

[Leeds holidays](#) British boltholes

## Art Hostel, Leeds: hotel review

Leeds finally has its own arty city-centre hostel, a revamped listed building with installations and bespoke design touches



 Trendsetter ... the Art Hostel, Leeds. Photograph: Tom Williamson

**Tony Naylor**

Saturday 16 July 2016 12.00 BST



Leeds has always been an unusually style-conscious city. It loves hot trends. In the 1990s, its clubs Back To Basics and Vague popularised glam clubbing and, famously, Leeds was the first city outside London to get a Harvey Nics. More recently (check this, Dalston!), its huge Trinity shopping centre opened a street food court at a time when most northerners still thought “street food” meant Greggs (personally, I still do).

What Leeds has not been, though, is important creatively. While Liverpool and Manchester put in the hard yards to create seismic pop-cultural moments, Leeds has been too busy checking its designer labels. Outside of its vibrant but tiny DIY underground, this has chiefly been a city of consumption, not creativity. That would explain why Leeds has probably the UK’s best craft beer bar circuit (but only two notable breweries), and why its food scene - from [Bundobust](#)’s Gujarati snacks to the Michelin-starred [Man Behind The Curtain](#) - trumps that of its northern rivals.





For a city that prides itself on being first to new stuff, it must be galling that it has only just got a hip, arty city-centre hostel of the type that already exists in - never mind Berlin - most UK cities. Luckily, though, the Art Hostel is an unusually thorough, holistic example of such creative spaces. It's a spin-off from, and income stream for, the charitable Leeds-based East Street Arts, and the integration of artistic imagination into the build has gone much further than getting a few local taggers in to spray some graffiti.

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Rather, the Art Hostel's individually, artist-designed dorms and five twin rooms have been created with real thoughtfulness, in both their concepts and how those have been stylishly reconciled with the demands of a bedroom (comfortable mattress, decent Wi-Fi, no TV). My room references the impoverished 19th-century dock workers who congregated at the nearby Riverside Mission. The artist responsible, Hannah Stacey, specialises in handmade collage wallpaper, and this adorns one wall.

The complementary period and thematic details are impressive, too: parquet floor, Victorian fireplace and antique furniture; lights made from mooring ropes and a ship's wheel; cushions printed with local maps. There is also a shelf of books to read, swap and take away. Will it be Hegel's Introductory Lecture On Aesthetics or The Art of Walt Disney?



The other rooms are similarly comprehensive. For instance, in one, designed by a German artist, a radio plays people's memories of their homes. In a room by Keighley's Drew Millward, even the curtains are bespoke-printed with his drawings.

Downstairs, there is a project space where visiting artists create new work - it was scattered with the remnants of a sound installation - which guests and the public can engage with. Several artists volunteered in the makeover of the building and are continuing to tweak it. Right now, someone is making neon antimacassars to jazz up the grannyish furniture in the communal lounge-kitchen.

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East Street's (temporary, five-year) occupation of this charmingly rough-edged listed building does have its drawbacks, however. None of the twin rooms has en-suite facilities. Bathrooms are shared with the dorms which, perfectly acceptable and even amusing as they are (where else can you shower serenaded by a Bowie-inspired video installation?), will not suit everyone. Nor will the fiddly keypad door locks or the lack of wardrobe (it's all hooks). Most significantly, it is pretty noisy from the road and from guests milling around.



In short, this is a hostel. You have to rough it a bit. Breakfast, chosen from the kitchen, is a perfunctory mix of fruit, juices and Tesco Everyday Value spreads and bread. For a better start, try [Laynes Espresso](#) near the station.

Nonetheless, the Art Hostel has great character, chatty staff and, if you are in the arts, you will be among friends. Damn it, for all Leeds's frivolous flashiness, this place could just be proof that there is creative heft to this city after all.

● Accommodation was provided by Art Hostel (0113 345 3363, [arthostel.org.uk](http://arthostel.org.uk), twin rooms £55 B&B). Travel between Manchester and Leeds was provided by [TransPennine Express](#)

**Ask a local**

Dave Olejnik owner of [Laynes Espresso](#)

