

Circulation: 18,776,358  
February 21, 2015

# USA TODAY TRAVEL™

## ROAD WARRIOR VOICES



Photo courtesy of Canopy by Hilton

Boutique hotels are smaller properties, carefully designed to connect travelers to the local culture of the places they visit. Or at least that was the idea when they started. Lately we're seeing drastic changes in the hotel sector as boutique hotels look to grow and corporate chains try to get their own slice of the independent (and probably artisanal) hotel pie.

Jason Clampet, co-founder of Skift, says:

*"Consumers have shown they're a little sick of seeing the same thing every time. Big brands are now rushing into the space, focusing on younger clientele who care less about 5-star service and more on doing something local and different."*

Take Hilton, for example, who this year will launch the Canopy by Hilton brand, which will include 11 properties designed to immerse guests in the food,

culture, and design of the neighborhoods in which they're located, including Portland's Pearl District and Miami's Brickell neighborhood. Other big chains and their boutique offspring include Sofitel So (Sofitel), Andaz (Hyatt), Moxy and Edition (both Marriott) and Tryp (Wyndham).

On the flipside of boutique-ification, some small hotels are becoming more corporate. In late 2014, [InterContinental Hotels Group \(IHG\) acquired Kimpton](#) for \$430 million. IHG's purchase was done with the motivation of becoming a major player in "the fastest growing segment in the industry."

Meanwhile, Clampet doesn't believe that a chain brand has perfected the boutique approach yet, for one paradoxical reason: as those properties get larger, they lose the very identity that made them "boutique" in the first place. Clampet names Viceroy Hotels & Resorts as an example. Viceroy began by opening a number of properties with unique names and identities, then changed them all to become Mini-Mes of the Viceroy brand.

Sean Murphy, editor-in-chief of Jetsetter, however, says that he thinks that big brands *can* do boutique right, using Edition and Andaz as examples.

*"Truth is there are travelers who crave a more personalized, distinct, boutique-like experiences, but also enjoy the convenience, comfort, consistency and confidence that comes with a familiar brand."*

In large part, the desire for hotels to become more localized has stemmed from travelers seeking out accommodation alternatives like Airbnb, where they can stay in local homes, [often at cheaper rates](#) than a standard hotel room. Boutique properties offer some of the local flavor of sites like Airbnb, but with the added amenities of a hotel. Still, Murphy suggests combining your stay with a [website that will help connect you with locals](#):

*"Taking advantage of sites like EatWith, Eat With a Local and Feastly, you can secure a seat at a local's table for a delicious home-cooked meal. You'll most likely pick up some fantastic, insider travel tips over appetizers."*

***What are your thoughts on the boutiqueification of hotels?***