

NYC Highlights

The most beguiling city in the world, New York is an adrenaline-charged, history-laden place that holds immense romantic appeal for visitors. Wandering the streets here, you'll cut between buildings that are icons to the modern age - and whether gazing at the flickering lights of the midtown skyscrapers as you speed across the Queensboro bridge, experiencing the 4am half-life downtown, or just wasting the morning on the Staten Island ferry, you really would have to be made of stone not to be moved by it all. There's no place quite like it.

You could spend weeks in New York and still barely scratch the surface, but there are some key attractions - and some pleasures - that you won't want to miss. There are the different ethnic neighborhoods, like lower Manhattan's Chinatown and the traditionally Jewish Lower East Side (not so much anymore); and the more artsy concentrations of SoHo, TriBeCa, and the East and West Villages. Of course, there is the celebrated architecture of corporate Manhattan, with the skyscrapers in downtown and midtown forming the most indelible images.

There are the museums, not just the Metropolitan and MoMA, but countless other smaller collections that afford weeks of happy wandering. In between sights, you can eat just about anything, at any time, cooked in any style; you can drink in any kind of company; and sit through any number of obscure movies. The more established arts - dance, theater, music - are superbly catered for; and New York's clubs are as varied and exciting as you might expect. And for the avid consumer, the choice of shops is vast, almost numbingly exhaustive in this heartland of the great capitalist dream.

New York City comprises the central island of Manhattan along with four outer boroughs - Brooklyn, Queens, the Bronx, and Staten Island. Manhattan, to many, is New York - whatever your interests, it's here that you'll spend the most time and are likely to stay. New York is very much a city of neighborhoods and is best explored on foot.

Offshore,
the Statue of Liberty
and
Ellis Island
comprise the first section of New York (and America) that most nineteenth-century immigrants would have seen. The
Financial District
takes in the skyscrapers and historic buildings of Manhattan's southern
reaches and was hardest hit by the destruction of perhaps its most
famous landmarks, the Twin Towers of the World Trade Center. Just
northeast is the area around City Hall
, New York's well-appointed municipal center, which adjoins
TriBeCa
, known for its swanky restaurants, galleries, and nightlife. Moving east,
Chinatown
is Manhattan's most populous ethnic neighborhood, a vibrant locale that's great for food and shopping. Nearby,
Little Italy
bears few traces of the once-strong immigrant presence, while the
Lower East Side
, the city's traditional gateway neighborhood for new immigrants, is
nowadays scattered with trendy bars and clubs. To the west, SoHo is one of the premier districts for galleries and the
commercial art scene, not to mention designer shopping. Continuing
north, the West
and
East Villages
form a focus of bars, restaurants, and shops catering to students and would-be bohemians - and of course tourists.
Chelsea
is a largely residential neighborhood that is now mostly known for its
gay scene and art galleries that borders on Manhattan's old Garment District
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Murray Hill
contains the city's largest skyscraper and most enduring symbol, the
Empire State Building
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Beyond
42nd Street
, the main east-west artery of midtown, the character of the city
changes quite radically, and the skyline becomes more high-rise and
home to some of New York's most awe-inspiring, neck-cracking
architecture. There are also some superb museums and the city's best
shopping as you work your way north up Fifth Avenue
as far as 59th Street. Here, the classic Manhattan vistas are broken by the broad expanse of
Central Park
, a supreme piece of nineteenth-century landscaping, without which life
in Manhattan would be unthinkable. Flanking the park, the mostly
residential and fairly affluent Upper West Side boasts Lincoln Center, Manhattan's temple
to the performing arts, the American Museum of Natural History, and
Riverside Park along the Hudson River. On the other side of the park,
the Upper East Side is wealthier and more grandiose, with its
nineteenth-century millionaires' mansions now transformed into a string
of magnificent museums known as the "Museum Mile," the most prominent
being the vast Metropolitan Museum of Art . Alongside is a patrician
residential neighborhood that boasts some of the swankiest addresses in
Manhattan, and a nest of designer shopping along Madison Avenue in the
seventies. Immediately above Central Park, Harlem , the historic black city-within-a-city, has a
healthy sense of an improving go-ahead community; a jaunt further north
is most likely required only to see the unusual Cloisters, a
nineteenth-century mock-up of a medieval monastery, packed with great

European Romanesque and Gothic art and (transplanted) architecture.