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guide



SOCIAL CALLING

A new crop of boutique hotels combine distinctive style with features designed to give visitors a genuine interactive experience.

Words CARLY FISHER

A vintage Airstream trailer is one of the more mainstream options at the quirky El Cosmico in Marfa, Texas.

Do it

The U.S. may have started the social media revolution, but traveling here can be a bizarrely antisocial experience. Despite the abundance of cheap flights making weekend getaways easier than ever, it can feel tough to find lodging options beyond classic hotels and Airbnbs—essentially stylish crash pads with housekeeping and fancy soap. But if you actually want to meet people while you travel, you typically have to go out of the way to do it.

In an effort to fill this vacuum, some ambitious hoteliers are launching unconventional boutique properties with a heavy social slant. Nicer than traditional hostels, less remote than typical Airbnbs, with more personality than most hotels, these design-centric spots are all about bringing people together through social spaces, cool events and amenities. Think: quirky 10-person hot tubs and custom slot-car tracks, pop-up boutiques and festivals, designer bunk beds and shared rooms, and cool craft cocktail bars where even jaded locals want to hang.

“We’ve seen an evolution in how people travel, and the way that we do it is less communal hostel living in the actual room and more extenuating the common areas,” says Robby Baum, co-founder of FieldHouse Jones, which has locations in Chicago and Nashville. “Our thought is that if you stay in an Airbnb by yourself, it’s pretty isolated. You could be in a remote location in the city where you’re not getting the interaction with other people. We’re creating spaces where people can have a true stay experience and a social/communal aspect. I’d put our style against any hotel out there, but we created a place that’s fun to go to.”

Whether you’re a solo traveler who’d rather join the party than hole up with a book at the hotel bar or you want to bring the party with your squad, these unconventional, socially driven properties might make your next hotel stay the life of your party.

LIFE HOUSE

The location Miami; coming soon to Brooklyn, Denver and Nantucket. An additional 20 properties are set to open in the U.S. by the end of 2020.

The vibe Tropical vintage boho meets art deco chic.

If you’re the type of person who gets turned on by design blogs featuring succulents and wicker furniture, this might be your little slice of heaven. Inspired by the vintage Cuban and art deco vibes of Miami’s South Beach in the 1930s, Life House is the kind of hotel where you can grab a daiquiri and fantasize about being (or meeting) a modern Ernest Hemingway.

“We saw there was pent-up demand for a more affordable and more comfortable way to travel with friends and even colleagues, without sharing a bed, spending too much or compromising on design/experience,” says CEO and founder Rami Zeidan. “So we designed the most luxurious bunk bed ever—with stairs instead of ladders, full-size mattresses, luxury linens, Le Labo bath products and privacy curtains—all at a price per bed that’s cheaper than an Airbnb, while still delivering the great experience and community of a lifestyle hotel.”

Zeidan isn’t joking—this might be the most adult-like four-person bunk bed on the planet worth pining after. That said, more traditional tastes can still capture plenty of Instagrammable moments in classic queen- and king-style suites and an artist loft all draped in handpicked textiles, furnishings and art. But you’re here to meet people, right?



A comfy hammock awaits you in the courtyard of Life House in Little Havana.



The exterior of Life House's Little Havana location is giving us classic art deco vibes.

After hopping around South Beach and Little Havana, you'll find the see-and-be-seen crowd catching sun on the garden bungalow rooftop lounge, grabbing a drink at their cool craft cocktail bar or pounding away on their laptops over a café con leche.

lifehousehotels.com



Each teepee comes with a queen bed—and electrical outlets for charging your devices, natch.

EL COSMICO

The location Marfa, Texas

The vibe Conceptual art fans with quirky, astral tastes.

Best known for its community of minimalist artists, appearances of extraterrestrial “ghost lights” and random Prada store installation in the middle of the desert, Marfa is the type of destination that demands socializing. After all, who else are you going to compare notes with about all the local eccentricities?

El Cosmico is the product of a classic Marfa fairy tale: A woman buys an empty pasture with a horse shed, decides to roll with it and ends up with a cosmic-themed nomadic campground that art-school kids dream about. “When we opened, we had five trailers, a few safari tents and a bath house. The fence was loose and you’d see pronghorn



Illuminated teepees at night; upscale trailers come with an outdoor shower and glorious AC.



antelope on the property while you were taking a shower,” says Liz Lambert, founder and chief creative officer of Bunkhouse Group, which owns nine unconventional hotel properties across the Southwest and Mexico, including El Cosmico. “We wanted El Cosmico to be a place where Eastern culture would meet the myth of the American West.”

Since those humble beginnings, the property has expanded to include a vintage

Airstream trailer, Sioux-style teepees, Mongolian yurts and BYO campgrounds. Those with finer tastes can opt for the design-centric Kasita mini-home or the sprawling 3,800-square-foot apartment nestled above the Ayn Foundation. Communal amenities like a hammock grove, outdoor kitchen and wood-fired Dutch hot tubs are huge perks, but it’s the programming that everyone is here for—everything from regular karaoke and bingo nights to sunrise yoga, culinary workshops, sunset concerts and the annual three-day Trans-Pecos Festival, featuring headliners like Broken Social Scene, Margo Price, Jenny Lewis and Portugal, The Man.

“We try to create programming that benefits and engages guests as well as the local community—live music being the best example,” Lambert says. “When we first opened, we really wanted to connect with musicians passing through Texas on their tour schedules so they could stop at El Cosmico. Our Sunset Soundtrack shows are free to attend, and the Trans-Pecos Festival of Music + Love, which first started out with 400 people around a campfire, is in its 14th year. A similar phenomenon has taken place with our workshops. The more people hear about us and about Marfa, the more they seek us out.”

elcosmico.com

Whether you travel solo or in a pack, these socially driven properties will make your stay the life of your party.

Do it



The fireplace in the grand room of the Bivvi is ready for all your après-ski hangs.



Shack up in a private hot tub suite or bunk up with five buddies at Bivvi.

THE BIVVI HOSTEL

The location Breckenridge, Colorado

The vibe Fancier than your average backcountry shelter.

Here's a word most travelers don't use every day: bivouac, a term referring to a temporary encampment. Shortened to "bivvi," it's a fitting moniker for a cool backpackers lodge situated at the perennially popular mountain destination of Breckenridge, Colorado. Founded by a pack of well-traveled friends and hostel lovers who spent their college salad days as seasonal

regulars in the swanky ski town, the Bivvi was born out of their frustration with the lack of affordable area accommodations that had the right atmosphere.

"We wanted something a little more unique, something that wasn't cliché in a mountain town, and really target that demographic of young adventurers who want to experience Colorado," says general manager Balazs Jarai. "We wanted to be rugged and low-key and attract that demographic, but we wanted to give them something a little extra."

After hitting the slopes (to ski, ride, bike or whatever), you'll find other travelers shackled up by the fireplace inside the grand room of the property's European-style chalet, hanging at the bar or library, grabbing beers (they have PBR and an IPA from New Zealand on tap) for the 10-person hot tub or huddled around the giant fire pit. For a little more privacy and a lot more luxe, book one of the stylish suites or a furnished apartment, featuring perks like in-room hot tub and fireplace.

"We're a hostel in an outdoor mountain town," says Jarai. "Because we attract that kind of person, they already have that in common with everyone."

thebivvi.com

You can scale up or down in size— but always get something extra.

FIELDHOUSE JONES

The location Chicago (and a new one now in Nashville, too).

The vibe Old-school Chicago meets modern urban oasis.

Fieldhouses, a quintessential yet often overlooked part of Chicago's iconic architecture, were an O.G. cultural epicenter for anything social—from gymnastics and field hockey to community activism and civic service. So is it any surprise that this local, historical symbol of social culture would become the inspiration for a social hotel?

"We've created a place where if a group has to travel, they don't have to go back to their room," says FieldHouse Jones co-founder Robby Baum. "If they have a finite amount of time, the essence of what they're doing is the in-between time that people remember."

With roughly a dozen types of rooms, there's no shortage of convertible options for choosing your own adventure. Along with private rooms that are stylish enough to rival a boutique hotel, the property has several modern bunk bed suites outfitted with luxury bedding, private bathrooms, custom furniture and art and flat-screen TVs perfect for





FieldHouse Jones in Chicago

shacking up with three of your closest friends. Think exposed brick, reclaimed wood, midcentury modern furnishings and a Midwestern “come as you are” casual atmosphere.

During the day, find digital nomads contemplating their laptops at DropShot Coffee & Snack Bar or whipping up food in the communal kitchen stocked with brand-new appliances and professional kitchenware. In the evening, hit up the subterranean cocktail bar, Janitor’s Closet, featuring a 12-track slot-car course. “[Slot cars are] these small electric racing cars that you can do alone to see how fast it goes or race other people. It’s fun if you have a drink or not, for solo travelers, groups and companies,” Baum says.

fieldhousejones.com

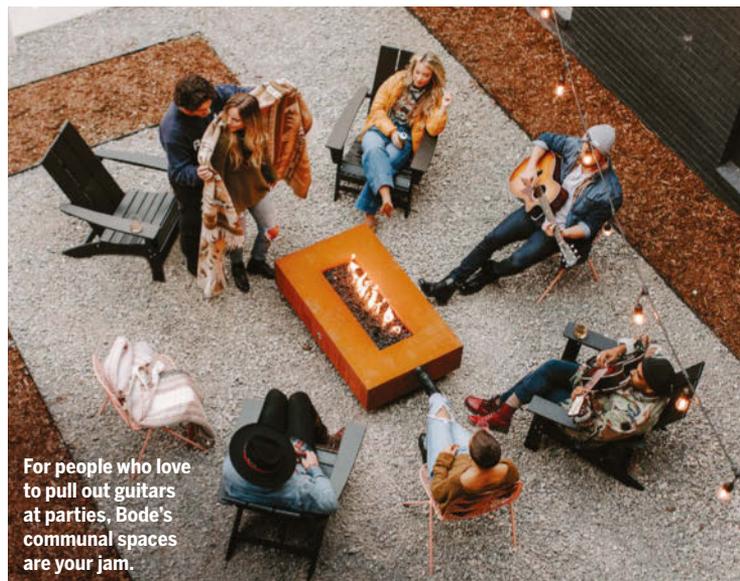
BODE

The location Chattanooga, Tennessee (plus a property in Nashville, with Palm Springs, Indian Wells, Orange County, Savannah and Greenville on the way).

The vibe Living large

Only those who have been put in charge of trying to block off a hotel floor for a dozen of their closest friends know the true perils of finding group accommodations. Because it’s not just about finding connecting rooms; it’s also about figuring out where to convene and making sure everyone is having a good time. And really, who wants to micromanage when they’re on vacation? That’s why this group lifestyle hotel is all about the communal space and customization, from one-person suites to a five-bedroom condo for 12.

“There were a lot of things lacking in the hotel experience, but one of the biggest gaps is how there’s simply nowhere to spend time with your friends during downtime,” says Bode CEO Philip Bates. “If you want to have a cup of coffee in the morning, a glass of wine before dinner or a beer after a night out, you’re forced to go to a noisy lobby. Most folks would



For people who love to pull out guitars at parties, Bode’s communal spaces are your jam.



Spacious living rooms let you unwind with friends in a more intimate setting.

rather enjoy this in the privacy of their own space, where they can relax and enjoy time together and unwind.”

Spacious apartment-style units and common areas are outfitted with a bespoke design. Rooms are stocked with full-sized kitchens, dining and living rooms; a private backyard or porch make it easy to get everyone together for an impromptu sunset dinner party or off-site team-building work session. But if your crew wants to meet and mingle, sprawling communal spaces like an open mic bar or vintage trucks for tailgating are perfect for combining forces with other folks.

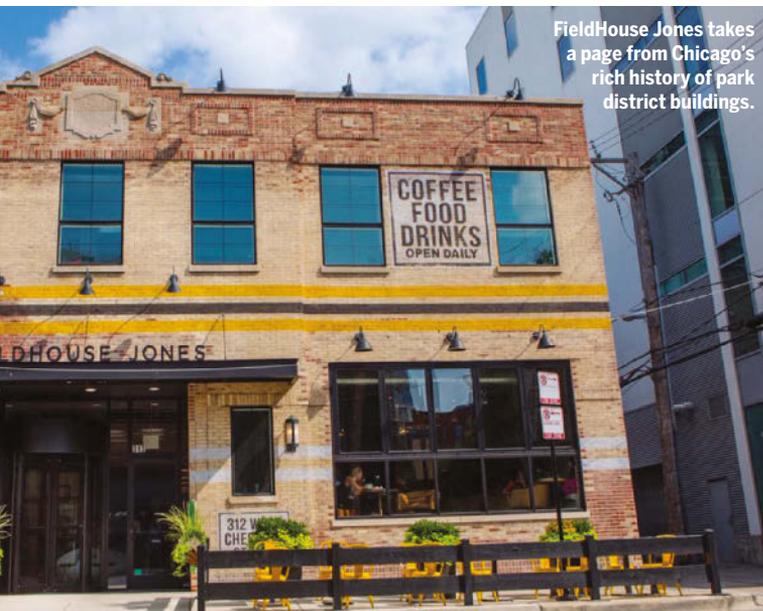
“It really is inspired by how we like to travel,” says Bates. “Rarely do we find ourselves



The lobby at Bode in Chattanooga

traveling alone anymore, and the best times of our trips seem to be when we are hanging out and laughing with our friends.”

bode.co



FieldHouse Jones takes a page from Chicago’s rich history of park district buildings.