

Latest news for those interested in the 'small is beautiful' adage comes from YO! Sushi director Gerard Greene. Not satisfied with turning the UK restaurant industry upside down with YO! Sushi, YO! is turning its attention to hotels after the launch of YOTel at the 100% Design exhibition in September.

YOTel is a revolutionary hotel concept destined to deliver the industry a wake-up call. Offering its customers the quality of a 4/5 star hotel for around £75 a night in central London, YOTel is described as the world's most revolutionary hotel concept, offering luxury accommodation at an affordable price.

Founder of YO! Sushi, Simon Woodroffe says he got the idea after flying first class on a BA flight where the seat folds down into a bed.

"It is not enough that a hotel is designed well; people want to be excited when they stay at a hotel, they want things to work, to be treated like a first class traveller but they also want value for money. We have been bold enough to take steps that no other hotel product has taken before and therefore are able offer a first class travel experience comparable to a luxury yacht or private aircraft." says Greene

Designed by Priestman Goode, who has helped Airbus define the double deck aircraft of the future, the rooms feature rotating beds, techno walls, sophisticated lighting, flat screen TV complete with a choice of hundred's of films and CD's and wi-fi access. It's luxury liner meets The Fifth Element in 10 sq metres.

The hotel pods are to be prefabricated and could go anywhere. The first YOTel being planned for central London should be open within a year.

However, the truly revolutionary element of YOTel is its windows, which are internal rather than external – they look into the corridors, which are in turn naturally lit through reflective mechanisms and channelling of light. This allows YOTel to boldly go where other hotels simply can't – tricky central city locations, airports, even underground. The reduced land costs and savings can then be passed on to customers to offer a first class experience at an affordable price.

With the world's population growing steadily, and crowding into massive mega-cities appearing to be the trend for tomorrow, one Japanese institution, the capsule hotel, may indeed be pointing the way to the future.

The capsule hotel derives its name from the capsule, a box about 1 metre wide, 1 metre high and 2 metres long, that serves as your "room". The classic "room-the-size-of-a-closet" complaint is no exaggeration.



SQUEEZE UP AT THE BACK

Crammed inside are a mattress and in most hotels, a TV with headphones, a light, and a clock.

Capsule hotels make perfect sense in Japan where the economics of astronomical land prices and punitive taxi fares dictate the requirement. Couple with this the mandatory late-night drinking sessions with work colleagues and an ability to tolerate large crowds and small spaces (and large crowds in small spaces) and it makes perfect sense.

"Salarymen" (mid-level execs) out drinking after the last train leaves for home can fork over big money on a long, lonely cab ride for a couple hours sleep, or just spend \$25-\$33 to hang out with their buddies in the capsule hotel lounge and then sleep peacefully in the capsule until morning.

In fact, the capsule itself is used only for the largely motionless pursuits of sleeping, reading or watching TV. For other activities, capsule hotels have many other facilities often including: saunas, bath areas, restaurants and snack bars as well as lounge areas featuring lounge chairs, larger-sized TVs, and vending machines offering instant noodles and beer.

It's like room service, only faster and cheaper. Bathe, dine, chat with colleagues or watch TV until you're ready to retire to your "room" to sleep.

Anyone who can handle the sleeping compartment on an overnight train can manage a capsule hotel. If you think of it as your "room", then it's small. But look at it as a covered bed with a shuttered door, and you'll be fine. Just remember that ear-plugs could be a useful addition to your overnight bag.

After a long day cruising around wintry Tokyo, the hot sauna, warm bath and cold vending machine beer may be all you need to sleep soundly in your own little womb.

