

## New face of luxury

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The Remix (lounge) at Aloft. Photo: K. Pichumani

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*Aloft, the newly-opened four-star hotel in Sholinganallur, is for the business traveller who seeks comfort in familiarity*

Astonishingly, the lobby manages to be reminiscent of both a cheery kindergarten play pen and flashy Times Square, NYC. Sofas the colours of ripe tropical fruit sprawl across vivid, stripy carpets. The air is thick with thudding music. Showy electronic signs, flat screen televisions and sunshine vie with one another for your attention.



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Aloft, newly opened in Sholinganallur to cater primarily to Chennai's IT corridor, is the city's newest luxury hotel. A part of Starwood Hotels & Resorts Worldwide (which has more than a 1,000 properties, including the Sheraton, Westin and Le Meridien brands, in 100 countries) it's being developed by UrbanEdge hotels, which belongs to Automatrix.

### QUIRKY CHIC

The Chennai property, India's first, is a four-star luxury hotel that abounds in quirky chic. Spacious and swathed in glass and colour, it follows the global Aloft design laws. These ensure that every hotel is similar, irrespective of where in the world it's placed, right from the colour of the cushions in the lobby to the brand of mattress in your room.

These are design aesthetics created for frequent fliers. For people who seek comfort in familiarity. At Aloft, the guest knows exactly where the hair dryer is, because the location doesn't change whether he/she is in a room in Chicago or Chennai. This cookie cutter approach undeniably takes away much of the excitement of travel. It creates a bubble, enabling people to shift locations mindlessly, without really having to connect anywhere. Not much fun for a tourist, or adventure-seeker. After all, journeys are essentially about constant challenges and new experiences.

However, as it turns out, this is precisely what a section of business travellers wants. After all, they live in a world of airport lounges, hotel rooms and conference halls. Hunting for the mini bar in every new suite probably gets annoying after eight hours of meetings laced with jet lag.

Aloft defied recession with this philosophy, growing steadily over the last few years. In some ways, it's the face of the new age business hotel. A decided step away from established concepts of luxury. No ankle deep carpets, Mozart playing from the lobby grand piano or attendants to cater to your every whim. Instead, there are functional interiors, with quality fittings and technology. House music blasting from Bose speakers. And 'talent' instead of staff, trendy in T shirts and unabashed chumminess.

### WELL-EQUIPPED

There's free wi-fi available, computers in the lobby and a 'plug and play' device in every room so you can hook up your iPod/ laptop to listen to music, watch movies or work. All hotels also feature identical lounge bars, called 'w xyz' and little delis called Re:fuel, encouraging 'grab and go' meals. Laid out like a well-stocked home kitchen, with a collection of sandwiches, cereals and juices, as well as a coffee machine and microwave, this enables guests to help themselves instead of waiting for room/restaurant service.

Since the Indian market tends to be more demanding when it comes to food, Aloft Chennai offers a wider range of food than most of the properties. It also has the first 'dot.yumm' a coffee shop offering more traditional buffet meals as well as a lengthy a la carte menu. A part of this restaurant has been sectioned off to form Estia, which veers closer to fine dining. This coffee shop and its menus will be replicated in the other Indian Aloft properties. The next phase includes hotels in Bengaluru, Chandigarh, Coimbatore and Ahmedabad.

It's a decidedly young, unapologetically brash, and determinedly liberated approach. Certainly, it won't appeal to everyone. Ask a traditional CEO to load his luggage onto the hotel trolley or make his own cappuccino and he'll be in his limousine giving his chauffeur directions to The Taj faster than you can say 'Yes Sir.' Yet, the younger lot seems quite happy with this less bureaucratic and more economical style of hotel. A model where luxury is in the design and amenities rather than frills.

*(Aloft is at 102, Rajiv Gandhi Salai, Sholinganallur. Call 4592550 or go to [aloft-hotels.com](http://aloft-hotels.com) for details.)*

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