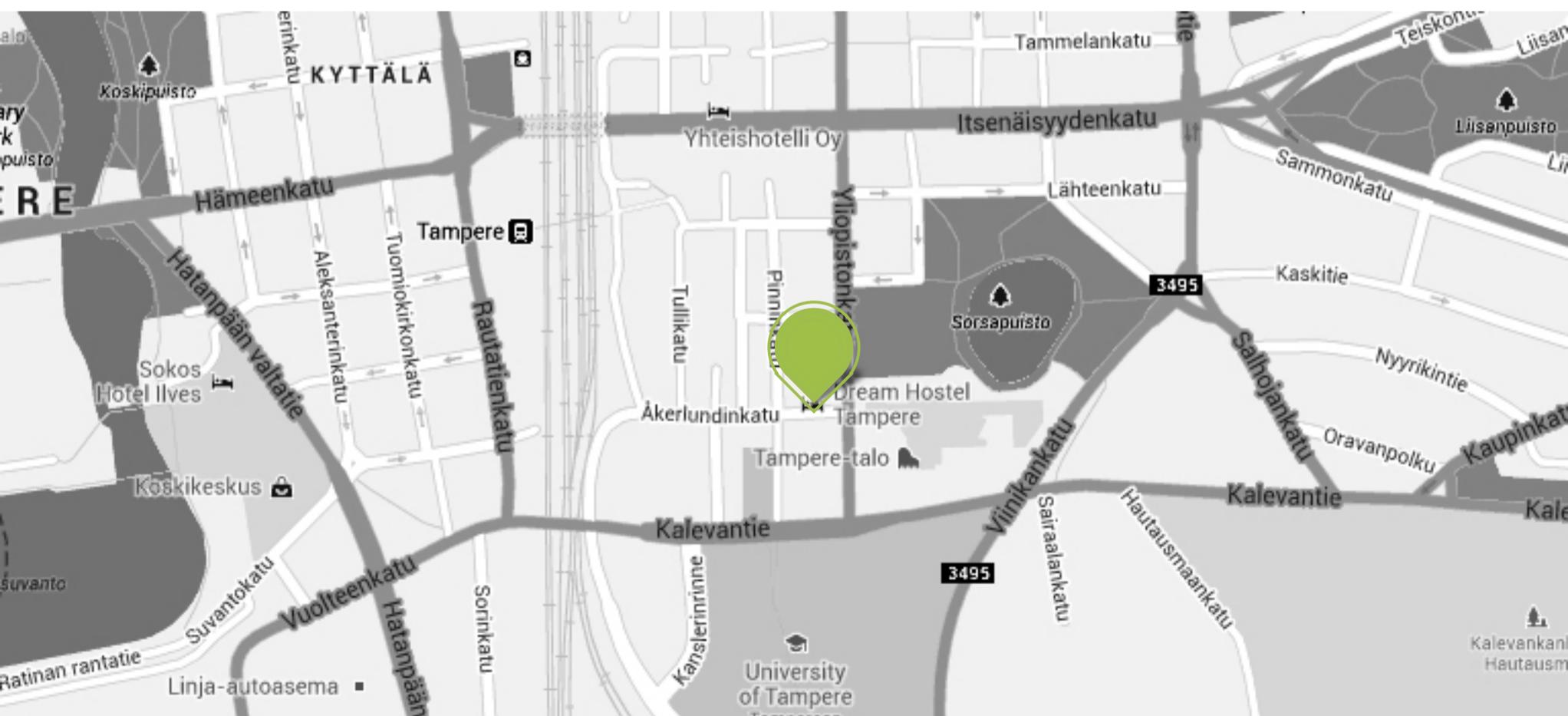
VERDICT:

Excellent design, great hospitality, and comfortable rooms make this a very cool luxury hostel. No surprise that it has been voted the best hostel in Finland.

GETTING THERE:

From Tampere-Pirkkala Airport: Take Bus 61 from Terminal 1 or the Tokee bus from Terminal 2 to the bus station or railway station.

From the railway station and the bus station: the hostel is a 10-minute walk away.



PLUS HOSTEL BERLIN

Warschauer Platz 6, D-10245 Berlin, Germany

An indoor swimming pool, sauna, jacuzzi, excellent Italian restaurant, and iconic artists' commune all under one roof? Say hello to Plus Berlin, a hostel with a big difference.



LOCATION

Plus's Berlin branch is in an excellent location just off Warschauer Strasse near the S-Bahn station, so you're well connected to the Hauptbahnhof and the heart of Berlin.

The East Side Gallery – one of the remaining stretches of the Berlin Wall – is a few hundred yards away. There's a clutch of cool bars in the area and across the bridge is the hip Watergate club.

ROOMS & BATHROOMS

TOP TIP

If you're travelling in a group, I recommend checking out their six-bed dorm rooms, which have two ensuite bathrooms. At just €13 per person per night, these rooms represent a great deal.

The rooms themselves are very spacious, clean, and comfortable. I stayed in the double room within the 'hotel' wing of the hostel.

Private rooms come with ensuite bathrooms. They're a decent size with a fantastic power shower and add-ons like hairdryers.

FACILITIES

One key signature of the Plus Hostels is that they have a swimming pool and sauna.

Hostels and swimming pools?! I know.

The moment I walked in and saw the pool, I suddenly had an image of crazy pool parties. The idea of a swimming pool in a hostel seems utterly fantastic yet a recipe for total anarchy.

The reception staff told me that they did have pool parties before, but it predictably descended into chaos and was stopped soon after.

TOP TIP

When I visited the pool in the afternoon, it was quiet with not a soul around. The school groups had left for the day so it was serene.

FACTBOX:

Address:

Warschauer Platz 6, D-10245 Berlin, Germany

Phone:

(+49) 30 21238501

Website:

www.plushostels.com/plusberlin

PRICES:

Dorms from €12,

Doubles from €19 per person,

Triples from €17 per person.

The perfect place to relax in Plus is the courtyard and garden. Guests here drink in the mellow sunshine, relaxing on the deck chairs or sleeping off the excesses of the night before.

The presence of a few pet rabbits scurrying around adds to the sense of tranquility. There is a series of wrought-iron sculptures exhibited in the garden. I was told they are part of a mobile exhibition known as the Tacheles. Since they were evicted from their home, the Tacheles has become a mobile art exhibition presenting contemporary artworks around the city, and their temporary home is the garden of Plus Berlin.

There are exciting plans to introduce art and design classes for guests in the future, so definitely keep an eye out when you visit.

Another defining space is the Opera Restaurant and Bar. It's an impressive room with polished wooden floors and vaulted ceilings adorned by a series of kitsch circular lampshades. The centrepiece of the room is the impressively stocked long bar.

To the front they have a huge projector screen showing all the big games, as well as a well-stocked library of books that guests can use.

Adjoining the front is a room with a pool table. In the evenings, you can enjoy a choice of pizza or pasta dishes for a small price.

At night, the bar is a great place to hang out and meet fellow guests.

The staff were some of the friendliest I've come across so far – extremely helpful and cheerful with lots of great tips for places to eat and drink at nearby.

VERDICT:

Plus Berlin is an awesome hostel – I really enjoyed my stay here and definitely recommend staying here as an option when you visit Berlin.

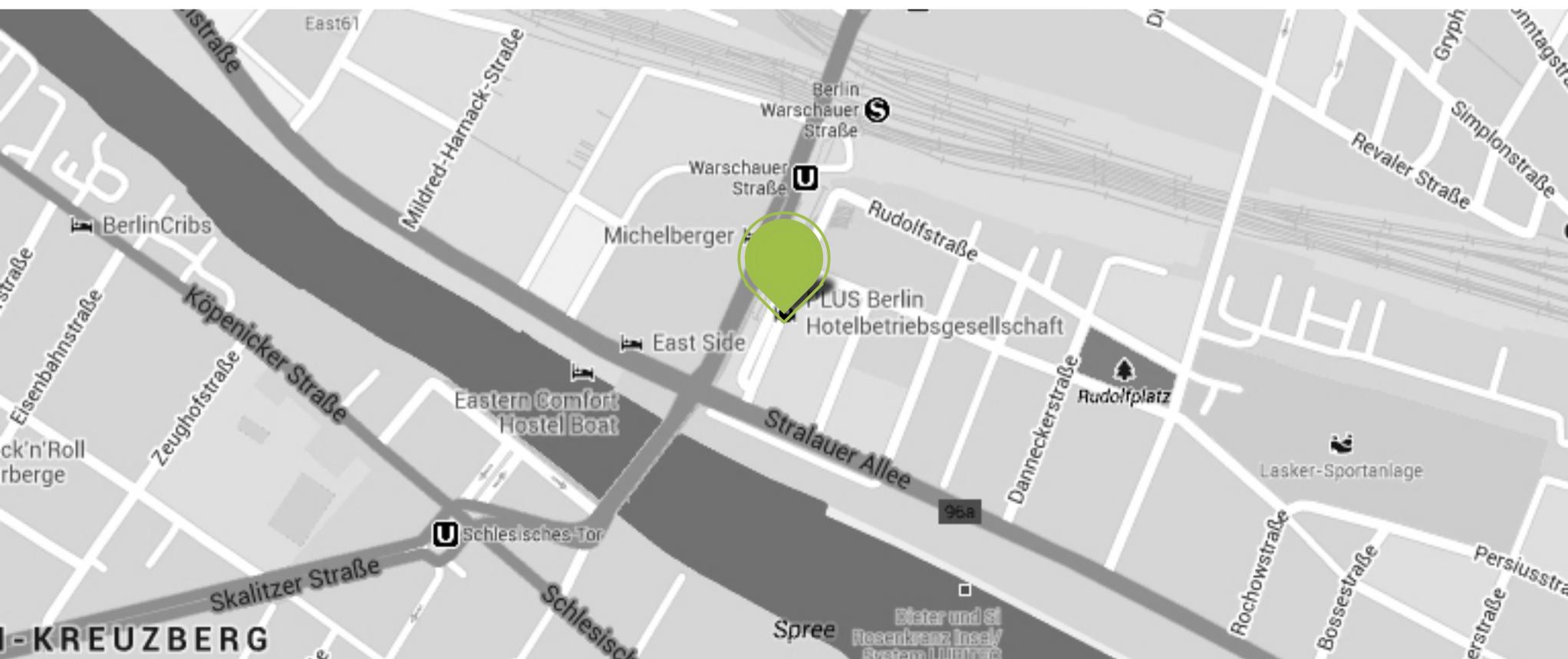
GETTING THERE:

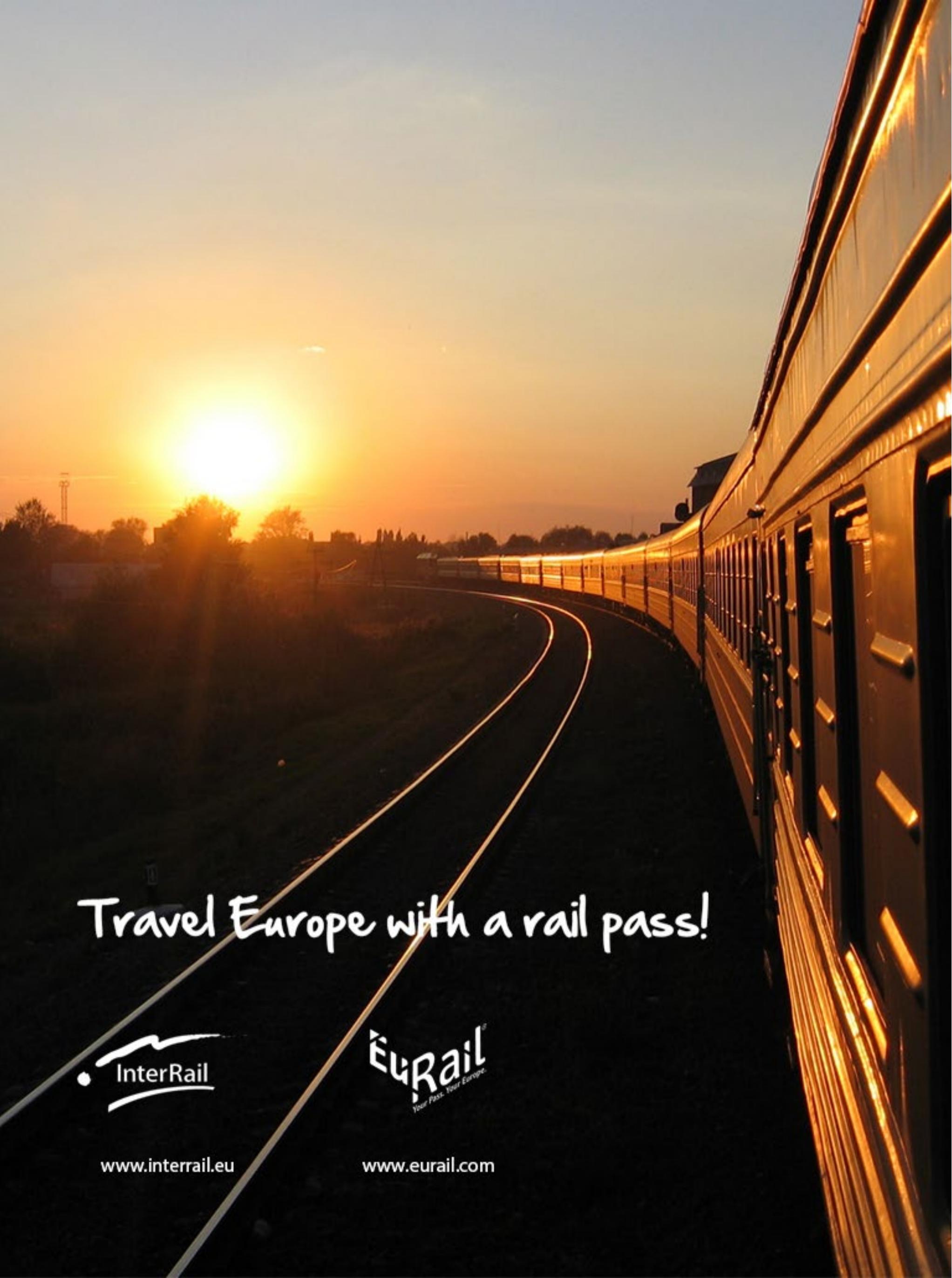
From Tegel Airport, take the Express Bus TXL to Berlin Hauptbahnhof and then the S3, S5, S7, or S75 train to Warschauer Strasse. The hostel is a five-minute walk away.

From Schönefeld and Berlin-Brandenburg Airports, take the S9 train to Ostkreuz, then the S3, S5, S7, or S75 to Warschauer Strasse. The hostel is a five-minute walk away.

From Berlin Hauptbahnhof or Berlin Ostbahnhof, take the S3, S5, S7, or S75 to Warschauer Strasse. The hostel is a five-minute walk away.

From Central Bus Station, take the U2 to Gleisdreieck, then the U1 to Warschauer Strasse. The hostel is a five-minute walk away.





Travel Europe with a rail pass!



www.interrail.eu



www.eurail.com

PLUS HOSTELS PRAGUE

P ívozní 1562/1, 170 00 Praha, Czech Republic

If you're looking for an alternative view of Prague, Plus Prague just might be the hostel for you.





LOCATION

At first, the location of the hostel in Praha 7 can seem a bit of drawback. However, having visited Prague three times before while staying in the Old Town, I was looking for a different view of Prague this time around. Outside the hostel is a tram stop that drops you into Malastrana in 15 minutes, which I found to be pretty convenient. Plus, Holesevice train station is just one stop away, so it's handy if you're coming into Prague by train.

The hostel is on a quiet street. There are a few grocery shops nearby where you can buy basic essentials and pick up a half litre bottle of the local pilsner beer for around €0.60. Further up the road is a busy little bakery packed with locals called Mlsny Jazycek Bistro. You can get fresh-baked bread along with slices of locally produced salami and cheese to build your own sandwich. Cost-wise, it came to only €2, which was a bargain.

The other great thing about this location for me was discovering Cross Club, a very alternative club just a few minutes' walk from the hostel. I didn't encounter too many tourists or guests from the hostel here, mainly locals. While they play a lot of drum and bass, even if you're not into that kind of music, you will love this place. There's a nice outdoor seating area for chilling, two bars for drinking, and two clubs for dancing.

ROOMS & BATHROOMS

Rooms are clean, comfortable and quite spacious with ensuite bathrooms in all the dorms and private - rooms. All the beds come with a private reading light and power socket to power your gadgets.

They also have the female-only Plus Girls dorms,



FACTBOX:

Address:

Přívozní 1562/1, 170 00 Praha, Czech Republic

Phone:

+420 220 510 046

Website:

www.plushostels.com/plusprague

PRICES:

Dorms from €12,

Doubles from €24 per person

which include towels, hairdryer, and a complimentary cosmetic pack.

FACILITIES:

Plus Prague has an excellent range of facilities including a swimming pool, sauna, and a nice on-site restaurant and bar. There is a cool bar and social space, which is ace for meeting fellow guests. I met a crazy bunch of guys and girls at the hostel and had a cracking night out with them. In the evenings, the bar gets busy and doubles as a nightclub and often hosts its own themed nights for guests. It's a great place to start your evening in Prague.

The staff are friendly and efficient.

You'll also find an onsite travel shop where the staff can book you into local activities from pub crawls to concerts and various organised tours, even skydiving! Also, the popular free New Europe walking tours depart from the hostel and are great if you're looking to get an idea and feel of Prague's history and landmarks.

There are a few minor quibbles to mention: wifi is excellent in the common room but nonexistent in the rooms. The curtains in the bedrooms could be a bit thicker and prevent daylight from flooding in. The breakfast was quite basic and could be improved.

In terms of meeting fellow travellers, I got lucky and met a really cool group of travellers and had a sensational night out on the town with them. However, I noticed the big groups of tour operators like Busabout and Topdeck dominated the scene. This is a problem for most large hostels catering for groups, and I think more can be done to identify and cater to solo travellers. Having an on-site swimming pool and sauna, a rarity for hostels, is a big plus. For the price of just €10 for an eight-bed ensuite dorm, this hostel represents great value.

VERDICT:

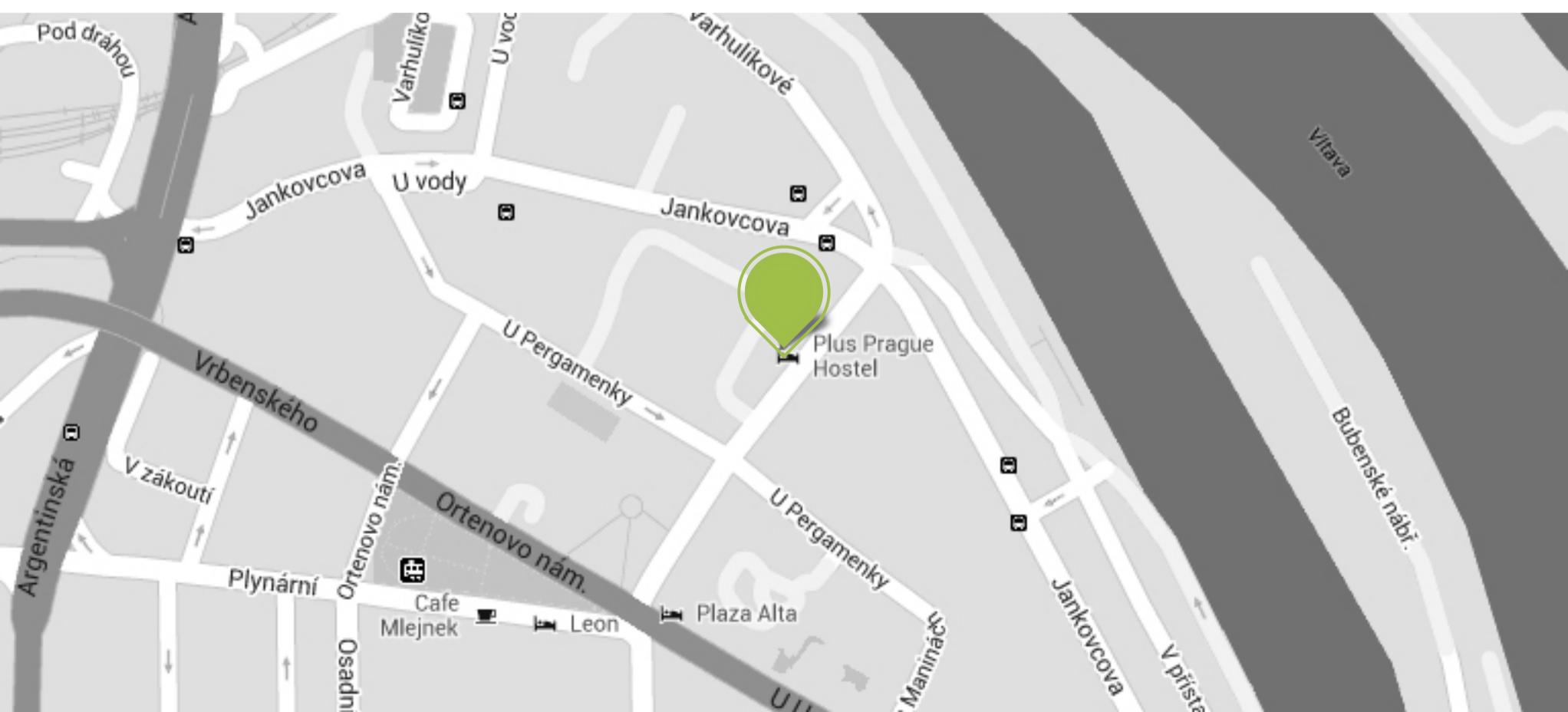
My stay at Plus Prague was a positive experience and gained me a new perspective of the city.

The obscure location means it is a 15-minute ride into town, but on the other hand, it also offers you a chance to get off the beaten track and check out places that tourists rarely visit. If that sounds like your game, do check out Plus Prague on your next trip.

GETTING THERE:

From Prague Airport, take the express bus to Hlavní Nádraží train station. Private shuttles from the airport are available upon request.

From Hlavní Nádraží train station or Florenc bus station, take metro line C to Nádraží Holešovice, then take the tram to Ortenovo Náměstí. The hostel is a two-minute walk from the Ortenovo Náměstí stop.



PLUS HOSTELS FLORENCE

Via Santa Caterina D'Alessandria, 15, 50129 Florence, Italy

It's not often that you visit a hostel boasting not one but two swimming pools in addition to a Turkish bath, steam room, and sauna – but there's so much more to Plus Florence than those incredible amenities.





LOCATION

Plus Hostels Florence is in a nice, quiet neighborhood about a 10-minute walk from Firenze Santa Maria Novella Station. A short walk from the hostel brings you past the markets to the Duomo and the historic core of the city.

ROOMS & BATHROOMS

The rooms are akin to what you would find in a budget hotel: clean and spacious with ensuite bathrooms. You have lockers within the room, as well as a dressing table, mirror and a small TV. Beds come with a reading light and a power socket to charge your gadgets.

There are also the 'Plus Girls' four-, six-, and eight-bed female-only dorms that include a large ensuite bathroom, towels, hairdryer and a complimentary cosmetic pack.

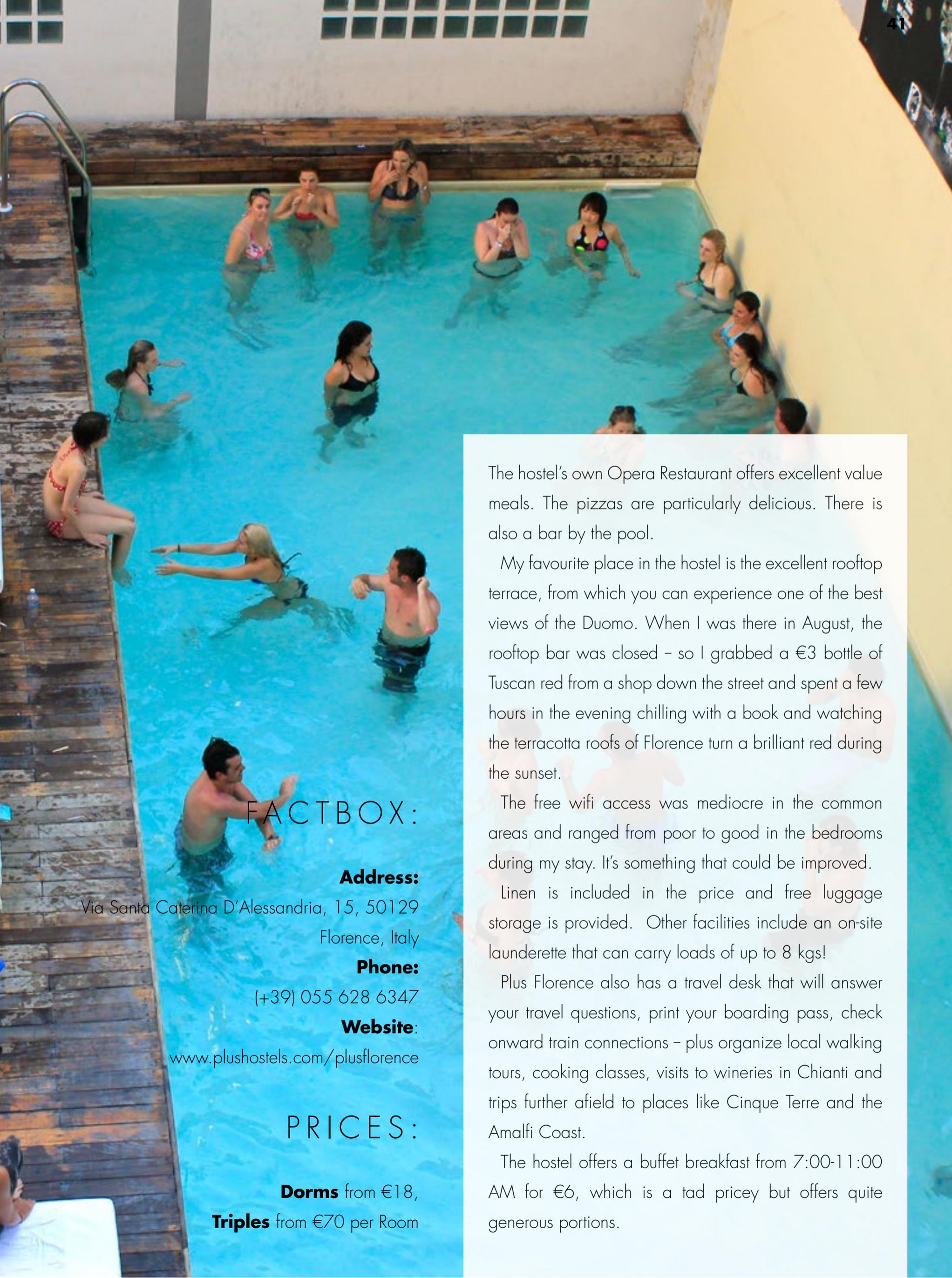
The hostel also has family-friendly mini-apartments that come with all of the above plus refrigerator and microwave, but no cooking facilities.

FACILITIES:

The facilities are outstanding at Plus Florence. You have a huge outdoor pool to cool down in after a long day in the heat. In the winter, guests can access an indoor pool, Turkish bath, sauna, and steam room – for a hostel, this is highly unusual and but very welcomed and appreciated.

TOP TIP

If you're not in the party spirit, choose a room in the top floor where it is much quieter.



FACTBOX:

Address:

Via Santa Caterina D'Alessandria, 15, 50129
Florence, Italy

Phone:

(+39) 055 628 6347

Website:

www.plushostels.com/plusflorence

PRICES:

Dorms from €18,
Triples from €70 per Room

The hostel's own Opera Restaurant offers excellent value meals. The pizzas are particularly delicious. There is also a bar by the pool.

My favourite place in the hostel is the excellent rooftop terrace, from which you can experience one of the best views of the Duomo. When I was there in August, the rooftop bar was closed - so I grabbed a €3 bottle of Tuscan red from a shop down the street and spent a few hours in the evening chilling with a book and watching the terracotta roofs of Florence turn a brilliant red during the sunset.

The free wifi access was mediocre in the common areas and ranged from poor to good in the bedrooms during my stay. It's something that could be improved.

Linen is included in the price and free luggage storage is provided. Other facilities include an on-site launderette that can carry loads of up to 8 kgs!

Plus Florence also has a travel desk that will answer your travel questions, print your boarding pass, check onward train connections - plus organize local walking tours, cooking classes, visits to wineries in Chianti and trips further afield to places like Cinque Terre and the Amalfi Coast.

The hostel offers a buffet breakfast from 7:00-11:00 AM for €6, which is a tad pricey but offers quite generous portions.

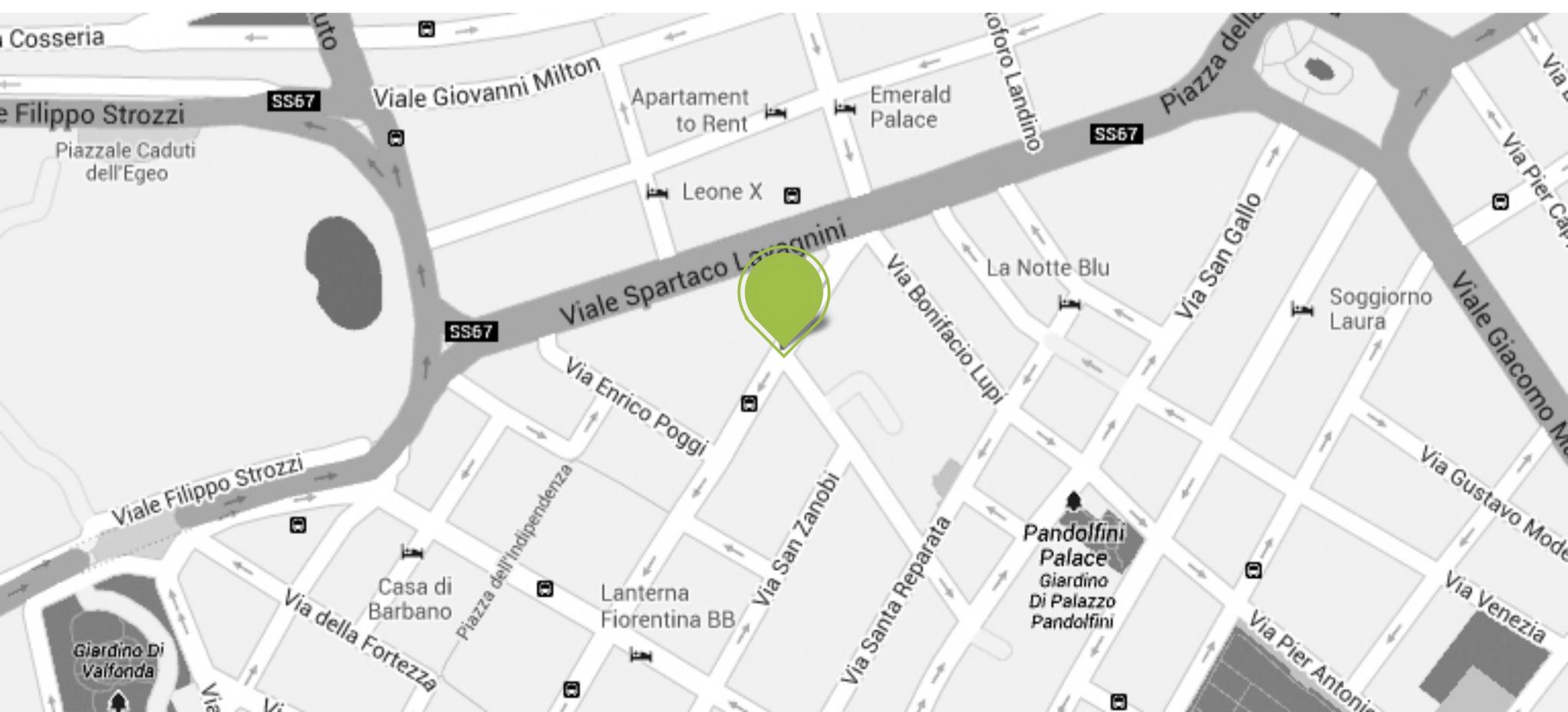
VERDICT:

Thanks to a great location in Florence, top-notch facilities like the on-site restaurant, outdoor and indoor swimming pools, Turkish bath, steam room and sauna, plus a terrific rooftop terrace makes this is a great base for exploring Florence. If they can improve the wifi, perfect.

GETTING THERE:

From Florence Airport, take the bus to Santa Maria Novella station. From Pisa Airport, take the train to Santa Maria Novella Station in Florence.

The hostel is a ten-minute walk from Santa Maria Novella Station.



WOMBATS HOSTEL VIENNA NASCHMARKT

Rechte Wienzeile 35, Vienna, Austria

Thanks to its great location in the Naschmarkt, excellent facilities, cool design, and superb value for money breakfast, Wombats City Hostel Vienna Naschmarkt is the perfect base for exploring Vienna.





LOCATION

Wombats City Hostel Vienna Naschmarkt is in a terrific location overlooking Vienna's biggest market. It's a short walk from the Hofburg, Secessionhaus and the Vienna State Opera, making it ideal for those looking to soak up some culture while in the city.

ROOMS & BATHROOMS

All of the rooms come with comfy wooden beds and ensuite bathrooms.

The female-only dorms have full-length mirrors and come with a hairdryer in the bathroom.

Cleanliness is next to godliness for this hostel staff - they take it very seriously here and have twice won the HostelWorld award for the Cleanest Hostel Chain Worldwide.

FACILITIES

Wombats is very secure with key card access for the front door of the hostel, each floor, the rooms, and personal lockers.

Free wifi access in the common areas is excellent and at the time of this review, they had started extending it to the guest bedrooms, which is great news.

Linen is included, as is luggage storage.

The hostel offers a free drink on arrival, which you can enjoy at the excellent womBar. The womBar also has special drink offers, including €1 beers, between 6:00 PM and 8:00 PM every day.



The front lobby is stocked with lots of brochures, travel guides and maps of the city and onward destinations to help with your trip planning.

There is a small kitchenette for guests to use. Plenty of supermarkets are in the neighborhood, making it perfect if you're looking to cook and save money.

Wombats offers an excellent breakfast – one of the best ones I've seen in a hostel. The all-you-can-eat breakfast costs an extra €3.80 but offers a very generous spread which includes coffee, bread, selection of cheese and cold meats like prosciutto and salami, yogurts, fruit, honey, cereals and lots of Nutella.

Other facilities include an on-site launderette, costing €5 for a wash and dry. You can also hire hair dryers from reception for a refundable €10 deposit.

FACTBOX:

Address:

Rechte Wienzeile 35, Vienna, Austria

Phone:

(+43) 1 8972336

Website:

wombats-hostels.com/vienna/the-naschmarkt/

PRICES:

Dorms from €18,

Triples from €26 per person,

Doubles from €32 per person.

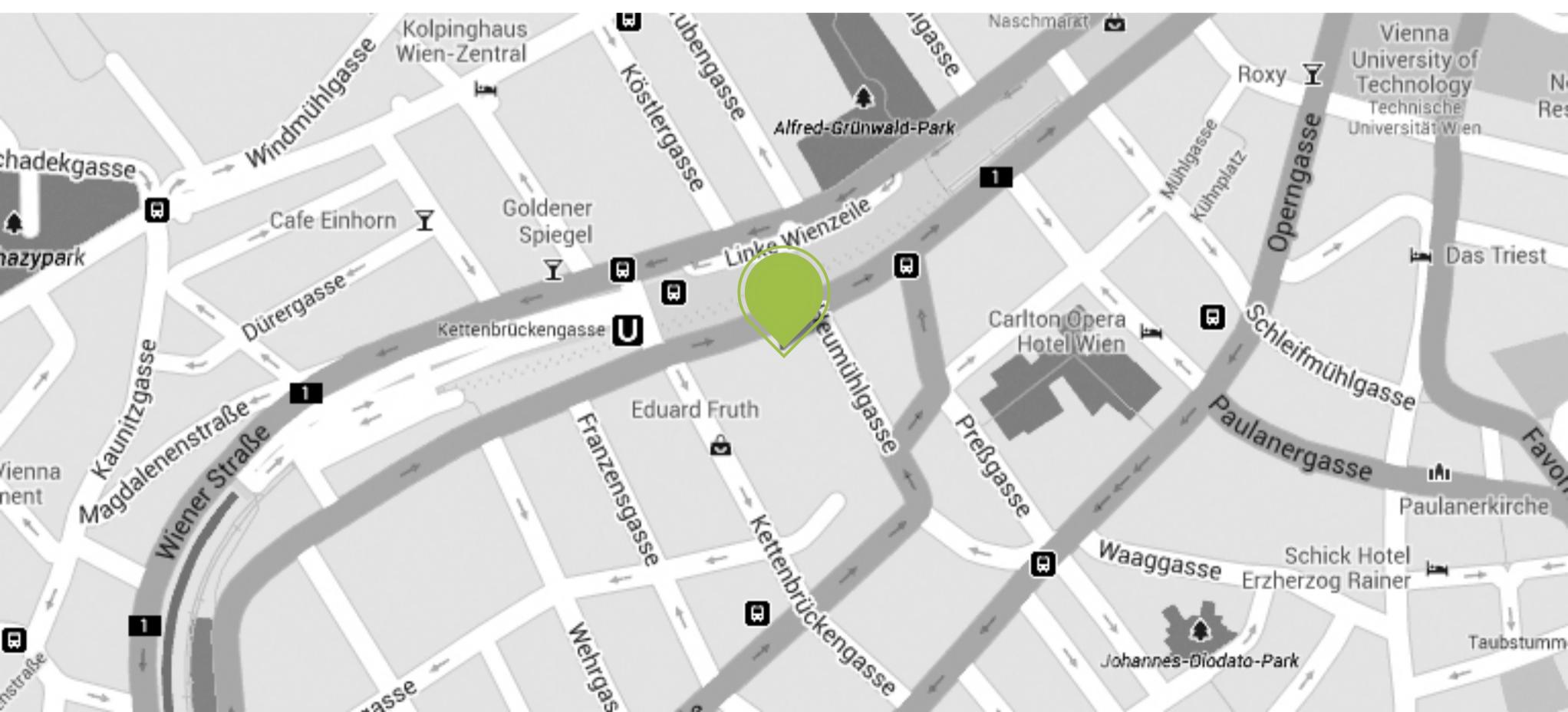
VERDICT:

The great Naschmarkt location, top-notch facilities, cool design, and superb value for money breakfast make Wombats Naschmarkt the perfect base for exploring Vienna. Highly recommended.

GETTING THERE:

From Vienna Airport, take the shuttle bus to Schwedenplatz, then the S-Bahn to Wien Mitte, then the U4 to Kettenbrückengasse. The hostel is a three-minute walk from Kettenbrückengasse station.

From all train stations, take the U4 to Kettenbrückengasse. The hostel is a three-minute walk from Kettenbrückengasse station.



Travellerspoint

For people who love to travel



create your own map like this



www.travellerspoint.com



AVENTURA BOUTIQUE HOSTEL, BUDAPEST

1132 Budapest, Visegrádi St 12, Budapest, Hungary

If you're looking for a friendly, cosy hostel to enjoy after a long day of exploring the sights and sounds of Buda and Pest, then the Aventura Boutique Hostel, Budapest is a perfect base for your adventures in this fantastic city.



LOCATION

The hostel is in a quiet neighbourhood just off the 5th district and a 15-minute walk from Parliament, the Basilica, Opera House and Margaret Island. Nyugati Ter metro station is just one block away. Nyugati Palyaudvar train station and the grand boulevard of Budapest, home to the tram network, are also close by. There are two inexpensive convenience stores around the corner from the hostel and a modern shopping mall is just down the road.

ROOMS & BATHROOMS

Aventura offers a range of different themed rooms, all quite spacious with lots of light. From the minimalistic Japan room to the exotic and colourful Africa and India rooms to sleeping under the stars in the Space room, staying in this hostel is like a trip around the world.

Unlike most hostels, there are no bunk beds in the Aventura. Linen is included in the price; hairdryers are available at reception and towels can be hired for a small price. The



**BOUTIQUE
THEMED
ROOMS**

Space Theme



BOUTIQUE THEMED ROOMS

India Theme

FACTBOX:

Address:

1132 Budapest, Visegrádi St 12, Budapest, Hungary
(Doorbell 5, Floor 1, Apt. 1)

Phone:

(+36) 1 239 0782

Website:

www.aventurahostel.com

PRICES:

Dorms from €9,

Doubles from €29 per room,

Apartments from €50.

common bathroom is very clean and given the small size of the hostel, getting access is easy. Showers are excellent with plenty of hot water.

Families looking for their own space but still wanting the comfort and convenience of the hostel can choose to stay in the stylish Art Apartment, just around the corner from the main hostel building.

FACILITIES

Sleeping 25 guests, this is a cosy, peaceful and friendly hostel.

In terms of facilities, this hostel knows just how to put a smile on a weary backpacker's face: nice kitchen, free excellent wifi, tons of information about places to go and things to see in Budapest and the surrounding region.

The staff are very friendly and knowledgeable with lots of cool tips for things to see and do. They also happy to do your laundry at a small price.

A noteworthy feature of Aventura is that they offer an in-house massage service costing as little as €20 for a one-hour massage! It's great value and perfect if your backpack has been breaking your back in the weeks past.

The hostel offers a continental breakfast for around €3. Alternatively, check out the café downstairs, which offers a nice cooked breakfast with coffee for a few euros. Professional childcare can be organized on request.

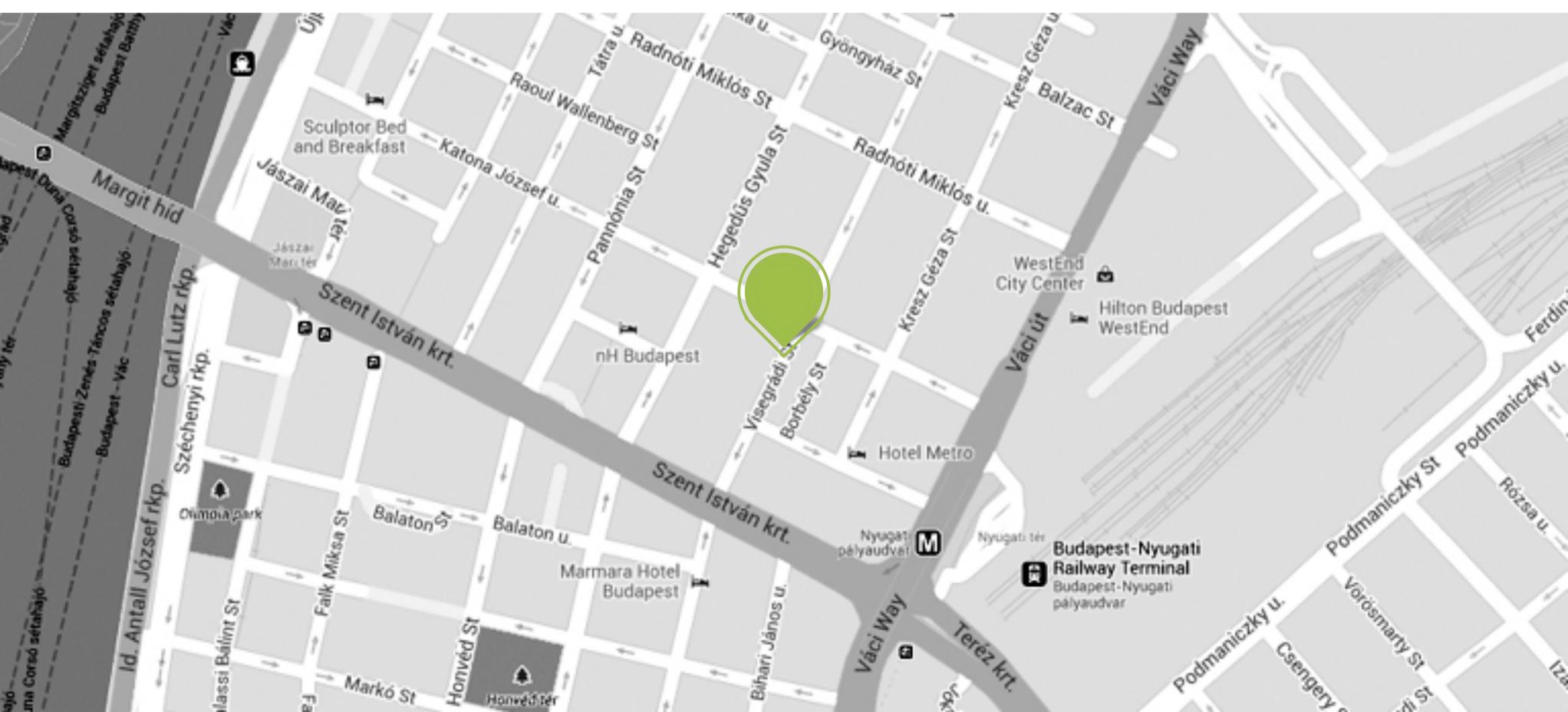
VERDICT:

Great location, friendly staff and the unique feature of offering an inexpensive, in-house massage service makes a stay at Aventura a memorable experience.

GETTING THERE:

From Budapest Airport: Take the bus to the metro, then take the metro to Nyugati Ter (Nyugati Pályaudvar/Western Train Station). Exit at Szent Istvan Korut. The hostel is a five-minute walk from the station.

From the train station: take the 2 line on the metro to Deak Ferenc Ter, then the 3 line to Nyugati Ter (Nyugati Pályaudvar/Western Train Station). Exit at Szent Istvan Korut. The hostel is a five-minute walk from the station.



HOSTEL CELICA SLOVENIA

Metelkova 8, SI, 1000 Ljubljana, Slovenia

Ever considered spending a night behind bars without getting arrested? Welcome to Hostel Celica, a former jail.



BANGED UP

PRISON CELLS

from

€22

per person.

LOCATION

Hostel Celica is located just a few meters from the main bus and train station in Ljubljana and a 10-minute walk from the Ljubljana city centre.

ROOMS & BATHROOMS

My room was Prison Cell #107. It was quite a radical departure from all the other hostels I've stayed in, complete with a barred metal door.

As it swung open and made that all too familiar whining

sound, it felt surreal – after years of watching prison dramas, I was starring in my own.

My immediate instinct when I shut the door behind me and dumped my rucksack on the bed was to escape – to find a ventilation pipe or drain and dig a tunnel under the bed with my ballpoint pen.

The cells are quite tight and clammy. Everything is neatly squeezed in, bunk bed on the bottom and top, reading light and a power point conveniently situated behind the pillow.

There's no air conditioning in the rooms. I'm told it's hard

getting permission from local authorities to make changes to heritage buildings like this one. Thankfully, the staff here are very helpful. Within a few minutes of informing them of the excessive heat, a big huge stand fan appeared in my cell. Each of the cells is beautifully illustrated by local artists, giving them a unique feel and look.

None of the cells are ensuite. Instead, there are a handful of toilets and showers located on each floor. Given that this is a relatively small- to medium-sized hostel, they thankfully never get overcrowded.

FACILITIES

Like all good hostels, Celica excels in looking after its guests and offering a home away from home experience.

From the reception staff to the breakfast staff to even the cleaners, everyone has a smile on their face.

The hostel benefits from its alternate ego as an arts and culture centre, but its true piece de resistance is its fantastic garden.

Overgrown with huge tall trees and a nice spread of colourful tables and chairs under umbrella shades, it is an oasis of calm in the middle of the city. Toward the back of the garden, there is a separate area with hammocks and beanie chairs – perfect for grabbing a book and relaxing. Breakfast in the garden is a great way to start my day in

Ljubljana.

Every evening, the candlelit garden becomes a meeting point for guests and locals who flood into to see a wide variety of live concerts, art exhibitions, and themed parties, all of which are free for guests to attend.

During the day, there is a steady trickle of locals coming in to drink coffee and meet friends in the hostel bar or to take advantage of Celica's excellent lunch specials. For as little as €6.50, you can enjoy a three-course meal.

I try the three-course lunch for myself: a delicious soup, chicken curry and rice, and a nice slice of melon for dessert. A simple but great meal, just what one needs after days of hostelling, eating street food, and drinking beers.

On hot summer nights, the hostel does an excellent barbecue for guests on certain days of the week.

Hostel Celica feels like a meeting point between the world and the locals of Ljubljana. Everywhere you walk in Ljubljana, there are signs pointing to Hostel Celica. It's great to be in a place that is such an intrinsic part of the community and its history.

Luxury is not just a concept that can be simply defined by a double room with ensuite facilities in a hostel. Luxury is an experience.

At Hostel Celica, I did not feel like a typical tourist; instead, I was a guest of the city and its people. That for me is what makes staying in Hostel Celica an unforgettable luxury experience.

FACTBOX:

Address:

Metelkova 8, SI, 1000 Ljubljana, Slovenia

Phone:

(+ 386) 1 230 97 00

Website:

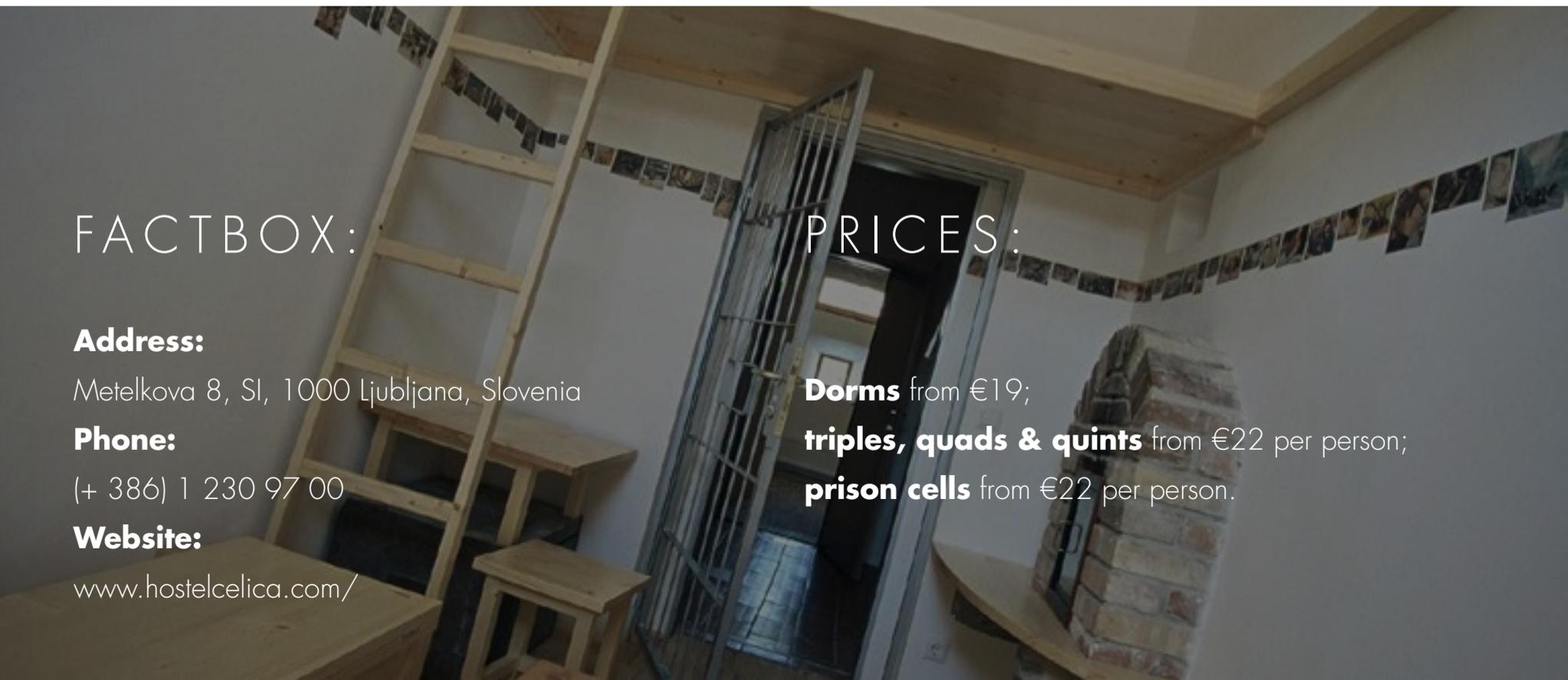
www.hostelcelica.com/

PRICES:

Dorms from €19;

triples, quads & quints from €22 per person;

prison cells from €22 per person.



VERDICT:

In the era of mass tourism and globalization, where cities have been homogenised and there is less emphasis on character and individuality, it's rare to find experiences that provoke, inspire and move the human imagination. Hostel Celica is a truly unique experience, situated in a stunning city. Come and visit Celica and Ljubljana before the hordes of tourists come.

GETTING THERE:

Hostel Celica is 300 meters from the central railway and bus stations and 700 meters from the city center.



COCOMAMA AMSTERDAM

Westeinde 18, 1017 ZP, Amsterdam, Netherlands

A beautiful 130-year-old building with high ceilings and chandeliers, a garden complete with picnic tables and gnomes, a cuddly hostel cat called Joop, a kitchen stocked with beers for €1, a hostel run by a bunch of energetic ladies who know the city like the back of their hand plus an authentic, not-too-touristy location – what more could you want from a hostel in Amsterdam?



LOCATION

A 20-minute walk from Amsterdam's tourist-filled red light district and much closer to Rembrandt Square and the Heineken Museum lies Cocomama. It's definitely an interesting site location: the premises of Cocomama were once the address of one of the city's most famous brothels, 'Yab Yum'. Guests can still view pictures of the flamboyant former owner and his girls at the entrance. You'll also find a few pairs of racy, lacy underwear hanging beside the pictures of its former residents as a tongue-in-cheek reference to the history of the building.

ROOMS & BATHROOMS

Wherever you choose to sleep, you will find comfortable beds, lockers, power points, and a shower in your room.

If you're on a budget but still looking for a unique experience, you can stay in the brothel-inspired Red District six-bed dorm. Linen is included in the price and the beds are freshly made prior to arrival.

If you're looking for more privacy, you can choose one of their four private double rooms, which are all ensuite and come with linen, towels, soap, a safe for your valuables, a hairdryer and a coffee and tea set-up. Each room comes with a traditional Dutch theme like 'Tulips', 'Forest', 'Royal', and 'Cow & Milk'.

Wifi is free and works in all rooms.



FACILITIES

With a month of rain, Cocomama's sizeable back garden had turned lush and green with furiously long grass.

Lotje, the pretty, red haired co-owner of Cocomama, admitted that it needed to be cut.

'We're quite lucky to have a garden,' she confided to me. "Many of the residential houses and hotels on the street don't have one.'

Being a boutique hostel, Cocomama never caters for groups. The maximum group size they accept is four. This means that the hostel audience is primarily comprised of solo travellers who are keen to mix and socialise with other guests.

Lotje often dines with the hostel guests in the cosy kitchen/living room that is the focal point of socialising in the hostel. Today, she is eating with me.

I've volunteered to cook a simple dish of pasta with peppers and smoked sausage, accompanied by a €3 bottle of Merlot that I picked up from the nearby Lidl, just a block away. The hostel provides basic cooking ingredients, pastas, and spices for the guests' use.

I had thought about venturing out for dinner but I enjoyed the buzz and banter so much in the hostel that on both the nights, I stayed in and ate dinner with the guests.

Cocomama organises a 'Tight Ass Tuesday' where guests can dine together for as little as €3. Sundays are movie nights and on weekends, the staff take the guests on out to their favourite nightlife hotspots.

The hostel has its own beer fridge, which operates on an honesty box policy.

Cocomama is also home to Joop, the hostel cat. He's the star of the show at Cocomama, scurrying around the garden, chasing his imaginary foes. Many an afternoon is

spent on his back in his beanie bag, being showered with affection by the hostel guests.

Expect many acts of random kindness at Cocomama. Right from the moment you walk in, guests are orientated with their surroundings with a detailed and handy explanation of their surroundings with a neat map. Soon, I'm given the lowdown on places where the hostel staff like to eat - I always enjoy these kind of recommendations.

When you're constantly travelling, it's great to be in a place where you can relax, talk to some nice people and just chill.

I've lived in hostels that make a great base to explore and discover a city. Cocomama, on the other hand, really felt like home. During the two days I spent in Amsterdam, I actually ended up spending most of my time in Cocomama.

In the end, thanks to Cocomama, I saw a very different side of life that is known only to the people who have had the good fortune of staying there.





FACTBOX:

Address:

Westeinde 18, 1017 ZP,
Amsterdam, Netherlands

Phone:

(+31) 20 627 2454

Website:

www.cocomama.nl

PRICES:

Dorms from €26,

Doubles from €39 per person.

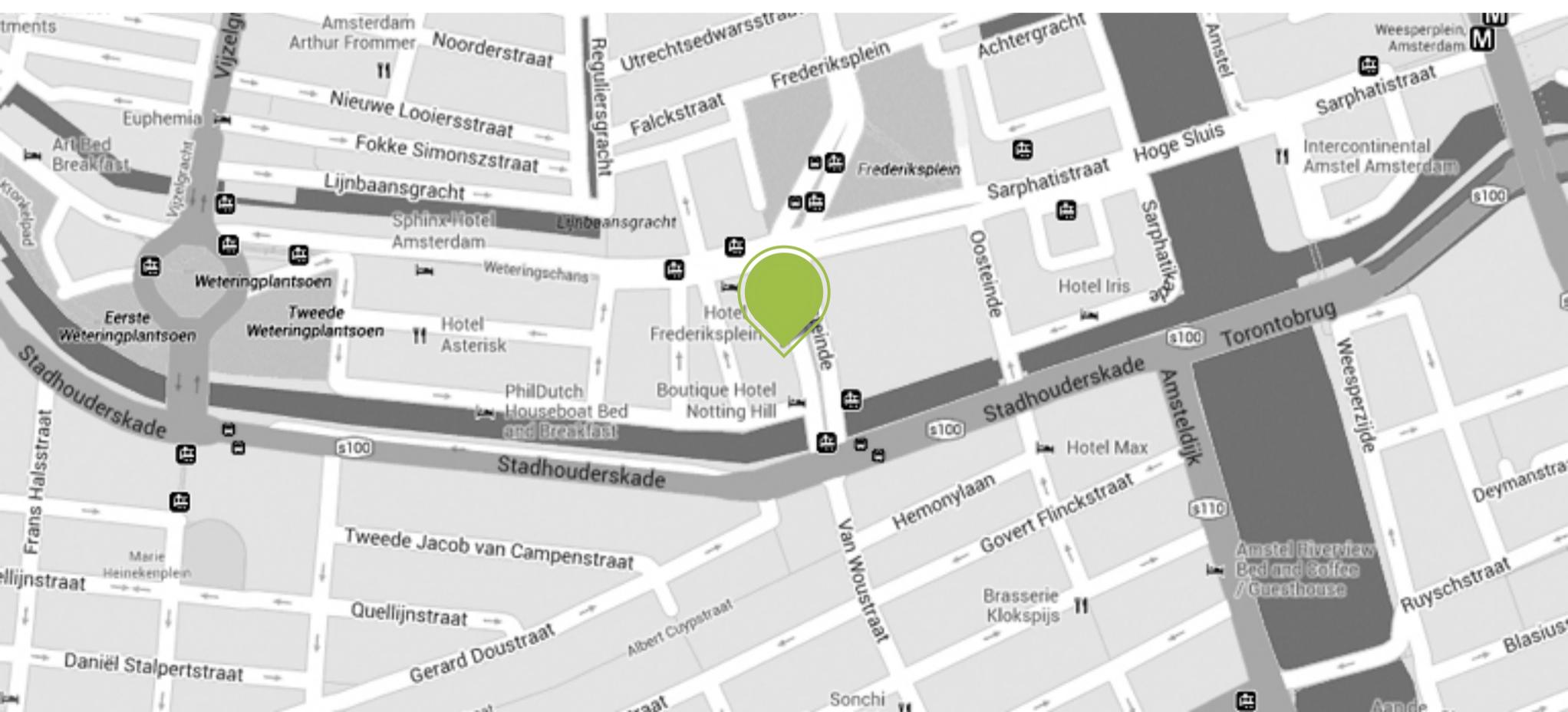
VERDICT:

One guy I met who moved to Amsterdam six months ago stayed at Cocomama for the first few days. He summed up the Cocomama experience perfectly:

'Even after leaving the place and getting my own apartment I come back here. I know all the staff well now; they are now some of my closest friends. Cocomama felt like home from day one and wherever I go in the world, it will always be like a home to me where I know I will be welcomed with open arms.'

GETTING THERE:

From Amsterdam Schiphol Airport: Take a train to Amsterdam Central Station. From Amsterdam Central Station, take Tram 4 to Stadhouderskade. The hostel is a two-minute walk from the tram stop.



CASA GRACIA BARCELONA

Passeig de Gràcia 116, 08008, Barcelona, Spain

As you can tell from the first word 'Casa', the concept of this hostel is all about feeling at home – a 'home in Gracia' – and that's what they focus on offering their guests.





LOCATION

The hostel is centrally located on the grand boulevard of Paseo de Gracia in the neighbourhood of Gracia, close to Gaudi's La Pedrera and Casa Batlló.

You are away from the touristy drag of Las Ramblas, Barrio Gothic, and the menace of pickpockets.

ROOMS & BATHROOMS

Casa Gracia offers a choice of six-bed dorm rooms and one-, two-, three-, four-, and five-bed private ensuite rooms, all of which are spacious, cosy and quiet. Bed linen is included in the price and the bathrooms are large and clean.

I stayed at one of their doubles and loved it – with great design and a stunning ensuite bathroom, it was finished to the comfort and standard of a chic four- or five-star boutique hotel.

FACILITIES

The building in itself is not something you would typically associate with a hostel. It's more like an apartment building, which actually was the original idea before the idea of the hostel was born in the owners' minds.

You feel like you're stepping back in time from the moment you walk in through the beautiful wrought-iron gate and then step into the stylish art deco elevator.

The reception staff are cheerful; check-in is bright and breezy. Either at check-in or later in evening, you'll soon be acquainted with Alex, who is the Casa's dedicated guest relations manager. This is part of the hostel's efforts to be helping create a home away from home experience and looking after their guests' needs.

Minutes after I checked in, he offered me tickets to go a beach party with some of the hostel guests – DJ plus drinks



FACTBOX:

Address:

Passeig de Gràcia 116, 08008, Barcelona, Spain

Phone:

(+34) 931 874 497

Website:

www.casagraciabcn.com

PRICES:

Dorms from €30,

Doubles from €100 per room.

and barbeque for just €15. It sounded amazing and I was tempted but I realised with three weeks of hostelling and hardly any sleep, I needed to take it easy, so I declined.

Not to worry because later in the evening, the game between Spain and France was on the TV in the common room and Alex was cooking an awesome paella for the guests with sangria or beer included for just €5.

The next evening, Alex organized a mojito night and later took a crowd of 30 of us salsa dancing at a local bar. The fun didn't stop – the last night of my stay was the Euro 2012 final being shown on the projector in the hostel common room. Alex and his good friend Mihaela cooked us a delicious chicken stew that is native to his home region in Romania.

When I think of Casa Gracia, the first things that pop into my head are all the cool things I did and the fun I had hanging out every night with Alex and the fellow guests. It's the people that make the experience memorable more than anything else. I could also rave about how cool the hostel is. One example? Showcasing the works of 16 emerging fashion designers from the local fashion college. What a great idea and what fantastic exposure for the budding fashionistas!

The outdoor terrace is another memorable part of staying at Casa Garcia. Lit by candlelight, perfect for warm summer evenings, where you can sit in the cool breeze sipping on a €1.60 bottle of Rioja wine from the local supermarket, chatting to fellow hostel guests for hours on end. With a new rooftop terrace and private bar for guests planned for later this year, Casa Gracia is set to soar in the coming months.

It is impossible to put into words how cool and fun this hostel is. However, what makes this hostel a great luxury hostel for me is the staff. They made my stay memorable and for me made me feel I was at home.

The wifi signal could be better on sixth floor, but at the time of my stay they were installing a new system, so hopefully that will be improved soon.

Rates here are above the median average, but in terms of the experience that you get, I think it's very much worth it.

VERDICT:

This incredibly fun home away from home experience, fun activities, amazing staff, and living in a fantastic neighbourhood like Gracia is what makes Casa Gracia one of the best luxury hostels I've stayed in so far.

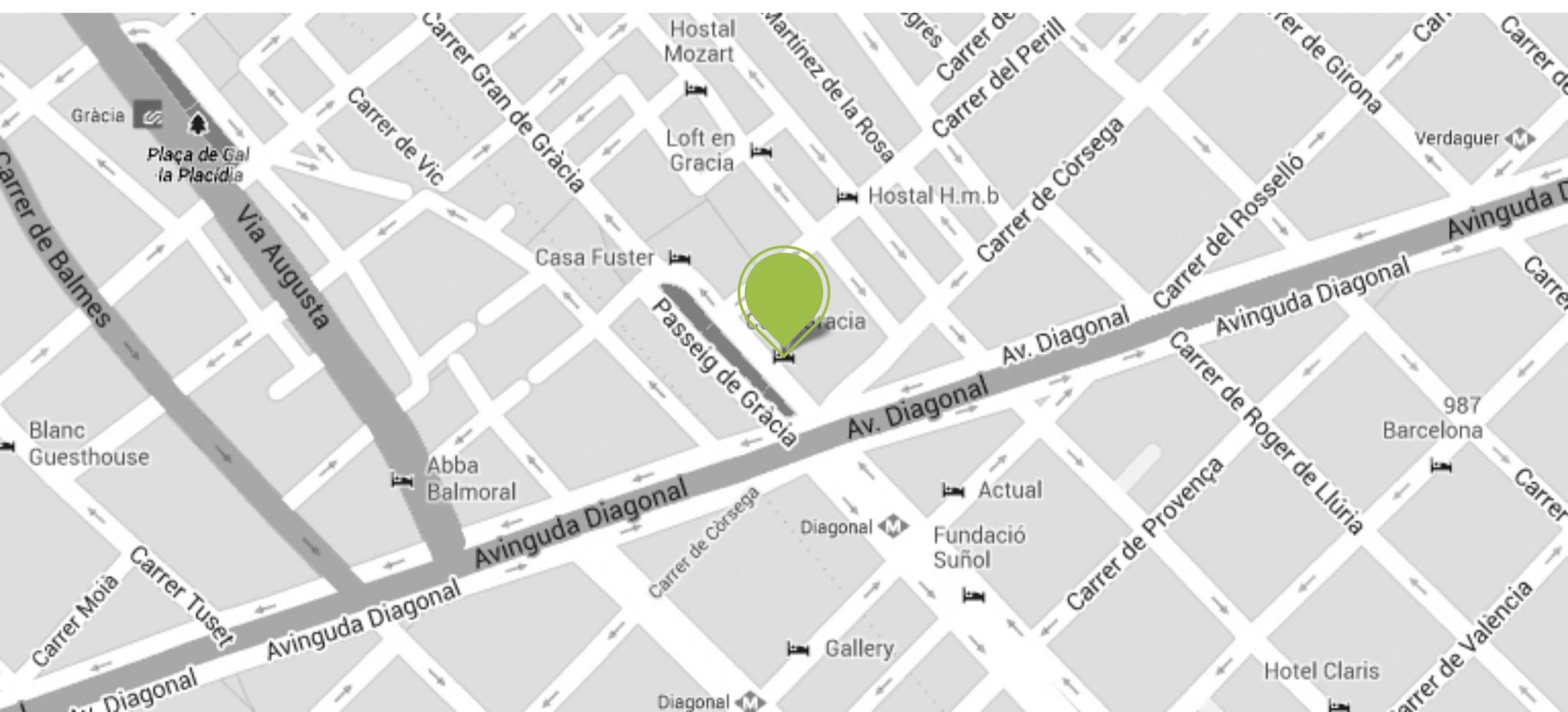
GETTING THERE:

From Barcelona El Prat, take the Aerobus to Plaça Catalunya, then Line 3 (green) to Diagonal. The hostel is a two-minute walk from the Diagonal stop.

Nord. From Estació de Nord, take the Metro Line 1 (red) to Plaça Catalunya, then Line 3 (green) to Diagonal. The hostel is a two-minute walk from the Diagonal stop.

From Reus or Girona airports, take the bus to Estació de

By metro, take Line 3 (green) to Diagonal. The hostel is a two-minute walk from the Diagonal stop.



OSTELLO BELLO MILAN

Via Medici, 4, 20123 Milan, Italy

A free Mediterranean breakfast whenever you wake up, aperitivo in the evening with locals in a traditional Italian-style bar, lazy afternoons on a bright terrace with hammocks and barbecues – Ostello Bello is a hostel with an amazing difference and a great reason to visit Milan.





LOCATION

Just a 10-minutes walk from the Duomo, Ostello Bello boasts a great location with easy access to Milan's nightlife and fashion hotspots, as well as sites like Galleria Vittorio Emanuele, La Scala, Santa Maria della Grazie and Castello Sforzesco.

ROOMS & BATHROOMS

I stayed in an ensuite double room. It was bright and spacious with a huge bathroom.

The dorm rooms have beds well spaced out with drawers beneath them to allow you to secure your valuables.

All rooms are ensuite and there is air conditioning in the rooms and common areas.

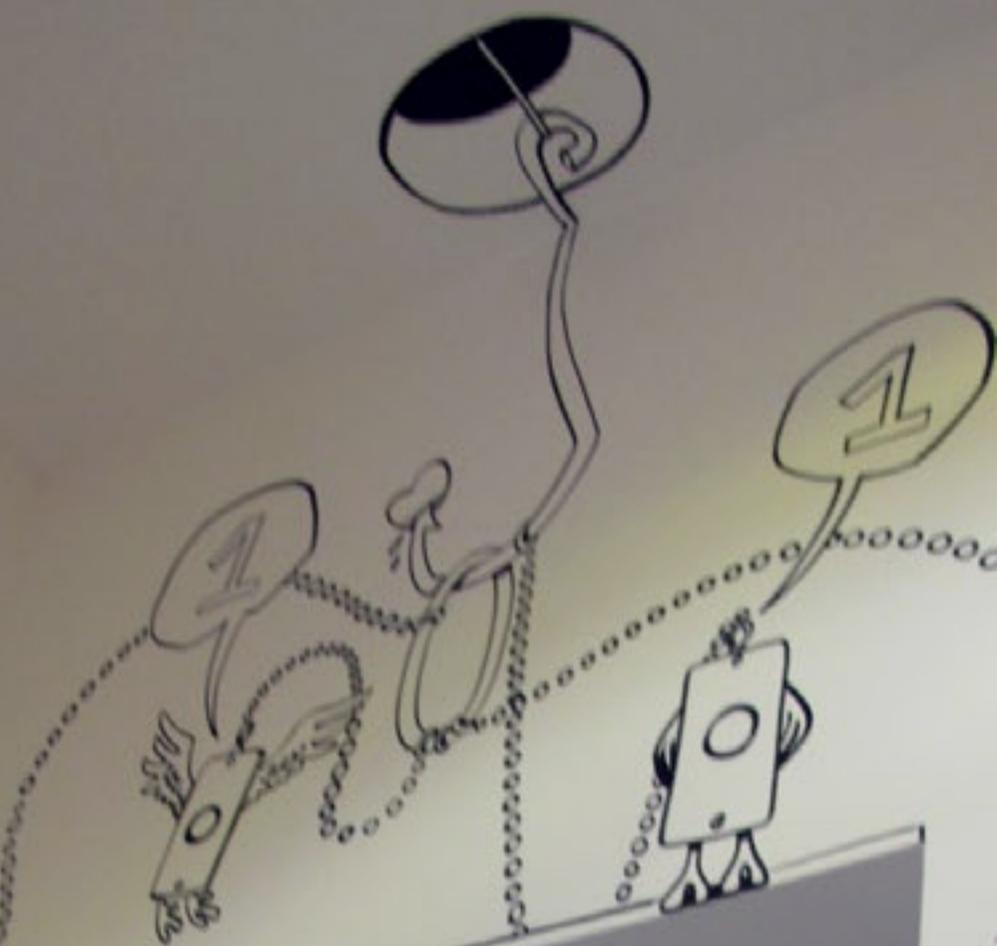
FACILITIES

Ostello Bello boasts some top-notch facilities – some of the best I've seen in Europe so far.

From the moment I walk in, I'm offered a welcome drink by the cheerful receptionist. I ask for an Aperol spritz and after a few sips, the stresses and strain of my travels just melt away.

The common room is one of the coziest ones I've ever seen. There is free wifi in both the common areas and the rooms. My third-floor room had a great signal.

Most impressively, the hostel offers an excellent Mediterranean breakfast that is included in the price of a night's stay. The best part of this deal is that the breakfast is available whenever you wake up, which means that even if



FACTBOX:

Address

Via Medici, 4, 20123 Milan, Italy

Telephone

(+39) 02 3658 2720

Website

www.ostellobello.com

PRICES:

Dorms from €28,

Doubles from €80 per room,

Triples from €110 per room,

Quads from €150 per room.

you can get yourself out of bed by noon, you can still walk downstairs and have your...brunch.

I can't think of any hotel or hostel that offers complimentary breakfast on demand – I think it's the ultimate luxury you can offer mankind. I'd love to see more hostels offer this!

Ostello Bello also has ping-pong tables, a piano, multiple guitars, a huge library, and a book exchange facility.

There's also a traditional Italian-style bar and restaurant where guests and locals mingle during Aperitivo Hour. For the price of a drink, €4-5, you can help yourself to the food at the bar. The bar is open pretty much 24/7, which is another cool feature.

What I loved about the bar was the number of locals pouring into the joint after work in the evening. They definitely add flavor to the atmosphere. Ostello Bello isn't just a hostel, but a meeting point where Milanese can mingle with travellers from all over the world.

Another great feature is the large and bright terrace, complete with hammocks and barbecue facilities.

Last but not least, the staff here at Ostello Bello are all very friendly and a massive incentive for staying at this hostel. They make Ostello Bello feel like a sanctuary for travellers to relax in and enjoy Milan.

It's hard to find any faults with this hostel.

VERDICT:

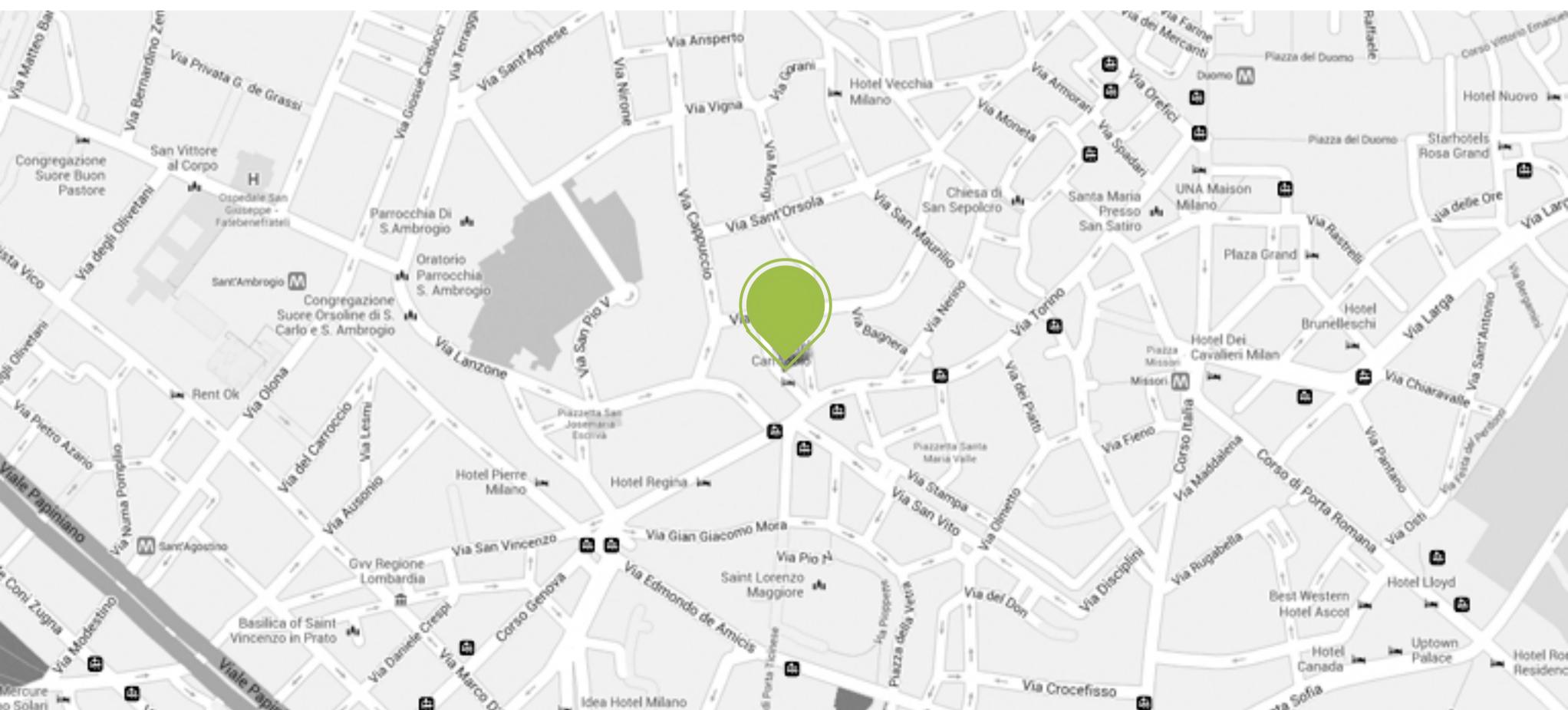
Despite the higher price point, Ostello Bello is worth it in my opinion. Every cent. It's one of the best hostels I've visited and I left with good memories of the place and also of Milan.

In fact, I think it's so cool, that it should be made into a tourist landmark and be one of the main reasons for visiting Milan.

GETTING THERE:

From Malpensa Airport, take the Malpensa Express train to Stazione Cadorna. The hostel is a six-minute walk from the station.

From Stazione Centrale, take the yellow MM3 line to Missori Station. The hostel is a five-minute walk from the station.



LOL HOSTEL SIRACUSA, ITALY

Via Francesco Crispi 92, 96100, Syracuse, Sicily, Italy

A luxury hostel in a fantastic city, with history and the Mediterranean Sea to discover, LoL Hostel is an excellent base for exploring Sicily.



LOCATION

The well-presented LoL Hostel is less than 100 yards from both the bus and train stop in Syracuse, and a ten-minute stroll from the island of Ortigia, the historic centre of what the Italians call Siracusa. A ten-minute walk in the opposite direction will take you to the city's legendary archaeological sites. While the hostel's spot is unremarkable, it's a great point for exploring the city and has a plethora of cheap eats in the immediate vicinity.

ROOMS & BATHROOMS

The shared dorms in LoL Hostel have clean toilets and shower rooms ensuite, with free lockers to keep your valuables safe. Some of the dorms are large, but the high ceilings and good temperature controls ensure you a good night's sleep on the comfy clean linen.



FACILITIES

A night at the hostel includes basic breakfast, free wifi and there are several public computers.

The chic lounge area is great for relaxing, but even better is the courtyard at the rear of the hostel. With plenty of tables and chairs, this peaceful sun-trap is great for soaking up some rays. You also get use of the well-provisioned kitchen, great for cooking with a few friends, and the hostel has its own funky bar.

FACTBOX:

Address:

Via Francesco Crispi 92, 96100,
Syracuse, Sicily, Italy

Phone:

(+39) 0931 465088

Website:

www.lolhostel.com

TOP TIP

The peninsular island of Ortigia is a UNESCO World Heritage Site and the best way to discover it is on foot. Don't pay too much attention to your map – enjoy getting lost in the winding little streets where you can stop to see local crafts or have a gelato or a cold drink. Make sure not to miss the bold structures and views of the coastline from Castello Maniace at the seaward tip of the island.

PRICES:

Dorms from €18,

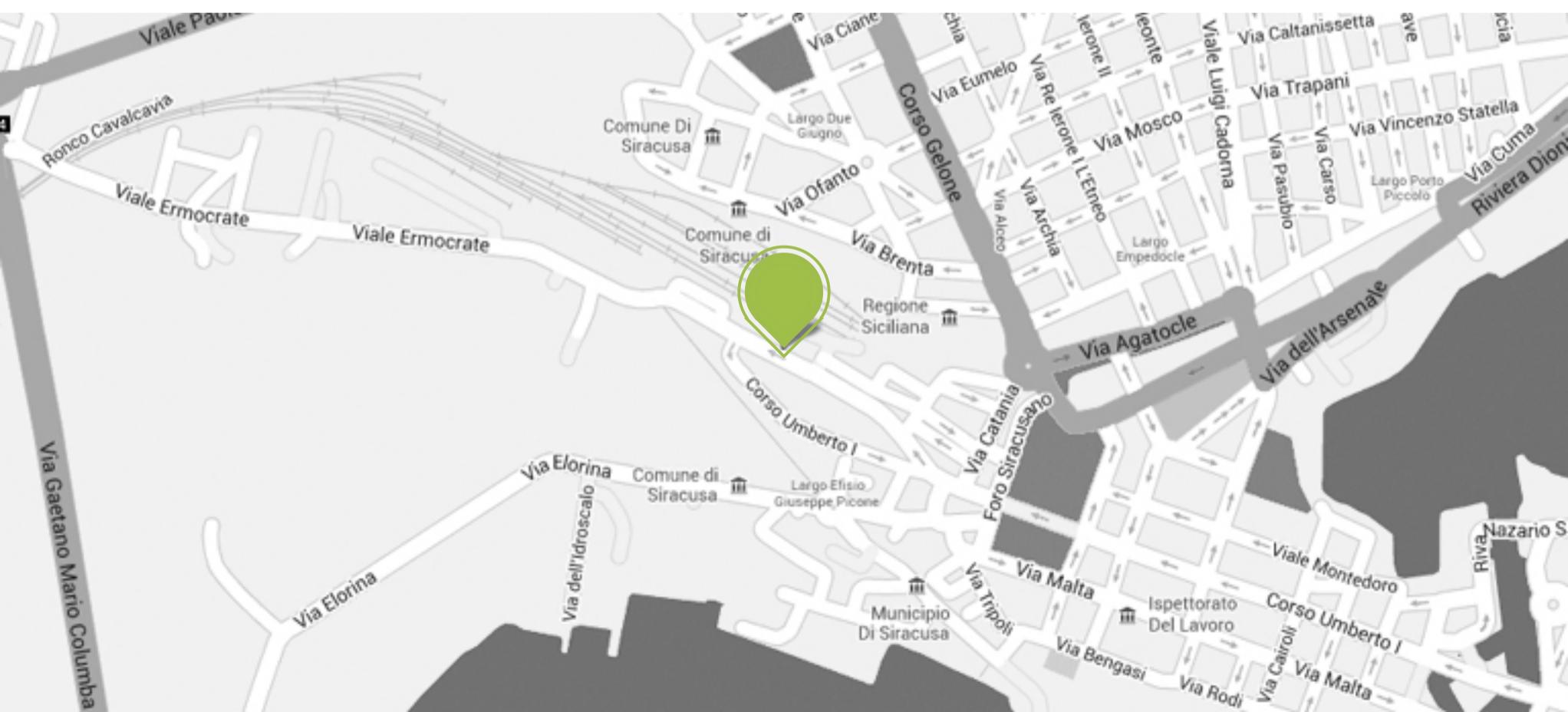
Doubles from €54 per room.

VERDICT:

With the air of a design hotel, it's the stylish presentation of this hostel and great service from staff that really makes LoL Hostel a luxury experience. Thanks to their own bar and the comfortable living spaces, you can really enjoy your surroundings after a hot day seeing the sights or before a big night out.

GETTING THERE:

LoL Hostel is a 100-meter walk from the bus and train stations.



VILLA SAINT EXUPERY GARDENS, NICE

22 avenue Gravier, 06 100 Nice, France

Villa Saint-Exupéry Gardens, a former Carmelite monastery in Cimiez neighbourhood of Nice is one of the nicest, most atmospheric hostels I've visited on my travels.



LOCATION

Looking for a place right near the beach with all the other tourists? The Villa Saint Exupery Gardens isn't for you.

However, if you're looking to get away from the madness of the tourist strips on the beach and get some fresh air, you might prefer this backpacker oasis, perched on top of a hill. It's a bit of a jaunt to get here up the hill, so make full use of the hostel's very handy, free shuttle service that takes guests up and down the hill.

It's a perfect base to explore the jewels of the Cote D'Azur like Monte Carlo in Monaco, which is affordable to visit when using the excellent bus service from Nice. Also within close radius are the picturesque towns of Villefranche-sur-Mer and Antibes.

In nearby proximity you have the Musée Matisse and the ruins of Cemenelum, capital of the ancient Roman province of Alpes Maritimae.

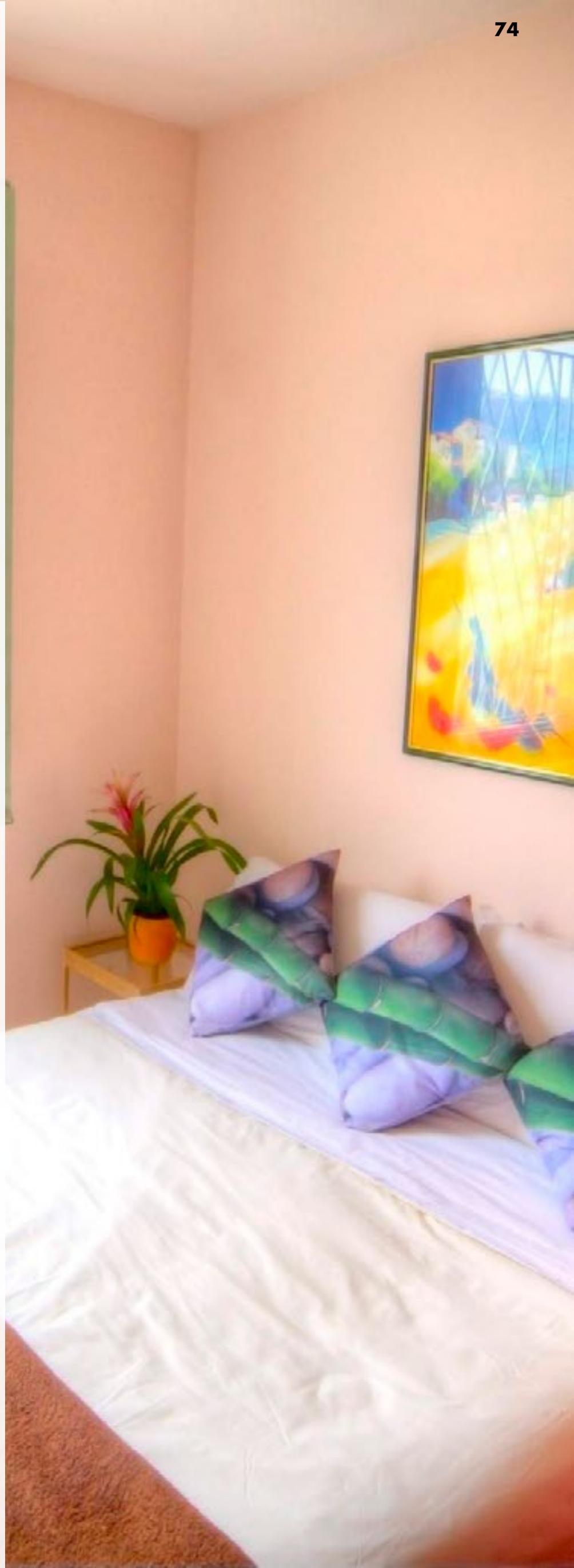
ROOMS & BATHROOMS

The dorms are comfortable and basic with good light. The private rooms have been recently been refurbished and offer dreamy views of the city of Nice nestled beside the azure blue waters of the Mediterranean.

FACILITIES

The chapel of the original monastery is the heart of Villa Saint Exupery, a great social space to meet fellow travellers in the hostel. One of the most breathtaking features of the room is the stained glass window that spans nearly the entire length of the room.

The Chapel gets lively during breakfast and then for the fantastic Happy Hour from 6:00-8:00 PM, where you get drinks for as little as €3.50. During the day it's quite chilled out, and you'll find people on the sofas with their tablets surfing away, making use of the free wifi.



It's a rarity to find good quality inexpensive grub in a hostel and this is one area where the Villa scores highly over many other hostels. There is a daily 'plat du jour' – dish of the day – and I enjoyed a nice seafood pasta on my first night in the hostel.

Besides that, they do great stone-baked pizzas and have a nice choice of salads. Given how expensive eating out can be in town, this is a great service provided by the hostel. Breakfast is simple affair of toasts, cereals and decent coffee – your standard hostel fare. However, you do get to enjoy it in the beautiful, wide-open spaces of the hostel's garden. With classic tunes blaring on the jukebox, it's a great way to start the day.

Hostel owners Arno and Ulf often drop by for breakfast to meet the guests and give them tips of how to make the most of their stay in the region.

They have a really nice group of staff at the Villa Saint Exupery – backpackers and travellers themselves, they're armed with great tips and ideas for things to do in the city.

At busy times, however, the wifi becomes painfully slow. The solution would be to install a few more routers to boost the signal, something that I hope they do in the future.



FACTBOX:

Address:

22 avenue Gravier, 06100

Nice, France

Phone:

(+33) 493 844 283

Website:

www.villahostels.com/index-en

PRICES:

Dorms from €18,

Singles from €35,

Twins from €27 per person,

Triples from €25 per person,

Quads from €22 per person..

VERDICT:

If you're looking for an inexpensive and fun base to explore the Cote d'Azur, Villa Saint Exupery Gardens is the hostel for you. The great staff, beautiful garden, and the fabulous on-site dining options made my stay very enjoyable.

GETTING THERE:

From Nice's airport, take bus 98 to Opéra-Vieille Ville, then take the tram in the direction of Las Planas to Comte de Falicon. The hostel will pick you up in a Toyota minibus in front of Casino supermarket. Call them toll-free for a pickup at 0800 307 409.

From the train station, walk to the tram stop at Avenue Jean Medecin, then take the tram in the direction of Las Planas to Comte de Falicon. The hostel will pick you up in a Toyota minibus in front of Casino supermarket. Call them toll-free for a pickup at 0800 307 409.



PALMERS LODGE BOUTIQUE HOSTELS

Hillspring Lodge and Swiss Cottage, London, England

It's a strange sensation when you say goodbye to a place where you've only stayed for a few days, yet it feels as if you're leaving home. That kind of place where everyone seems to be dead friendly and you just slip into the swing of things like a duck to water.

Staying at two members of the Palmers Lodge Boutique Hostels family was exactly like that – home away from home.



Self catering at
Hillspring only.

LOCATION

Palmers Lodge Swiss Cottage is in a superb location, just a few minutes' walking distance from Swiss Cottage tube station in zone 2. The Hillspring Lodge is also located in zone 2 of London in a quieter residential location, about a 10-minute walk to 24-hour bus stops, the Underground and Overground.

ROOMS & BATHROOMS

The 20-bed dorms feature bunks built on solid oak, with proper thick mattresses and nice fluffy pillows. Each bunk has a curtain, which offers a great level of privacy, and comes with a handy reading light and power points for charging up your gadgets.

Moving up the scale, both hostels offer private ensuite rooms. If you're travelling as a couple or just want your own space, these rooms are great.

Starting at £70 (€82) per night for Hillspring Lodge and £100 (€117) mark for Swiss Cottage, these prices are on par for a budget hotel in London but still represent a great deal and are far better than many four-star hotels in the city.

FACILITIES

The staff look after their guests well. They're people who are just travellers like you and me and always armed with great tips.

Besides being very accommodating, both the hostels offer a great level of comfort.

Palmers Lodge, Swiss Cottage is an 18th century lodge featuring a stunning entrance with a chandelier and many original features like the oak doors and staircase.

Palmers Lodge, Hillspring Lodge is filled with quirky items of furnishing like a deer rug hanging from the ceiling and a garden full of the owner's collection of 100-odd motorcycles.



The facilities are great here – huge laundry plus an on-site restaurant that does decent pub-style grub.

Both hostels have a really nice lounge area. There are tons of comfy sofas where guests vegetate, smartphone in hand, surfing the web, thanks to the excellent free wifi in both hostels.

The lounge area at Swiss Cottage and the reception area in Hillspring Lodge also has a few desktop PCs to use for free. Each hostel has a huge plasma screen TV with a huge library of DVDs that you can watch and even borrow for free. Each hostel has a great funky bar, where you can socialise and meet other hostel guests.

Breakfast is limited and basic – cornflakes, coffee, orange juice and a croissant.

The hostels offer free wifi in the lounge areas, but not in the rooms – this, they explained, was to prevent people who would abuse the privilege and be streaming movies or downloading massive files, draining the bandwidth for everyone. Fair enough.



VERDICT:

Overall, I had a great stay at both Palmers Lodge Swiss Cottage and Hillspring Lodge.

They're refreshing alternatives to the mundane, soulless chains of budget hotels London and they offer the personal touch that you crave when you're a stranger in a city.



SWISS COTTAGE:

Address:

40 College Crescent, London, NW3 5LB

Phone:

(+44) 20 7099 2435

Dorms from £20 (€23);

Doubles From £100 (€117) per room per night

Website:

www.palmerslodes.com

GETTING THERE:

Take the Jubilee Line to Swiss Cottage. The hostel is a five-minute walk from the stop.

HILLSPRING:

Address:

233 Willesden Lane, London, NW2 5RP

Phone:

(+44) 20 7099 2435

Dorms from £20 (€23);

Doubles

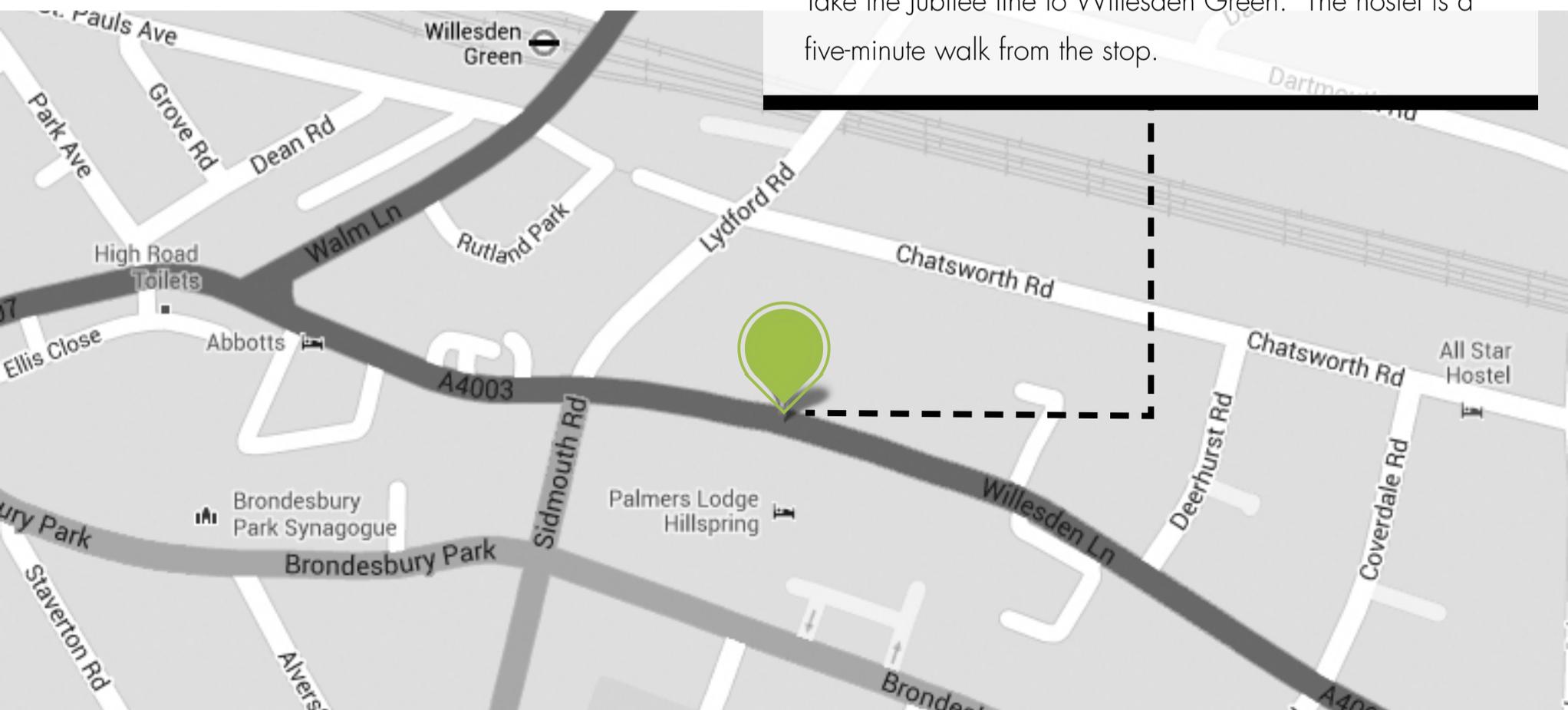
From £70 (€82) per room per night

Website:

www.palmerslodes.com

GETTING THERE:

Take the Jubilee line to Willesden Green. The hostel is a five-minute walk from the stop.





Within walking distance of Edinburgh Castle, the Royal Mile, the National Museum of Scotland and the Scottish Parliament, the SYHA Edinburgh is perfectly located hostel with friendly staff and excellent modern facilities.





LOCATION

Location-wise, this hostel is perfect for visiting Edinburgh. It's just a few minutes walk from the east end of Princes Street.

Leith Walk is kind of the Brick Lane of Edinburgh, home to a hive of ethnic eateries and some great pubs. After a few minutes' walk down the road, you're in Leith, which is where you can sample the city's best seafood dinners and also meet some great characters.

It's a part of Edinburgh that gets sadly neglected by tourists in favour of the more well-heeled gentrified surroundings of Stockbridge and Morningside.

There's also the Omni Centre just across the street, which has a bunch of popular chain restaurants and a Vue Cinema.

ROOMS & BATHROOMS

The rooms here are clean and comfortable. I stayed in one of their private rooms where you have an ensuite shower and toilet. The rooms come equipped with a plasma screen TV and coffee- and tea-making facilities.

There's a reading light and a power point for charging gadgets located right behind the pillow.

FACILITIES

Recently developed, the hostel is very clean, modern and comfortable with some great facilities.

You walk into the reception and straight ahead you have a great little café that stays open until late in the evening.

There's good coffee – a rarity in hostels – and combined with the free wifi in reception area, this place gets busy in the evenings.

On the ground floor, the hostel serves a continental breakfast of cheese, ham, toast, bread rolls, juice, coffee, yoghurt and fruit. This costs an extra £4.50 (€5), which is pretty decent value, but if you're looking for something more, down Leith Walk there is a multitude of places where you can grab a decent breakfast.

The hostel has an enormous kitchen, which is a big plus point for self-catering guests. There is a nearby Tesco Metro on York Place where you can buy your groceries, bread, and everyday essentials. There are also laundry and ironing facilities within the hostel.

Someone is always available at reception 24/7, and during my stay they were very helpful with lots of great tips of places to eat and drink.

FACTBOX:

Address:

9 Haddington Place,
Edinburgh EH7 4AL

Phone:

(+44) 131 524 2090

Website:

www.syha.org.uk/hostels-in-scotland/lowlands/edinburgh-central

PRICES:

Dorms from £12 (€14),

Singles from £52.50 (€62),

Doubles from £65 (€76) per room.

In terms of drawbacks, there is a charge of £1 (€1) per hour for in-room wifi. Personally, I think free wifi should be universal in hostels. The reality is that in large hostels, they struggle with offering wifi with proper bandwidth, so maybe this is a case of restricting access and offering a better service.

My suggestion to SYHA would be to offer a flat rate of £3 (€4) per day to make it an affordable proposition to their customers.

I also found SYFA slightly flat in terms of atmosphere with little in terms of organised activities. This is not a party hostel. If you're looking for the party, you are better off staying somewhere like the Castle Rock Hostel.

Other than nightlife, there are other local experiences that the hostel could look into introducing the guests during their stay, especially for solo travellers.



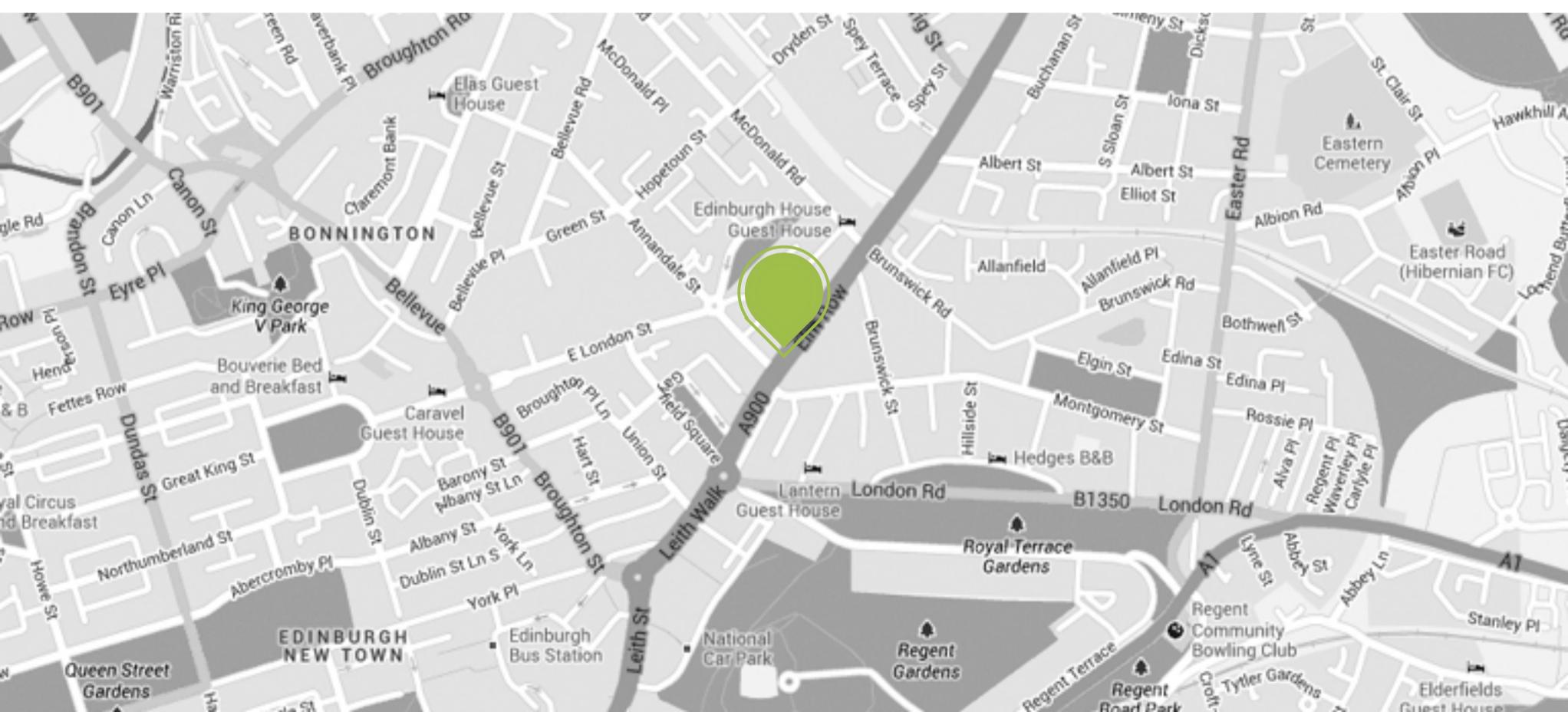
VERDICT:

Overall, it's a great hostel in terms of a great range of facilities and excellent staff. When picking this hostel, I think the key USP is the location, which makes it a great base for exploring the city.

GETTING THERE:

From Edinburgh Airport, take the Airport Bus to the City Centre stop. The hostel is a ten-minute walk from the bus station.

From Edinburgh Waverley Station, the hostel is a ten-minute walk away



SAFESTAY LONDON

Walworth Rd London, Elephant & Castle, London

Situated in one of London's less fashionable but up-and-coming neighbourhoods, Safestay is a beautifully designed hostel with top-notch facilities, offering a comfortable base for exploring London's sights and delights.



FACTBOX:

Address

Walworth Rd London,
Elephant & Castle
London, SE17 1JL

Telephone

(+44) 20 7703 8000

Website

www.safestay.co.uk

PRICES:

Dorms from £18 (€21),

Twins from £58 (€68) per room,

Doubles from £66 (€77) per room

LOCATION

Safestay at Elephant and Castle is in a great location in London. There's also an added bonus advantage of having the bus stop right at your doorstep, taking you straight to Victoria Station and the heart of London.

The Electric Elephant Cafe, just around the corner from the hostel, is one of the many interesting finds in this relatively undiscovered neighbourhood of London. Adjacent to the artists' quarter, you can expect home-baked goodness, great crispy bacon rolls, 'Damn fine coffee', and happy, smiling people.

This great neighbourhood has tons of character with cafes, takeaways, and little pots of history that give the location a great deal of character.

ROOMS & BATHROOMS

I found the rooms at Safestay to be some of the best I've ever seen at a hostel.

The beds have a reading light, nice thick duvets, and the privacy of a curtain – a simple but genius idea that more hostels should implement. It's nice not just for privacy but for the joy of not being woken up when fellow guests come in later at night and switch on the main light.

FACILITIES

I loved the bright colours, quirky design and décor – Safestay definitely has the look of a five-star boutique hotel written all over it.

The common room downstairs is a very chilled out and relaxing space. Whether you are there for a drink at the bar or just to catch up with friends or work on your laptop, it's a great shared space.

In the spirit of the great British tradition, there are tea-making facilities. The rooms have lots of natural light, which is great on cold winter days. And of course, an awesome plasma screen TV. Attached ensuite bathrooms are stunning and would not look out of a place in a four-star hotel.

The staff were very polite, friendly, and professional whenever I required their help.

While the hostel has all the hallmarks and touch of a luxury hostel, the one thing it lacked for me was a real soul. As many nice conversations as I had with the staff, it seems that they are still finding their feet in terms of creating the experience.

It is a challenge in a large hostel where you have huge volume of people passing through on a daily basis. Groups require their own focus. You then have solo travellers and families passing through – all of these groups have their own needs. So compared to smaller hostels, it means the staff in a larger hostel have to have work much harder to give the optimum experience. I think this is where the concept of a dedicated guest relations manager would be helpful, which has been successful in some of the other hostels I've visited.

The other key thing that could be improved is the wifi, which during the time of my review was available only in the common room.

The signal was excellent in mornings and afternoon but poor in quality when a few people jumped on the network in the evenings. The hostel could solve this issue by installing a few more routers.

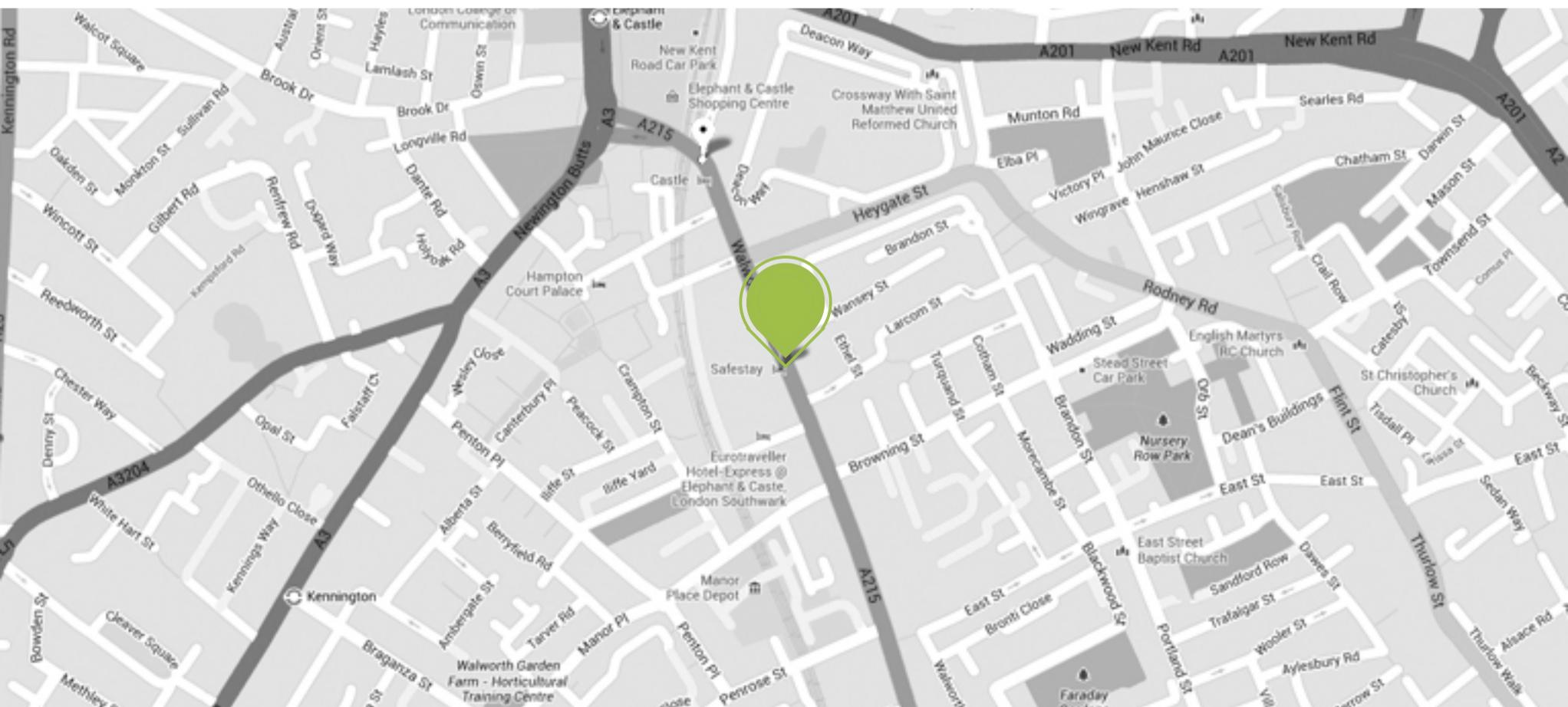


VERDICT:

Overall, I really enjoyed my stay at Safestay – it was a comfortable and very pleasant experience. The great location and high quality rooms, as well as its nice layout and decor, make Safestay a very welcome addition to the London hostelling scene. I will definitely be revisiting in my future visits to London.

GETTING THERE:

On the Underground, take the Bakerloo or Northern Line to Elephant & Castle. The hostel is a five-minute walk from the station.



LOFT MOUNTAIN HOSTEL BOURG ST MAURICE

440 Avenue Maréchal Leclerc 73700, Bourg-Saint-Maurice, France

If you are an adrenaline junkie, this is your hostel, whether it's summer or winter. A real home away from home, once you visit, you may wish to never leave...





LOCATION

Loft Mountain Hostel is just a 10-minute walk from Bourg St Maurice train station. Just a five-minute walk to the Les Arcs Express funicular, Loft offers excellent access to the huge Paradiski area, which has three parks, two half-pipes and over 400 km of skiable piste.

ROOMS & BATHROOMS

The Loft is on two levels and houses up to 15 people. It is large enough for you to hang out with everyone in the large communal kitchen and living areas. If you wish to seek privacy, there is a quiet chill-out area upstairs. The communal bedrooms, which range from three-bed dorms to the bigger six-bed dorms, are very spacious. There are no bunk beds in this hostel.

FACILITIES

At first appearance, Loft Mountain Hostel looks like a very chic French chalet. Once you walk in, however, it feels like you've been welcomed into someone's home. The Loft is very spacious and has a very comfortable, cosy feeling about the place. The hostel is impressively geared toward its guests: At the entrance, there is a handy drying room for your boots and gloves; inside, there is a ski-tech on hand in case you forget to wax your board before you come out. After weeks on being on the road, I suddenly felt very much at ease and home in the space.

The living room is like that of a 5-star ski resort, with big, comfy sofas and large windows that give the room a bright ambiance. There is a huge 40-inch plasma screen TV with Sky channels so if you've been travelling on the road for a while and missing your favourite UK shows, you can have your fix! They also have a massive collection of movies stored on their server, which guests can access from their laptops to watch movies in the comfort of their own bed.

There is also a nice pool table in the centre of the room.

FACTBOX:

Address

440 Avenue Maréchal Leclerc 73700,
Bourg-Saint-Maurice, France

Telephone

(+33) 6 46 21 71 61

Website

www.loftbourg.com

Outside, there is a nice terrace and garden patio area where guests can relax in the sun.

The kitchen is probably my favourite part of the Loft – so much so that I featured Loft in my list of top five luxury hostel kitchens. My favourite part of the room is the massive long wooden table by the kitchen. This is where people eat, surf the internet, and play board games. Often you find owners Charley and Robin and their guests drinking wine and chatting into the late hours of the night. There is a Lidl supermarket right across the road that stocks a number of local French specialties, so you won't have to go far to find ingredients for your next meal.

The shower facilities are shared but large. For a 15-bed hostel, you have unfettered access and the showers are powerful with hot water. You can also call home for free to over 100 destinations. With superb facilities like these, I felt very much at home at the Loft and in Bourg. The nearby Vanoise National Park offers a great variety of hiking trails and some beautiful views.

I love visiting Vanoise National Park, a short drive away. It's a great place to go hiking and offers some breathtaking views. After a good hike, head to Chez Feliz restaurant for some great crepes. I drank their famous freshly pressed raspberry juice, which was followed by a garden salad accompanied by a selection of jambon cru, saucisson, Reblochon, and the amazing local Beaufort cheese.

One of the highlights of a stay in Bourg St Maurice is a visit to their weekend markets where you can get your hands on some stunning local fare – from the ripest, juiciest tomatoes to freshly baked baguettes to deliciously nutty Beaufort. The key thing I loved about my stay was just chilling out in the Loft and the village of Bourg with its quaint narrow streets, patisseries, nice restaurants, and weekend markets. Also, it's worth investing in a ski pass and hopping to the resorts of Les Arcs 1800 and 1950 where you can grab a few beers and drink in amazing views of Mont Blanc in the distance. If you're missing out on the nightlife, pop up to Les Arcs 1800 on a Friday and Saturday evening where there are a few good bars and nightclubs.

When you've been travelling constantly on the road through Europe, it's great to find a place where you can just zone out for a few days.

PRICES:

Dorms from €28 during the winter season;
€19 during the summer season.
Reduced rates for long-term stays

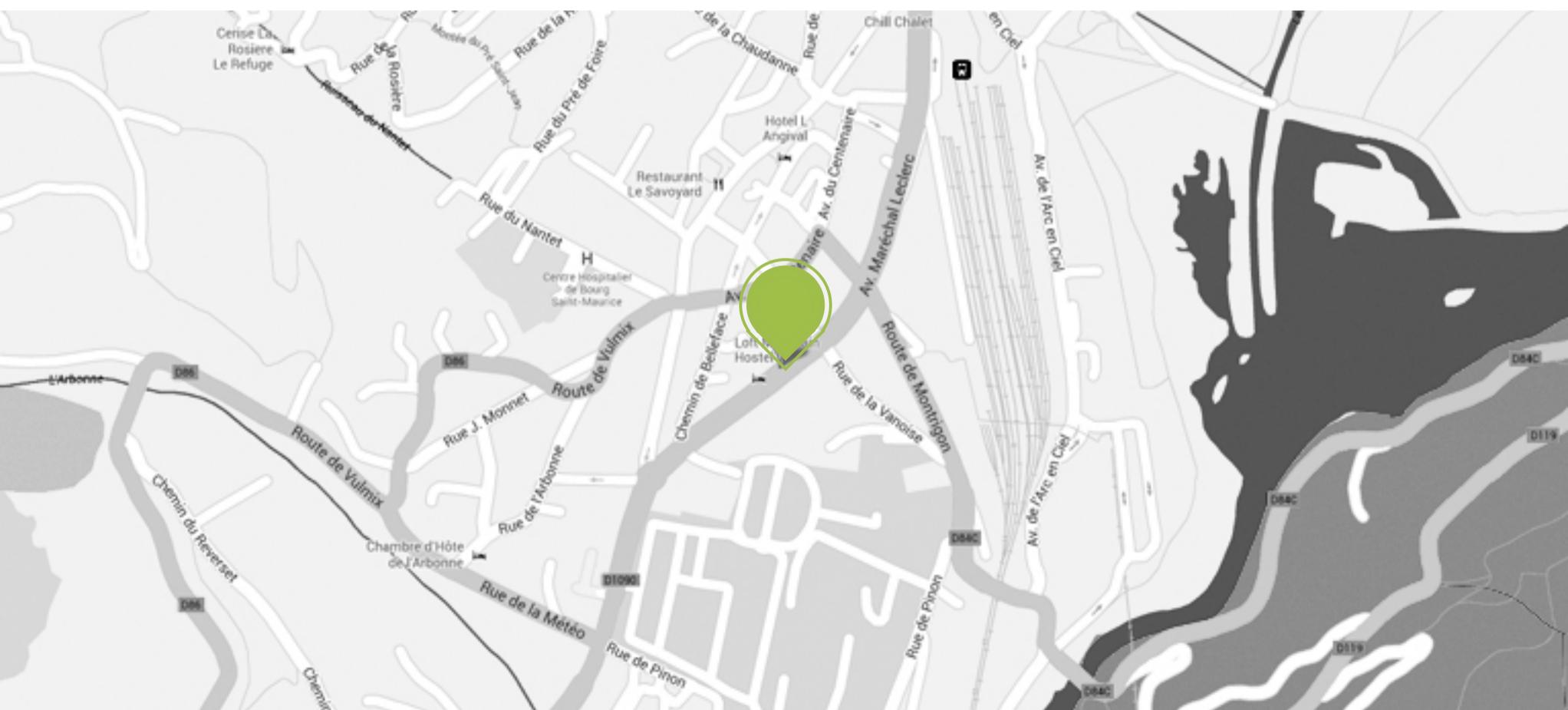
VERDICT:

A great home away from home and the ultimate hostel for adrenaline junkies. In terms of relaxation, long walks and great gastronomy, it's a great option for a very chilled out short break.

I definitely recommend a stopover at Loft in the summer while traveling by train, and in the winter, Les Arcs and Loft Mountain Hostel are the perfect choice for a budget ski trip.

GETTING THERE:

The hostel is a 10-minute walk from the Bourg St Maurice train station.



GALLERY HOSTEL PORTO

Rua Miguel Bombarda, 222, 4050-377 Porto - Portugal

Located in the trendiest quarter of Porto, between the art district and hip nightlife, the eco-friendly Gallery Hostel characterizes the concept of the luxury hostel –service, cleanliness and facilities are top priorities along with friendliness and a familiar atmosphere.



LOCATION

When I came to Porto eight years ago, unloved is the word that came to mind. These days, however, there is a sense of renewal and energy around Porto. New chic cafes are springing up with free wifi, great coffee, and awesome cakes, catering to the hipster crowds.

Old buildings lying in ruin and severe decay are being brought to life again. Shuttered wine cellars once famed for their white marble floors, vaulted ceilings, and beautiful chandeliers are now being converted into nightclubs, the new subterranean refuges of the city's young, brash, and beautiful people.

The Gallery Hostel on Rue Miguel Bombarda, just a 10-minute walk from the centre, is one of the impressive faces of this new reimagining of Porto's landscape. The hostel is a rehabilitation of an impressive 1906 building and seeks to maintain the original aspects of a traditional Porto house, while blending it with modern decor and furnishings.

ROOMS & BATHROOMS

I stayed in one of the six-bed dorms. It's well spaced out and each room comes with its own ensuite bathroom, complete with a stellar power shower. The room even has its own private balcony, perfect for sitting and enjoying with fellow travellers and friends.

At just €18 a night, it's a steal. The doubles, just as nice as the dorms, come in around the €60 mark.

I am only here for two nights, but I easily could have stayed at least a week.

FACTBOX:

Address

Rua Miguel Bombarda,
222, 4050-377
Porto - Portugal

Telephone

(+351) 224 964 313

Website

www.gallery-hostel.com/en

PRICES:

Dorms from €20,

Doubles and twins from €50 per room,

Triples from €75 per room.



FACILITIES

The hostel is an excellent poster child for the stunning metamorphosis that Porto has undergone.

Formerly an 18th-century villa owned by a member of the local aristocracy, the building has been restored to its former glory by two friends.

They had the unique idea of creating a designer hostel that could also function as an art gallery.

Twice a month, the hostel opens its doors to the public. When I visited in April, there was an exhibition from a local photographer.

Huge, colourful prints on canvas were set against the whitewashed walls, juxtaposed with the gleaming, polished wooden floors.

From the moment you walk into the building, to the right is a cosy reception room. Straight ahead is the long narrow corridor with the art exhibition.

Walking through the corridor, to my right is a computer room for guests, replete with gigantic Mac desktops and also a well-stocked library, packed with books about the local history of Porto.

Further ahead, you come to an opening with a skylight – I love this part of the building. To the right, you have a staircase that winds down to the lower level of the building.

Tucked beneath the staircase is this very cool, open-plan bar with lots of cushions and seats to sink into after a long day roaming the streets of Porto.

Beside it is a living room with huge comfy sofas and a projector screen where they show movies and occasional local football derbies.

Plus, they have a karaoke machine. Yep. Karaoke machine. Awesome.

Straight on from the bar to the right is a glass-enclosed seating area where smokers congregate. Beyond that, you have the kitchen/dining area.

Beautiful space.

You get an awesome breakfast buffet spread that would not look out of place in a five-star hotel.

In the evenings, you can choose to dine with the guests and sample some great, authentic cuisine typical of northern Portugal. The meals are cooked by the hostel's very own Brazilian chef. It's the kind of food your mother-in-law would make, that good. Meals come to €10 including dessert and copious amounts of wine.

Beyond the kitchen, you have the hostel's little own garden. Facing the garden is a set of private rooms. Above the rooms, there is a sun lounge terrace.

Hospitality is one area where I know hostels often excel, but truly, at the Gallery, each guest is looked after with great care. It partly can be attributed to the owners' training at Lausanne, where the best go to learn the art of hospitality.

Being a small boutique hostel, they can afford to offer that almost one-to-one attention. It's hard work but so far they seem to have managed to create a place that marries the old world charm that Porto is famous for with great, modern design and comfort, plus a liberal sprinkle of charm and hospitality for good measure.

You leave the place intoxicated and already dreaming of your next visit.

VERDICT:

I loved the Gallery Hostel. It's probably my favorite of all the luxury hostels I have visited so far. I recommend visiting while it's still relatively unknown and has not been discovered by the Lonely Planet.

GETTING THERE:

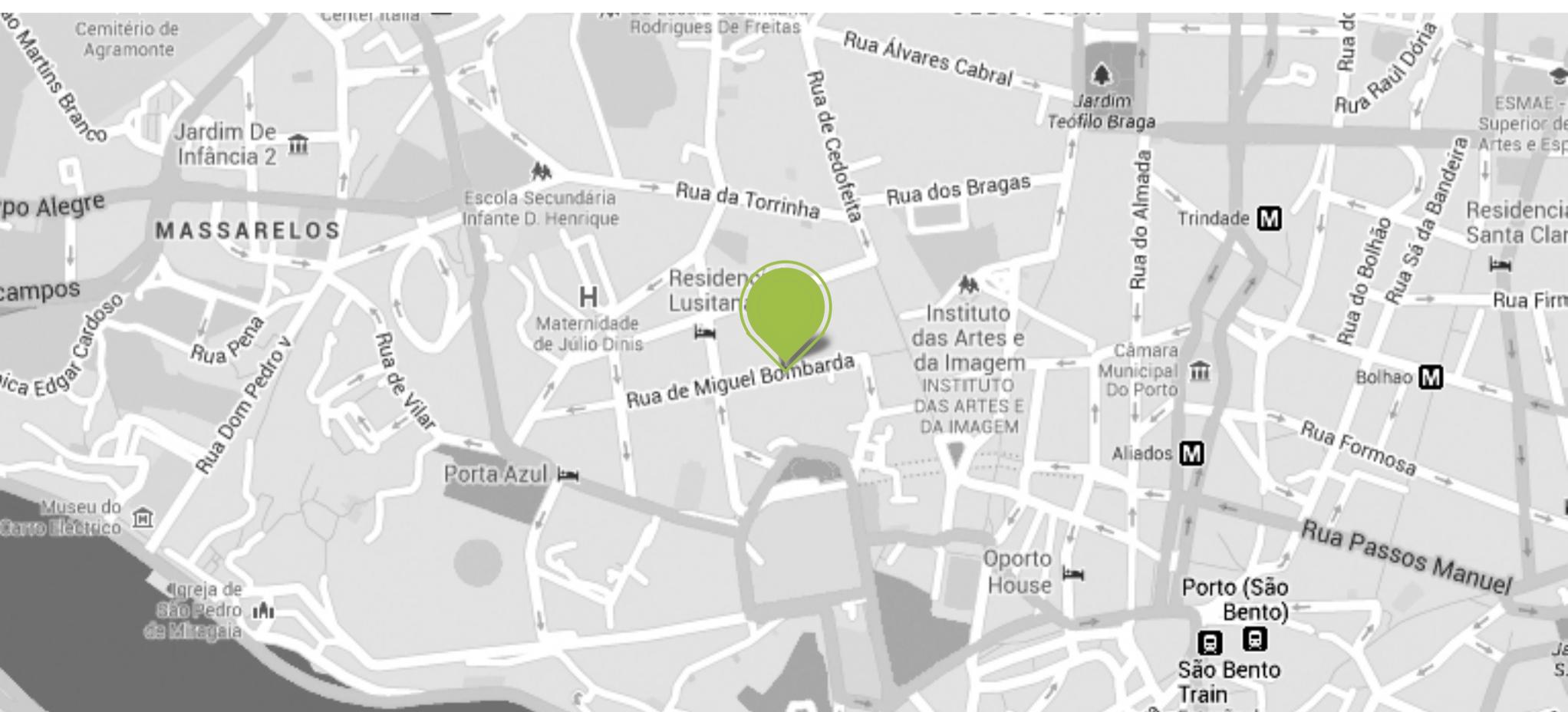
From Porto Airport, take the metro to Trindade station.

The hostel is a 14-minute walk from the station.

From the bus station, the hostel is a six-minute walk away.

From Campanhã train station, take the connecting train to São Bento.

The hostel is a 12-minute walk from the station.





LISBON POETS HOSTEL PORTUGAL

Rua Nova da Trindade, no. 2, Floor 5, 1200 Lisbon, Portugal

Lisbon Poets Hostel was a pioneer in the hostelling movement along with the Living Lounge Hostel. As artists, the owners were more concerned about creating an experience rather than just a cheap bed to sleep in.

In many ways they have set a new standard and continue to lead the way for other luxury hostels in Lisbon and the rest of the world.



LOCATION

This is a hostel with a great location, right at the foot of the Chiado Metro station. Guests entering the living room are treated to a breathtaking view of Chiado through the huge floor-to-ceiling windows and can admire the beautiful architecture of the buildings of the area, most of which were restored after the earthquake of 1755

ROOMS & BATHROOMS

The rooms are located on two separate floors. The dorm rooms share the colourful vibe present throughout the hostel. The beds are wooden bunk beds, sturdy with the possibility

of a great night's sleep.

I stayed on the lower fourth floor, where you have the choice of nine simple double rooms, all with quirky themes.

My walls were daubed with lines from various poems. I felt a psychedelic, slightly disorientating experience of having all these unknown words staring at me.

Still, it's a nice feeling to fall asleep in a cloud of words. That night, I dreamed of words and that I had started writing poetry again.

It was pretty humid in September, but I was glad to see that they have air-conditioning in the room.

The rooms come with a shared bath and toilets, separated by sex. There are plenty of them on each floor and they are very clean and well-maintained.



FACILITIES

It's a stunning space – one of the most impressive common rooms I've seen on my Luxury Hostels tour. You have a choice of colourful beanbag chairs where you can relax and surf the net on your tablets and laptops with the help of the hostel's excellent free wifi.

Or you can just chill out on the sofas and daydream, or maybe read from the extensive collection of books that adorn the shelves of the room.

The living room has a quirky feel with the odd typewriter lying around, as well as few books of poems by local poets. The hostel even has its own postcard collection.

It's a very creative space. The moment I sat down, I felt an irresistible urge to grab pen and paper and start writing poetry again, something I haven't done for awhile now.

Adjoining the living room is a well-equipped kitchen where guests can cook their meals.

A continental breakfast is included in the price and is a nice affair with toast, jams, pastries, fresh orange juice, and pretty decent coffee.

The hostel staff are a massive credit to this place. From the moment you walk in, there is a feeling that the owner Ricardo and his staff really want you to experience and enjoy their hometown.

Lisbon Poets Hostel organises a great range of activities for guests to get a feel of the spirit of the city.

They are unstintingly helpful and take pride in organising a plethora of great events for guests from free walking tours of the Lisbon, evening dinners, guided visits to a Fado bar, and visits to the Alfama market.

FACTBOX:

Address

Rua Nova da Trindade, no. 2, Floor 5,
1200 Lisbon, Portugal

Telephone

(+351) 213461241

Website

www.lisbonpoetshostel.com

PRICES:

Dorms from €19,

Doubles from €50 per room.

If you are also visiting Porto and staying at their sister property:

Oporto Poets Hostel, you get a 10% discount on both your bookings.



VERDICT:

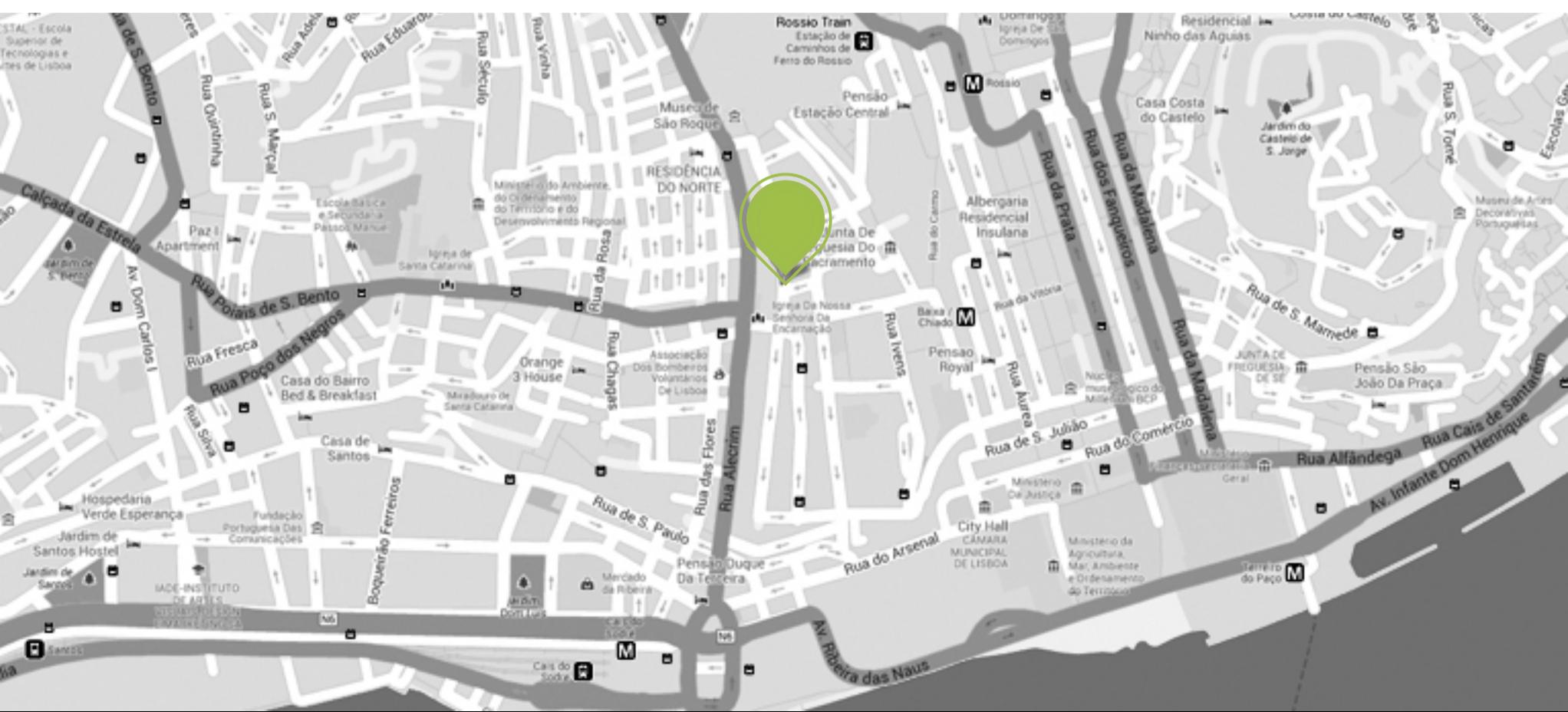
I loved Lisbon Poets Hostel. Great location, great space, great people and a great experience.

GETTING THERE:

From Lisbon International Airport, take the red line to Alameda, then the green line to Baixa-Chiado. The hostel is a six-minute walk from the station.

From Oriente train station, take the red line to Alameda, then the green line to Baixa-Chiado. The hostel is a six-minute walk from the station.

From Sete Rios bus station, take the blue line to Baixa-Chiado. The hostel is a six-minute walk from the station.



STAY INN HOSTEL LISBON, PORTUGAL

Rua Luz Soriano, nº19, 1º andar, 1200-246 Lisbon, Portugal

An excellent location in the Bairro Alto area, cool and chic decor, and a friendly staff make this a great base for exploring Lisbon.



LOCATION

The hostel has a fantastic location in the heart of the Bairro Alto, just a two-minute walk from the Largo Camões in Chiado, the centre of Lisbon.



ROOMS & BATHROOMS

The rooms are very nice and in line with what you would expect from a boutique hotel. Beds have nice mattresses and fluffy pillows – perfect for a great night's sleep after a long day on the tiles of Lisbon.

I stayed in one of their premium double rooms. This did not have the option of a private bathroom, but they do have ensuite rooms.

The bathroom, complete with a toilet and shower, was just outside of my room and shared with another double room in the corridor. During my stay, I practically had the bathroom to myself.

FACTBOX:

Address

Rua Luz Soriano, n°19,
1° andar, 1200-246
Lisbon, Portugal

Telephone

(+351) 213 425 149

PRICES:

Dorms from €19,

Doubles from €40 per room.

Website

stayinnlisbonhostel.com/en





FACILITIES

My first impression upon walking into the living room? WOW!

The interior decor is very chic and what you would expect in a boutique hotel. Parquet floors, floor-to-ceiling windows, comfy leather sofas that you just sink into – plus, quirky features like a plasma screen TV sitting on an old trunk. Good lighting and lots of bright colours create a happy ambience.

The common area is linked to a nice enclosed dining area where you can enjoy dinner with fellow hostel guests or surf the internet on your device, using the hostel's excellent free wifi. There are also communal desktops for guests' use.

The other cool space is the kitchen. In the morning you get a simple continental breakfast of delicious rustic morning rolls with cheese, ham and jam. Decent concentrated orange juice is available.

The coup de grace, however, is the Nescafe coffee machine, where you can help yourself to unlimited espressos, mochas, and cappuccinos all day. I have to admit they were pretty tasty!

For self-caterers, there are excellent cooking facilities with all the amenities you could expect. The huge fridge also handily dispenses ice and chilled water on demand. There is a supermarket just across the road from the hostel.

The hostel also has a wash and dry laundry service for as little as €2. Bargain!

Overall, Stay Inn is a small but very cosy hostel with everything you could want. Many guests come here for two days and end up staying a week.

It's a great hostel in which to chill out. The owner, Ricardo, makes it clear that his hostel is not a party hostel but a place to relax and take it easy. And if you do want a party, Bairro Alto is at your doorstep.

While sitting in the lounge, I got chatting to a few of the guests. Being such a small place, it's easy to strike up conversations.

VERDICT:

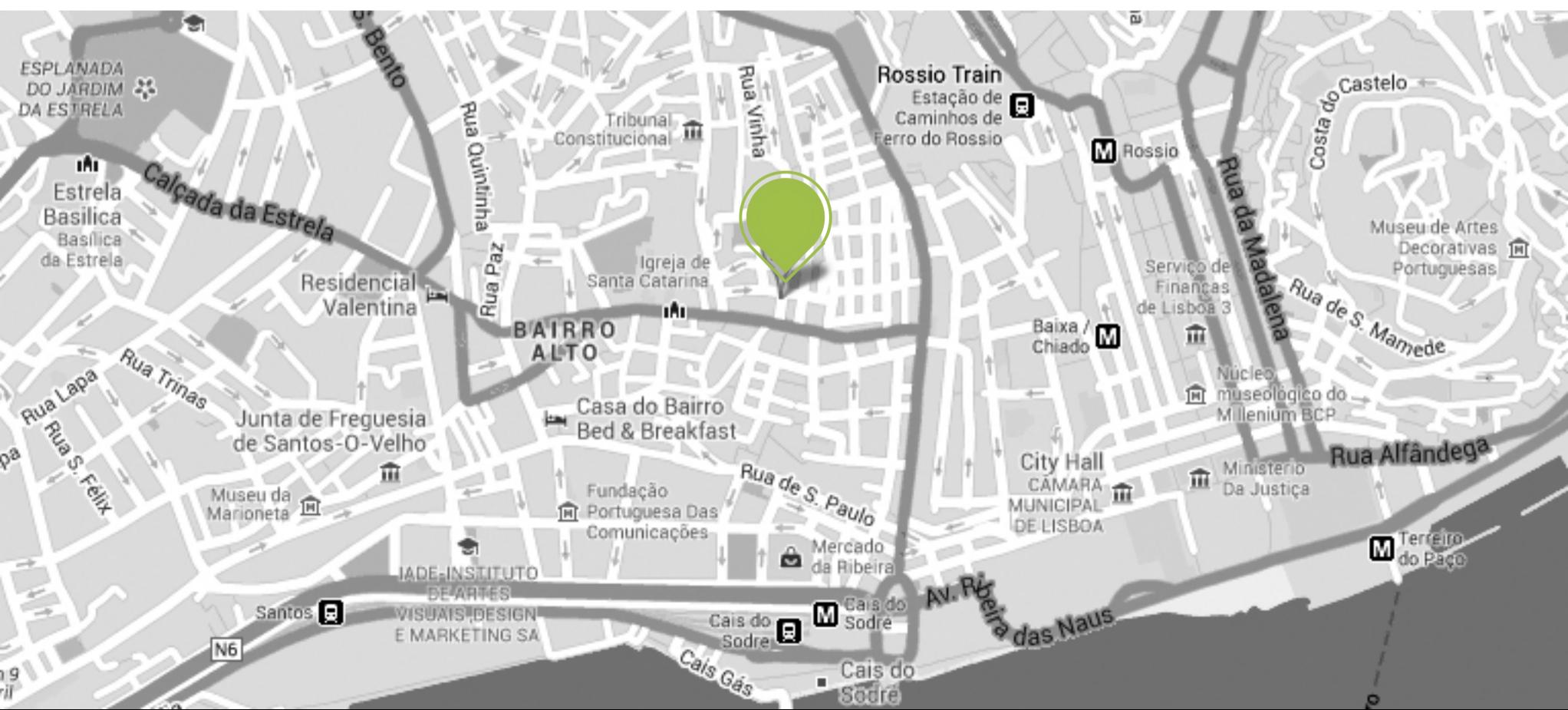
Lisbon is blessed with many great hostels, but Stay Inn is up right there with the best and is a great home away from home in Lisbon.

GETTING THERE:

From Lisbon International Airport, take the red line to Alameda, then the green line to Baixa-Chiado. The hostel is a 12-minute walk from the station.

From Sete Rios bus station, take the blue line to Baixa-Chiado. The hostel is a 12-minute walk from the station.

From Oriente train station, take the red line to Alameda, then the green line to Baixa-Chiado. The hostel is a 12-minute walk from the station.





OASIS BACKPACKERS LISBON, PORTUGAL

Rua de Santa Catarina, 24, 1200-402, Lisbon, Portugal

This is a social hostel – so if you are travelling solo and looking to make friends, Oasis Lisbon is the place to be. The staff are a friendly bunch and the in-house dinners and on-site bar are excellent.



LOCATION

Lisbon is the city of seven hills. No matter where you stay, you can have a room with a view.

This is very true when it comes to staying at the Oasis Backpackers Lisbon. The bedrooms on one side have panoramic views of the Tejo River. On the other side, the views are of the hostel's peaceful garden, complete with a hammock and palm trees swaying in the breeze.

Often the breeze will be accompanied by the melancholy strains of Taylor's guitar. You'll find him gently strumming away on most mornings.

Right in front of the hostel is the Miradouro Santa Catarina, where there is always a gaggle of tourists and locals alike drinking in the mesmerizing panoramic views.

Just a hop, skip, and jump away is a second building which houses a few doubles where travelling couples can get more privacy – which is handy if you want to get away, because this hostel is very much a party hostel.

TOP TIP

If you say something to the bartender in Portuguese, you get rewarded with a free shot.

ROOMS & BATHROOMS

I stayed in one of their apartments near the main building, which was quiet and very comfortable, allowing me to have my own space as well as access to the facilities of the hostel.

The rooms here are very cool – bright, snazzy wallpaper; comfy mattresses; fresh, clean linen. If you're looking for peace and space, definitely go for their double rooms.

The dorms within the hostel are clean and bright with a balcony offering a view of the Lisbon port area. There are cupboards within the room for guests to store their possessions, plus a large ensuite bathroom.

FACTBOX:

Address:

Rua de Santa Catarina,
24, 1200-402,
Lisbon, Portugal

Phone:

(+351) 213 478 044

Website:

www.oasislisboa.com/lisbon-hostel

PRICES:

Dorms from €13,

Doubles from €25 per person.

FACILITIES:

The notion of a 'party hostel' can be quite intimidating to thirty-something solo travellers like myself.

However, I have to say that given the small size and intimate feel of Oasis, it's not your typical crazy party hostel.

Drinking in the cozy lounge and bar area with other guests made me feel like I was back at university, drinking with friends at a house party.

The staff line up their favourite songs on their custom YouTube channel. Hostel guests often chip in. On a typical night you might be drinking to a very wide range of musical tastes.

Drinks in the hostel are very affordable. You can bring your own drinks, if you'd like, and there's a supermarket around the corner on the main drag.

Despite Oasis's proximity to the nightlife-heavy neighborhood of Bairro Alto, the hostel itself is on a quiet cobbled street.

The hostel staff go to great lengths to make the guests feel at home, which is great especially if you're travelling solo.

The staff take guests on bar crawls along the Bairro Alto. If you want tips of places to eat or want to check out the latest art gallery exhibition, they're quite helpful and resourceful.

The best thing I enjoyed about this hostel is their dinner. For just €10, you get a three-course meal with wine.

The chefs are friendly locals like Stella, an architecture student, who comes and cooks three times a week just for the fun of meeting new people.

These communal dinners are a great way to meet and get to know fellow hostel guests – I highly recommend you have at least one dinner in the hostel.



VERDICT:

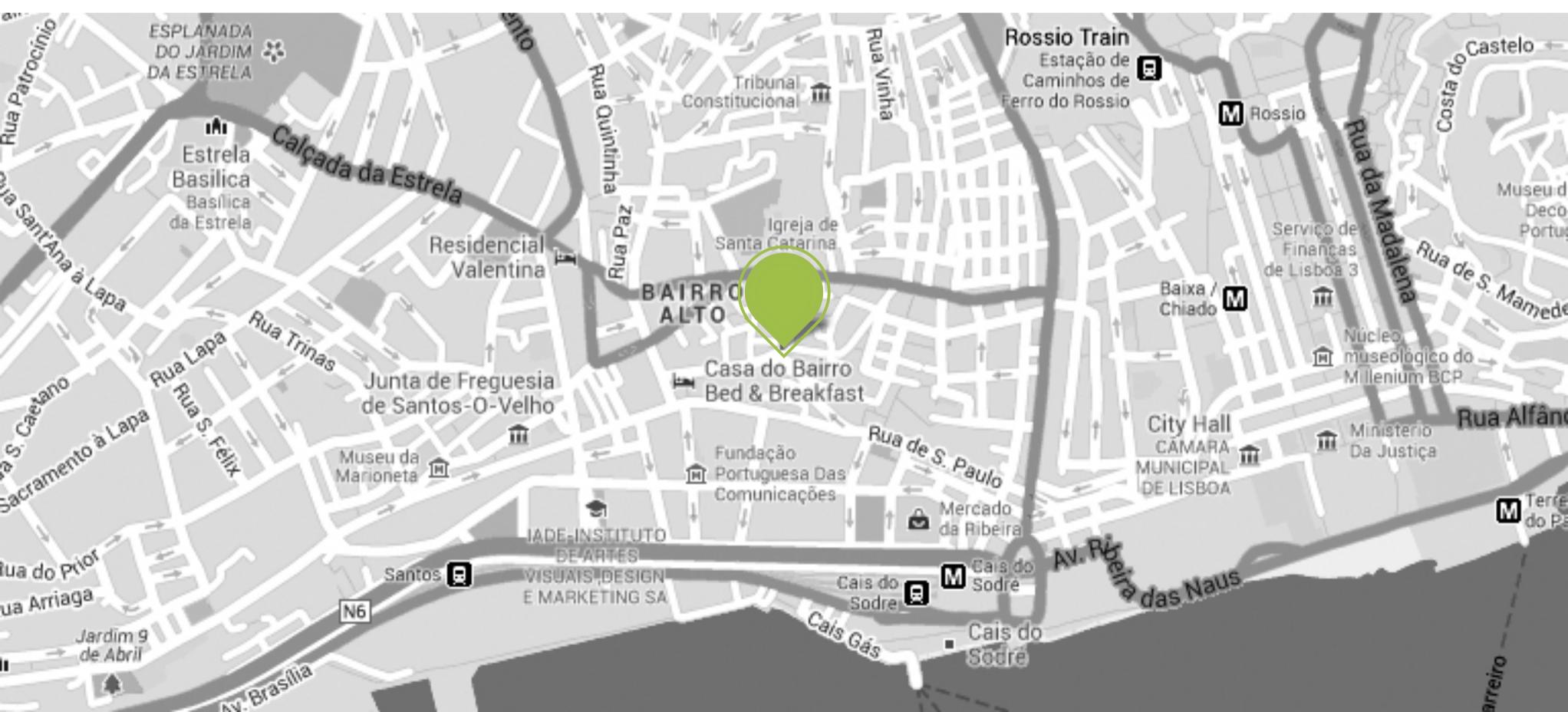
Oasis prides itself on being quirky and cool and with their ace location, cool design, nice rooms, beautiful outdoor garden, nightly dinners, and fun evening soirees, they triumph. I was worried about whether I would fit in as an older, solo traveller, but the staff made me feel at home immediately and I had two great days at this hostel.

GETTING THERE:

From Lisbon International Airport, take the red line to Alameda, then the green line to Baixa-Chiado. The hostel is an 8-minute walk from the station.

From Oriente train station, take the red line to Alameda, then the green line to Baixa-Chiado. The hostel is an 8-minute walk from the station.

From Sete Rios bus station, take the blue line to Baixa-Chiado. The hostel is an 8-minute walk from the station.





LISBON CALLING PORTUGAL

Rua de Sao Paulo, 126 – floor 3D, 1200-429 Lisbon, Portugal

Part of a charming 250-year-old building, Lisbon Calling Hostel is stunning, overflowing with beautiful period features and vintage charm. It's also where the owners and their friends live, so staying at this hostel really feels like you've been welcomed into someone's home.





LOCATION

Situated just a short walking distance from the city center of Chiado and the nightlife hotspots of Bairro Alto and Cais de Sodré, this hostel is in a fantastic location.

ROOMS & BATHROOMS

Staying here is an experience. With quirky interior decor, stone walls, and hardwood floors, the rooms here are bright and spacious with a nice rustic charm.

If you are looking for something romantic and exclusive, stay in the doubles wing, which is in a separate section of the building and feels like having your own apartment in Lisbon.

Guests get their own keys to come and go from their rooms as they please. There are only four rooms, each one with a cool theme.

I stayed in '1812' room, charmingly furnished with retro pieces. The tall ceilings and large windows offered me panoramic views of the square below and the beautiful church of Sao Paulo. I shared a very clean, well-maintained bathroom and kitchen with the other residents, but I didn't find it to be much of an issue.

Four-, six- and 10-bed dorms are excellent value and comfortable. The beautiful wooden bunk beds are custom-made and raised so you can catch views of the church square. The ceilings are adorned with frescos.

TOP TIP

Across from the hostel is Rua de Nova Carvalho, formerly the red light district of Lisbon. There are some cool bars here, but the pick of the joints is Pensao Amor, once a cheap pension with rooms rented by the hour to prostitutes. Today the place functions as a bar and concert venue and also has a leopard- and gold-decorated room used for pole dancing lessons and workshops.

FACTBOX:

Address:

Rua de Sao Paulo, 126 – floor 3D,
1200-429 Lisbon, Portugal

Phone:

(+351) 213 432 381

Website:

www.lisboncalling.net

PRICES:

Dorms from €16,

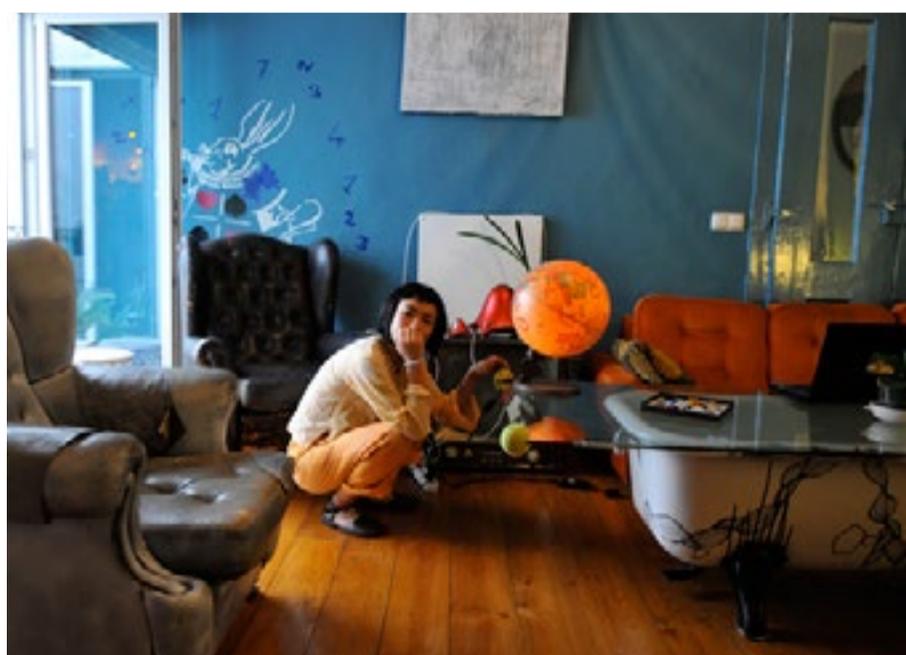
Doubles from €50 per room.

FACILITIES

This hostel is a living exhibition of eclectic furniture pieces and fittings that the owners have procured from all over Portugal and Europe. There is everything from an antique bathtub converted into a table to 1950's Rock and Roll memorabilia and outlandish kitsch decorations. Altogether, it creates a very colourful vibe.



One of the great features of staying in the doubles is the very cool free breakfast. Rather than having a fixed breakfast time, bread rolls are placed in an embroidered cloth bag and hung on your room's door handle in the morning.



Once you're up and running, you take them to the common kitchen and are free to make coffee or tea, help yourself to orange juice, have muesli, and toast the rolls, enjoying them with butter or delicious fruit jam. Given that you are sharing with only three other couples, you have a good chance to having the kitchen to yourself.



The kitchen area in the main part of the hostel is a very cool, social space where the owners encourage guests to use their fridge and often invite guests to join in their lunch or dinner at no extra cost. It really feels like you're visiting a friend's or relative's home.

The free wifi is excellent and the staff here are friendly and helpful with lots of great tips to make the most of your stay here.

There is free secure storage with individual lockers, locks and keys, as well as 'all day do-it-yourself coffee and tea', in the words of the owners.

VERDICT:

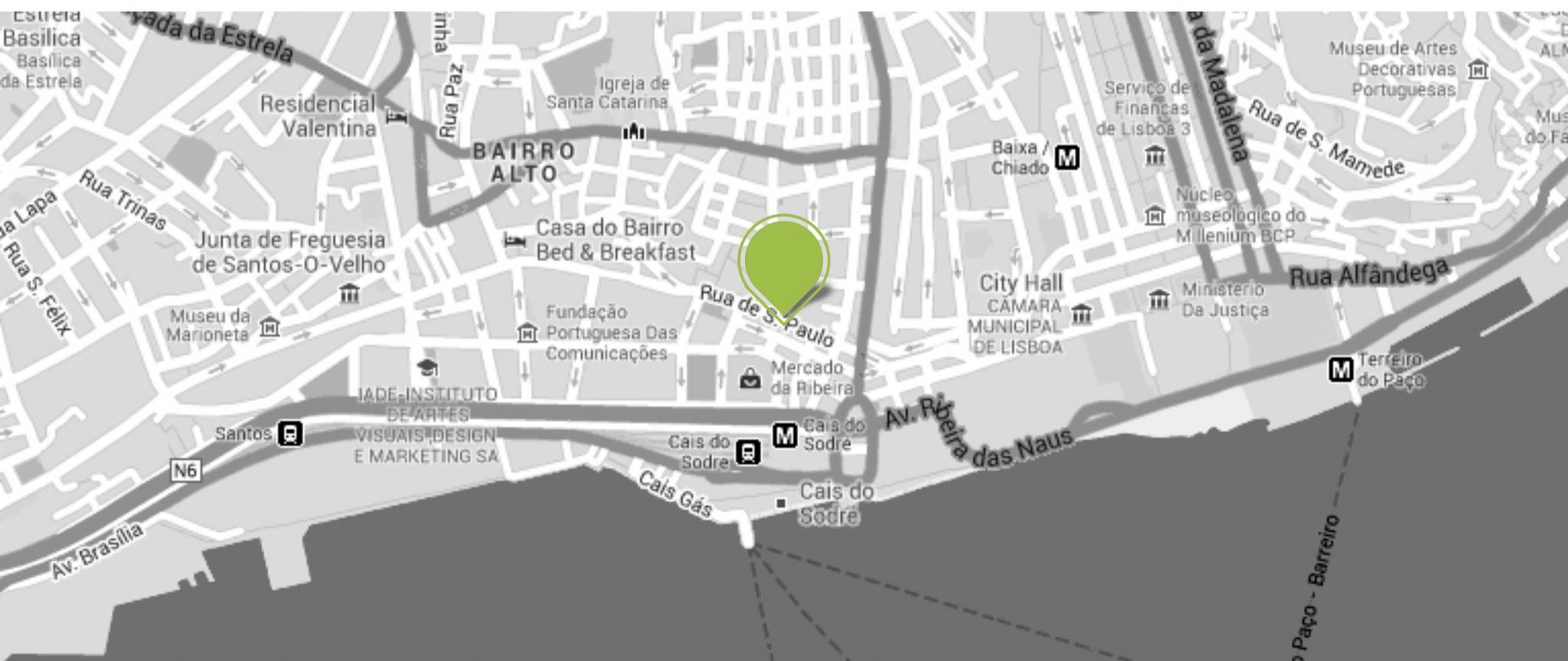
With its beautiful interior design and vintage charm, Lisbon Calling is easily one of the most stylish and romantic hostels in Lisbon. Highly recommended.

GETTING THERE:

From Lisbon International Airport, take the Aerobus to Cais do Sodre. The hostel is a five-minute walk from the station.

From Sete Rios Bus Station, take the blue line to Baixa-Chiado, then the green line to Cais do Sodre. The hostel is a five-minute walk from the station.

From Oriente Train Station, take the green line to Cais do Sodre. The hostel is a five-minute walk from the station.



GOODMORNING HOSTEL LISBON, PORTUGAL

Praça dos Restauradores, no. 65, 1250-188 Lisbon, Portugal

If you're looking for a taste of warm Portuguese hospitality in an unbeatable location in Lisbon, say hello to Goodmorning Hostel on your next visit to the city.





LOCATION

Goodmorning Hostel is in an unbeatable location in Praça dos Restauradores, just a stone's throw away from a Metro station and Rossio Train Station. The airport shuttle leaves from just across the square.

ROOMS & BATHROOMS

Warm and cosy are two perfect words to sum up the experience of staying in the Goodmorning.

The dorm rooms are spacious with well laid out, very comfortable beds. Each bed in the dorm comes with a mini shelf, power socket, and reading light.

Travellers looking for more privacy can choose from one of their private ensuite doubles on the top floor of the hostel. All rooms come with a balcony and panoramic views of the city.

If you're looking for a romantic break in Lisbon in a great location, choose the double ensuite room at the top of the hostel with its beautiful comfy bed, great views, and quirky decor.

FACILITIES

Goodmorning Hostel is typical of the breed of designer hostels in Lisbon. You have warm wooden flooring, bright bold wallpaper, and rooms filled with a cornucopia of vintage curios and recycled furniture pieces. My personal favorite? The bathtub couch on the top floor.

The staff are the outstanding feature of this hostel. Joao makes the best waffles, Yolanda puts on great tunes and introduced me to some cool bands, Duarte is a great guitar player for a good ole singsong in the evening over a few beers, Magdalena has a wicked sense of humour and makes great pierogi, and Manuela is an amazing singer who organizes cool and fun stuff, always with a big smile on her face.



They have a friendly, personable approach and are full of great enthusiasm and ideas of cool, unusual things to do in Lisbon. It's rare to meet such a great group of nice staff in one hostel. By the time I left after a few days, I felt like I was part of their big family.

The staff organise excellent free walking tours of the city and also a 'Dinner with the Locals', where they introduce guests to local Portuguese dishes. Guests can join in with the cooking if they'd like. I pitched in one night and cooked the guests an authentic Indian curry.

Eating dinner and sharing stories of travel experiences with the staff and hostel guests at Goodmorning was one of my most memorable experiences from my travels this year. The staff often offer a glass of red wine, port wine, or Ginginha to the guests for free. There's also a cheap and excellent supermarket just a stone's throw away, which is quite handy.

The free breakfast is fantastic and something different from your standard hostel fare - they offer freshly made waffles, as well as good filtered coffee and juices. It's also served until 11:30 AM, which is nice. Free coffee and tea are offered throughout the day.

The hostel has a dedicated internet room where guests can surf the web for free, as well as a separate TV room with a large flatscreen TV and DVD player to watch movies. The free wifi is decent and available throughout the hostel. There is a free left luggage facility in case you are travelling later in the day.

FACTBOX:

Address

Praça dos Restauradores, no. 65, 2nd floor,
1250-188 Lisbon, Portugal

Telephone

(+ 351) 213 421 128

Website

www.goodmorninghostel.com

PRICES:

Dorms from €28 during the winter season;

€19 during the summer season.

Reduced rates for long-term stays

VERDICT:

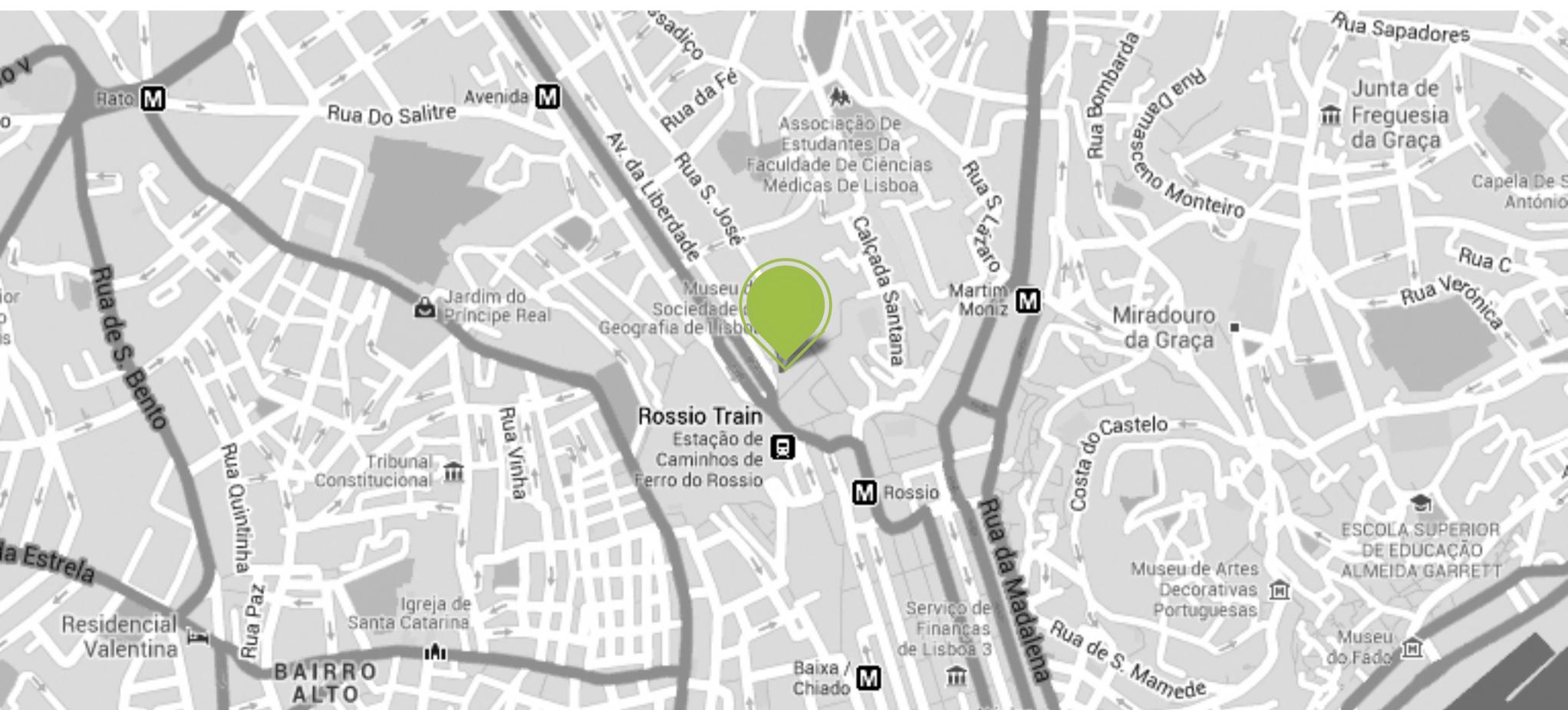
Staying at the Goodmorning Hostel is like being invited into a friend's home. The superb central location, generous breakfast, and friendly, knowledgeable hostel staff make this a great base for exploring Lisbon.

GETTING THERE:

From Lisbon International Airport, take the Aerobus to Cais do Sodré and exit at Restauradores. The hostel is at the doorstep.

From Oriente train station, take the red line to São Sebastião, then the blue line to Restauradores. The hostel is at the doorstep.

From Sete Rios bus station, take the blue line to Restauradores. The hostel is at the doorstep.



U HOSTELS MADRID, SPAIN

Calle Sagasta 22, Madrid 28004, Spain

A design hostel in a 19th-century palace with its own private cinema room, rooftop terrace, and bar? Welcome to U Hostels, Madrid.





LOCATION

Located in a 19th-century palace right beside the Alonso Martinez metro station and just a 15-minute walk to Puerta del Sol, U Hostels Madrid is a great base to explore Madrid. The hostel is located in close proximity to the Malasaña district, which is a rich hive of bars and restaurants and easily one of the most vibrant neighborhoods in Madrid.

ROOMS & BATHROOMS

In sync with the rest of the building, the whitewashed rooms have a clean minimalist design that is easy on the eye. Dorms are air-conditioned and come with private lockers. Bunk beds are custom-made with comfortable mattresses. Each bed comes with a private reading light and power points for charging your gadgets. You have a choice of dorms with an ensuite bathroom or shared facilities. There is also a female-only dorm. Linen is included in the price, and the hostel has free luggage storage.

TOP TIP

Choose the six-bed dorm with no bathroom over a four-bed ensuite dorm. It's much more spacious, plus you have a private balcony looking onto the main street. There are tons of bathrooms and showers on each floor.

FACILITIES:

U Hostels boasts its own private cinema room. Guests can relax and or catch the latest football match or choose a movie from their extensive DVD collection.

It's so cosy that you can often find the odd guest dozing away during the day, sleeping off their nocturnal exertions.



Next to the cinema is a nice chill-out zone for guests where they can read a book or plot their travels across Madrid on the huge magnetic wall map of the city.

If you're looking for a quiet drink after a day of seeing the sights, the hostel has an excellent on-site bar with very competitively priced drinks. Staff members Erica and Pablo run an excellent programme of daily activities to help guests plug into the city's DNA. From excellent free walking tours to visits to Flamenco bars and pub crawls, there's something for every type of traveller. The hostel has recently opened their rooftop terrace, which is perfect for enjoying Madrid sunsets and having a drink. The free wifi is excellent, especially for a hostel of this size, and on each floor are free computer terminals. There is a nice-sized kitchen for guests' use with a fridge to store food items. The free breakfast is decent, but an extra €1 gets you a cup of Lavazza coffee and €3 gets you the special breakfast: coffee, fruit, and delicious Serrano ham. It's worth every penny.

FACTBOX:

Address:

Calle Sagasta 22, Madrid 28004, Spain

Phone:

(+34) 914 45 03 00

Website:

www.en.ghostels.com

PRICES:

Dorms from €15,

Doubles from €60 per room.



PURPLE NEST HOSTEL VALENCIA

Plaza de Tetuan 5, 46003 Valencia, Spain

If you're looking for budget accommodation in Valencia for Las Fallas or La Tomatina, Purple Nest Hostel is a great place to stay and get you into the party spirit.





LOCATION

Purple Nest enjoys a good central location in Plaza Tetuna, which is on the edge of Valencia's historic center. The hostel is a short walking distance from the metro and bus station so the city's arts, music, and cultural hotspots are in easy reach, as are the city's beautiful beaches.

ROOMS & BATHROOMS

Rooms at Purple Nest are clean, comfortable, and air-conditioned. Linens and towels are included at no extra cost. The hostel caters to every type of backpacker with four-, six-, eight-, and 10-bed dorms. Female dorms are available, as are private rooms.

I stayed in their ensuite private rooms on the fifth floor during La Tomatina and enjoyed the bright decor, quality and comfort of the beds, and the clean bathroom. The shower could be a little more powerful, but overall I couldn't find any other faults.



FACILITIES

The hostel runs a busy schedule of events for its guests, ranging from great value pub crawls and live music nights to free tapas and walking tours of the city. The top feature of the hostel is that it is very secure with key card access for all guests and very strict 24-hour security at the reception desk. Guests are required to carry their reservation cards at all times.

This is the only hostel in the city with its own bar and it runs happy hour offers in the evenings, where you can enjoy a pitcher of beer and mojito cocktails for just a few euros. The bar also has a pool table, common area with a flatscreen TV, and free wifi (which is decent strength-wise).

There is also a free baggage storage facility, plus a well-equipped, shared kitchen space for guests.

The hostel offers a basic free breakfast of cereals, toast, and coffee. That's great if you're on a strict budget, but a few euros extra can buy you breakfast at the nice cafes on the doorstep of the hostel.

FACTBOX:

Address

Plaza de Tetuan 5, 46003 Valencia, Spain

Telephone

(+34) 963 532 561

Website

www.nesthostelsvalencia.com/purple

PRICES:

Dorms from €14,

Doubles from €35 per person.

VERDICT:

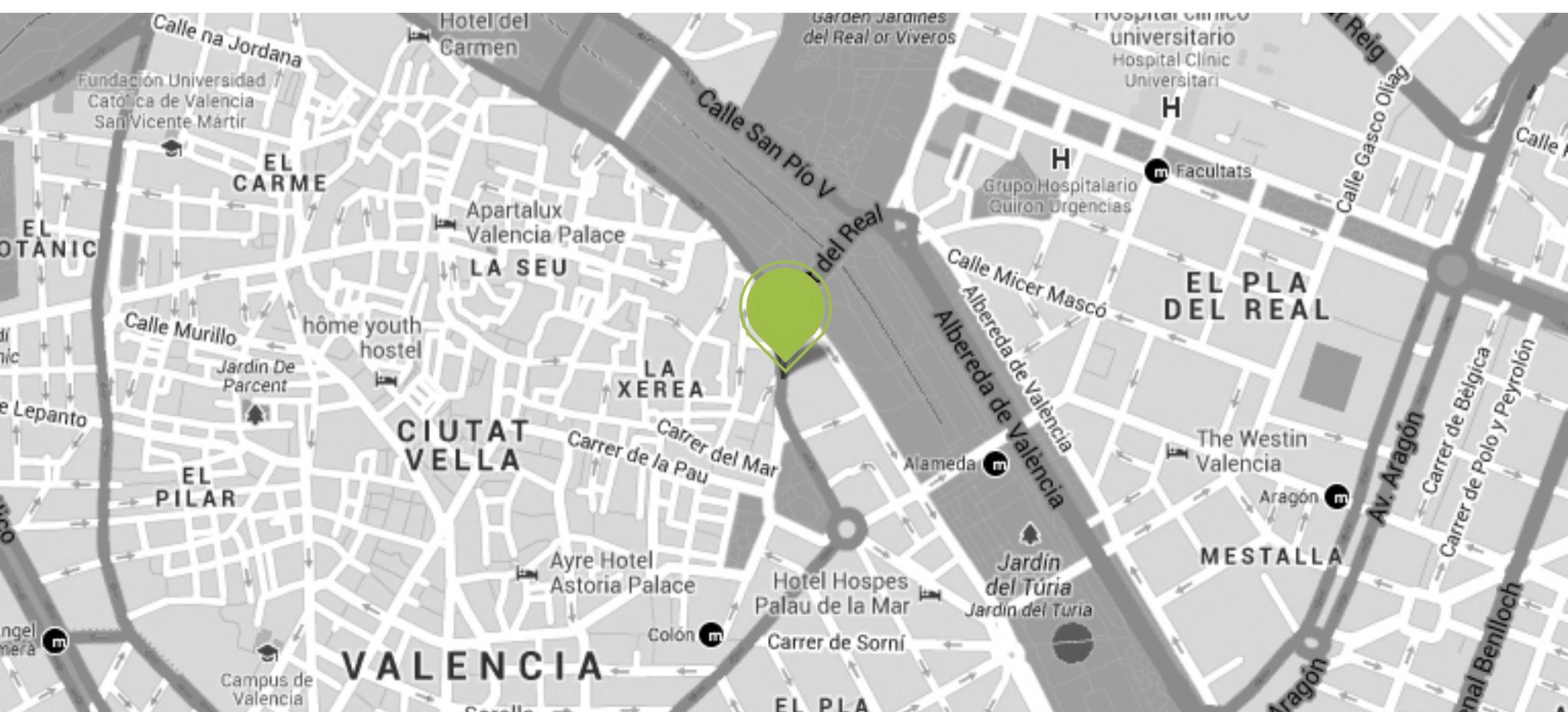
This is a party hostel, so if you've come to Valencia for the fiesta, this is the place to stay. Great location, very secure, good facilities and well-maintained, clean rooms ensure a pleasant stay. The wifi strength could be improved, but that was just a minor quibble for me in an otherwise enjoyable stay at this hostel.

GETTING THERE:

From Valencia Airport, take metro line 3 or 5 to Alameda. The hostel is a seven-minute walk from the station.

From Valencia bus station, take bus #8 to Plaza Tetuan. The hostel is in front of the stop.

From Valencia train station, take metro line 3 or 5 to Alameda. The hostel is a seven-minute walk from the station.



FUSION HOTEL PRAGUE

Panska 9, 110 00 Prague 1 – Czech Republic

Smart interiors, a revolving bar, central location in Prague and with all the technological trimmings you could dream of in your own home like an interactive gaming room, a Skype booth and Apple TV's-Prague Fusion Hostel and Hotel is a flashpackers wet dream.





TOP TIP

Make sure you get to breakfast on time, because they already start putting away the buffet maybe 10mins before closing time, even if you still try to grab some cheese and fruits...

LOCATION

Right in the center of Prague, within walking distance of the main train station and the key historical sights, bars and shops, this luxury hostel is an excellent base. Public transport such as trams and buses are just a few minutes walking distance from the hostel.

ROOMS & BATHROOMS

There is a diverse range of rooms on offer here to guests. The private rooms range from a "Rock room" with guitars on its walls and a red lip sofa to the "Love room", perfect for a romantic stay. My personal favourite was the "Vintage

room", with its old books, artworks, a great old workbench as a desk, a superb view, a big bed plus a comfy old leather sofa. All private rooms have queen size beds plus ensuite bathroom with shower, Apple TV, hair dryer and most importantly- fast and free WiFi. There are also some special rooms that cater to bigger groups- such as the "Flexi room" that can be used for up to 4 people and 'a room' that basically just contains a big ass huge mattress sleeping up to six people- perfect for a girls/boys getaway with endless nights of prosecco/beer and gossip/footy banter.

From 16€ a night, a bed in one of the dorms is yours, all equipped with a bathroom, hairdryer, free towels, free wifi and safety lockers. Breakfast is included in the price. I feel like this is a true bargain.

FACILITIES

Fusion's concept already lies within the name. In one place it combines not only a neat boutique hotel with unique private rooms and a cozy hostel with dorms of several different sizes but also a restaurant, a bar and a soup diner, bringing together locals, interior design enthusiasts and of course travellers on different budgets from all over the world. The old bank building underwent a complete reconstruction being equipped with both modern and vintage furniture that has been beautifully collected from different places. It all comes together beautifully with the playful and funky wall illustrations by young artist Klára Tesarova.

What I loved the most about Fusion was the social aspect. You can have your lunch with locals at "Soup in the city", the hotels own diner, that serves 5 different soups from typical Czech and vegetable cream soups to Far East-inspired soups . You can also enjoy home made sandwiches and cakes or a typical Czech dinner at the restaurant, where every dish you order comes with a free beverage. Guests will love the interactive gaming room, the free Skype box and also the beautifully designed 360° bar. Breakfast is included within your stay.



PRICES:

Dorms from 16€

Privates start from 80€

FACTBOX:

Address

Panska 9,
110 00 Prague 1 – Czech Republic

Telephone

(+420) 226222 800

Website

www.fusionhotels.com



VERDICT:

I can tell the Fusion was completely my cup of tea with all the neat interior design and smart gimmicks in the rooms and common areas. I loved the idea of having everything in one place, being able to socialize with travelers from around the world and even locals during my stay. The location was very convenient, I never had to buy public transport tickets because everything is in walking distance.

GETTING THERE:

The hotel is situated at the corner of Panska and Jindriska street.

From the Main Train Station (Hlavni Nadrazi)

Once you step out from the building, turn right and walk through the park, in 2 minutes you will reach the tram stop Hlavni nadrazi. Trams go both ways, cross the road and take the tram No.9 going down towards the crossroad. It is just 1 tram stop, get off at the station called Jindriska. Walk straight on the right pavement, following the tram lines and in 2 minutes you will see Fusion Prague on the corner.

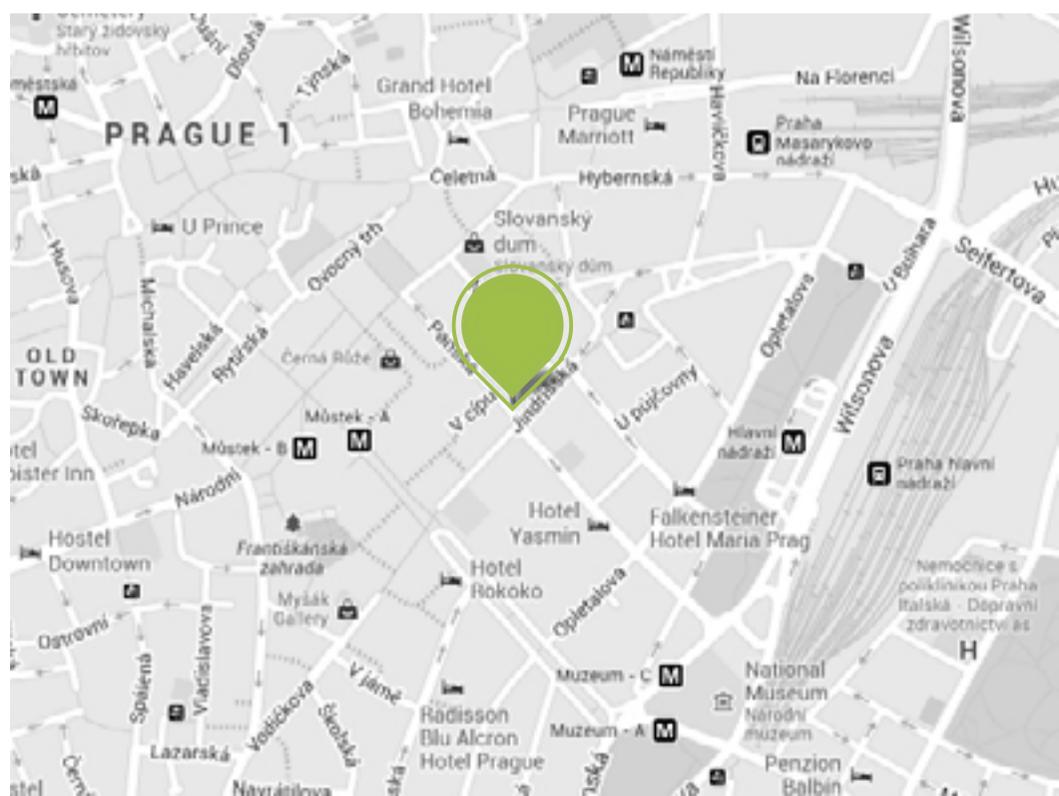
From the Holesovice Train Station (Nadrazi Holesovice)
Take the underground in the direction of Haje. Get off at Vltavska (just one stop). Once you get outside, there is a tram stop. Take tram No. 3, in the direction of Sidliste Modrany. Get off at Jindiriska (the 5th stop).
Walk straight on the right pavement, following the tram lines in 2 minutes you will see Fusion hotel on the corner.

From the Florenc Bus Station

Florenc is the central bus station, with arrivals and departures for most routes involving Student Agency, Eurolines, OrangeWays, Bohemian Lines and more.

Once you leave the bus station, turn left into the underpass and use the gate Sokolovska to get out, keep walking straight to the main street with trams passing by.

Cross this street and take tram No. 24 in the direction of Kubanske Namesti (the 3rd stop). Walk straight, on the right pavement, following the tram lines and in 2 minutes you will see Fusion Hotel on the corner.



GRAMPA'S HOSTEL WROCLAW, POLAND

Pl. wietego Macieja 2/1c – 50-244, Wrocław, Poland

Grampa's Hostel in Wrocław, Poland, is a budget-friendly, casual, and stylish place where strangers become friends. This family-run establishment balances a party atmosphere with quality facilities, great hospitality, and comfortable beds.



LOCATION

Situated just a 15-minute walk from the biggest market square in Europe, the hostel is a stone's throw away from the heart of the city. If you walk to the hostel, you will pass some beautiful bridges and realize why Wrocław is also known as the 'Venice of Poland'. The hostel is also very well connected via the city's excellent tram and bus network.

Before I arrived I wished the hostel was a bit closer to the main square, but after I returned late from a day strolling around Wrocław, I fell in love with the location! Once you are on your way home and take a look behind you, you get a magnificent view over the lit-up bridges and the skyline, you would never get if it wasn't for that 15-minute walk.

ROOMS & BATHROOMS

Grampa's Hostel offers nine rooms in which they can accommodate up to 48 guests.

I stayed in the Blue Room, a single that is also known as the 'writer's room' – and I most certainly felt like Ryszard Kapuściński (a Polish travel writer) when I entered it. I enjoyed a good night's sleep and with five (!) power points just to myself, I woke up to an army of fully charged devices.

All of the rooms offer air conditioning and a heating system. Unfortunately, my heater was broken, as was one of the two lamps.

FACTBOX:

Address

Pl. świętego Macieja 2/1c – 50-244,
Wrocław, Poland

Telephone

(+48) 71 78 78 444

Website

www.grampahostel.com

PRICES:

Dorms from 30 PLN (€7),

Singles from 75 PLN (€18).



The shared toilets and bathrooms are completely new, spacious, and clean. In both the bathroom and kitchen, you will find hilarious signs that ask you to clean up your own mess or save energy by turning up the lights.

I stayed in a private room that had no ensuite bathroom, but the shared bathrooms were always free and perfectly clean so that wasn't a big deal. If you book a private room, towels are not included – they are thinking about changing that. Also, my room did not have a mirror, which is something I would expect if I didn't have an ensuite bathroom. I very much enjoyed the homey common room that gave me a chance to meet some fellow travellers and revive my 'Tekken' (popular PlayStation fighting game from the 90s) skills.

FACILITIES

On arrival, guests get an orientation of the hostel's various facilities, a carrot keychain, and receive a homemade cupcake.

The clean and generous kitchen is a nice meeting point. Whether you are treating yourself to free tea and coffee or if you are cooking your own meal, chances are very high that you will run into another guest and can have a pleasant conversation.

The hostel holds cooking events on Sunday evenings. Together with volunteers, couchsurfers, expats, friends of the owners and fellow guests you will create different kinds of meals every week. Your contribution towards the expenses

is just 10PLN (€2.50).

The generous free breakfast sets you up nicely for the day. You can start your day with different choices of cereal, bread, cheese, ham, butter, miscellaneous marmalades, hazelnut cream, tea, instant coffee, and milk.

The colorful and comfy common room offers a variety of possibilities to enjoy yourself. You can either hang out on your own reading a book from the 'take a book, leave a book' shelf, watch a DVD on the 42-inch flatscreen TV with your old friends, make new friends while enjoying the PlayStation 3, or show off your guitar-playing skills.

On Fridays and Saturdays (and Thursdays during high summer season), the common room is also the starting point for the free pub crawl. You will be taken to various fun places with no entrance fee, and you only need to pay for your own drinks. A pub crawl is always a great excuse to get to know your fellow guests.

You need wifi? This place seriously had the best wifi I have ever had during my travels! Oh, and of course, it is free! And even if you don't own a smartphone, tablet or laptop that lets you connect to the rest of the world, you can still always use the hostel's common computer – again, free of charge.

Other great facilities, beside the 24-hour reception with friendly staff, are free hairdryers, adapters, or an iron (just ask at the reception), and a laundry machine that is free for guests to use. You will just need your own washing powder. And if you, like I usually do, forget your paddle lock – they don't force you to buy one: you just pay a 10PLN (€2.50) deposit.

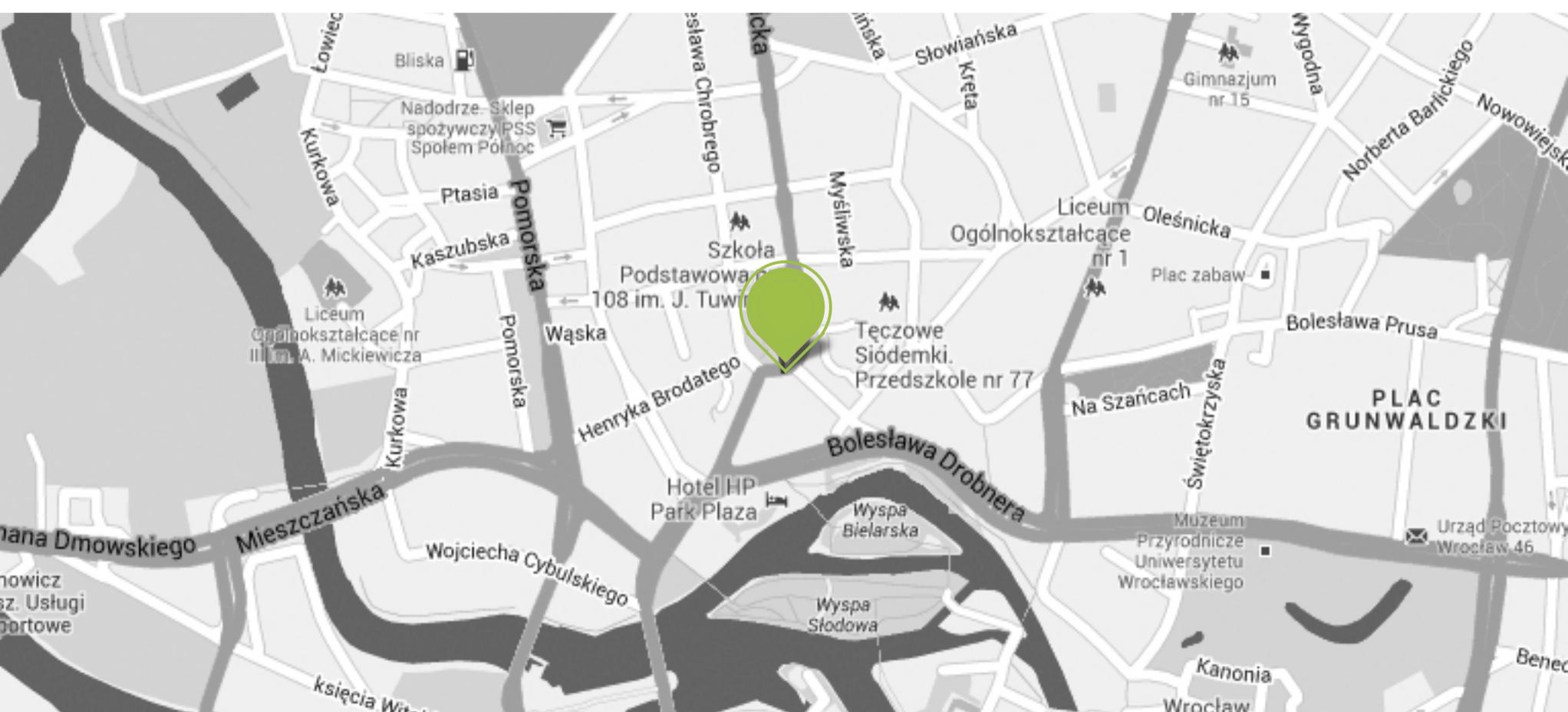
VERDICT:

Grampa's Hostel offers you a lot for your money's worth! Free breakfast, free washing machine and no costs for other supplies mentioned above make it a high value destination. Mostly I remember a friendly place, with a great sense of humor, that welcomed me like home – and this feeling is like gold while travelling.

GETTING THERE:

From Wrocław-Copernicus Airport: take bus 406 to Renoma, then tram 6 to Paulinska. The hostel is a five-minute walk from the tram stop.

From the train station: take tram 8 to Pl. Bema. The hostel is a ten-minute walk from the tram stop.



THE BEEHIVE HOTEL & HOSTEL, ROME

Via Marghera 8, 00185 Rome, Italy

Right next to Termini station, this eco-conscious hostel-meets-hotel in Rome is an oasis of calm in this fast-paced city, complete with a garden and an organic vegetarian café that offers generous portions of locally sourced, home-cooked goodness.





LOCATION

Just two blocks from Rome's Termini Station in the historic area of Rome lies one of the friendliest places in the city – The Beehive. Situated on Via Marghera, the hostel is in close proximity to Piazza della Repubblica and sights like the Basilica di Santa Maria Maggiore.

ROOMS & BATHROOMS

The hotel offers a choice of private rooms (some with ensuite bathrooms), an eight-bed dormitory, and guest rooms with self-catering facilities off-site. There's an option here to suit every type of traveller and budget.

The dorm rooms are clean, bright, and spacious with large, sturdy lockers. I stayed in the dorm room and the shared bathrooms are plentiful and clean, so I really didn't miss having my own bathroom.

Double rooms have bright colours, beaded lamps, huge windows that breathe in light, and lots of wardrobe space – plus your own private sink and locally sourced, handmade vegetable soaps.

The common shared bathrooms are plentiful, clean, and well maintained. Self-catering apartments come with a kitchen and private bathroom.



FACTBOX:

Address

Via Marghera 8, 00185 Rome, Italy

Telephone

(+39) 0644704553

Website

www.the-beehive.com

PRICES:

Dorms from €25,

Singles from €50,

Doubles from €80 per room.

FACILITIES

This place is a hybrid of a hostel and a holistic retreat – perfect for unwinding after a day of exploring Rome.

The common lounge has a huge Mac desktop for browsing the internet, plus a nice selection of travel guides and books. The free wifi here is excellent. Steve, the owner, is a keen photographer and has a fantastic collection of framed photographs adorning the walls for guests to enjoy.

The garden area is a blissful oasis of calm – the kind of place where you can linger for hours while chatting with guests while drinking wine and losing track of time.

The staff are friendly and attentive. The owners are passionate locals and have some great tips to share to make your stay more enjoyable, like recommending the best gelateria in town (a subject of fiery debate amongst the Romans).

They have also created their own free guide to Rome, which you can download from the Beehive website.

The real added bonus of staying here is the excellent organic vegetarian café. Breakfast is not included in the room price, but if you do splash out, it is a real treat. You can enjoy everything from omelettes to yoghurts and granola or organic oatmeal with apples and honey.

Vegan chef extraordinaire Aimee Jackson helps prepare the weekly vegan aperitivo buffet, where locals and guests tuck into treats like homemade hummus, besan chella, grilled veggies, and a glass of wine or local artisan beer. The aperitivo takes place in on Wednesday and Saturday evenings between 7:00-9:30 PM and costs just €8.

VERDICT:

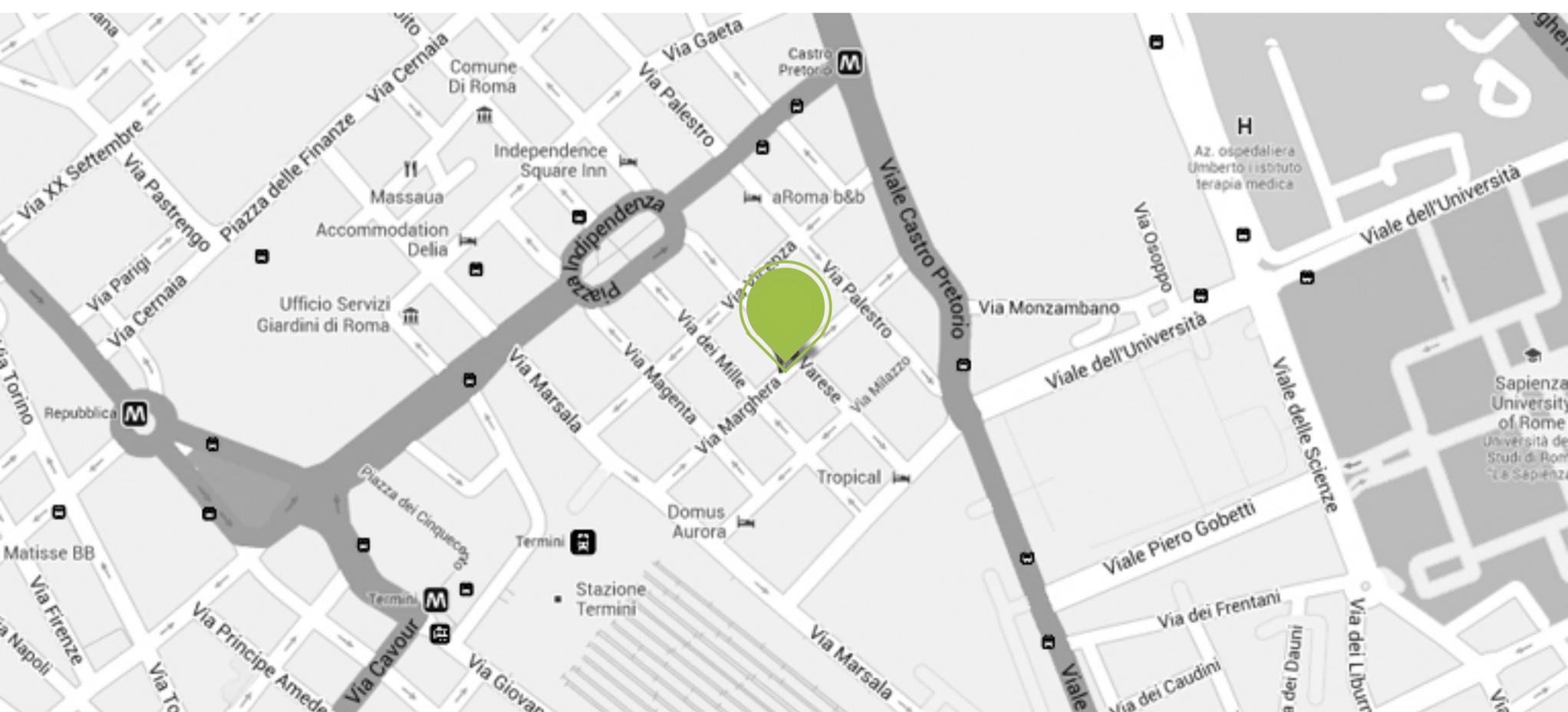
I loved the contemporary design element of the place like the Phillippe Starck inspired chairs at the reception, warm coloured interiors, Steve's beautiful portraits, and facilities like the basement organic café and their beautiful outdoor garden. Most of all, my enduring memory of this place is meeting awesome people here like Steve and Aimee. If you like places with a personal touch and attention to detail, then the Beehive is the place to stay for you in Rome.

GETTING THERE:

From Fiumicino (Leonardo da Vinci) Airport: Take the airport train to Termini station. The hostel is a five-minute walk from the station.

From Ciampino Airport: Take the Terravision shuttle to Termini station. The hostel is a five-minute walk from the station.

From Termini station: The hostel is a five-minute walk from the station..



PLAS CURIG SNOWDONIA, WALES

Capel Curig, Betws-y-Coed North Wales LL24 0EL

Beautiful interiors, superb facilities, and the stunning lush green landscape of Snowdonia make Plas Curig one of Europe's best hostels. Once you come here, your opinion of hostels will change forever.





LOCATION

Plas Curig is in a dreamy location in the picturesque village of Capel Curig at the foot of Snowdonia. Come here to escape. I spent most of my time snug in the lounge, admiring the mist-shrouded views of Moel Siabod in the distance with the River Llugwy at its foot, winding its way to Betws-y-Coed. It's also not far away from the beautiful stretch of North Wales coastline, so it's a great location for exploring the great Welsh outdoors.



ROOMS & BATHROOMS

The interior decor is breathtaking. Even on the rainiest of days (and there are many here in Snowdonia), soft lighting, warm colours, and a multitude of colour-coordinated cushions give the place a cosy, cheerful ambience. An elegant worn spiral staircase leads you to the rooms.

It's hard to think of dorms and luxury in the same breath, but you have to come and stay in Plas Curig to see for your own eyes: built-in wooden bunk beds come with private fitted curtains, power point and reading light. Beds are made up before arrival, a nice personal touch. The bedding here consists of Welsh woolen blankets and fluffy duvets that you just sink into after a long day of hiking around the countryside; crisp sheets and excellent quality mattresses ensure you have a sound sleep. Bunk beds come with storage drawers.

The rooms are not ensuite, but the communal black and white bathrooms are plentiful on each floor and have nice, hot showers.

TOP TIP

Capel Curig is a beautiful village and a great base for exploring Snowdonia. You can scale the mountains or go for a wander through the forest following the River Llugwy. For the more adventurous, Plas-y-Brenin Outdoor Activity Centre is close by, which offers a smorgasbord of adrenaline-rushing skills to master. The excellent pub next door, Bryn Tyrch Inn, offers a range of excellent local produce.

FACILITIES

The staff here are a great asset to this place – they're extremely knowledgeable with lots of great tips of nearby hiking trails and places to eat. They offer guided walks of the area and wildlife tours for as little as £8.50 (€10) per person.

The hostel offers an excellent self-catering kitchen and a large separate dining area. The communal entrance area includes a well-stocked library. The seating here and in the dining room consists of reclaimed scaffolding planks.

Stay warm by the wood-burning stove in the lounge and enjoy sitting by the broad bay windows, perfect for spending hours gazing at the beautiful scenery. Alternately, enjoy the huge flatscreen TV.

The free wifi is excellent. The hostel is dog-friendly. There is a drying room for hanging up your waterproofs and walking boots. If you are bringing your car here, there is adequate car parking space.

FACTBOX:

Address:

Capel Curig, Betws-y-Coed North Wales LL24 0EL

Phone:

(+44) 1690 720 225

Website:

www.snowdoniahostel.co.uk

PRICES:

Dorms from £22.50 (€26),

Doubles from £50 (€59) per room.

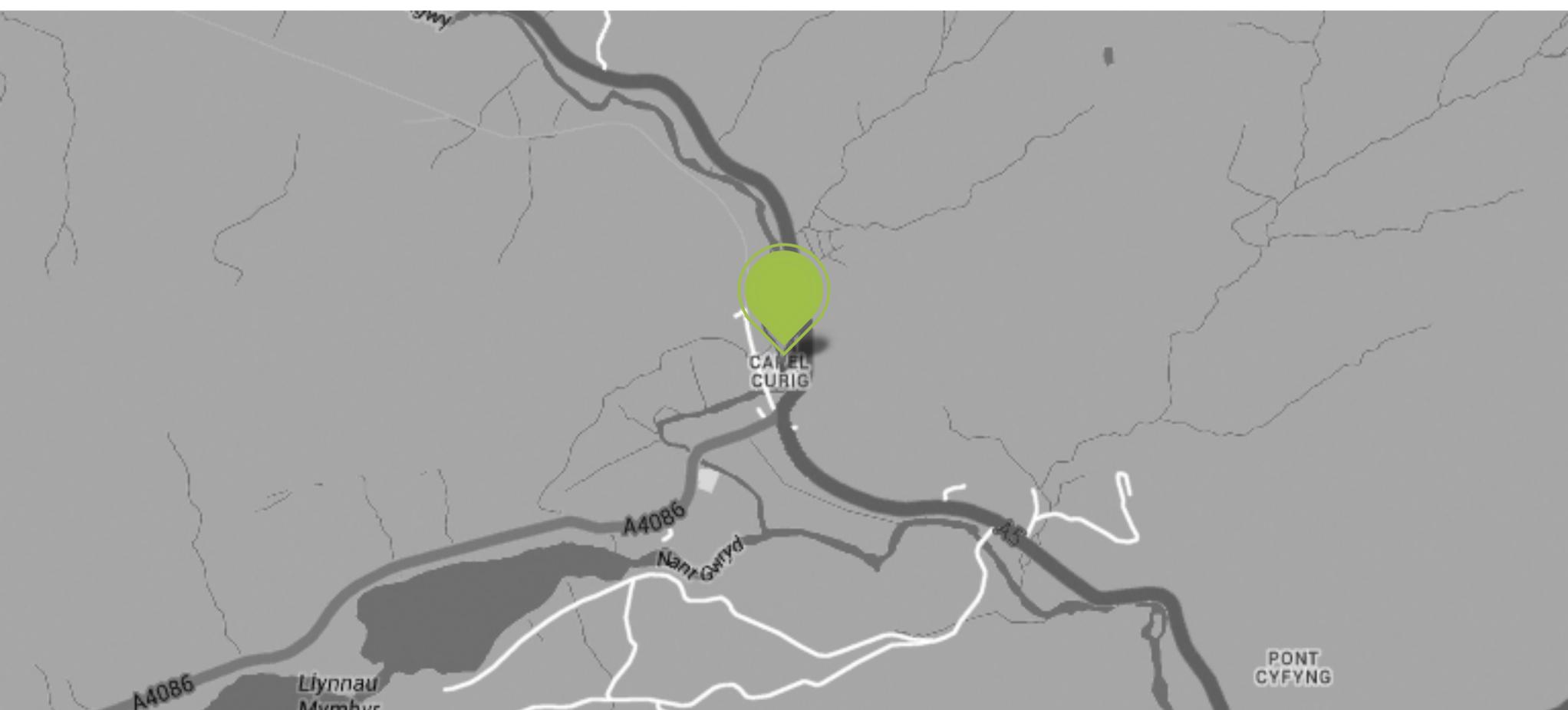


VERDICT:

Beautiful interiors, top-notch facilities, and a great location makes this stunning abode the best hostel I've seen in Britain.

GETTING THERE:

From Betws-y-Coed Train Station: Take the Sherpa Service bus S2, S6, or S97, all of which stop in front of the hostel.



OASIS BACKPACKERS PALACE SEVILLE

Calle Compañía, 1, 41004 Seville, Spain

With a stunning outdoor pool and terrace bar, close to some of Seville's oldest tapas bars and cafes, Oasis Backpackers Palace is a great base for exploring Seville.



LOCATION

Situated in a 19th-century building near Plaza Encarnación, the hostel is in a great location with plenty of historic tapas bars and some of the city's best nightlife spots within a short radius.

ROOMS & BATHROOMS

High ceilings, towering ornate columns, stained glass windows, a marble staircase, and antique furniture create a sense of palatial grandeur. The dorms are spacious and the bunk beds are sturdy with large lockable drawers beneath to store your luggage and valuables. The private rooms are air-conditioned, very stylish, and spacious with a balcony and a large ensuite bathroom.



TOP TIP

Do not come here if you are not in the party social mode.

FACILITIES

Guests checking in get a free drink token that they can redeem at the rooftop terrace bar, which also has its own pool.

On the first floor, there is a common area where you can meet people and check your mail on the free internet terminals or on the free wifi. Plus, you have the stunning rooftop terrace with its own pool. It becomes a party zone at night with cocktails and live bands or a DJ pumping out the tunes.

You can have dinner with fellow guests on the terrace, enjoying dishes like paella and glass of sangria for as little as €5.



FACTBOX:

Address:

Calle Compañía, 1, 41004
Seville, Spain

Phone:

(+34) 954 293 777

PRICES:

Dorms from €13,

Doubles from €44 per room.

Website:

[www.oasisseville.com/
palace-hostel](http://www.oasisseville.com/palace-hostel)



VERDICT:

I loved the interior decor and the staff are friendly and helpful. The facilities here are good and there is a great buzz around the place. The rooftop terrace is great for cooling down in the Andalusian heat and also is a fun place to party. Overall, this is a very cool hostel in a great city.

GETTING THERE:

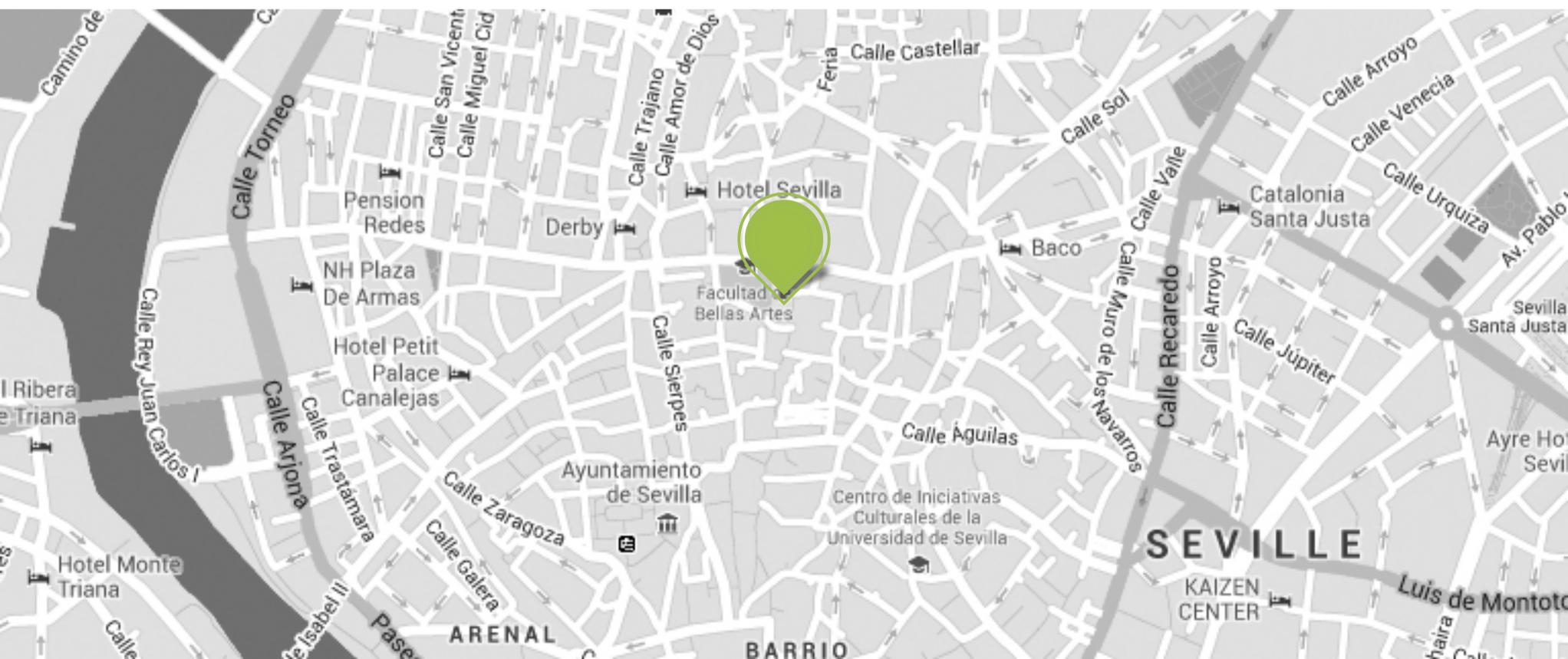
From Seville Airport: Take the EA-Aeropuerto bus to the final stop, Avenida el Cid, then take the tram from Prado de San Sebastián bus station to Plaza Nueva. The hostel is an eight-minute walk from the bus stop.

From Santa Justa train station: Take bus 32 to Plaza del Duque.

The hostel is a three-minute walk from the bus stop.

From Plaza de Armas bus station: The hostel is a six-minute walk from the bus station.

From Prado de San Sebastián bus station: Take the tram to Plaza Nueva. The hostel is an eight-minute walk from the bus stop.



GRAND HOSTEL BERLIN

Tempelhofer Ufer 14, 10963 Berlin, Germany

Situated in the trendy Friedrichshain-Kreuzberg district in a former Bishop's Palace dating back to 1874, The Grand Hostel Berlin is a hostel that combines a bit of old world Berlin charm with great modern hospitality – as well as a stunning library bar.



TOP TIP

You're just a short walk away from kebab heaven: ask the staff for direction to Mustafa's on Mehringdamm 32. The kebabs here have the perfect balance of meat, sauce, vegetables, and bread. The meat is nice and juicy, the vegetables are fresh, and they include fried potatoes, which is ingenious. Warning: Queues are huge here so grab a bottle of beer so ease the pain of a long wait. It's worth it in the end.

LOCATION

The location is excellent – just a three-minute walk to the Möckernbrücke station, from where you can access the U1 and U7 lines. It's in a quiet neighbourhood, so this hostel is as relaxing as it is conveniently located for exploring the city and its nightlife.

ROOMS & BATHROOMS

Key card access keeps the rooms secure. The shared dorms in Grand Hostel are clean and well-maintained – they all have well-positioned single beds and no bunks. The rooms have high ceilings and come with beautiful bay windows.

The double rooms are beautifully furnished with the a bit of old-fashioned charm with potted plants, a dressing table, and a walk-in wardrobe. My only minor gripe would be the extra €3.50 for linen and €2 for towels.

Common bathrooms are clean and plentiful on each floor. They come with hairdryers.

FACTBOX:

Address:

Tempelhofer Ufer 14, 10963 Berlin, Germany

Phone:

(+49) 200 95 45 0

Website:

www.grandhostel-berlin.de/en/

PRICES:

Dorms from €12,

Doubles from €40 per room.

FACILITIES

At check-in, guests are offered a free cup of coffee or tea, which is a nice gesture after a long journey. The coffee machine is terrific.

The staff here are a real credit to the hostel and some of the best I've encountered on my luxury hostels tour. Professional, courteous, and always willing to help – this is five-star hotel-level service.

A standout feature of the hostel is the library bar. It's impossibly cool with volumes of old dusty books from floor to ceiling that you can leaf through while enjoying your coffee. During the day, I spent a lot of time sitting on one of the leather armchairs reading a book or just catching up with friends on my laptop with the help of the free wifi.

In the evening, the bar opens and the library becomes the meeting point of the hostel. Morgan, the bartender running the show, knows how to make a mean cocktail and keeps guests entertained with his banter. I spent a large part of my evenings at the Grand Hostel chatting with Morgan and the guests.

Breakfast is not included. However, the hostel's very own Grandwich Bar just next door to the hostel offers a good breakfast, variety of delicious sandwiches, paninis and traditional German food at decent prices.

If you're visiting the hostel on a Wednesday, they are currently offering a free weekly pasta dinner – a great way to save money and meet fellow guests.

The hostel staff also offer a walking tour of Berlin and run a pub crawl on Fridays. They offer an in-house bicycle rental for €10 per day (€50 deposit required).

VERDICT:

Staying here is a great experience – the combination of Old Berlin charm, beautiful interior décor, and great service from staff makes you feel as if you are staying in a hotel more than a hostel. The cool library bar and spacious, bunkless dorms make this an ideal base for exploring Berlin.

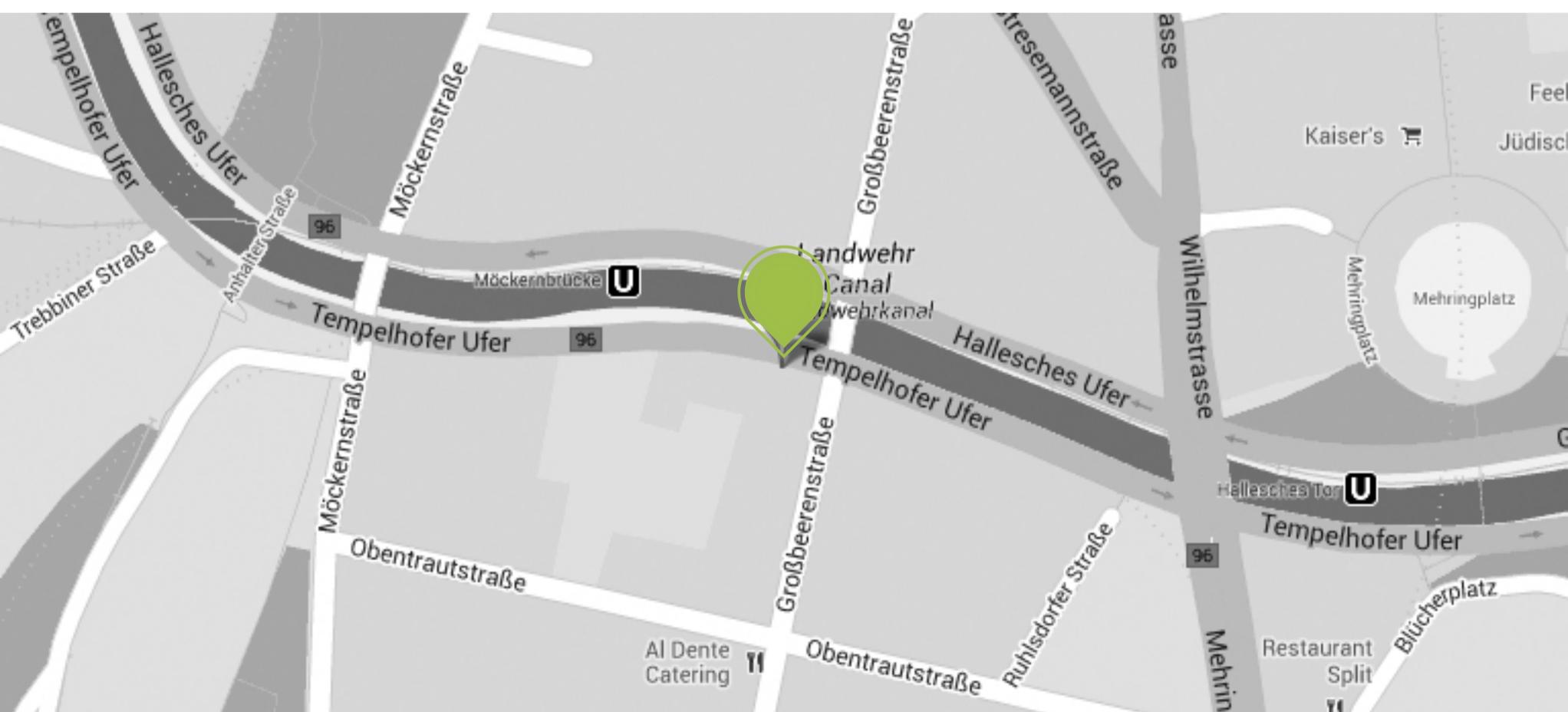
GETTING THERE:

From Tegel Airport, take bus X9 or 109 to Jakob-Kaiser-Platz, then take the U7 to Möckernbrücke. The hostel is a two-minute walk from the station.

From Schönefeld Airport: Take bus X7 or 171 to Rudow, then take the U7 to Möckernbrücke. The hostel is a two-minute walk from the station.

From Berlin Hauptbahnhof, take bus M41 to Willy-Brandt-Haus. The hostel is an eight-minute walk from the bus stop.

From Berlin Central Bus Station, take the U2 to Gleisdreieck, then take the U1 to Möckernbrücke. The hostel is a two-minute walk from the station.



The logo for CLINK 78 is displayed in large, illuminated, pink and white letters against a wood-paneled wall. The letters are stylized with a glowing effect.

CLINK 78 LONDON

78 King's Cross Road, London WC1X 9QG, United Kingdom

From Charles Dickens to The Clash, there are a few hostels in the world that can lay claim to an illustrious history like Clink! 78 London.

Today it's one of London's coolest party hostels, accommodating up to 500 guests from as little as £12 (€14) per night.



LOCATION

Clink! 78 is set in a stylishly renovated Victorian 200-year-old courthouse in an excellent location, just a few minutes walk from Kings Cross station.

ROOMS & BATHROOMS

The rooms at Clink! 78 offer free bed linen, reading lights, and personal lockers – plus, there is secure key card entry to every room. The hostel has female-only, male-only, and unisex toilets and showers on every floor.

For those who wish to indulge in the criminal past of the hostel, you can rent your own private prison cell. The cells come fully furnished, complete with a barred window.

Note that the cells are not ensuite – but for the experience, this room is nevertheless well worth the investment. Alternatively, you can check into the dorms, which house up to six people.

TOP TIP

This is a party hostel and a very sociable one. If you're looking for a quieter stay, check out their nearby sister hostel Clink! 261, further down Grays Inn Road.



FACILITIES

Charles Dickens worked here as a court scribe and the court cases he saw here served as inspiration for his classic novel *Oliver Twist*. In the reception and in the courtroom, you can read quotes from Dickens' works tastefully written high on the walls, adding a very stylish and contemporary touch to a heritage building. Facilities on-site include an excellent bar and a travel shop helping guests book discounted tickets for top London attractions, as well as assisting with airport transfers and onward travel arrangements. Guests can chill out in style in the infamous,

wood-panelled internet and PC courtroom. In this very room, The Clash were famously tried for shooting carrier pigeons in 1978, provoking them to write the song 'Guns on the Roof'.

The free, all-you-can-eat-breakfast from 7:00-10:00 AM is filling. There is a modern, fully equipped kitchen for self-caterers as well. The hostel offers unlimited wifi for the whole of your stay for £3 (€4). Guests can use the same code for future stays if they wish.

The multilingual staff are friendly and always ready to help – a big asset of this hostel.

FACTBOX:

Address:

78 King's Cross Road,
London WC1X 9QG,

Phone:

(+44) 20 3475 3000

Website:

www.clinkhostels.com

PRICES:

Dorms from £12 (€14),

Doubles from £40 (€47) per room,

Prison cells from £50 (€59) per room.

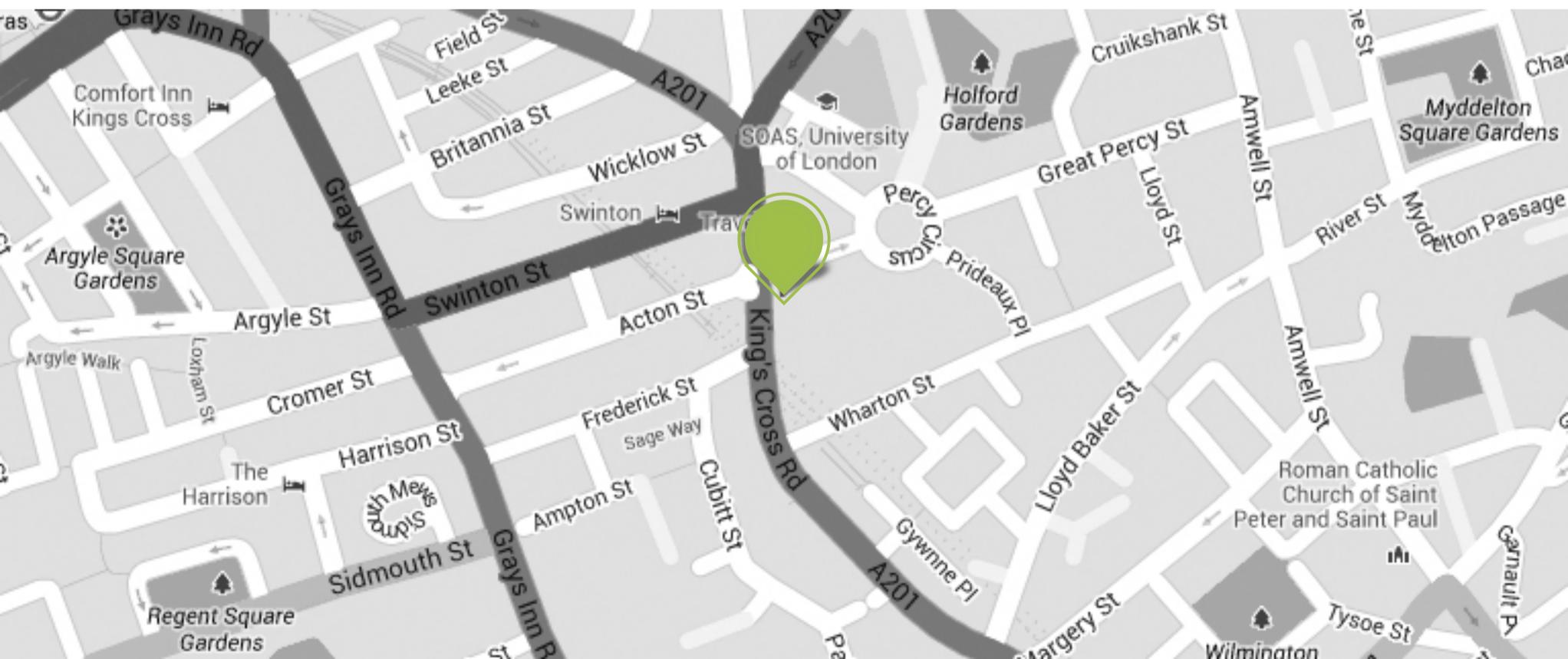


VERDICT:

A clean and convenient hostel with a great location and friendly staff, top-notch facilities, nice rooms, and quirky history make Clink! 78 one of the best value hostels in London.

GETTING THERE:

From the Underground, take the Hammersmith & City, Circle, Metropolitan, Northern, Piccadilly, or Victoria line to King's Cross St. Pancras. The hostel is a six-minute walk from the station.





HOSTEL ONE EIGHTY BERLIN

Otto-Braun-Straße 65, 10178 Berlin, Germany

Thanks to a great central location, guest relations manager, ace breakfast buffet, and a lobby that would not look out of place in a five-star hotel, this is one of Berlin's coolest hostels.



LOCATION

The hostel has a great location, just a few minutes' walk away from Alexanderplatz, the epicenter of Berlin. Alexanderplatz is a great hub for connecting with the rest of Berlin's sights, as well as travelling to Tegel and Schönewald airports.

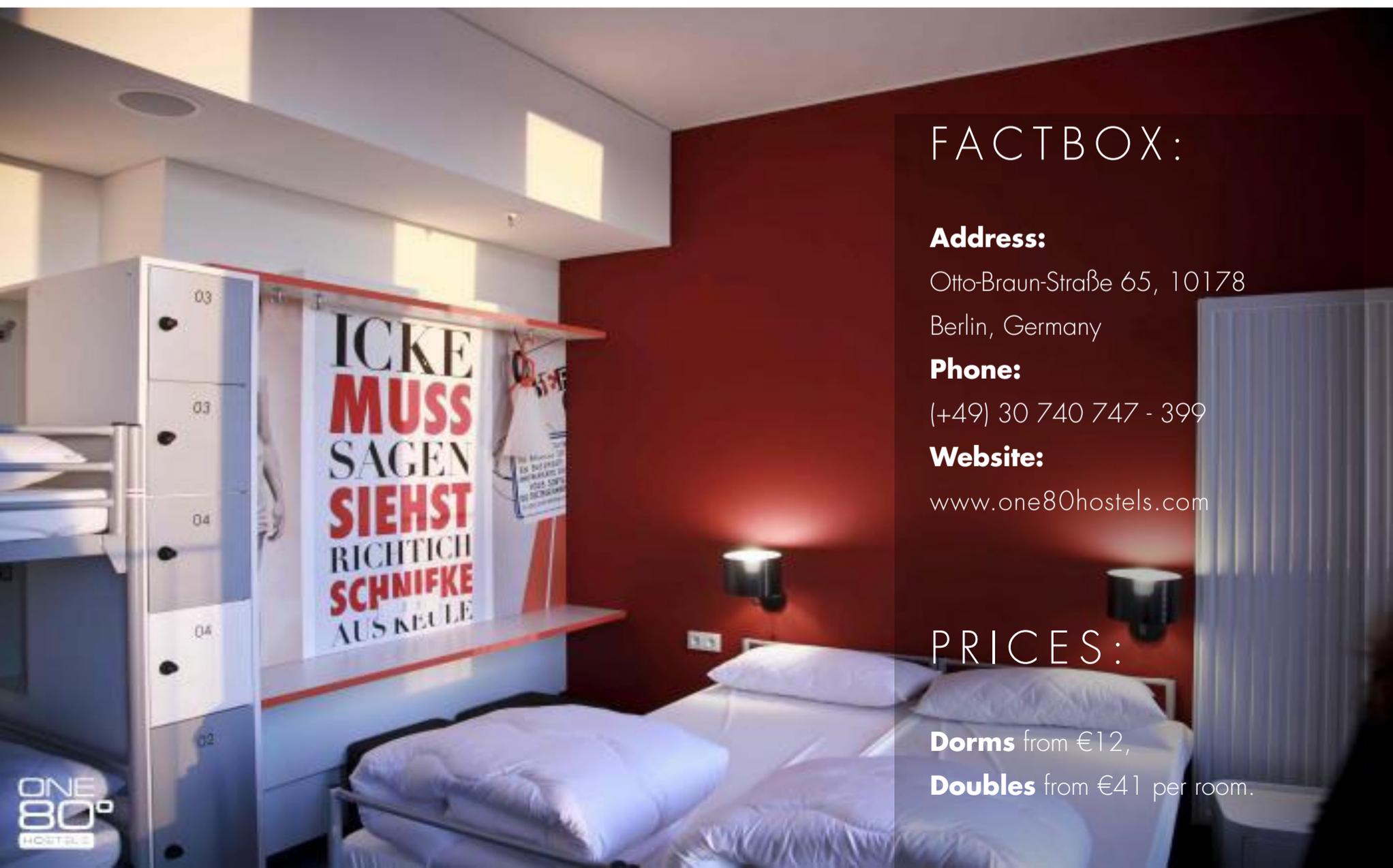
ROOMS & BATHROOMS

The rooms are bright, spotless, and well-maintained. You can choose from four-, six-, or eight-bed dorm rooms, some of them with ensuite bathrooms, as well as double ensembles.

The beds are incredibly comfortable and I had a cracking sleep. Each bed has a reading light, plus two power points to juice your gadgets.

There are also excellent storage units below the beds to secure your backpack, as well as a smaller locker for each bed to secure your smaller valuable items.

The showers are super – so good, you'll want to shower with your clothes on! Some of the rooms come with their own balcony.



FACTBOX:

Address:

Otto-Braun-Straße 65, 10178
Berlin, Germany

Phone:

(+49) 30 740 747 - 399

Website:

www.one80hostels.com

PRICES:

Dorms from €12,

Doubles from €41 per room.

FACILITIES

From outside the building it's a huge concrete block and doesn't impress. Once you're inside, a different story emerges.

When you've walked in for the first time, it feels like you're in the reception area of a five-star hotel, rather than a hostel.

The lounge area is filled with lots of comfy, stylish sofas and has a very trendy vibe – I feel like I've walked into the middle of a music video.

One cool feature in the lobby area is the hostel's own photo booth, where guests can get their pictures taken. The picture gets sent to your email address, uploads to the Hostel One Eighty Facebook page, and appears on a range of cool digital photo frames on the lounge walls. Definitely a cool piece of technology.

The hostel has its own bar, which was heaving for the launch night. After it shut down, guests carried on the party in the hostel's basement nightclub – this is Berlin, after all!

The breakfast buffet is generous and worth the €4 it costs. Where the hostel really shines is its guest relations manager – a one-woman army named Stella. Every week, Stella pulls together an eclectic schedule of events in the hostel for the guests.

This could be anything from a guide to her and her

friends' favourite dining spots to a special walking tour of the city's amazing street art scene. The idea here is to give guests a view of the city that only locals get to experience.

Being a large hostel with large groups often coming in, Stella keeps an eye on the list for solo travellers. Her job is to bring together the solo travellers and make sure they don't feel left out, which is often the drawback of larger hostels compared to smaller boutique hostels. Great idea.

There are a few drawbacks to this hostel. The reception area is slightly cramped, with just two people to service the needs of guests. With this being a large hostel, I found this often led to an overflow of guests in the reception, waiting to be checked in or to have any general issues addressed.

If they can remedy it by adding more staff and expanding the reception area, it would make a big improvement.

The hostel offers a free wifi service, which I found to be a mixed bag at my time of review.

I've found this to be a general problem in larger hostels that offer free wifi – guests start streaming movies and severely restrict the bandwidth for other guests. The way around this? I don't know.



VERDICT:

In the end, I was really impressed with Hostel One Eighty. I like the idea of a dedicated guest relations manager, nice rooms, superb design, plus a brilliant price point. I hope the wifi service improves, but otherwise there's little to fault. A worthy addition to Berlin's rich hostelling scene.

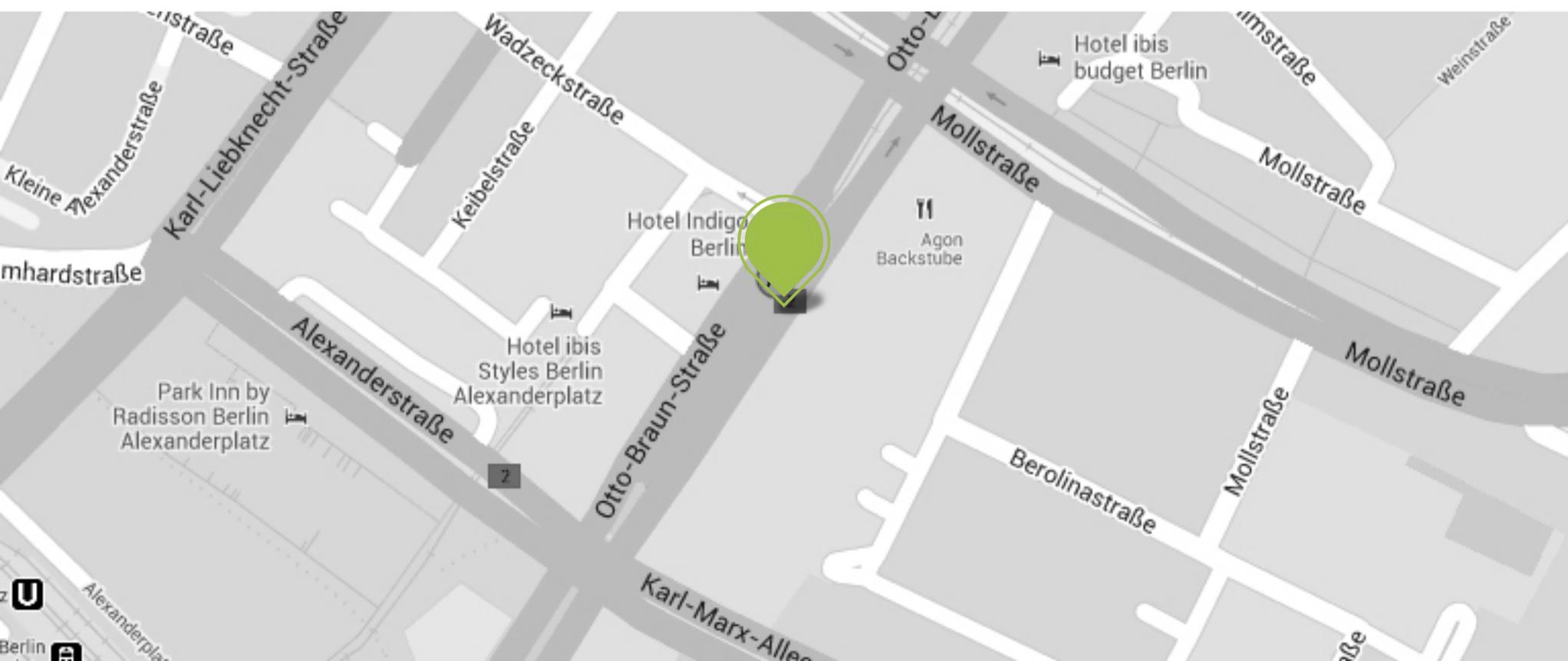
GETTING THERE:

From Tegel Airport, take the TXL bus to Alexanderplatz. The hostel is an eight-minute walk from Alexanderplatz.

From Schönefeld Airport, take the S-Bahn S9 to S-Bahnhof Landsberger Allee, then take tram M8 to Mollstrasse

Otto-Braun-Strasse. The hostel is a two-minute walk from the tram stop.

From Berlin Hauptbahnhof: Take the S-Bahn S5, S7, or S75 to Alexanderplatz. The hostel is an eight-minute walk from Alexanderplatz.



KEX HOSTEL REYKJAVIK

Skúlagata 28, Reykjavik 101, Iceland

Looking more like a retro hipster lounge in Brooklyn than an Icelandic abode, Kex Hostel is one of the most stylized hostels in Northern Europe.





LOCATION

Reykjavik is a small, colorful, and very walkable city. Kex Hostel is located right on the water at Skúlagata 28. Cafes and shops can be found within a two-minute walk; the epicenter of the town is a 10-minute walk away.

ROOMS & BATHROOMS

My private room was simple but had everything I needed: two twin beds with chubby pillows and big, fluffy duvets. Out the window is a view of the water and the distant mountains. Nearly all of the rooms use shared bathrooms; a few doubles have ensembles. Many of the showers and toilets are private, rather than a large room filled with showers. A few days later, I moved on to the six-bed mixed dorm, which happened to be all-women at the time. While the design in the dorms is basic, they have enough space for all guests. Lockers are provided – though they are tall and skinny, I can fit my valuables but not my whole backpack.

FACILITIES

Travelers to Iceland most often spend their days chasing adrenaline: climbing glaciers, rafting, hiking through the volcanic landscape, snorkeling in near-freezing water. At the end of a day in the chilly outdoors, all you want to do is curl up with a book or your computer.

Kex understands that, and their hostel is outfitted perfectly. The massive common room is filled with hammocks and comfy couches. Vintage maps dot the walls, and a library with leather chairs and dozens of books takes up one wall.

Vintage pieces are blended with a modern aesthetic. One wall is covered with magnetic letters for instant poetry. In another corner, you'll find a 1940's-style barbershop!

Free wifi is available in the common room only.

If you're stumped when it comes to the dozens of excursions on offer in the Reykjavik area, the staff at Kex serves as a travel agency and will help you choose and book them. Nearly all excursions will pick you up and drop you off at Kex.

While Kex has a bar and restaurant and often hosts events for outside organizations, I don't find there to be a community spirit amongst the travelers. Most of the guests here keep to themselves. I think it's because travel to Iceland isn't spontaneous – most people arrive here with flights booked and activities scheduled, leaving little time for serendipity.

On my final night, I decided to try out Kex's restaurant and order the roasted bone marrow, served with crostini and a salad. It was fantastic. Never did I imagine I'd be eating bone marrow at a hostel!

Dessert is Icelandic-style tiramisu, made with layers of tart skyr yogurt instead of mascarpone. As picky as I am about my tiramisu, it's strangely delicious.

FACTBOX:

Address:

Skúlagata 28, Reykjavik 101, Iceland

Phone:

(+354) 561-6060

Website:

www.kexhostel.is

PRICES:

Dorms from 2300 ISK (€14),

Singles from 8400 ISK (€53) per room,

Doubles from 9400 ISK (€59) per room.

VERDICT:

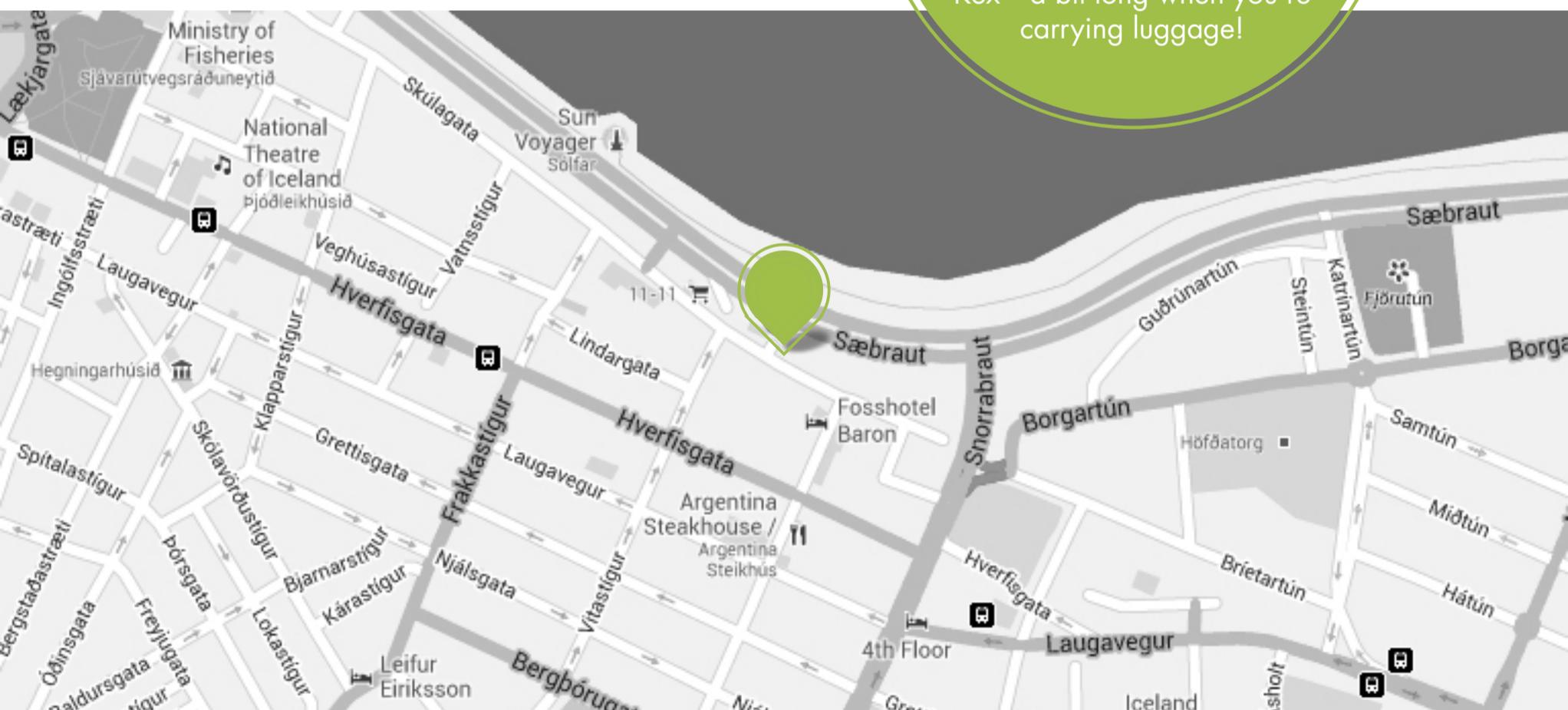
This is one of the absolute best styled hostels I've ever seen. It's fun and offbeat with loads of retro charm. While the rooms themselves don't have the same style factor as the common room and the hallways, Kex is a welcome respite from run-of-the-mill hostels. The location is convenient and the prices are very reasonable for this expensive country. I'd love to see them put on activities for the hostel guests and foster some community spirit.

GETTING THERE:

The Flybus from Reykjavik Excursions offers airport transfers to the BSI bus station for 1950 ISK (€12) one-way or 3500 ISK (€22) round-trip. Booking Flybus + includes a transfer to a number of hotels and hostels in town, Kex included. One-way transfers on Flybus + are 2500 ISK (€16); round-trip transfers are 4500 ISK (€28).

TOP TIP

Splurge on the Flybus +. While most of Reykjavik is walkable, the bus station is a bit further away and it's a 20-minute walk to Kex – a bit long when you're carrying luggage!



BACKPACKERS VILLA INTERLAKEN

Alpenstrasse 16, Interlaken, Switzerland

A mishmash of modern design and old-school Swiss comfort, Backpackers Villa provides the luxuries of top-notch service and all-inclusive perks in the adventure capital of Europe.





LOCATION

Backpackers Villa is conveniently located directly behind the Höhematte, Interlaken's famous green space where paragliders land, and right in between the town's two train stations.

ROOMS & BATHROOMS

The hostel is split into two parts: the historic Chalet side and the modern extension that opened in 2009. On the modern side, you find Comfort Rooms, which are the newest in the hostel and have an ensuite toilet and shower. These rooms have one to six beds.

On the historic Chalet side, there are either the cheap Eco Rooms, which have two to six beds, private lockers, and a wash basin, or the Jungfrau Rooms, which have four to seven beds with a balcony and view of the mountains. All rooms on the Chalet side have shared bathrooms.

Power adapters and hairdryers are available at reception.

FACILITIES

Though the hostel is quite large and can accommodate up to 200 backpackers at one time, it still feels intimate. Whether you want to relax on your own or hang out and be social, you will be well accommodated. The common room was cosy and inviting with gorgeous parquet flooring, big screen TV and more than 100 films on offer.

For those who want some Zen, there is also a great meditation room on the top floor of the Chalet with a wide selection of spiritual books and religious texts in several languages.

The kitchens are incredibly well kept and large, which is great because cooking for yourself is a surefire way to save money while in expensive Switzerland. There

TOP TIP

If you don't drink much tea or coffee, you can use the two daily coins they give you for hot drinks to do your laundry. It costs two per load to wash and using the dryer is free. It gets busy down there, especially at night, so try to get your laundry done in the morning.

is technically a kitchen in each building, but they're adjoined. You'll find extensive dining space downstairs, upstairs, and on the patio when the weather is nice.

There is also a nice-sized garden with an outdoor pool table and excellent view of the mountains.

With so many things to do in Interlaken, you don't have to worry about getting overwhelmed – the staff are there to advise you and make bookings, whether it's adventure sports or day trips. Free guided walking tours of Interlaken are also offered three times a week during the summer season, and upon check-in you are given a card that entitles you to complimentary use of public buses, entry to nearby swimming pools, mini-golf, and discounts at a few local restaurants.

If there's one drawback to this hostel, it would be the selection they have for breakfast. Though it is 'all you can eat', they just serve basic cereal and slices of white bread with jam, butter, and cheese spread. Considering that this is an adventure town, it would be nice to see the hostel offer a breakfast that provides people with the fuel they need for adrenaline-filled days.

That said, there is a Lidl about a seven-minute walk away where you can stock up on groceries of your own.

FACTBOX:

Address:

Alpenstrasse 16, Interlaken, Switzerland

Phone:

(+41) 33 826 71 71

Website:

www.villa.ch

PRICES:

Eco Rooms from 37 CHF (€30) per person,

Jungfrau Rooms from 41 CHF (€33) per person,

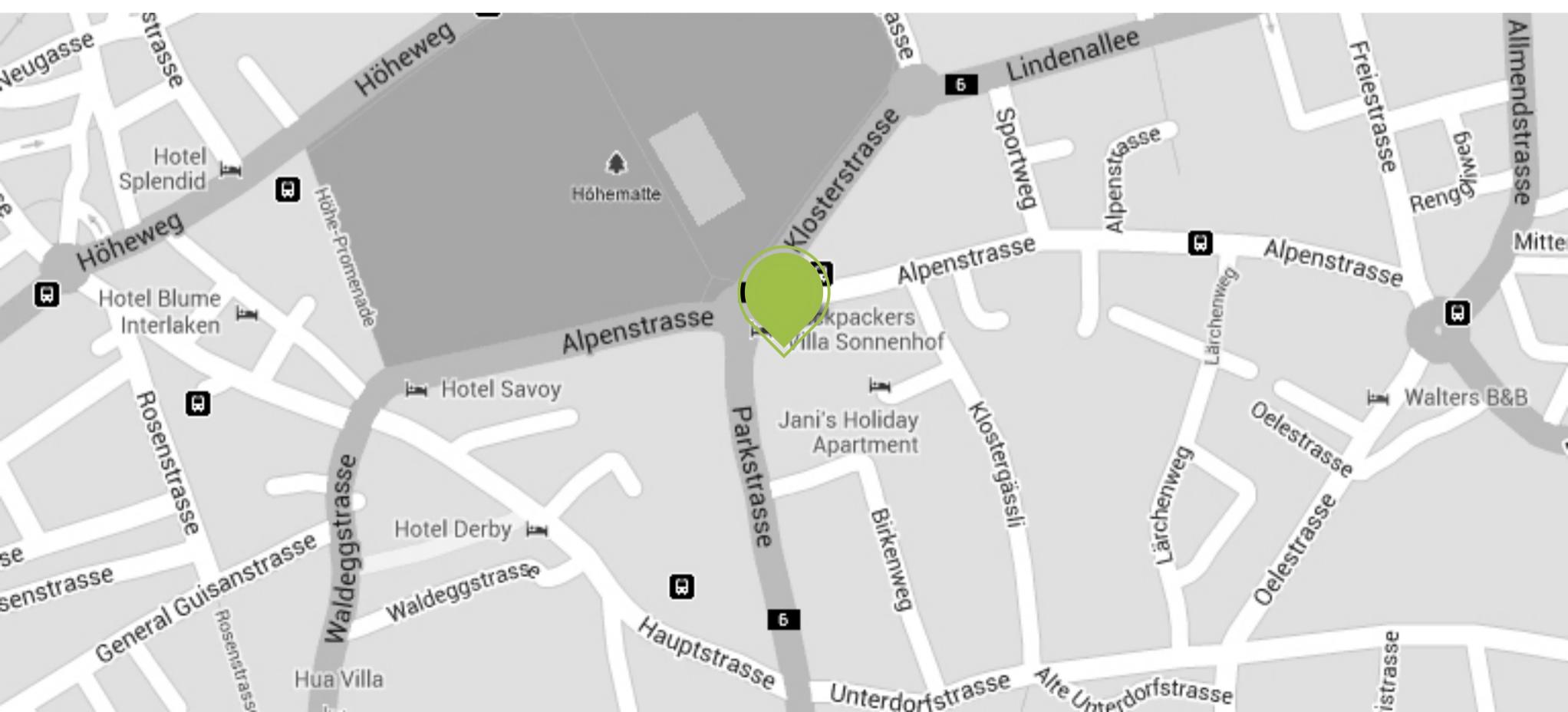
Comfort Rooms from 45 CHF (€36) per person.

VERDICT:

The quality and atmosphere at Backpackers Villa is that of a clean and modern hostel for independent backpackers and families alike – but the element of luxury is evident in the service they provide for their guests.

GETTING THERE:

From each train station, the hostel is a 10-minute walk away.



GRANADA INN BACKPACKERS SPAIN

Calle Padre Alcover 10 A, Granada, Spain 180

Granada Inn Backpackers is certainly a place to indulge in luxury on the budget. Spacious, mellow, charming and filled with Moorish influence, Granada Inn Backpackers is luxurious yet affordable and easily accessible to the sights of Granada.



LOCATION

Only a few steps away lie the Cathedral, City Hall, the old Albayzin neighbourhood, lots of nightlife options, and Spain's best tapas zone. Granada's most famous attraction, the Alhambra, is a 30-minute walk or five-minute bus ride away.

ROOMS & BATHROOMS

You are spoilt for choice at this hostel – there are options from simple dorm beds to private apartments.

There are eight, 10- and 12-bed dorms, each of which is sectioned off to create a smaller space with three to four beds. The linen is crisp and comfy, complete with blankets for cold nights. On hot summer days, you'll be grateful for the air conditioning unit in each room.

Each bed comes with a large locker. While several power points were available, it would be nice if each bed had its own power point and shelf.

The spacious bathrooms are cleaned daily, and the showers are hot and powerful.

The apartments feature double and single beds with a private kitchen. All have ensuite bathrooms.



FACILITIES

Perhaps the best feature of Granada Inn Backpackers is its relaxing patio. It's a great spot to relax or chat with new friends, and you can't find a better place to enjoy the free breakfast each morning.

Self-caterers can take advantage of a fully stocked kitchen. Coffee, tea, biscuits, and milk are available to guests all day.

There is a small washing service as well.

There are free internet terminals open until midnight. Free wifi is available, but the signal isn't very strong and it's hard to access anywhere but the patio. In the future, I'd like to see them provide free wifi in all rooms.

The reception is manned 24 hours a day and the staff are polite, charming, and responsive to guest enquiries and needs.

A big added plus for is their comprehensive activities programme for guests looking to get to know Granada better. I attended the Flamenco Tour, which was both educational and exhilarating. I also took part in Sangria Party Night, which went down a treat.

FACTBOX:

Address:

Calle Padre Alcover 10 A, Granada, Spain 180

Phone:

(+34) 958 26 62 14

Website:

www.grnadabackpackers.es

PRICES:

Dorms from €17,

Doubles from €50 per room.



INDEPENDENTE HOSTEL LISBON

Rua São Pedro de Alcântara 81, 1250-238 Lisbon, Portugal

Lisbon is blessed with the best luxury hostels in the world – and the art deco-inspired Independente Hostel is one of its most glorious creations. The hostel is the brainchild of three brothers who envisioned a different concept in hospitality: creating a meeting point where ‘travelers as well as locals can come together’.





LOCATION

Overlooking the Miradouro de Sao Pedro de Alcantara, Independente Hostel is in a great location at the intersection of three of Lisbon's most vibrant and celebrated neighborhoods: Bairro Alto, Principe Real, and Avenida da Liberdade.

ROOMS & BATHROOMS

In terms of design, imagine a juxtaposition of Scandinavian minimalism with ornate architecture. This hostel is a happy contradiction, and it works beautifully.

Formerly the Swiss ambassador's official residence, the

building was converted into a luxury hostel in 2011 with 90 beds housed within 11 spacious dorm rooms.

The rooms have preserved the original character of the building with high ceilings, ornate wall moldings, and detailed wrought-iron balconies that open onto the Tagus River. The dorm rooms have sturdy wooden bunk bed frames and come with private reading lights and plug points. Each dorm is tastefully decorated with a mix of antiques and family heirlooms alongside reclaimed furniture pieces.

Besides the 11 modern dorm rooms, you have four private suites with balconies where you can linger with an espresso from the self-service coffee machine.

FACTBOX:

Address:

Rua São Pedro de Alcântara 81, 1250-238
Lisbon, Portugal

Phone:

(+351) 21 346 1381

Website:

www.theindependente.pt

PRICES:

Dorms from €11,

Suites from €70.



FACILITIES

The outstanding feature of this hostel is that it also houses one of Lisbon's most stylish and popular restaurants. The Decadente is known for serving up modern Portuguese cuisine using locally sourced ingredients.

Outside the restaurant you can lounge with one of their signature cocktails in the outdoor beer garden, which doubles as a live music venue on weekends. The bar attracts a steady stream of trendy Lisboetas, making you feel like you're part of the city's DNA.

The staff here are friendly travellers themselves, and the perfect opportunity to mingle with them is the nightly 'dinner with the staff' where you get to enjoy a sumptuous buffet for as little as €7.

The free breakfast, consisting of orange juice, cereals, coffee, bread, cheese, and cold meats, is a great way to start your day.

VERDICT:

In terms of interior design, this hostel is a notch above most other hostels and boutique hotels. When you pair that design with a cracking restaurant, cool bar, and friendly staff, you have all the makings of a great experience. A very special and unique hostel.

GETTING THERE:

From Lisbon International Airport: Take the Aerobus line 1 to Restauradores, then the Elevador da Gloria funicular tram to São Pedro de Alcântara. The hostel is a one-minute walk away.

From Santa Apolonia Train Station: Take the blue metro line to Baixa-Chiado. The hostel is a five-minute walk from the Largo do Chiado exit.

From Oriente Train Station: Take the red metro line to São Sebastião, then take the blue line to Baixa-Chiado. The hostel is a five-minute walk from the Largo do Chiado exit.



RESOURCES

MIGHTY
MIB

BUSABOUT EUROPE REVIEWED

Bus, Train, or Plane?

FIRST-TIME TRAVELLER TO EUROPE?

‘What is the best way to see Europe?’

A question I often hear from first-time travellers.

So many countries to see and visit, but so little time – trying to fit in all the cities you’ve dreamed of visiting can become a bit of an ordeal.

Then there is a question of budget.

Organising your trip on a fixed budget can become a bit of nightmarish experience – especially if you’re travelling solo. You also want to have the spontaneity to be able to just get on a bus or a train without the fear of the last-minute price tag.

Earlier this year, as many of you may know, I ventured on a quest to visit 40 of Europe’s best luxury hostels. I was going to cover a lot of ground, so I adopted a flexible approach of using the train on some routes, and the plane and then the bus wherever relevant. I had a great time Interrailing across Europe in June with my Eurail pass. I

especially loved the freedom of hopping on some of their networks (like Germany and Austria) with no reservations. However, in countries like France and Spain, reservations were essential and in some cases had also a price tag. For far-flung corners of Europe, like Lisbon and Edinburgh, I found easyJet to be a really quick way to crisscross my way across Europe by plane. All that was left was jumping on a bus. Then someone told me about Busabout Europe – a hop-on, hop-off bus network where using their Flexitrip pass, I could visit nine cities in Italy and throw in a trip to France, Austria, Germany and Switzerland for as little as £350 (€410). It sounded like a great deal and a more economical option compared to Interrail. Courtesy of the nice people at Busabout, I was given a pass to sample the Busabout Europe experience. I thought I’d summarise below my thoughts about what I enjoyed about Busabout and give you a balanced idea of whether the pass will work for you.

On my first day of travel I presented my booking reference (which I printed off from the internet) and my passport and was issued a swipe card that was to be my Busabout pass.

I started by booking my Florence- Nice-Barcelona-Valencia journeys and all of my accommodation online at the Busabout website.

The site is easy to use and it clearly lays out all of your bookings so you don't mix up any of your plans.

Choose from 33 destinations, stay as long as you want, explore the region.

With the Flexitrip pass, I could have six stops across the 33 destinations in their network, and it lasts the whole operating season, which in 2012 ran from 2nd May to 28th October. There is no limit on how long you can stay in each city.

I travelled from Florence to Valencia. My journey began with a week in Florence, staying at the fantastic Plus Florence; then a few days in Cinque Terre; then I headed to Nice, where I spent a week using it as my base for exploring Cote D'Azur; I then went to Barcelona for a few days, then ended my trip in Valencia, where I sampled the madness that is La Tomatina. There were five stops in total and I spent a month covering that route.

Most of the fellow travellers I met, who were primarily younger and visiting Europe for the first time, were covering that same route in a matter of a week or 10 days and running themselves ragged in the process. After sharing my trip experiences with a few fellow Busabouters, many of them wished they had spread their journey out.

The other thing is that you have a degree of flexibility with the pass. You can make changes to your schedule 24 hours in advance if you wish to stay where you are for a few days extra. You can also buy additional stops from your Busabout guides to extend your Flexitrip pass.

During the peak summer schedule, know that some of the bus routes fill to capacity, so it can be a problem rebooking.

My advice for you is that if you do want to make changes, make them early. It takes a matter of seconds for the change in itinerary to be confirmed, so that is very handy.

TOP TIP

TOP TIP: The pass is valid for the whole summer, so take it slow if time isn't an issue for you. I recommend doing lots of research before you plan your itinerary if you are traveling in summer. Make at least three stops along the way where you can stay somewhere for a longer time and have a few 'chill-out' days to recharge your batteries.



Terrified of travelling solo? Then you will love Busabout. Having been on the road for the last few months, I seem to have mastered the art of travelling solo. Thanks to social networks like Twitter, social travel networks like Gogobot, and sites like Couchsurfing, making new friends on the road is not a problem. However, if you like the idea of a network across Europe that allows you to meet fellow travellers during your trip, then Busabout is perfect for you. Busabout have an excellent community page where you can get tips prior to your departure, plus via the TripMates function, you can befriend fellow travellers who are travelling on the same departure dates as you.

Friendly, Expert Guides

One of the other great advantages of travelling with Busabout is that you get the expert advice and insight of Busabout guides. The Busabout guides on each bus gave me lots of details on the destination where I was heading, plus they also helped pre-plan any activities prior to my arrival. Also, they are at your service if you need to book your accommodation at the destination. Note that they can

only book you with their recommended providers. While I didn't need to take advantage of these features, it's great to see the level of care and passion that the guides put into their jobs to help the passengers. These guys are passionate travellers themselves and that comes across clearly in their jobs. I had the chance to hang out with Adam Agenda MC Bazeley, who was our guide from Nice to Barcelona. From the best places to taste paella to the history of Spain under Franco and where to enjoy local tipples like the calimocho, Adam was a walking encyclopedia of everything Spanish. Not only did he know his history and his food, the guy turned out to be an awesome rapping travel vlogger!

Overall, it was a smooth and enjoyable experience. Even though some sectors like Nice to Barcelona can last up to 10 hours, the monotony of the journey was broken up by putting on films for the bus. There were a few refreshment stops along the way at service stations to grab food.

Also, another big plus point is whenever you have a mighty hangover from the night before, it helps to just roll out of a bed and just hop on the bus without the stress and hassle of getting to the train station or airport.



So, is there anything that could be improved about Busabout?

Suggestions for improving the product would be to offer more routes, possibly bespoke networks for slightly older, mature travellers to help attract a more wider audience, more activity options at destinations, a broader choice of accommodation options at each network point – plus, having free wifi on the buses would boost the brand and the overall user experience.

For more about booking your Busabout Europe experience visit the website:

www.busabout.com

Also, do check out the Busabout TV channel on

YouTube: **www.youtube.com/user/BusaboutTV**

VERDICT:

I think if you are a first-time traveller in Europe and have never travelled solo before, Busabout is definitely for you. I love the concept. You can plan your own itinerary, never worry about being alone, you have expert friendly guides on the buses to answer your queries and help you, accommodation options can be booked on the site or via the guides – all you have to do is put your name down, get out of bed before the bus leaves, meet lots of people and be ready to party hard.



EURAIL AND INTERRAIL PASSES

The Budget Way to Discover Europe

EURAIL AND INTERRAIL PASSES

Eurail and InterRail passes are the affordable way to make your dream European travel itinerary a reality. Hop on and off many of Europe's trains as you move from one destination to the next. Take a leisurely jaunt through Tuscany's enchanting countryside. Drool at divine sea views from the train window along the Côte d'Azur in the south of France. Or why not head off on a winter adventure through the Swiss Alps, or take on Scandinavia's Arctic – think Northern Lights, ice fishing and whale watching!

The Freedom Traveller

Rail passes give you the freedom to live in the moment and let your trip take on a life of its own, based on the people you meet, the places you stumble upon, and the adventures that stand before you!

Save Money

Set out on the trip that fits your budget. Go for the authentic

local feel by taking free regional trains and head to the less-visited towns and cities that faster routes miss. Pay a small reservation fee to upgrade to state-of-the-art high-speed trains that can transport you between Europe's most popular cities in a flash. And be sure to spend a night or two of your trip traveling by night train. Drift off to sleep in Munich and wake up in Rome feeling ready to pack in a full day's sightseeing, visiting attractions like the Colosseum and the Spanish Steps.

Value for money rail passes

Rail passes save you money compared to buying point-to-point train tickets for each journey. Eurail and InterRail let you take train journeys across the length and breadth of much of the continent, taking in as many destinations as you want. Choose from a range of passes to fit your travel plans. Do you want to pack in as many famous attractions across Europe as possible? Go for the Global Pass and get



your money's worth by discovering up to 24 countries with Eurail and 30 countries with InterRail. Have you got some specific countries in mind? Choose from the Select Pass (three, four, or five countries), Regional Pass (usually two countries) or the One Country Pass.

How the Passes Work

The rail pass is designed to let you travel within and between multiple European countries in the most comfortable and fun way possible: by train. Get access to almost all of Europe's rail networks, often without having to make any reservation – get on board the next train, show the conductor your pass, and hop off at your desired station.

Take the Stress Out of Travel

The journey should be part of your holiday adventure! Use Europe's trains to explore the continent and you'll have time in between stops to sit back and relax. Read that book you've been meaning to bury your nose in, have a dabble at travel writing, or gaze out the train window as the story of Europe's diverse scenery unfolds before your eyes. The train drops you off in the city centre, so all you have to do is drop your bag off at your hostel and then you're ready to hit up the city's hotspots. Missed your train? Have a drink and a bite to eat at the train station café while you wait for the next one. Meet some friendly backpackers and fancy switching your route to travel with them? No problem, go for it!

Eurail or InterRail?

The Eurail pass is available to travellers who live outside Europe. If you're a resident of any European country, the InterRail pass is for you.

Carve out your very own European trip of a lifetime with Eurail and InterRail passes. To find out more about getting around Europe with one of our rail passes and for a dose of travel inspiration, visit:

www.eurail.com for Eurail passes.

www.interrail.eu for InterRail passes.

SAVVY TIPS

from Travelzoo's European Deal Experts

BARCELONA, BERLIN, LONDON AND LISBON

Barcelona, Berlin, London and Lisbon are the four most popular cities featured in the *Luxury Hostels of Europe* guidebook. I asked Travelzoo's European Deal Experts to come up with some cool tips and here is what they had to share.

BARCELONA

You can't go to Barcelona without trying some tapas. One of the most popular places is **Ciudad Condal** – the atmosphere is as laidback as the clientele and the terrace is the perfect place to watch the world go by. Top recommendations are the serrano ham, octopus and prawns – and you can't leave without trying some of traditional Spanish omelette. 20€ will get you a good selection of delicious treats. Ciudad Condal is open until 1.30am, but get there early as it gets very busy!

If art is your thing, then the **L'Antic Teatre** is the benchmark of the contemporary scene in Barcelona. Reopened in 2003 after years of neglect, it is now a hub of creativity with theatre, music, dance, variety shows and specialist DJ nights. Top tip: try to grab a table in the garden, it gets very busy as the night goes on.

Our Deal Experts recommend visiting some of Barcelona's beach bars and Chringuito Pacha is a classic. Surrounded by palm trees, it has a huge list of cocktails – this bar has an energy all of its own and the music is always pumping.

BERLIN

No visit to Berlin is complete without a trip to the **Berliner Fernsehturm**. One of the most famous structures in Berlin, this TV tower attracts nearly 1.2 million visitors a year and has amazing views. It boasts a revolving restaurant, the Telecafe. You'll need to book ahead for the restaurant. We recently ran a deal where subscribers could buy VIP entrance and have a breakfast buffet in Telecafe for just 25€; a real bargain!

If nightlife is on the agenda, one of the best places is **Club der Visionaere**. A bar by day and a club by night, this cool little venue sits right on the canal where night owls dance on the pontoon decking under a huge weeping willow.



TOP TIP: entry is usually around 5€, but it's worth checking ahead as some nights it's free.

Cycling is the cheapest – and easiest – way to get around the German capital. We've recently ran an offer for a bike tour for two that cost 25€. Our Deal Experts recommend doing the tour on your first day as it's a great way to get your bearings.

LONDON

A great destination for foodies, it really is possible to experience some of London's finest restaurants on a budget. Some of the city's best restaurants offer wallet-friendly set menus at lunch or early-bird dinner times. You'll also find fantastic offers on Travelzoo.co.uk – for example, we recently ran a deal for a 4-course dinner with a champagne cocktail at Michelin-starred celebrity chef Marco Pierre White's newest restaurant, the **Kings Road Steakhouse & Grill**, for £29.

You can't go to London without having a traditional **afternoon tea**. It doesn't need to break the bank either – we regularly have deals for champagne afternoon tea at the city's top hotels, many of which save up to 50% on the usual price.

For evening entertainment, you can't do much better than a **West End** show. Those willing to leave it to chance can queue up on the night for a discounted ticket at one of the booths on Leicester Square. However, if last-minute stress isn't really what you want from a holiday, Travelzoo has lots of entertainment deals for West End shows, from classics such as "Singin' In The Rain" to new shows including acrobatic show "Knee Deep" with discounts of up to 50%.



Palmers 'Swiss Cottage' London

LISBON

Rua Augusta is the main shopping centre with more than 400 outlets, while Bairro Alto is home to independent boutiques selling everything from handmade soap to limited-edition trainers and one-off designer dresses. For a special treat, head to Luvaria Ulisses in the Chiado area. This tiny glove shop specialises in bespoke handmade gloves in any design you can imagine; they can measure your hands one day and have the gloves ready the next.

If bargain hunting is more your thing, the **Feira da Ladra** was once where Lisboans went to sell stolen goods. Now a flea market, it is popular with locals and tourists alike and open on Tuesdays and Saturdays from 9am-6pm. It's a great place to find bargains on books, art and antiques.

Finally, Lisbon is one place where it pays to be late. No one really ventures out before 10pm and there are plenty of bars and clubs around this laidback city. One of the best is Club Lux Fragil, which offers stunning views over the city from its roof terrace.

A photograph of a room featuring wooden bunk beds and a staircase made of wooden blocks. The room has a window with white trim and a red chair. The text "TRAVELLERSPOINT'S COMMUNITY WISDOM" is overlaid in large white letters.

TRAVELLERSPOINT'S COMMUNITY WISDOM

Community Wisdom on Budget Travel

Over the years, the topic of how to budget for trips has come up quite a lot in our forums. We decided it would be interesting to take a look back over the forums and compile a list from our community on top ways to save money while traveling.

We came up with this list of 13 top cost-saving tips.

ACCOMMODATION

1. Stay in dorm rooms. If you really want to save, and in particular if you are travelling alone, dorms are a great option. Other penny-pinching options are couchsurfing and camping. If you decide to couchsurf, though, be sure to spend a bit of money thanking your host.
2. Stay in locations longer. Often you can get deals by staying somewhere longer. Spend a few months and you could find a room in a share house, for instance.
3. Be prepared. Sometimes accommodation prices are driven up considerably for special events (see our [Sydney price chart](<http://www.travellerspoint.com/budget-accommodation-en-ci-1253.html>) in December, for example). Book in advance for better prices – or wait until the last minute and die a little on the inside.

FOOD AND DRINK

4. Skip the alcohol. A few beers will rack you up a gigantic bill if you're not careful. Skip alcohol entirely and you will see your budget stretch a lot further.
5. Eat less. Quite simply, just reducing the amount you eat can clearly save you a lot of money. No need to go hungry, but being on a bit of a diet will stretch your money a lot further.
6. Self-cater. Eating in, buying food at supermarkets, or visiting local food markets are all great ways to save a lot of money. Markets double as a great activity to enjoy, anyway.
7. Go for the street food. Get a bit of local flavour from street vendors. This can often be an extremely cheap source of food.

TRANSPORT

8. Use public transport. Buses are generally the cheapest transport option from city to city, excluding much slower options like riding your bike.
9. Walk. A lot. Not only is it a good way to get from A to B, but it also allows you to explore lots of areas you might not have seen otherwise. Taking it slowly allows you to take in everything, helping you get the most out of your travels.
10. Train Passes. Check your transportation options and see if a travel pass works out to be a cheaper option than buying point-to-point tickets on your route. But be sure to check your specific trips, because using a rail pass for primarily short, inexpensive journeys can work out to being more expensive overall. This also comes back to the earlier tip – be prepared.

OTHER

11. Get a job. If you are on a working holiday visa or similar, this is a great way to make your money last. You can either find paid work, or work in exchange for accommodation or food. [WWOOFing](<http://www.travellerspoint.com/wwooof/>) is a way to get accommodation in exchange for some time spent working on a farm.
12. Choose destinations wisely. This is probably one of the most critical choices you'll make when budgeting. Choosing Eastern Europe over Western Europe, for example, will make a world of difference to your back pocket. If things are tight, just save the pricy locations for future visits when you'll undoubtedly be a millionaire (well, we can all dream).
13. Check for free days. Museums often have free days or evenings. In Paris, for instance, all the national museums are free on the first Sunday of the month. The downside, of course, is long lines. Solution? Wake up early. Also, many cities have special museum passes, like the [Berlin Museum Pass](<http://www.visitberlin.de/en/article/museum-pass-berlin>).

One final note though as you head on your frugal way: do not scrimp on once-in-a-lifetime experiences. One Travellerspoint member, Cool Paul, laments such a moment:



"WHEN I WAS IN NZ A BUNCH OF FRIENDS WENT OUT SWIMMING IN KAIKOURA AND WERE SURROUNDED BY HUNDREDS OF DOLPHINS ... I DIDN'T GO BECAUSE I WAS BROKE AND AT THE END OF MY TRIP AND I WOULD HAVE HAD TO PUT \$150 ON MY CREDIT CARD. IN THE LONG RUN, \$150 IS NOTHING, AND NOW I COMPLETELY REGRET THAT DECISION"

It's the chance to do things like these that make us all want to travel in the first place.

HAPPY TRAVELS!