

Novotel Edinburgh Centre – incredibly welcoming

With so many big-name hotel companies saturating the market, it's becoming increasingly difficult for chain hotels to stand out from the crowd.

The problem for many of these companies is that they are trying to cater for the masses with demand from both corporate and leisure clientele fundamental to their success. Their hotels have to appeal to a broad range of tastes and requirements, from honeymooners and families with children to business travellers simply in need of somewhere to rest their heads between flights. They must be stylish and comfortable yet flexible and practical.

It's a hard balance to get right.

I'll be the first to admit that I'm often reluctant to book into a chain hotel when visiting somewhere new. I prefer the quirks and imperfections that come with local, independent hotels. Rickety staircases? Bathrooms so small you can barely swing a mouse, let alone a cat? You name it, I've experienced it. I like my accommodation to have *character*, and in a world where chain companies are having to tick so many boxes, that's a luxury they can – understandably – rarely afford to offer.

And so, it was both curiosity and trepidation that I recently accepted an invitation to stay at Novotel Edinburgh Centre. With its prime location and grand facade, I had no doubt that this stalwart of Lauriston Place would be able to offer an entirely satisfactory experience, but would it be able to change my opinion on brand-name hotels? Would it be able to offer something *new*?

The answer, I was surprised to find, was yes.



From the moment I arrived, I was made to feel incredibly welcome. At 6pm on a busy pre-festival evening, with a foyer buzzing with activity, I was fully anticipating a lengthy wait at check-in. Instead, I was attended to straight away, and after a friendly exchange with the receptionist, was reassured that if I needed anything at all, I need only ask.

The reception space is surprisingly small given the hotel's 180 guest rooms, and yet the space is used well. The restaurant and bar are tucked away to the side, comfortable seating areas provided space for people to gather and wait, IT facilities are built into neat little alcoves. There is a nice, open feel to the lobby and this is complimented by the decor, which struck a nice balance between warm tones and a contemporary, minimalist style. There's nothing worse than arriving at a hotel and being unsure whether you've perhaps walked into the waiting room at a dentist surgery!



I was equally impressed with my room; though there was perhaps nothing terribly unique about the décor, it was certainly very pleasant and inoffensive – though of course, what really stole the show was the view of the castle from my window:



My room was larger than I had anticipated and well-furnished with a large queen-sized bed, clever storage space, a work station and ensuite bathroom. The provision of a double sofa-bed meant that the space was very versatile, and could easily

have accommodated a small family or group of friends.

Admittedly, I felt a little indulgent having it all to myself...although, of course, this gave me the freedom to kick off my shoes and do what everyone secretly loves to do first – check out the bed! I was very pleased with it, and I felt assured that the eco-designed ‘LIVE N DREAM’ bedding (complete with ‘smart pillows!’) would make for a very comfortable night ahead.



What I liked most about the room, however, were the clever little touches which showed that real thought had been put into the design process. For example, there were light switches on the walls *and* by the bed; the power points had been cleverly positioned; the minibar was tucked away in an alcove by the door so that the noise was not disruptive.



Similarly, the gadgets which had been provided were excellent. My room was equipped with an iron, a hairdryer, a flatscreen TV (which you could angle yourself to face either the sofa or the bed), and even a bluetooth speaker with USB connecting points. Couple this with free WiFi (which worked perfectly throughout my stay) and you’ve got the perfect set-up for modern travellers and business customers alike.

There was very little to dislike about the room, but perhaps it might be worth pointing out the slightly unconventional layout of the bathroom, which had a separate room for the WC. While I’m sure this was designed with privacy in mind, I’m not sure everyone would be comfortable with having to cross the room to wash their hands! A minor gripe however, for what proved to be well-thought out, and comfortable room.

One of the biggest selling points of the Novotel Edinburgh Centre is its location. Just a couple of minutes’ walk from

the bustle of Tollcross, the Meadows and the Grassmarket, the hotel is perfectly situated in the heart of Edinburgh's old town. There are countless great places to eat and drink, and it's also very close to many of the city's main attractions, from the castle and the Royal Mile to the National Galleries and the National Museum of Scotland. It's also well positioned for public transport, with nearby bus stops and Waverley Station just over a kilometre away.

Thankfully you don't have to look too far for an evening's entertainment however, as the hotel's *Tap* bar has some pretty fine spirits on offer, as well as great live music on Thursday, Friday and Saturday evenings.



I had wondered whether this or the closeness of the nearby nightlife might cause some disturbance at night, but even with my windows open, I was surprised by how quiet my room was. This was certainly a bonus, given the hotel's central location!

After a peaceful night, it was time to check out the breakfast facilities. Guests have the option of having breakfast in their rooms or eating downstairs in the restaurant. I chose the latter, and was blown away by the wide choice available at the buffet. For those looking for a lighter meal, the continental options of pastries, cereals and fruit were fresh and inviting. For the more ravenous guests (...guilty!), there were also plentiful cooked options and having indulged myself with a full Scottish breakfast (complete with Haggis!), I can safely say that the quality was up to scratch!

The information pack provided in my room had very helpfully given advice on when the busiest times were anticipated, and so I was able to avoid the mid-morning rush – though I have no doubt that the staff would have handled the busy spells well, for they were always on hand to look after guests and see to

it if they had any requests. It was also good to learn that the hotel offered 'early bird' breakfasts from 4am for those needing to leave at an ungodly hour – perfect if you have an early morning flight to catch or if you've just stumbled in from a night at the nearby Hive nightclub...!

To round off my stay, I decided to explore the hotel's health suite, which consists of a small gym, pool, sauna, steam room and jacuzzi. The facilities were modern and well-maintained, but it's worth noting that you need to sign a disclosure form at reception first as the pool is unsupervised. Children under 16, therefore, have to be accompanied by an adult.



The changing facilities were a little basic and the pool petite (particularly after 9am when families begin to emerge!), but I have to admit, there was something very relaxing about starting the day with a quick dip and being able to chill out in the jacuzzi – a treat made even better knowing that check-out was not until 12pm. All the more time to pamper yourself, I'd say!

I think it's fairly safe to say that by the time I checked out I was feeling suitably relaxed and refreshed. I had enjoyed my stay immensely, and while I couldn't exactly say that there was anything unique or unpredictable about my stay about the Novotel, the quality of the service and the facilities were hard to fault.

It was evident from the start that genuine thought and care had been put into creating an easy yet enjoyable experience for the customer, and this is largely down the little touches throughout – from the soft, fluffy towels to the flexible catering options and, in particular, the clever use of technology, which even included a virtual concierge in the reception! It was this attention to detail along with the pleasant décor which gave the hotel some personality, and

helped avoid the trap many chain competitors can fall into of being a little too clinical for comfort.

Accommodation of this calibre does not come really cheap, but it's easy to see why. With its prime location in the very shadow of Edinburgh's iconic castle, friendly staff and top-notch facilities, it's hard to imagine a better place to base yourself for a stay in Scotland's capital city.



The writer stayed at the [Novotel Edinburgh Centre](#) courtesy of Accor Hotels. Prices shown on their website show that you could stay there on 7 August 2016 for £167.