

Only in New York

By Jet Salalima

Welcome to New York City! This is the only city brazen enough to claim capital of the world. As the old adage goes, this city is so great you have to say it twice. New York, New York has never been subtle and humble. It can look fierce, inhuman and hard, intimidating in its enormity and complexity. At first glance, it can be overwhelming. Either you'll be enthralled by the tempo, glamour and sheer excitement of it all or you'll be shocked by the noise, the smog and the callousness that's an everyday occurrence on city streets.

New York has that special charisma. The city attracts the intelligent, the creative, the determined, and the overbearing from all over the world. Just about any language is spoken here. No other city is ethnically, culturally and socially more diverse. Whatever food you crave for, you will find it here from Malaysia's *roti telur* to Russia's *blintzes*. Throughout the years, the city has formed pockets of communities following their ethnicity. Aside from being the melting pot of all cuisines, New York is the nerve center of world finance and trade and the creative core for the arts. This is the international hub of advertising, publishing, entertainment and fashion. Lastly, New York is a magnet for travelers from all over the country (33 million) and around the globe (another 9 million).

The good news is that New York is in top form and has never been better. The economy is up and crime is at its lowest. Everywhere you look, everything is being refurbished from roads to buildings to street signs. The best showcase is the new Time Square. Ten years ago, the area was riddled with peep show establishments and infested with drug dealers and prostitutes. Today, the sleazy joints are gone and replaced with Disney shops, Toys R' Us and Virgin Record Stores. Roaming around Times Square are parents with their children trying to catch matinee showings of *The Lion King*.

For visitors, New York is overwhelming for the senses. There is so much to see, so many neighborhoods to experience and too many restaurants and cuisines to try out. Face it, it will be impossible to see the city in a few days. New York is unfathomably big and constantly changing. Even residents still make startling discoveries everyday. The best way is to take it apart and decide which ones are more important to visit. Don't try to take everything in. You just can't. Relax and try not to be intimidated by the city. Don't try to tame it. Instead, let the city take you on its own ride. As you go around the city, or better yet, pick a neighborhood and stroll in it. Take the time to admire the details. Appreciate the architecture or check out the smaller shops. Rest and enjoy a cup of coffee from a sidewalk café or a nearby bench and just idle a few minutes to watch New Yorkers go about their everyday lives.

Whether staying in New York for a few days or a week, it is best to get oriented first. Thanks to the Randall Plan, New York City from 14th Street and up has been designed as a grid. It is easy to determine what direction you are heading. The lower the street

number means you heading downtown or South. Avenues cross the streets perpendicularly from East to West. Familiarize yourself with a subway map and get a Fun Pass Metrocard (\$7.00 for one day unlimited ride in subways and buses).

Midtown

The area from 34th Street to 59th Street is called Midtown



Manhattan. This area alone is host to many New York City landmarks. Start off by going straight up to the top for classic views of the city. Following 09/11, the **Empire State Building** (350 Fifth Avenue and 34th Street, 212.736.3100) claimed back its old title of the tallest skyscraper in New York. The observation decks on the 86th Floor and 102nd Floor are open till midnight, last ticket sold at 11:25 pm (\$11.00 for adults). One of the world's most famous landmarks, the building measures more than 1450 feet tall with 102 floors was completed ahead of schedule in 1931.



Back on the ground, head down the street to 32nd Street and Sixth Avenue and you'll find yourself in the heart of **Koreatown**. Though definitely smaller in area than Chinatown, you can find authentic bulgogi in the numerous Korean restaurants in the vicinity.

Another building worth visiting is the Art Deco jewel, **Chrysler Building** (405 Lexington Avenue and 42nd Street, 212.682.3070). Designed by William Van Alen and completed in 1930, the building features eagle gargoyles and gilded spires on its crown. It held the title of tallest building for a few months before the Empire State Building claimed in 1931.

Right next door is the Beaux Arts beauty commonly known as the **Grand Central Terminal**. Though primarily a train station, the interior of Grand Central is the main attraction. Designed by architect Whitney Warren in 1913, the train station was nearly demolished had it not been for Jacqueline Kennedy who fought to have the building declared a landmark in the mid 1960's.



The station suffered major neglect in the 1970's and 1980's. A massive four year renovation has just been completed and the results came out nothing short of amazing. The vast vaulted ceiling which was once covered in dust, grime and soot, revealed an evening sky with gilded stars and constellations. Complimenting all the renovations are the new shops and restaurants on the main floor and basement levels.

About 8 blocks north is the **Cathedral of St. Patrick's** (460 Madison Avenue and 50th Street, 212.753.2261). This is the largest Catholic cathedral in the United States and is the seat of the Archdiocese of New York presided by Timothy Cardinal Dolan.



Designed by James Renwick in 1858, it was consecrated in 1878 and completed finally in 1906. This Gothic marvel is made from white marble and stone, imposing and impressive on the outside just as it is inside. For devout Catholics, no visit to New York is complete without attending mass at the Cathedral.

Across the street from the Cathedral is **Rockefeller Center** (30 Rockefeller Plaza, 212.632.3975). It is basically an active office complex with famous tenants. The site was originally occupied by Columbia University until they transferred in the 1880's to their actual site uptown. Construction of the building complex started in the 1930's. The biggest draw during winter time is the skating rink and the huge Christmas tree that attracts tourists by the busloads.



The Center is also home to **NBC Studios** for over 75 years now. Some of the network's shows on television are taped and transmitted straight from this location. Studio 8H is where Saturday Night Live tapes their shows every week. The street side studio of the Today Show is a huge draw for tourists every morning. There are guided tours (\$17.50 for adults) every 15 minutes which includes stops at the famed studios and mock up of a producer's control bay.

Further west of the Rockefeller Center is **Times Square**. The area from 42nd Street to 50th Street with Broadway and Seventh Avenue running through it symbolizes the Big Apple. Here is where you will find bright lights and twinkling theater marquees, brilliant billboards and neon signs and flickering jumbotrons of NBC and ABC. In the early 1990's Broadway theaters survived side by side with pornographic peep show establishments. During the mid 1990's when Rudy Gulliani took over as Mayor, he raised funds, private and public to clean up the area. Historic theaters were restored, restaurants and shops followed and peep shows were driven out of the area.



Today, aside from all the restored Broadway theaters, MTV and ABC set up their studios in Times Square. Big corporations followed suit with Reuters and Price Waterhouse building their corporate towers in the vicinity.

Downtown

The Downtown area comprises that muddled part below 14th Street. Still reeling from the after effects of the terrorist attacks, the Downtown area is still trying to lure big businesses back. It has been a slow process. Most of the buildings damaged have been repaired. West Side Highway (the downtown section) has been reopened with the waterfront area fronting the Hudson River refurbished with bicycle lanes and parks. **Ground Zero** (Church Street between Vesey and Liberty Streets- take the N or R Trains to Cortland Street Station) can be viewed from the Church Street side of the site.



The viewing platform has been removed and visitors can now see the site at eye level. Restrictions have been removed and site is open 24 hours. The walls surrounding the area

feature panels depicting the history of the World Trade Center, the tragic events during the 9/11 attacks, the heroic acts during recovery of survivors and workers.

Walking Eastward on Fulton Street is the **South Street Seaport** (take the 2 or 3 Train to Fulton Street Station). This is a landmark district on the East River covering 11 square blocks of historic buildings, a maritime museum, several piers, numerous shops and restaurants. The 18th and 19th century buildings lining the cobbled stone streets have been intricately restored. It is a little strange that the new tenants are J. Crew, The Gap, Abercrombie & Fitch and Brookstone. The historic barge (renamed as Pier 17) has been converted into a mall complete with a food court and several upscale shops. Rampant commercialism aside, Pier 17 also has merits. The third floor deck overlooking the East River offers panoramic views of the Brooklyn Bridge and Brooklyn Heights on the other side of the river.

Just across the street from Pier 17 is **Fulton Fish Market**, the nation's largest wholesale fish market. The market opens at 4:00 am when all the catch from all over the world is being sold and traded the old fashioned way. Chefs, as well as different wholesalers converge every morning to buy the freshest fish and other seafood.

At the southern tip of Manhattan is **Battery Park**. This park is an expanse of green and resting entirely on landfill. This is also where the ferries to the **Statue of Liberty** and **Ellis Island** are located. Ferries leave daily every half hour to 45 minutes from 9:30



am to 3:15 pm, with more frequent trips in the mornings and extended hours in the summer. A stop on Ellis Island is included in the fare (\$10.00 per adult). The ferry deposits you on Liberty Island. Remember that the crown remains closed due to security reasons. You are free to roam around the island and admire the statue from below. Lady Liberty measures 152 feet from foot to flame and weighs 225 tons. For millions of immigrants in the last century, she will always be the symbol of America waiting with her torch held high ready to welcome the new arrivals. The restored Ellis Island nearby opened in 1990. Roughly 40% of Americans can trace their heritage to someone who passed through the gates of Ellis Island. From 1892 to 1954, this island was America's main entry point for immigrants. During that period, Ellis Island processed some 12 million immigrants. Today you enter the Main Building's baggage room just as the immigrants did and climb the stairs to the Registry Room with its dramatic vaulted tiled ceiling, where millions waited anxiously for medical and legal processing. Aside from

the Registry Room, do not miss the “Treasures from Home” 1000 objects and photos donated by descendants of immigrants, including family heirlooms, rare jewelry and religious articles.

Other Areas

There are numerous areas that are worth visiting while you are in New York. Limits on space can only accommodate a fraction of the sights available. Remember that walking is the best way to check out the different pockets of neighborhoods. Do not fail to check out the following (also located downtown) Wall Street and the New York Stock Exchange, Chinatown (please see inset article for more details), Little Italy and City Hall. Greenwich Village, Soho and Tribeca are districts worth visiting in the downtown area.

Further uptown, the **Upper West Side** is a typical yuppie neighborhood with restored brownstone buildings. Restaurants and bars line the main avenues. **Harlem**, on 125th Street, just like Times Square, has been gentrified. No longer is it the symbol poverty for African Americans. Today, the main thoroughfare has Old Navy, Disney Store, and other prominent retailers.

On the other side of the Manhattan, the **Upper East Side** remain to be the bastion of the old rich with their palatial homes lining up Park Avenue and Fifth Avenue. Museum Mile on Fifth Avenue is home to at least eight major museums including the **Guggenheim** and the **Metropolitan Museum of Art**.



New York, New York! Indeed an overwhelming sight to behold. Relax, take it apart and see it one day at time. Be prepared to be exasperated, delighted and utterly charmed by the Big Apple.