

New York City is one of the most fascinating cities in the world. Love it or hate it, it can't be denied that this city has everything anyone could ever ask for— a glorious harbour, spacious parks and greenery, 24-hour food and activities, towering skyscrapers offering stunning views, plentiful entertainment—and the list doesn't end there.

However, because there is so much to do, it can be hard to figure out how to make the most of your time and finances. There are several things I've discovered over a few trips to New York, which would have been helpful to know before I set foot in such a large and diverse city.

To help you plan your trip, I've put together some tips on what I wish I had known about New York's unique hidden and not-so-hidden gems before I visited.

New York is one of the world's biggest cities, so a visit requires planning.

1. Coffee

Many people know that New York is crawling with coffee shops. But if you consider yourself something of a coffee connoisseur, you might be looking for somewhere offering more than just the average cup of joe. Funnily enough, *Joe* is one of the finest coffee spots scattered around New York that offers unique blends and flavours. *Stumptown Coffee* also comes highly recommended by coffee lovers but has just two locations. *Joe* is more accessible, offering 15 stores in Manhattan and 2 in Brooklyn. They're scattered fairly regularly throughout the city, ensuring there is usually one nearby.

There is even a store in Grand Central Terminal, making it an easy stop on the way to wherever you are headed. While *Stumptown Coffee* is less accessible, it is definitely worth the trip. One café is located in the Ace Hotel New York right near the famous Flat Iron District, and the other is near Greenwich Village situated at 30 W 8th Street.

Check out [Joe New York's website](#) and [Stumptown's website](#) for a map of their respective locations and more information on opening hours.

A good coffee spot is a must when in NYC.

2. The High Line

Starting on Gansevoort Street in the Meatpacking District, the High Line is a linear park built on New York's historic, elevated railroad. At first, I thought it was merely one of the ways to easily get from A to B in the city, all while taking in some great views. Therefore, I didn't allow much time in my schedule for just enjoying the experience.

While it does serve the purpose of a convenient walkway, it is also one of the city's public parks. Apart from getting stunning views of the city, you will also encounter beautiful flowers and plants growing through the old railway lines, as well as market and food stalls situated in various spots along the way. Be prepared to take your time, just wander and explore some of the other activities it has to offer. In total, the High Line stretches for 1.45 miles or 2.33 km, ending at West 34th Street between 10th and 12th avenues. There are many different entrances and exits along the way, so you don't have to worry about entering at one spot and having to continue the entire length of the park.

Like most public parks, it doesn’t cost anything but it does close at night. It is best to check out the closing times online [here](#) because even though it always opens at 7 am, the closing times differ depending on the season.

The High Line is a lesser-known public park to consider. Image by: Exploration Hawaii

3. The Statue of Liberty

Planning a visit to the Statue of Liberty usually conjures up images of crowds of people, long lines, intense security checks and of course spending quite a bit of money. In my experience, these images are completely accurate. If you are interested in getting up close and personal with Lady Liberty you can visit Liberty Island, with the option of also visiting Ellis Island along the way.

You can then choose whether you want to visit the base of the statue, known as the pedestal, or walk up 162 narrow steps to the crown. There are certain items such as backpacks, laptops and tripods which you can’t take through, so lockers are available for hire at an extra cost. However, if you don’t have a lot of time or aren’t dying to get that close to the Statue of Liberty, the Staten Island Ferry is an easy alternative. It runs 24 hours a day, seven days a week and is completely free. You get to head out onto New York Harbor, taking in sweeping views of the city, while sailing past the Statue of Liberty.

The trip only takes about 25 minutes each way and runs regularly throughout the day. If you are solely heading out on the ferry to go past the statue and not wanting to stay in Staten Island, it is good to know that you can’t stay on for the round trip. You can travel back immediately, you just have to disembark and get right back on again. Make sure you check out their [website](#) for up-to-date schedules.

The ferry takes you onto the New York Harbor, so you can see the Statue of Liberty.

4. Broadway show

If you don’t spend at least one night on Broadway, you haven’t really experienced New York. Some tickets are very expensive, but if you don’t have a specific show in mind there are cheap tickets available for various productions.

The Theatre Development Fund is a not-for-profit organisation that runs TKTS Discount Booths. These booths offer same-day heavily discounted tickets to various Broadway and Off-Broadway shows. They are usually fairly busy, so it is a good idea to get there as early as you can to avoid long lines.

Even if you do have to wait a while, it is worth getting 20-50% off regular ticket prices. The most popular TKTS booth is in Times Square, but there are also three other outlets throughout the city. Visit [here](#) for more information and to check out specific times and locations.

You can get affordable tickets for shows at the TKTS booths.

5. Breakfast at Tiffany's

If you're heading to Central Park and the Upper East Side from Manhattan's Theatre District, strolling along Fifth Avenue is the way to go. While it boasts high-end brands such as Henri Bendel, Louis Vuitton, Armani and the famous Plaza Hotel, favourites such as Zara, H&M, Forever 21 and MAC can also be found along this famous shopping strip.

None of these stores, however, can compare with Tiffany & Co., New York's finest jeweller. Founded in 1837, Fifth Avenue's Tiffany & Co. is the company's flagship store and was featured in Audrey Hepburn's classic film *Breakfast at Tiffany's*. Up until recently, if you wanted to actually have breakfast at Tiffany's, it would have looked like chewing on a cream cheese bagel from the street while staring at the window displays.

Now, however, Tiffany & Co. on Fifth Avenue has just opened up their very own café called *The Blue Box Café*. Because it is still fairly new and very popular, you must have a reservation to visit. Reservations can be made online through the events section [here](#). Don't get in too early though—you can only book 30 days in advance. Also, it is good to be aware that the menu is constantly changing, depending on the season. The café is open from 10 am to 5:30 pm Monday to Saturday and 12 pm – 4:30 pm on Sundays.



A stroll down Fifth Avenue isn't to be missed.

6. Central Park

Lose yourself in the beauty of this 843-acre park, right in the heart of Manhattan. One minute you'll be looking up at skyscrapers towering above the trees. The next, as you venture deeper into the serenity of the park you'll be wondering if the surrounding city has ceased to exist. There are so many beautiful places to visit in Central Park. These include Bethesda Terrace and Fountain, The Loeb Boathouse, Belvedere Castle and the Central Park Zoo. Even if you haven't been to New York before, these locations might start to seem a little familiar. Central Park is one of the most popular filming locations in the world for movies and TV shows. You might remember the beautiful Loeb Boathouse restaurant from romantic comedies like *27 Dresses* or *When Harry Met Sally* or the Belvedere Castle in *The Smurfs* movie as Gargamel's secret headquarters. The Bethesda Fountain is the location of a large musical number in Disney's *Enchanted*, which boasts filming locations throughout much of the city.

Other movies which offer glimpses of Central Park include *Home Alone 2: Lost in New York*, *Spiderman 3*, *Elf* and *The Avengers*. There are a few tour companies that provide an official movie tour through the park if you want to know more. Otherwise, entering from either the West 59th Street end or the West 110th Street and wandering through to the end will help you cover most of these iconic locations.



You might spot some familiar locations when visiting Central Park.

7. One World Trade Centre

The Empire State Building and Rockefeller Centre both offer amazing views of the city buildings. However, the new One World Trade Centre at Ground Zero offers beautiful views from a different angle of the city. Gaze down at the touching September 11 memorial fountains, or across the city skyline to the Empire State and Chrysler Buildings. Below the tower, you can also admire the new World Trade Centre subway station. However, as with most of the towers offering viewing platforms in NYC, the line for tickets is usually quite long and almost put me off. Thankfully a worker came past, encouraging people to buy tickets online so we could go straight through instead of waiting. As a tourist, I was thankful there was free wifi available so I could immediately make my purchase. I was then able to go straight through and up to the viewing platform, all in under 30 minutes. When you are there, just head [here](#) on your smartphone or device, and choose the next available time to purchase your ticket and avoid any long queues.



The One World Trade Centre at Ground Zero is not to be missed.

8. Times Square

Although it’s crowded with tourists, cabs, and buskers – this feast for the eyes has to be visited at least once. Stand on the red steps under the Coca-Cola billboard and marvel at the abundance of bright, flashing advertisements.

You can expect to fight your way through the crowds, get your portrait sketched on the street, have a photo with Elmo, a cowboy or a Disney character, and just bask in the chaos that is Times Square. However, also be prepared to possibly run into a celebrity. Times Square is another popular filming location in New York, making it a hive for both fans and celebs. Times Square also plays host to countless musical performances by musicians such as Rihanna, Taylor Swift and Katy Perry.

The popular restaurants Planet Hollywood and Hard Rock Café are also in Times Square and are regularly visited by celebrities. Not to mention the Broadway stars who usually delight their fans by taking selfies and signing autographs outside the theatre after a show. Check out the website [here](#) for any upcoming events and see if any of your favourite stars might be in town when you are there.



You might be lucky enough to spot a celebrity in Times Square.

9. Dumbo, Brooklyn

One of New York’s most ‘Instagrammable’ spots is in Dumbo, Brooklyn. I had seen these beautiful pictures of the Empire State building peeking through the Manhattan Bridge all over social media, but I never quite knew exactly how to get to the picturesque location. A big clue is actually in the name itself, as DUMBO stands for Down Under the Manhattan Bridge Overpass.

With a bit of research, I was finally able to make my way to Dumbo to find this hidden gem. The location you want to get to is the intersection of Water Street and Washington Street in

Dumbo, Brooklyn. The nearest subway station is York Street on the F, Orange line. You can easily get there from the Rockefeller Centre Station if you are coming from Manhattan. From there it is just a short walk down to the famous photo spot. You can also continue walking through the charming cobbled streets of Dumbo to the water's edge. There you can gaze up, not only at the Manhattan skyline but at both the Brooklyn and Manhattan bridges.



You may have spotted this picturesque location on social media.

10. Comedy show

Comedy shows are a New York staple. There are so many comedy clubs scattered around the Times Square area, and countless people selling tickets on the street. It can be hard to decide who to see, especially when being pressured on the street to purchase discount tickets.

If seeing a good comedy show is something you're interested in, I recommend doing research beforehand. I ended up in an underground comedy club on the spur of the moment, spending money on a show I didn't really enjoy.

Gotham Comedy Club is one of the best clubs in the city. It's got a good mix of both well-known and up-and-coming comedians. Jerry Seinfeld and Dave Chappelle are just a couple of the regular A-list celebrities you can spot there.

The *Upright Citizens Brigade Theatre* (known as *UCB Theatre*) is another great comedy club. It offers a range of stand-up, improv and sketches. Kate McKinnon (*SNL*), Ben Schwartz (*Parks & Recreation*), Ellie Kemper (*The Office*, *Unbreakable Kimmy Schmidt*), Ed Helms (*The Office*), Aziz Ansari (*Parks & Recreation*) and Amy Poehler (*Parks & Recreation*) are some of the most famous comedians who began at *UCB Theatre*.

Amy Poehler was actually one of the co-founders of the theatre. Aside from offering great quality comedy, it also serves as a training ground for performers and comedians. You can visit this [website](#) for the latest schedules and locations.



There are quite a few comedy clubs near Times Square. Image by: Curbed NY

Enjoy your trip to the Big Apple!

Hopefully, some of these tips will make your trip to New York City a pleasant and stress-free experience. No matter where you are travelling, there are always new things to discover and experiences to learn from.

It never hurts to connect with other travellers, share knowledge and do your research in order to get the most out of your experience. Happy travelling!

What hidden spot did you discover in NYC? Let us know in the comments.