

An Insiders guide to NYC

By Christae Evanson

For those who don't know me...

Hi I'm Christae-

I'm 30 and an Musical Theatre Actor who lives in NYC. I grew up in the west (Montana) and have been living in NYC for 2.5 years. I often have family and friends asking for advice on how to navigate NYC and my favorite spots, many of who have never been in a big city.

Out of that grew this labor of love since I don't have the means to show everyone around this city which I am so passionate about. I've wanted to move here since I was 9 (20 years ago!) so I have a lot of favorite spots.

This city is vibrant and full of gorgeous history and I hope this helps you out.

If you have any questions after reading this or want specific recommendations, please don't hesitate to ask me (even if we're strangers, I'm happy to help, just email me!)

I can be reached at ccevanson@gmail.com

Here we go!

Where to stay:

It depends largely on whether you plan to use the subway or not to get around. It's the easiest and cheapest way to get around NYC.

It makes where you choose to stay pretty flexible, so long as you're within reasonable distance of a subway.

Lots of first time tourists stay in Times Square, which tends to be a little pricier and busier, but it does keep you centrally located.

There are lots of great hotels in Manhattan in lots of neighborhoods other than midtown Manhattan that are affordable and easy to access by subway.

If you're comfortable taking the subway even a bit further to your destinations, I have friends who often stay in slightly cheaper hotels in Brooklyn or Queens. Otherwise, if you plan to cab or Uber a lot, staying in midtown saves you a lot of money.

When cars go over the bridges, they often have a toll charge built into your ride so it can add up.

Additionally, AirBnb is a GREAT option for single people, families, couples on a budget, families with children etc.

Often times you can rent out a whole or partial apartment for your trip at a fraction of the cost of a hotel and have access to a full kitchen and fridge.

I also suggest booking a 1 week or even 1 month AirBnb for people moving here who need to find housing. It's a great affordable option that is easier than a temporary sublet and you can book it with confidence before you arrive.

I can't say I know any particular hotels that are especially discounted or ideal, I think researching and seeing what fits your needs is best since every budget and accommodation preference is different.

I've personally have stayed at the Wolcott (wolcott.com) and the Mayfair (mayfairnewyork.com)... both were wonderfully charming with an old school NYC feel to them. I've also AirBnb in Staten Island (super cheap but I had to take the free ferry to the city everyday) and stayed at Hosteling International NYC (Upper West Side)- great if you're by yourself and on a super tight budget.

Transit:

The subway is the easiest and also the most cost-efficient way to get around NYC. You can get a seven day unlimited subway card for \$33. You can get a card at any subway station. Getting around the city is fairly easy in our day and age because you can plug in your destination in your maps app on your phone and hit the Transit button and it will tell you exactly how to get there.

Be sure to pay attention to whether or not you are going uptown or downtown and make sure you go in the right subway station, otherwise it's pretty user friendly!

There is also an MTA Subway Time app that can tell you when your train is arriving, if that appeals to you.

If you have questions, ask a friendly looking person. NYer's are surprisingly helpful when you need it. You can also use cabs which work in a pinch, but we also have Lyft and Uber apps which tend to be a little cheaper.

Rideshare on those apps is also cheaper than direct rides. Via is a rideshare app I love. It's typically cheaper than the Uberpool or Lyftline option.

Here are my promo codes for each of those apps if you're downloading them for the first time:

Via app- <http://bit.ly/1ZLXIHo>

Use my code, christae6q3, to get \$10 of free credit (you can use up to \$5 of credit per ride)

Uber app : www.uber.com/invite/christaeue

\$2 off each of your first 3 Uber rides. To accept, use code 'christaeue'

Lyft app: For \$5 in ride credit, download the Lyft app using my referral link:

<https://www.lyft.com/ici/CHRISTAE1>.

If take a cab around 8-9am or dinner time, you may hit rush hour traffic and pay an arm and a leg to sit in traffic, so keep that in mind when hailing a cab during a busy period. Basically, unless it's late at night, taking the train or prepaid car is likely to be faster or more cost efficient.

Be sure to pack a backup phone battery and cord, an umbrella if rain is in the forecast and don't be afraid to wear REALLY good shoes. Native New Yorkers commute in sneakers and change into their dress shoes at their destination. Bring a bag for your stuff, everyone does.

Bars:

If you're into the bar scene, I suggest piano bars in NYC.

There are tons of bars in NYC, but piano bars really create a fun other world atmosphere.

My favorites:

- Don't Tell Mama (Midtown near Times Square in Hell's Kitchen)
- Brandy's (UES- kind of divey but so fun!)
- Sid Gold's Request Room (Chelsea-Piano Karaoke bar if you want to sing!)
- Duplex & Marie's Crisis (Gay bars in the East Village with lots of history. Also Divey)

All these places have no cover, but Brandy's requires a 2 drink minimum after 9.

- Chez Josephine- Cute upscale French restaurant with live piano music
- Sid Gold's Request Room- Piano Karaoke- a bit of a more upscale vibe.
- Russian Vodka Room- divey quintessential Russian piano bar with strong drinks. Love this place before/after a show.

It's good manners to bring cash to tip the pianist ☺

I'm a big fan of 1920's- NYC has a bunch of really great speakeasies. Please Don't Tell and The Back Room are my absolute favorites. PDT you have to enter through a Hot Dog Store through a phone booth and reservations are required the day of at 3pm.

The Back Room is an authentic 1920's speakeasy with cocktails in teacups and gorgeous décor- you enter through a gate which says 'Lower East Side Toys' and walk through an concrete alleyway- I suggest not going on a Friday or Saturday nights because they play music and it gets loud.

Dante on MacDougal (and really any spot on that street) has super craft cocktails.

<https://www.harpersbazaar.com/culture/travel-dining/a12614/best-speakeasies-in-new-york/>

Here are two is a solid list of pubs! McSorleys is probably my #1 recommendation- not because it's fancy but because it's the oldest bar in NYC. It didn't let women in until the 1970's (weird but history ☹ ☹) McGees is in midtown and it's supposedly the bar that they modeled the 'How I Met Your Mother' bar after so I sort of love it ☹ ☹

<https://www.google.com/amp/s/www.thrillist.com/amphtml/drink/new-york/best-irish-bars-in-nyc>
(Not all pubs are in Manhattan, some are in nearby boroughs)

<https://www.theinfatuation.com/new-york/guides/best-midtown-irish-pubs-nyc>

There are also a TON of great rooftop bars in NYC and offer an only in NY feeling: my favorite spots include Mr. Purple, Plunge, Skylark, The Magic Hour, Refinery, and Gallow Green. The Marriott in Times Square has a slow rotating rooftop bar that is stunning, but there is for sure a drink minimum and possibly a cover.

If you would like a specific recommendation for a particular fare or cocktail, feel free to ask!

Sightseeing:

If you follow the Time Out NY Facebook page, they have relevant and current stuff to do on their Facebook page all the time.

Hells Kitchen is near Times Square and tends to have affordable food and bars. It's a great little area that is often over looked by visitors.

If you're on an extreme budget- www.theskint.com is a great site for all sorts of free/inexpensive stuff to do in the city every single day- I'd scout that if you're on a budget and willing to explore a bit outside of the touristy areas.

The People's Improv Theatre (PIT) near Madison Square Park has shows nightly for fairly inexpensive.

If you're looking to do the famous sites: (Statue of Liberty/Empire State building/One WTC etc) the CityPass ticket book is a really good deal and it saves you quite a bit of money vs. buying tickets to each attraction separately. You have 9 days to use up your tickets.

Be aware when you get the tickets, you may still have to book the reservations with each attraction.

IMPORTANT:

BOTH THE MET AND THE MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY ARE DONATION BASED.

You can pay \$1 for your admission if you want! Even though the suggested donation for both is \$25- you can just pay what you desire.

If you do purchase a city pass, DO NOT use one of those as your attractions, since they're basically free to do. Use your pass for the other attractions and pay cash for these two places.

I would say if you do want to do touristy things with the CityPass I would just do your research and decide what you want to see and plan your days out so you can utilize your time wisely and make the most of your trip.

I've actually never been to Top of the Rock (Rockefeller Center) but I've heard that view is prettier than the Empire State building so I think that that would be the more preferable skyline view if you want to see over Central Park/the city.

Times Square is jam packed with fun popular places like Good Morning America check online to see if you can get tix, Madame Tussads, Ripleys Believe it or Not, Planet Hollywood, Bubba Gumps- Times Square at night is a spectacle and I highly suggest you check it out. All of the Broadway theaters are off of that area so it holds a special place in my heart.

There's so much to enjoy in NY.

A popular place for tourists is Ellen's Stardust Diner- it's a 1950's themed diner has singing waitstaff (Broadway hopefuls)- great if you have kids with you.

They have super voices. It's fun, but sometimes there is a line to get in.

If you're adventurous, don't be afraid to hop on the Train and head into Brooklyn!

The Bedford Ave Stop is only a one stop from Manhattan and is FULL of glorious little shops and cafes and is hipster heaven, but you absolutely go in deeper and find some great hidden gems.

Soho (South of Houston street) is full of great shopping (many famous shops too!), if that's your jam- check it out! Great beautiful sun lit cobble stonestreets very popular for IG photos.

Also, Little Italy/Chinatown are just south of Soho. Go get a cannoli and coffee or some bubble tea and dumplings. It's worth it for the cool photo ops. It's not particularly big, but it's full of culture and history.

Central Park is a must, I definitely suggest a walk through there on day 3 or 4 when you need a break from the concrete jungle. There are tons of great sites to see there, such as Strawberry Fields, The Alice in Wonderland Statue, the Belvedere Castle and several bridges.

The Highline is a very charming pedestrian walk that was once a railroad track that runs along the edge of Chelsea. It's completely free to access.

The Chelsea Market in Chelsea is an indoor food and shop market toward the end of the Highline.

Chelsea also has some fabulous and trendy dining spots.

Greenwich Village (as well as the west and east villages) is my favorite area in NY, full of flavor and rich history. There are multiple comedy clubs which headline some top name comics every night and they're usually very affordable. Check out MacDougal Street. Also some GREAT restaurants full of history and

vintage charm in that area (adjacent to Washington Square Park, which you should walk through if you go to that area also)

Rockefeller Center is a very pretty famous area. In the winter, there is a skating rink and huge Christmas tree, but year round you can visit 'Top of the Rock' for a popular view of Manhattan, plus there are some shops below. Additionally the new updated FAO Schwartz is located there.

There are lots of public walking tours about Manhattan, I suggest utilizing <http://YESToursnyc.com>. They offer customized private tours, so you don't have to walk with a bunch of strangers AND they charge by the hour, not by the person which is awesome for large families or schools. They also offer accommodations such as renting a van or an Uber to meet them. If you choose to patronize them, please let them know I sent you!

The Tenement Museum is really amazing! It's one of my favorite historical experiences here in NY. I highly recommend taking one or more of their tours. The building doesn't have air, so I recommend going in the spring or fall or being super prepared for the heat if you go in the summer. It's a really wonderful educational experience and perfect for kiddos.

Treats & Eats:

NY is a food Mecca.

I love it all and believe you should try as much as you can!

Oh and there is all the fun food in NY- Dö- cookie dough, Cronuts, rainbow bagels, Black Tap Shakes etc.

Here's a starter list:

https://www.buzzfeed.com/francineroettger/65-of-the-most-instagrammable-food-spots-in-nyc-307sw?utm_term=.dvm1yOex8#.riYMVBNqz

Levain Cookies are the best cookies in the actual world. You'll not regret finding a Levain bakery. Also Smackerys Cookies is a popular cookie shop by Broadway people in midtown.

If you need a quintessential NY Cheesecake slice, head to either of the Juniors restaurants near Times Square or Eileen's special Cheesecake in SoHo.

I highly suggest checking out a vintage NY Deli counter and or knish shop. They simply cannot be beat and are my favorite spots in the city.

Katz Deli is probably the most famous for pastrami, but if you're looking for an authentic lox and smear, you have to go to Russ and Daughters- they have a gorgeous charming walk in deli counter shop and a sit down location to have a meal.

I've heard Eisenberg's is fabulous and also the Lexington Candy Shop (a diner).

For Knish- YONAH SCHIMMEL KNISH BAKERY

<https://theculturetrip.com/north-america/usa/new-york/articles/the-10-best-delicatessens-in-new-york-city/>

If you're a film buff, don't be afraid to google NY movie spots if finding some cool movie filming locations that appeal to you.

Frozen Hot Chocolate at Serendipity (from the Movie Serendipity) is so delish and the shop is adorable- down the street from there is Dylan's Candy bar which is featured on such shows at the UnBreakable Kimmy Schmidt.

Katz deli is one of my favorite spots in NY- it's where the famous scene from When Harry Met Sally was filmed. The pastrami sandwich is to die for and the restaurant screams old school vintage NY deli counter. (Just don't lose the meal ticket they give you or they'll charge you an exorbitant amount) <https://untappedcities.com/2016/09/30/10-of-the-most-iconic-film-scene-locations-in-nyc/>

The best Pizza I've ever had is at DiFara in Brooklyn. Every pizza is made by the owner and has been since 1964. It takes forever for a slice, so call ahead or be prepared to wait. It's worth it though. difarany.com

Little India (Curry Hill) is located on Lexington between 28-31. Tons of great Indian food and a very famous spice shop called Kalustyan's. I've also been to a cool tint BYOB India restaurant in the village called Pannall. The food is fine, but the instagram Christmas light laden interior are what make it amazing.

My very favorite Mexican restaurant is Rosa Mexicano- there are several locations in NYC. It's a touch on the higher end price point, but tends to be a nicer Mexican restaurant-feels a little tiny bit upscale. They make fresh tableside guacamole and have super drinks! <https://www.rosamexicano.com/>

I also like Tacombi- again, multiple locations but much more casual/street taco style. Here is another list with some options-

<https://www.google.com/amp/s/www.thrillist.com/amphtml/eat/new-york/best-mexican-in-nyc>

Lots of happy hour options all over the city, but one of my favorites is The Mermaid Inn. If you like seafood, this place has an awesome deals on oysters, fish street tacos, mini clam chowder, mini lobster rolls for around \$2-\$5 each. There are multiple locations in the city. So so delicious.

I love checking out restaurants and can make plenty of recommendations. There are too many to mention here and at varying price points. I know a lot of places, so feel free to ask for recommendations. I also know lots of dairy free/gluten free/vegan spots, if needed.

There are so many good ice cream shops in NY but if you can make it to an Ample Hills, Emack and Bolio, Big Gay Ice Cream, or Van Leeuwen (vegan ice cream options) you will not regret it. I've heard Oddfellows and , Morgensterns are also great.

I am familiar with lots of vegan/vegetarian/ paleo/gluten-free/dairy free restaurants in NY. If you needs recommendations, I'm happy to point you in the right direction.

Bus Tours:

I have never done a hop on, hop off bus tour in NYC- but that might a great option if you want some history and a chance to get around to some hot spots.

They have agents selling them all over the place in Times Square, and I've heard they're a good deal, especially when your feet are tired.

Someone also recommended doing a Hop on Hop off bus tour the first day so you can get your bearings and plan out your trip. I think that's a brilliant idea!

Beach:

Coney Island (Board walk and amusement park) can be easily accessed by the subway. Also a great break from the city. Nathan's Famous Hot Dogs is open year around.

Far Rockaway/Jacob Riis (Boardwalk on weekends) is also accessible via the subway. It's a fun day trip if you want to see the ocean.

You can also head out to Long Island via the LIRR, but that's a fairly hefty trip on a vacation.

If you use Groupon or Living Social- those can be great resources for affordable fun events in the city, as well as pampering deals if you want to splurge on a mani/pedi/facial etc.

Hope that helps!

If you have anything you specifically want to enjoy, ask away. I could probably offer a suggestion or point you in the direction.

For kids:

I'm a nanny and this is what I typically suggest to visitors with kiddos:

If the weather is nice:

- SeaGlass carousel at Battery Park or Jane's Carousel at Brooklyn Bridge Park
- Central Park zoo- small and very manageable (feat. In the movie Madagascar!)
- Bronx Zoo- Largest Zoo nearby. A full day adventure.

Indoor:

- Children's Museum of Arts is supposed to be great, but I haven't been. <http://cmany.org>
- Children's Museum on the UWS is a blast but some rotating exhibits err on the younger side so definitely see if what they offer are age appropriate
<http://cmom.org>
- NY Transit Museum in Brooklyn is small but fun for kids and adults. The subway cars through the decades are really very cool.

In the winter and for special occasions, they run some of the older cars in the city.

- Museum of Natural History is interesting for a lot my nanny kiddos. It's donation based admission and I think great for kids. (The one from the film 'Night at the Museum')
- This is fairly new but seems like a very cool interactive experience <https://mommypoppins.com/new-york-city-kids/indoor-activities/national-geographic-encounter-ocean-odyssey-times-square>
- The Tenement Museum is really not to be missed. I just have to mention it again. An awesome historical experience for elementary age children and adults.

If they like shows, Broadway shows such as Aladdin and Lion King are great ☐ ☐

Food for kids:

* Haven't been, but this seems like a cool only in NY experience where you make ice cream:

<http://www.coolmess.com/>

- Dylan's Candy Bar (Go to E60th and 3rd location) Giant Candy store featured in films and TV around the corner from there is

- Serendipity 3

(from the movie Serendipity)

Very small but cute restaurant.

Perfect for a special night out.

- Ellen's Stardust Diner (near Times Square around 50th) is a diner with singing waitstaff (warning, the actual diner food is nothing to scream about, but the dessert is standard shakes and whatnot.) People go for the singing and merriment.

There is often a line, so prepare accordingly.

- Sugar Factory- the smaller locations are candy stores, but the UWS location is a huge restaurant with candy focused menu items. Great location for celebrating birthdays for the under 21 crowd.

sugarfactory.com

Shops for Kids:

- The LEGO Store is small, but fun if they're into those

- The American Girl Store often does events, such as a tea etc.

- M&M world and Hershey world in Times Square are fun!

- The Disney Store in Times Square

- Newly renovated FAO Schwartz near Rockefeller

Holiday Themed Fun for the family:

- The Rockettes may be performing at Radio City in late Nov- early Jan- and the show is SO magical.

Highly suggest it.

- The Nutcracker at the Lincoln Center is supposed to be gorgeous if you're into dance

- Santa will be at Macy's after the Thanksgiving parade. You may need online reservations to see Santa and access may be limited the day of the parade

- There are lots of beautiful window displays on 5th Ave, Madison etc. I HIGHLY recommend seeing the windows at Bergdorfs and the light show at Saks + the Rockefeller tree etc.

Details here:

<https://www.google.com/amp/s/ny.curbed.com/platform/amp/maps/christmas-new-york-holiday-windows-macys-bloomingdales>

- Ice Skating is available at Rockefeller Center, Central Park and Bryant Park.

Also giant Tree at Rockefeller Center and the display at Saks 5th Ave is worth checking out.

- There is a cute winter village with shopping and treats at Bryant Park (near Times Square) and also a large one at Union Square. Lots of very cute gifts/wintertime treats.

- Rolf's German Christmas restaurant near Gramercy Park is truly gorgeous, but probably needs advanced reservations as it gets very busy in the winter.

- Serendipity 3

(from the movie Serendipity)

They have frozen Hot Chocolate and this place is DECKED out around the holidays. Very small but cute restaurant.

BROADWAY:

If you have specific questions about any shows, I've seen a lot of them or could likely give you some insight about them.

Sleep No More is a REALLY cool theatre experience I have to highlight, because it's not super known: Sleep No More is an immersive theatre show that takes place in a warehouse in Chelsea. They turned it into a 1940's Alfred Hitchcock- esque 6 floor hotel.

You choose your own adventure and follow different actors around it. It's very cool.

Anyway, they have 4 functioning bars inside it, including a stunning rooftop bar with a vintage train car on it.

If you have young guests, it may not be suitable. The age restriction details are on their site.

About tickets:

☐ I would say these are your best options for discounted Broadway Show tickets:

1. TodayTix- the #1 discount Broadway show app where you can book tickets up to a month in advance. It used to only be a week out, by now it's a month.

I use this the most. It's super reliable and there is not a ton of work required as far as running around the city. You buy the tickets through the app and pick them up from a concierge in a Today Tix jacket in front of the theatre around 30 mins before the show.

I HIGHLY SUGGEST USING THE TODAY TIX APP. Overall, it's what I use and it's very user friendly.

2. Rushing a show- get to the theatre when it opens (or well before for really popular shows) and they set aside a handful of discounted tickets.

Get to the theatre around 10am for the box office opening or much earlier for popular shows.

** There are some rush tickets available on the TodayTix App, which you unlock by sharing on social media. They go fast, so be sure to log on the app at 10am sharp.

3. Lotteries-Several shows have lotteries you can enter. Some you have to put your name in an hour and a half before the show other ones you can do online- some you can even submit for multiple days.

My favorite site for learning about the lotteries is www.broadwayforbrokepeople.com

(THIS SITE IS GOLD, despite the silly name)

Lotteries are awesome because they're often front row or second row seats or at least Orchestra seats for \$30-\$50 (usually selling for \$200-1000 depending on the show).

Often you need cash and an ID, so read the fine print.

Also, depending on the show/company... there is an option occasionally to submit a single online lottery entry for several shows/days, which creates much less work for you. I did this with Kinky Boots and after 3 days of not winning, I suddenly won and I even was given 24 hours notice so I could find a friend to go with.

With these lotteries, as well as rushing there is occasionally the option to do standing room only which allows you to see shows for super cheap if you're willing to stand. I don't suggest this for all people, but I've done it and it's not bad for fast paced shows.

** There are some Lotteries tickets available on the TodayTix App, which you unlock by sharing on social media.

4. TKTS booth- there are a couple a discount booths located throughout NYC- the most popular being under the red steps in Times Square. Prior to the TodayTix App this was the most popular way to get 1/2 price show tickets the day of performances. I haven't used it since I moved here, but it's really popular. They give you the 'best seats available' so they maybe 1/2 price a really pricey seat, thus still expensive (50% off a \$300 seat is still \$150, which may be out of your price range etc) They also have an app, but I haven't used it.

5. Groupon lately has had some good deals on shows! Unlike today tix, they don't charge an additional fee and sometimes you can purchase tickets for a show that night! You just pick your seats pay for your tickets through the app and they give you your tickets at the box office.

6. The most popular and direct way is just check their website or swing by the box office of any Broadway theatres after 10am (sometimes later on Sundays)- most Broadway shows use Telecharge.com. I often just purchase cheap seats and am very satisfied with them. Broadway Theatres are old and small, so there is rarely a bad seat in the house.

That is also the way to go about it if you're comfortable splurging and selecting your seats at the theatre.

If seeing that show is a bucket list item, purchase it upfront this way.

7. You can also look on stubhub for people selling tickets up to an hour before the show at severely discounted prices. I guess there is a place to pick them up in midtown- I've not done this yet.

Don't buy any discount Broadway tickets from scalpers on the street in Times Square.

The Statue of Liberty is a really great experience (and I encourage you to go if you're passionate about it) but it is long, I won't sugar coat it. You have to show up at the ferry and take it to liberty Island and go through a lot of security.

Also, I had the experience that I got in line at the statue to go to Ellis Island mid afternoon but by the time we got to the front of the line to board the ferry (about 4pm) the Ferry took us back to Manhattan, not to Ellis Island.

If you really are passionate about EI, go to Liberty Island early!

BEST KEPT SECRET IN NYC:

If you're not super invested into being close to Lady liberty, but still want to see her a bit closer... You can actually go down and take the Staten Island ferry for free!

It goes from the area a little south of where you would get on for the Statue of Liberty, the south most tip of Battery Park and takes you across the Hudson to Staten Island and then you hop off and walk through the terminal at hop back on and go back to Manhattan and it's a really beautiful view and 100% free... And you can see the Statue of Liberty from it. Great for those on a budget.

An additional option is researching some of the sailboat and ferry cruises that go around the harbor. There are a variety of options (check Groupon) if you want to take a two hour cruise on a boat and enjoy the water and a drink that's a good option.

There are a lot of tourist traps in time square so I would just be aware of those. The only thing that I really heard is worth it is the city pass deal and the hop on/hop off bus tours.

Overall, I recommend planning a couple solid things (like shows at night or 1-2 tourist attractions during the day) and then go with the flow.

Have a flexible itinerary.

Remember it takes a while to get around here and also you'll be doing a lot more walking than usual (most likely).

Whew!

I hope that helps you out!

I gladly accept additional financial contributions if you found this helpful or if this was sent to you for free and you'd like to contribute to the author:

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