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MANHATTAN'S AFFINIA 50 HOTEL: TOP CHOICE FOR FAMILIES

By Anne Z. Cooke, Tribune Media Services,
[World's Fare](#)

MANHATTAN -- "I love New York City!" announced 12-year-old Will. "Why?" we asked, taken aback at this sudden pronouncement. "Because you can buy a hot dog on almost every corner," he said, beaming.

Every couple of years we pack up our family and descend on New York City. There, over a whirlwind week, we revel in Gotham's street corner hot dogs, world-class museums, Fifth Avenue's fashion scene, at least one Broadway show and the iconic Empire State Building. Until recently, we managed to squeeze into the same hotel room together. And it worked, mostly. But now that the kids are as tall as we are, two rooms are a must.

Enter the AFFINIA 50, one of four family-owned Affinias in Manhattan. Each of these gems, remodeled and re-branded, is styled for a different type of traveler. The Affinia 50, the group's no-nonsense property, is a suite hotel offering a half-dozen room and bed styles geared toward two kinds of travelers: families touring the Big Apple, and frequent business travelers.

We could have booked two separate but connected rooms just about anywhere in Manhattan. But for the family that plays together, that's no fun. Our one-bedroom suite, simply furnished, and large enough to sleep six, had enough room to spread out, plenty of comfortable chairs and a coffee table big enough to play games. The dining area and a fully equipped kitchen -- with refrigerator, four-burner stove and dishwasher -- made it easy to eat in.

The bedroom had two queen beds with dreamy mattresses and the living room sofa bed was large enough for two teenagers. Each of us sampled the "six-choice pillow menu," a list that included Swedish, hypoallergenic, Swedish and buckwheat styles. I tried the "magnetic" pillow, reputed to relieve a stiff neck.

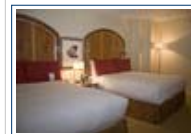
Besides this commodious setup, the Affinia 50 rates a thumbs-up in some other departments. It's affordably priced at \$369 a night, (with a discount, not including taxes; see the hotel Website for rates and payment options).

And there's the primo location, at 50th Street and Third Avenue in Midtown. Any hotel owner can turn a pumpkin of a hotel into Cinderella's castle, but no amount of money can fix an inconvenient

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address. This one is a stroll from the Metro (subway) and bus lines, and a 10-minute walk from the big sights: Rockefeller Center, Radio City Music Hall and the store windows on Fifth Avenue. Times Square, so brightly lit at night that you'd swear it was daytime, is 15 minutes away.

Third, the Affinia 50 easily passes the "germ" test. New carpets, spotless furniture and a remodeled bathroom gleam. The kitchen's steel cabinets aren't new, but they've repainted. Only the outer hallways (last stage of the renovation), await a facelift.

As for bonus points, the Affinia 50 has some of them, too. The neighborhood is chock-a-block with restaurants, from pricey steak houses to bistros and fast-food cafes. With five to feed, we shopped for breakfasts and some lunches at Azzure's, a delicatessen and specialty market around the corner, and at the Association grocery store down the block.

The second-floor Club Room is a generous bonus, considering that the owner could have converted the space into three more guest rooms. A spacious two-room lounge with a fireplace, street-view windows and upholstered armchairs, it's where you'll find the daily newspapers and no-charge tea and coffee urns. A lavish buffet breakfast (everything but hot dishes) is served on Monday through Thursday, and complimentary wine and cheese is served at happy hour.

The reception staff is first-rate. Doorman Manny Betances, who took our luggage on arrival, was a bundle of smiling energy. Retro-cool in a long coat and fedora, the Affinia hotels' signature uniform, he recommended a nearby deli and spelled out directions to a restaurant we wanted to try. Stephan Fauz, in Guest Services, produced city maps, subway plans and an events calendar, and handled requests in record time. Guests who arrive here expecting New York's infamous bluff and bluster won't find it on display at the Affinia 50. Friendly welcomes are part of the package.

INCIDENTAL INTELLIGENCE:

The Affinia 50 has 209 suites and rooms. The suites are on floors six through 22; single rooms are on floors two through five. All rooms have television, high-speed Internet access or wi-fi, two phones, hair dryer, Aveda amenities and a coffeemaker. Most suites have kitchens, executive desks and ergonomic chairs. Some suites have balconies.

Sail through airport security by leaving toothpaste, lotions and contact lens solution at home. Instead, ask for the hotel's free "Travel Smart" packets containing toothpaste, shaving cream, hair spray, deodorant, contact lens solution and mouthwash. The hotel also keeps cell phone chargers for all brands.

At 155 E. 50th Street, New York City, NY 10022; call 212-751-5710, or 866-246-2203. For details on room types and payment options, visit www.affinia.com.

Anne Z. Cooke and Steve Haggerty explore the world from Venice, Calif. They can be reached at TravelsWithAnne@cs.com.

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