



People didn't just check in; they hung out. We saw locals and visitors alike rubbing shoulders there, people dropping by for coffee and having a chat with reception staff. A local freelancer hammered out emails between Negronis and laughed when wide-eyed visitors returned from a day out, realising they had stumbled into the centre of Manchester's most liberal, bohemian, gloriously messy neighbourhood.

After all, LEVEN sits smack-bang in the middle of Manchester's Gay Village, perched along the historic canal in legendary Canal Street. Stepping outside, we were immediately in the thick of things: rainbow flags, cobbles, drag queens in full regalia at 11am and the occasional person still dressed from the night before doing the walk of shame.

But the hotel isn't just about its location; it is about its spirit. LEVEN is very much part of the Gay Village. The staff weren't just staff, they were neighbours, allies, part of the community fabric. They pointed us to the best club night we had never heard of, the queer theatre show running in a converted mill, and the café with the best flat white north of London. They are also the kind of team who are more than likely to join you for a post-shift drink, and that kind of authenticity is rare in hospitality. It is a particular brand of Mancunian warmth that felt genuine, because it is.

Some hotels you simply check into. At LEVEN Manchester, you more or less move in – or at the very least, start plotting how you might. It's the sort of place where, within minutes of stepping through the door, you find yourself mentally rearranging your life: quit the job, flog the London flat, draft a carefully worded explanation to friends and family about why you've suddenly relocated up North. Planted squarely on Canal Street in the beating heart of Manchester's Gay Village, LEVEN is an **urban concept hotel with soul** – homely yet enticing, and brimming with a sense of place. It's the antithesis of the city's cookie-cutter chain hotels, offering character and charm by the bucketload.

Manchester had always punched above its weight culturally. It was the city that gave us Joy Division, The Smiths, Oasis and a nightclub scene that rewrote history. It was a city of radicals, suffragettes and LGBTQ+ pioneers.

LEVEN Manchester plugged straight into that current. But what made this hotel work for us was just how unapologetically Mancunian it was. Everything felt rooted in the city, from the homegrown brands dotted around the public spaces and rooms to the art on the walls. From the coffee beans in our cups to the toiletries in our shower, much of it had a link to the city or **England's** mighty North. Even the cocktails nodded to local flavours... a deliberate decision to reflect Manchester's cultural prowess and entrepreneurial streak. After all, LEVEN knows that this was a city that gave the world Factory Records, the Hacienda, Queer as Folk, so why wouldn't it want that same spirit infused into a stay?

The magic touch, though, was how none of it felt curated to death – it all came across as authentic, lived-in, cheeky, playful, like Manchester itself. And if we were expecting bland beige minimalism and meaningless talk of "timeless design" like many of the city's big-chain hotels, we were most definitely in the wrong place. We found LEVEN's interiors to be rather eclectic: industrial bones dressed up in jewel-toned velvets, neon lighting, houseplants and the artwork (which needs its own special note) – a bold and visual mixtape of Manchester culture, with nods to queer nightlife, music legends, the city's radical politics, its footballing obsession and its anarchic wit – with enough personality to fill a warehouse (which, conveniently, it already is), all drawn from Manchester's eclectic creative community.

LEVEN Manchester was first positioned to us as a "concept hotel", which we cynical travelistas thought sounded faintly like marketing jargon, until we actually arrived and realised how true this was. This wasn't hospitality as usual. The lobby wasn't a lobby. It was a living room, a lounge, a bar, a workspace and, depending on the time of day and year, the unofficial pre-Pride party. During our visit to Manchester Pride, the place practically hummed. The lobby was base camp: flags flew, drinks flowed, and everyone seemed to know everyone.

