

Planning Your Trip to New York City

In the pages that follow, you'll find everything you need to know to handle the practical details of planning your trip in advance: airlines and area airports, a calendar of events, resources for those of you with special needs, and much more.

Note that there's no need to rent a car. Driving is a nightmare and parking is ridiculously expensive (or near to impossible in some neighborhoods). It's much easier to get around using public transportation, taxis, and your own two feet. If you're going to visit Aunt Erma on Long Island or you have some other need to travel beyond the five boroughs, call one of the major car-rental companies, such as **National** (☎ 800/227-7368; www.nationalcar.com), **Hertz** (☎ 800/654-3131; www.hertz.com), or **Avis** (☎ 800/230-4898; www.avis.com), all of which have airport and Manhattan locations.

1 Visitor Information

For information before you leave home, your best source (besides this book!) is **NYC & Company**, the organization that fronts the New York Convention & Visitors Bureau (NYCVB), 810 Seventh Ave., New York, NY 10019. You can call ☎ 800/NYC-VISIT to order the **Official NYC Visitor Kit**, which contains the *Official NYC Guide* detailing hotels, restaurants, theaters, attractions, events, and more; a foldout map; a newsletter on the latest goings-on; and brochures on attractions and services. It costs \$5.95 to receive the packet (payable by credit card) in 7 to 10 days, \$9.95 for rush delivery (3–4 business days) to U.S. addresses and for international orders. (**Note:** I've received complaints that the packets sometimes take longer to arrive.)

You can also find a wealth of free information on the bureau's website, www.nycvisit.com. To speak with a live person who can answer specific questions, call ☎ 212/484-1222, staffed weekdays from 8:30am to 6pm EST, weekends from 9am to 5pm EST.

For visitor-center and information-desk locations once you arrive, see “Visitor Information” in chapter 2.

FOR U.K. VISITORS The **NYCVB Visitor Information Center** is at 36 Southwark Bridge Rd., London, SE1 9EU (☎ **020/7202 6367**). You can order the Official NYC Visitor Kit by sending an A5-size self-addressed envelope and 72p postage to the above address. For New York-bound travelers in London, the center also offers free one-on-one travel-planning assistance.

2 When to Go

Summer or winter, rain or shine, there’s always great stuff going on in New York City, so there’s no real “best” time to go.

Culture hounds might come in fall, winter, and early spring, when the theater and performing-arts seasons reach their heights. During summer, many cultural institutions, especially Lincoln Center, offer free, alfresco entertainment. Those who want to see the biggest Broadway hits usually have the best luck getting tickets in the slower months of January and February.

Gourmands might find it easiest to land the best tables during July and August, when New Yorkers escape the city on weekends. If you prefer to walk every city block to take in the sights, spring and fall usually offer the mildest and most pleasant weather.

New York is a nonstop holiday party from early December through the start of the New Year. However, keep in mind that hotel prices go sky high, and the crowds are almost intolerable. If you’d rather have more of the city to yourself—better chances at restaurant reservations and shows, easier access to museums and other attractions—choose another time of year to visit.

Bargain hunters might want to visit in winter, between the first of the year and early April. Sure, you might have to bear some cold weather, but that’s when hotels are suffering from the post-holiday blues, and rooms often go for a relative song—a song in this case meaning a room with a private bathroom for as little as \$150. AAA cardholders could even do better in many cases (generally a 5%–10% savings if the hotel offers a AAA discount). However, be aware that the occasional convention or event, such as February’s annual Fashion Week, can sometimes throw a wrench in your winter savings plans. Spring and fall are traditionally the busiest and most expensive seasons after holiday time. Don’t expect hotels to be handing you deals, but you may be able to negotiate a decent rate.

The city is drawing more families, and they usually visit in the summer. Still, the prospect of heat and humidity keeps some away, making July and the first half of August a significantly cheaper time to visit than later in the year; good hotel deals are often available.

At Christmas, expect to pay top dollar for everything. The first 2 weeks of December—the shopping weeks—are the absolute worst when it comes to scoring an affordable hotel room; that's when shoppers from around the world converge on the town to catch the holiday spirit and spend, spend, spend. But Thanksgiving can be a great time to come: Business travelers have gone home for the holiday, and the holiday shoppers haven't arrived. It's a little-known secret that most hotels away from the Thanksgiving Day Parade route have empty rooms, and are usually willing to make deals to fill them.

If you want to know how to pack just before you go, check the Weather Channel's online 10-day forecast at www.weather.com; I like to balance it against CNN's online 5-day forecast at www.cnn.com/weather. You can also get the local weather by calling ☎ 212/976-1212.

New York's Average Temperature & Rainfall

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	June	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec
Daily Temp. (°F)	38	40	48	61	71	80	85	84	77	67	54	42
Daily Temp. (°C)	3	4	9	16	22	27	29	29	25	19	12	6
Days of Precipitation	11	10	11	11	11	10	11	10	8	8	9	10

NEW YORK CITY CALENDAR OF EVENTS

The following information is always subject to change. Always confirm information before you make plans around a specific event. Call the venue or the NYCVB at ☎ 212/484-1222, go to www.nycvisit.com, or pick up a copy of *Time Out New York* once you arrive in the city for the latest details.

January

Restaurant Week. Twice a year some of the best restaurants in New York offer three-course prix-fixe meals at almost affordable prices. At lunch, the deal is \$24.07 (as in 24/7), while dinner is \$35. Some of the participating restaurants in 2006 included stalwarts such as Lupa, Molyvos, and Aquavit. Call ☎ 212/484-1222 for info or visit www.nycvisit.com. Late January.

February

Chinese New Year. Chinatown rings in its own New Year (based on a lunar calendar) with 2 weeks of celebrations, including parades with dragon and lion dancers, plus vivid costumes of all kinds. The parade usually winds throughout Chinatown along

Mott, Canal, and Bayard streets, and along East Broadway. Call the NYCVB hot line at ☎ **212/484-1222** or the Asian American Business Development Center at ☎ **212/966-0100**. Chinese New Year falls on February 18 in 2007, and it's the Year of the Pig.

Westminster Kennel Club Dog Show. The ultimate purebred-pooch fest. Some 30,000 dog fanciers congregate at **Madison Square Garden** for the 130th "World Series of Dogdom." All 2,500 dogs are American Kennel Club Champions of Record, competing for the Best in Show trophy. Check the website www.westminsterkennelclub.org for information. Tickets are available after January 1 through **Ticketmaster** (☎ **212/307-7171**; www.ticketmaster.com). February 12 and 13, 2007.

March

St. Patrick's Day Parade. More than 150,000 marchers join in the world's largest civilian parade, as Fifth Avenue from 44th to 86th streets rings with the sounds of bands and bagpipes. The parade usually starts at 11am, but go extra early if you want a good spot. Call ☎ **212/484-1222**. March 17.

April

New York International Auto Show. Here's the irony: You don't need a car in New York, yet this is the largest car show in the United States. Held at the Javits Center, many concept cars show up that will never roll off the assembly line but are fun to dream about nonetheless. Call ☎ **718/746-5300** or visit www.autoshowny.com or www.javitscenter.com. Early April.

Easter Parade. This isn't a traditional parade: There are no marching bands, no baton twirlers, no protesters. Once upon a time, New York's gentry came out to show off their tasteful but discreet toppings. Today, if you were planning to slip on a tasteful little number, you will *not* be the grandest lady in this springtime hike along Fifth Avenue from 48th to 57th streets. It's more about flamboyant exhibitionism, with hats and costumes that get more outrageous every year—and anybody can join right in for free. The parade generally runs Easter Sunday from about 10am to 3 or 4pm. Call ☎ **212/484-1222**. April 8, 2007.

May

Fleet Week. About 10,000 Navy and Coast Guard personnel are "at liberty" in New York for the annual Fleet Week at the end of May. Usually from 1 to 4pm daily, you can watch the ships and aircraft carriers as they dock at the piers on the west side of Manhattan, tour them with on-duty personnel, and watch some dramatic exhibitions by the U.S. Marines. Even if you don't take in

any of the events, you'll know it's Fleet Week because those 10,000 sailors invade Midtown in their starched white uniforms. It's wonderful—just like *On the Town* come to life. Call ☎ **212/245-0072** or visit www.fleetweek.com (your best source for a full list of events) or www.intrepidmuseum.org. Late May.

June

Museum Mile Festival. Fifth Avenue from 82nd to 104th streets is closed to cars from 6 to 9pm as 20,000-plus strollers enjoy live music, from Broadway tunes to string quartets; street entertainers; and free admission to nine Museum Mile institutions, including the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the Guggenheim. Call ☎ **212/606-2296** or any of the participating institutions for details. Usually the second Tuesday in June.

Parades Around Town. During the summer there is a parade for almost every nationality or ethnicity. June is the month for (among others) the sometimes raucous but usually very colorful **Puerto Rican Day Parade** and the **Lesbian and Gay Pride Week and March**, where Fifth Avenue goes wild as the gay/lesbian community celebrates with bands, marching groups, floats, and plenty of panache. The parade starts on upper Fifth Avenue around 52nd Street and continues into the Village, where a street festival and a waterfront dance party with fireworks cap the day. Call ☎ **212/807-7433** or check www.hopinc.org. Mid- to late June.

Shakespeare in the Park. The Delacorte Theater in **Central Park** is the setting for first-rate free performances under the stars—including at least one Shakespeare production each season. For details, see “Park It! Shakespeare, Music & Other Free Fun,” in chapter 10. Call ☎ **212/539-8500** or visit www.publictheater.org. June through August.

Restaurant Week. Late June (see description in “January,” above).

July

Independence Day Harbor Festival and Fourth of July Fireworks Spectacular. Start the day amid the patriotic crowds at the Great July Fourth Festival in lower Manhattan, and then catch Macy's great fireworks extravaganza (one of the country's most fantastic) over the East River (the best vantage point is from FDR Dr., which closes to traffic several hours before sunset). Call ☎ **212/484-1222** or Macy's Visitor Center at 212/494-2922. July 4th.

Lincoln Center Festival 2007. This festival celebrates the best of the performing arts from all over the world— theater, ballet, dance, opera, nouveau circus performances, even puppet and media-based art. Recent editions have featured performances by Ornette

Coleman, the Royal Opera, the Royal Ballet, and the New York Philharmonic. Schedules are usually available in mid-March, and tickets go on sale in late May or early June. Call ☎ **212/546-2656** or visit www.lincolncenter.org. Throughout July.

Midsummer Night's Swing. Dancing duos head to the **Lincoln Center's Josie Robertson Plaza** for evenings of big-band swing, salsa, and tango dancing under the stars to the sounds of live bands. Dance lessons are offered with purchase of a ticket. Call ☎ **212/875-5766** or visit www.lincolncenter.org. July and August.

August

Lincoln Center Out of Doors. This series of free music and dance performances is held outdoors on the plazas of **Lincoln Center**. Call ☎ **212/LIN-COLN** or 212/546-2656 or visit www.lincolncenter.org for this year's schedule (usually available in mid-July). Throughout August.

Harlem Week. The world's largest black and Hispanic cultural festival spans the whole month to include the Black Film Festival, the Harlem Jazz and Music Festival, and the Taste of Harlem Food Festival. Expect a full slate of music, from gospel to hip-hop, and other festivities. Call ☎ **212/484-1222**. Through August.

U.S. Open Tennis Championships. The final Grand Slam event of the tennis season is held at the Arthur Ashe Stadium at the USTA National Tennis Center, the largest public tennis center in the world, at **Flushing Meadows Park** in Queens. Tickets go on sale in May or early June. Call ☎ **866/OPEN-TIX** or 718/760-6200 well in advance; visit www.usopen.org or www.usta.com for additional information. Two weeks around Labor Day.

September

West Indian–American Day Parade. This annual Brooklyn event is New York's largest and best street celebration. Come for the costumes, pulsating rhythms (soca, calypso, reggae), bright colors, folklore, food (jerk chicken, oxtail soup, Caribbean soul food), and two million hip-shaking revelers. The route can change from year to year, but it usually runs along Eastern Parkway from Utica Avenue to Grand Army Plaza (at the gateway to Prospect Park). Call ☎ **718/467-1797**; www.wiadca.org. Labor Day.

New York Film Festival. Legendary hits *Pulp Fiction* and *Mean Streets* had their U.S. premieres at the Film Society of Lincoln Center's 2-week festival, a major stop on the film-fest circuit. Screenings are held in Lincoln Center venues; advance tickets are a good bet always, and a necessity for certain events (especially evening and weekend screenings). Call ☎ **212/875-5166** (for

recorded information), 212/875-5050 for the box office, or check out www.filmlinc.com. Late September to early October.

October

Ice-Skating. Show off your skating style in the limelight at the diminutive **Rockefeller Center** rink (☎ 212/332-7654; www.rockefellercenter.com), open from mid-October to mid-March or early April (you'll skate under the Christmas tree for the month of Dec). In Central Park, try **Wollman Rink** on the east side of the park between 62nd and 63rd streets (☎ 212/439-6900; www.wollmanskatingrink.com), and **Lasker Rink**, midpark between 106th and 108th streets (☎ 917/492-3857). Both Central Park skating rinks usually close in early April.

Greenwich Village Halloween Parade. This is Halloween at its most outrageous. Call the *Village Voice* Parade hot line at ☎ 212/475-3333, ext. 14044, visit www.halloween-nyc.com, or check the papers for the route so you can watch—or participate, if you have the threads and the imagination. October 31.

November

New York City Marathon. Some 30,000 hopefuls from around the world participate in the largest U.S. marathon, and more than a million fans will cheer them on as they follow a route that touches on all five New York boroughs and finishes at Central Park. Call ☎ 212/423-2249 or 212/860-4455, or visit www.nyrrc.org, where you can find applications to run. First Sunday in November. November 5, 2007.

Radio City Music Hall Christmas Spectacular. A rather gaudy extravaganza, but lots of fun nonetheless. Starring the Radio City Rockettes and a cast that includes live animals (just try to picture the camels sauntering into the Sixth Ave. entrance!). For information, call ☎ 212/247-4777 or visit www.radiocity.com; buy tickets at the box office or via Ticketmaster's **Radio City Hot Line** (☎ 212/307-1000), or visit www.ticketmaster.com. Throughout November and December.

Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade. The procession from Central Park West and 77th Street and down Broadway to Herald Square at 34th Street continues to be a national tradition. Huge hot-air balloons in the forms of Snoopy, Bart Simpson, and other favorites are the best part of the fun. The night before, you can usually see the big blow-up on Central Park West at 79th Street; call to see if it will be open to the public again this year. Call

☎ **212/484-1222** or Macy's Visitor Center at 212/494-2922. November 23, 2007.

Lighting of the Rockefeller Center Christmas Tree. The ceremony is accompanied by ice-skating, singing, entertainment, and a huge crowd. The tree stays lit 24/7 until after the New Year. Call ☎ **212/332-6868** or visit www.rockefellercenter.com for this year's date. Late November or early December.

December

Holiday Trimmings. Stroll down Fifth Avenue and you'll see a 27-foot sparkling snowflake floating over the intersection outside **Tiffany's**, the **Cartier** building ribboned and bowed in red, wreaths warming the necks of the **New York Public Library's** lions, and fanciful figurines in the windows of **Saks Fifth Avenue** and **Lord & Taylor**. Madison Avenue between 55th and 60th streets is also a good bet; **Sony Plaza** usually displays something fabulous, as does **Barney's New York**. Throughout December.

Christmas Traditions. In addition to the **Radio City Music Hall Christmas Spectacular** and the New York City Ballet's *Nutcracker Ballet*, holiday events include *A Christmas Carol* at **The Theater at Madison Square Garden** (☎ **212/465-6741** or www.thegarden.com, or ☎ **212/307-7171** or www.ticketmaster.com for tickets), usually featuring a big name or two. At **Avery Fisher Hall** is the National Chorale's sing-along performances of Handel's *Messiah* (☎ **212/875-5030**; www.lincolncenter.org) for a week before Christmas. Don't worry if the only words you know are "Alleluia, Alleluia!"—a lyrics sheet is given to ticket holders. Throughout December.

Lighting of the Hanukkah Menorah. Everything is done on a grand scale in New York, so it's no surprise that the world's largest menorah (32 ft. high) is at Manhattan's **Grand Army Plaza**, Fifth Avenue and 59th Street. Hanukkah celebrations begin at sunset, with the lighting of the first of the giant electric candles. December 5, 2007.

New Year's Eve. The biggest party of them all happens in **Times Square**, where hundreds of thousands of raucous revelers count down in unison the year's final seconds until the new lighted ball drops at midnight at 1 Times Sq. Call ☎ **212/768-1560** or 212/484-1222 or visit www.timessquarenyc.org. December 31.

Brooklyn's fireworks celebration. Head to Brooklyn for the city's largest New Year's Eve **fireworks** celebration at Prospect Park. Call ☎ **718/965-8999** or visit www.prospectpark.org. December 31.

3 Tips for Travelers with Special Needs

FOR FAMILIES

Good bets for the most timely information include the “Weekend” section of Friday’s *New York Times*, which has a whole section dedicated to the week’s best kid-friendly activities; the weekly *New York* magazine, which has a full calendar of children’s events in its listings section; and *Time Out New York*, which also has a great weekly kids section with a bit of an alternative bent. The *Big Apple Parents’ Paper* is usually available, for free, at children’s stores and other locations in Manhattan; you can also find good information from the folks behind the paper at www.parentsknow.com.

The first place to look for **babysitting** is in your hotel (better yet, ask about babysitting when you reserve). Many hotels have babysitting services or will provide you with lists of reliable sitters. If this doesn’t pan out, call the **Baby Sitters’ Guild** (☎ 212/682-0227; www.babysittersguild.com). The sitters are licensed, insured, and bonded, and can even take your child on outings.

TRAVELERS WITH DISABILITIES

New York is more accessible to travelers with disabilities than ever before. The city’s bus system is wheelchair friendly, and most of the major attractions are easily accessible. Even so, **always call first** to be sure that the places you want to go to are fully accessible.

Hospital Audiences, Inc. (☎ 212/575-7676; www.hospitalaudiences.org) arranges attendance and provides details about accessibility at cultural institutions as well as cultural events adapted for people with disabilities. Services include “Describe!” which allows visually impaired theatergoers to enjoy theater events; and **HAI Hot Line** (☎ 212/575-7676), which offers accessibility information for hotels, restaurants, attractions, cultural venues, and more. They also publish *Access for All*, a guidebook on accessibility, available free on the website, www.hospitalaudiences.org.

Another terrific source for travelers with disabilities who are coming to New York City is **Big Apple Greeter** (☎ 212/669-8159; www.bigapplegreeter.org). All of its employees are extremely well versed in accessibility issues. They can provide a resource list of city agencies that serve those with disabilities, and sometimes have special discounts available to theater and music performances. Big Apple Greeter even offers one-to-one tours that pair volunteers with visitors with disabilities; they can even introduce you to the public transportation system if you like. Reserve at least 1 week ahead.

FOR SENIOR TRAVELERS

New York subway and bus fares are half-price (\$1) for people 65 and older. Many museums and sights (and some theaters and performance halls) offer discounted admittance and tickets to seniors, so don't be shy about asking. Always bring an ID card, especially if you've kept (or paid for) your youthful glow.

Many hotels offer senior discounts; **Choice Hotels** (which include Comfort Inns, some of my favorite affordable Midtown hotels; see chapter 3, "Where to Stay"). For a complete list of Choice Hotels, visit **www.hotelchoice.com**.

Members of **AARP** (formerly the American Association of Retired Persons), 601 E St. NW, Washington, DC 20049 (☎ **888/687-2277**; www.aarp.org), get discounts on hotels, airfares, and car rentals. AARP offers members a range of benefits, including *AARP: The Magazine* and a newsletter. Anyone over 50 can join.

Many reliable agencies and organizations target the 50-plus market. **Elderhostel** (☎ **877/426-8056**; www.elderhostel.org) arranges study programs for those age 55 or over. They regularly offer programs in New York City.

FOR GAY & LESBIAN TRAVELERS

The International Gay and Lesbian Travel Association (IGLTA), ☎ **800/448-8550** or 954/776-2626; www.iglta.org) is the trade association for the gay and lesbian travel industry and offers an online directory of gay- and lesbian-friendly travel businesses; go to their website and click on "Members."

Many agencies offer tours and travel itineraries for GLBT travelers. Among them are **Above and Beyond Tours** (☎ **800/397-2681**; www.abovebeyondtours.com); **Now, Voyager** (☎ **800/255-6951**; www.nowvoyager.com); and **Olivia Cruises & Resorts** (☎ **800/631-6277**; www.olivia.com).

All over Manhattan, but especially in neighborhoods like the **West Village** (particularly Christopher St.) and **Chelsea** (especially Eighth Ave. from 16th to 23rd sts., and W. 17th to 19th sts. from Fifth to Eighth aves.), shops, services, and restaurants have a lesbian and gay flavor. The **Oscar Wilde Bookshop**, 15 Christopher St. (☎ **212/255-8097**; www.oscarwildebooks.com), is the city's best gay and lesbian bookstore and a good source for information on the GLBT community.

The **Lesbian and Gay Community Services Center** is at 208 W. 13th St., between Seventh and Eighth avenues (☎ **212/620-7310**; www.gaycenter.org). The center is the meeting place for more than

400 lesbian, gay, and bisexual organizations. You can check the online events calendar, which lists hundreds of happenings—lectures, dances, concerts, readings, films—or call for the latest. Their site offers links to additional gay-friendly hotels and guesthouses in and around New York, plus tons of other information; the staff is also exceedingly friendly and helpful in person or over the phone.

4 Getting There

BY PLANE

Three major airports serve New York City: **John F. Kennedy International Airport** (☎ 718/244-4444) in Queens, about 15 miles (1 hr. driving time) from midtown Manhattan; **LaGuardia Airport** (☎ 718/533-3400), also in Queens, about 8 miles (30 min.) from Midtown; and **Newark Liberty International Airport** (☎ 973/961-6000) in nearby New Jersey, about 16 miles (45 min.) from Midtown. Information about all three airports is available online at www.panynj.gov; click on the “All Airports” tab on the left.

Even though LaGuardia is the closest airport to Manhattan, it has a hideous reputation for flight delays and terminal chaos, in both ticket-desk lines and baggage claim. Hopefully, airport officials will have rectified the problems by the time you fly, but you may want to use JFK or Newark instead. (JFK has the best reputation for timeliness among New York–area airports.)

Almost every major domestic carrier serves at least one of the New York–area airports; most serve two or all three. Among them are **America West** (☎ 800/327-7810; www.americawest.com), **American** (☎ 817/967-2000; www.aa.com), **Continental** (☎ 800/525-3273; www.continental.com), **Delta** (☎ 800/221-1212; www.delta.com), **Northwest** (☎ 800/225-2525; www.nwa.com), **US Airways** (☎ 800/428-4322; www.usairways.com), and **United** (☎ 800/864-8331; www.united.com).

In recent years, there has been rapid growth in the number of start-up, no-frills airlines serving New York. You can check out Atlanta-based **AirTran** (☎ 800/AIRTRAN; www.airtran.com), Indiana-based **ATA** (☎ 800/225-2995; www.ata.com), Denver-based **Frontier** (☎ 800/432-1359; www.flyfrontier.com), Milwaukee- and Omaha-based **Midwest Airlines** (☎ 800/452-2022; www.midwestairlines.com), or Detroit-based **Spirit Airlines** (☎ 800/772-7117; www.spiritair.com). The JFK-based airline **jetBlue** ✈ (☎ 800/JETBLUE; www.jetblue.com) has taken New York by storm with its low fares and classy service to cities throughout the

nation. The nation's leading discount airline, **Southwest** (☎ 800/435-9792; www.iflyswa.com), flies into MacArthur (Islip) Airport on Long Island, 50 miles east of Manhattan.

TRANSPORTATION TO & FROM THE NEW YORK AREA AIRPORTS

For transportation information for all three airports (JFK, LaGuardia, and Newark), call **Air-Ride** (☎ 800/247-7433), which offers 24-hour recorded details on bus and shuttle companies and car services registered with the New York and New Jersey Port Authority. Similar information is available at www.panynj.gov/airports; click on the airport at which you'll be arriving.

The Port Authority also runs staffed Ground Transportation Information counters on the baggage-claim level in each terminal at each airport, where you can get information and book all manner of transport once you land. Most transportation companies also have courtesy phones near the baggage-claim area.

Generally, travel time between the airports and midtown Manhattan by taxi or car is 45 to 60 minutes for JFK, 20 to 35 minutes for LaGuardia, and 35 to 50 minutes for Newark. Always allow extra time, though, especially during rush hour, peak holiday travel times, and if you're taking a bus.

TAXIS Taxis are still a quick and convenient way to travel to and from the airports. They're available at designated taxi stands outside the terminals, with uniformed dispatchers on hand during peak hours at JFK and LaGuardia, around the clock at Newark. Follow the **GROUND TRANSPORTATION** or **TAXI** signs. There may be a line, but it generally moves pretty quickly. Fares, whether fixed or metered, do not include bridge and tunnel tolls (\$3.50–\$4) or a tip for the cabbie (15%–20% is customary). They do include all passengers in the cab and luggage—never pay more than the metered or flat rate, except for tolls and a tip (8pm–6am a \$1 surcharge also applies on New York yellow cabs). Taxis have a limit of four passengers, so if there are more in your group, you'll have to take more than one cab.

- **From JFK:** A flat rate of \$45 to Manhattan (plus tolls and tip) is charged. The meter will not be turned on and the surcharge will not be added. The flat rate does not apply on trips from Manhattan to the airport.
- **From LaGuardia:** \$17 to \$27, metered, plus tolls and tip.

- **From Newark:** The dispatcher for New Jersey taxis gives you a slip of paper with a flat rate ranging from \$30 to \$38 (toll and tip extra), depending on where you're going, so you'll have to be precise about your destination. New York yellow cabs aren't permitted to pick up passengers at Newark. The yellow-cab fare from Manhattan to Newark is the meter amount plus \$15 and tolls (about \$45–\$55, a few dollars more with tip). New Jersey taxis can't take passengers from Manhattan to Newark.

PRIVATE CAR & LIMOUSINE SERVICES Private car and limousine companies provide 24-hour door-to-door airport transfers for roughly the same cost of a taxi. The advantage they offer over taking a taxi is that you can arrange your pickup in advance and avoid the hassles of the taxi line. Call *at least* 24 hours in advance (even earlier on holidays), and a driver will meet you near baggage claim (or at your hotel for a return trip). You'll probably be asked to leave a credit card number to guarantee your ride. You'll likely be offered the choice of indoor or curbside pickup; indoor pickup is more expensive but makes it easier to hook up with your driver (who usually waits in baggage claim bearing a sign with your name on it). You can save a few dollars if you arrange for an outside pickup; call the dispatcher as soon as you clear baggage claim and then take your luggage out to the designated waiting area, where you'll wait for the driver to come around, which can take anywhere from 10 minutes to a half-hour. Besides the wait, the other disadvantage of this option is that curbside can be chaos during prime deplaning hours.

Vehicles range from sedans to vans to limousines and tend to be clean and comfortable. Prices vary slightly by company and the size of car reserved, but expect a rate roughly equivalent to taxi fare if you request a basic sedan and have only one stop; toll and tip policies are the same. (**Note:** Car services are not subject to the flat-rate rule that taxis have for rides to and from JFK.) Ask when booking what the fare will be and if you can use your credit card to pay for the ride so there are no surprises at drop-off. There may be waiting charges tacked on if the driver has to wait an excessive amount of time for your plane to land when picking you up, but the car companies will usually check on your flight to get an accurate landing time.

I've had the best luck with **Carmel** (☎ 800/922-7635 or 212/666-6666) and **Legends** (☎ 888/LEGENDS or 888/534-3637; www.legendslimousine.com). (Keep in mind, though, that these services are only as good as the individual drivers—and sometimes

AirTrains: Newark & JFK—The Very Good & the Pretty Good

First the very good: A few years back, a new rail link revolutionized the process of connecting by public transportation to New York's notoriously underserved airport: the brand-new **AirTrain Newark**, which connects Newark Airport with Manhattan via a monorail/rail link.

Even though you have to make a connection, the system is fast, pleasant, affordable, and easy to use. Each arrivals terminal at Newark Airport has a station for the AirTrain, so just follow the signs once you collect your bags. All AirTrains head to **Newark International Airport Station**, where you transfer to a **NJ Transit** train. NJ Transit will deliver you to New York Penn Station at 33rd Street and Seventh Avenue, where you can pick up a cab to your hotel.

The trip from my apartment on Manhattan's Upper West Side to the Newark Alitalia terminal, for example, was under a half-hour and only cost me \$14 (\$12 for the AirTrain link via Penn Station plus \$2 for the subway to get to Penn Station). That's a savings of at least \$35 if I took a cab, not to mention the time I saved. NJ Transit trains run two to three times an hour during peak travel times (once an hour during early and late hours); you can check the schedules on monitors before you leave the terminal, and again at the train station. Tickets can be purchased from machines at both the air terminal and the train station (no ticket is required to board the AirTrain). The one-way fare is \$11 (children under 5 ride free). On your return trip to the airport, the AirTrain is far more predictable, time-wise, than subjecting yourself to the whims of traffic.

Note that travelers heading to points beyond the city can also pick up Amtrak and other NJ Transit trains at Newark International Airport Station to their final destinations.

there's a lemon in the bunch. If you have a problem, report it immediately to the main office.)

Car services are good for rush hour (no ticking meters in rush-hour traffic), but if you're arriving at a quieter time of day, taxis work fine.

Now the not-so-very good: A few years after opening in 2003, after years of anticipation and \$1.9 billion, AirTrain JFK is beginning to operate more efficiently. Though you can't beat the price—\$7 if you take a subway to the AirTrain, \$12 if you take the Long Island Rail Road—you won't save much on time getting to the airport. From midtown Manhattan, the ride can take from 40 minutes to an hour, depending on your connections. The ride takes approximately 90 minutes and the connections are murky. Only a few subway lines connect with the AirTrain: the A, E, J, and Z; the E, J, Z to Jamaica Station and the Sutphin Boulevard–Archer Avenue Station; and the A to Howard Beach/JFK Airport Station. The MTA is working to clear up the confusion, and contemplating adding connections to the AirTrain in lower Manhattan sometime in the next decade, there's not much they can do now to speed up the trip.

A word of warning for both AirTrains: If you have mobility issues, mountains of luggage, or a bevy of small children to keep track of, skip the AirTrain. You'll find it easier to rely on a taxi, car service, or shuttle service that can offer you door-to-door transfers.

For more info on AirTrain Newark, call ☎ **888/EWR-INFO** or visit www.airtrainnewark.com. For connection details, click on the links on the AirTrain website or contact **NJ Transit** (☎ **800/626-RIDE**; www.njtransit.com) or **Amtrak** (☎ **800/USA-RAIL**; www.amtrak.com).

For more information on AirTrain JFK, go online to www.airtrainjfk.com. For connection details, click on the links on the AirTrain website or the MTA site, www.mta.nyc.ny.us/mta/airtrain.htm

PRIVATE BUSES & SHUTTLES Buses and shuttle services provide a comfortable and less expensive (but usually more time-consuming) option for airport transfers than do taxis and car services.

Super Shuttle serves all three airports; **New York Airport Service** serves JFK and LaGuardia; **Olympia Trails and Express Shuttle USA** serves Newark. These services are my favorite option for

getting to and from Newark during peak travel times because the drivers usually take lesser-known surface streets that make the ride much quicker than if you go with a taxi or car, which will virtually always stick to the traffic-clogged main route.

The familiar blue vans of **Super Shuttle** (☎ 212/258-3826; www.supershuttle.com) serve all three area airports, providing door-to-door service to Manhattan and points on Long Island every 15 to 30 minutes around the clock. As with Express Shuttle, you don't need to reserve your airport-to-Manhattan ride; just go to the ground-transportation desk or use the courtesy phone in baggage claim and ask for Super Shuttle. Hotel pickups for your return trip require 24 to 48 hours' notice; you can make your reservations online. Fares run \$13 to \$22 per person, depending on the airport, with discounts available for additional persons in the same party.

New York Airport Service (☎ 718/875-8200; www.nyairportservice.com) buses travel from JFK and LaGuardia to the Port Authority Bus Terminal (42nd St. and Eighth Ave.), Grand Central Terminal (Park Ave. between 41st and 42nd sts.), and to some hotels between 27th and 59th streets, plus the Jamaica LIRR Station in Queens, where you can pick up a train for Long Island. Follow the GROUND TRANSPORTATION signs to the curbside pickup or look for the uniformed agent. Buses depart the airport every 20 to 70 minutes (depending on your departure point and destination) between 6am and midnight. Buses to JFK and LaGuardia depart the Port Authority and Grand Central on the Park Avenue side every 15 to 30 minutes, depending on the time of day and the day of the week. To request direct shuttle service from your hotel, call the above number at least 24 hours in advance. One-way fare for JFK is \$15, \$27 round-trip; to LaGuardia it's \$12 one-way and \$21 round-trip.

Olympia Airport Express (☎ 212/964-6233; www.olympiabus.com) provides service every 15 to 30 minutes (depending on the time of day) from Newark Airport to Penn Station (the pickup point is the northwest corner of 34th St. and Eighth Ave., and the drop-off point is the southwest corner), the Port Authority (on 42nd St. between Eighth and Ninth aves.), and Grand Central (on 41st St. between Park and Lexington aves.). Passengers to and from the Grand Central location can connect to Olympia's Midtown shuttle vans, which service some Midtown hotels. Call for the schedule for your return trip to the airport. The one-way fare is \$14, \$23 round-trip; seniors and passengers with disabilities ride for \$7 one way.

BY CAR

From the **New Jersey Turnpike** (I-95) and points west, there are three Hudson River crossings to the city's West Side: the **Holland Tunnel** (lower Manhattan), the **Lincoln Tunnel** (Midtown), and the **George Washington Bridge** (Upper Manhattan). From **upstate New York**, take the **New York State Thruway** (I-87), which crosses the Hudson River on the Tappan Zee Bridge and becomes the **Major Deegan Expressway** (I-87) through the Bronx. For the East Side, continue to the Triborough Bridge and then down the FDR Drive. For the West Side, take the Cross Bronx Expressway (I-95) to the Henry Hudson Parkway or the Taconic State Parkway to the Saw Mill River Parkway to the Henry Hudson Parkway south.

From **New England**, the **New England Thruway** (I-95) connects with the **Bruckner Expressway** (I-278), which leads to the Triborough Bridge and the FDR Drive on the East Side. For the West Side, take the Bruckner to the Cross Bronx Expressway (I-95) to the Henry Hudson Parkway south.

You'll pay tolls along some of these roads and at most crossings.

Once you arrive in Manhattan, park your car in a garage (expect to pay \$20–\$45 per day) and leave it there. Don't use your car for traveling within the city. Public transportation, taxis, and walking will easily get you where you want to go without the headaches of parking, gridlock, and dodging crazy cabbies.

BY TRAIN

Amtrak (☎ **800/USA-RAIL**; www.amtrak.com) runs frequent service to New York City's **Penn Station**, on Seventh Avenue between 31st and 33rd streets, where you can easily pick up a taxi, subway, or bus to your hotel. To get the best rates, book early (as much as 6 months in advance) and travel on weekends.

If you're traveling to New York from a city along Amtrak's Northeast Corridor—such as Boston, Philadelphia, Baltimore, or Washington, D.C.—Amtrak may be your best travel bet now that they've rolled out their new high-speed Acela trains. The Acela Express trains cut travel time from D.C. down to 2½ hours, and travel time from Boston to a lightning-quick 3 hours.

5 For International Travelers

VISAS

The U.S. State Department has a **Visa Waiver Program** allowing citizens of the following countries (at press time) to enter the United

States without a visa for stays of up to 90 days: Andorra, Australia, Austria, Belgium, Brunei, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Liechtenstein, Luxembourg, Monaco, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Portugal, San Marino, Singapore, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom. Citizens of these nations need only a valid passport and a round-trip air or cruise ticket upon arrival. If they first enter the United States, they may also visit Mexico, Canada, Bermuda, and/or the Caribbean islands and return to the United States without a visa. Further information is available from any U.S. embassy or consulate. Canadian citizens may enter the United States without visas; they need only proof of residence.

Citizens of all other countries must have (1) a valid passport that expires at least 6 months later than the scheduled end of their visit to the United States, and (2) a tourist visa, which may be obtained without charge from any U.S. consulate.

MEDICAL REQUIREMENTS

Unless you're arriving from an area known to be suffering from an epidemic (particularly cholera or yellow fever), inoculations or vaccinations are not required for entry into the United States.

If you have a medical condition that requires **syringe-administered medications**, carry a valid signed prescription from your physician—the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) no longer allows airline passengers to pack syringes in their carry-on baggage without documented proof of medical need. If you have a disease that requires treatment with **narcotics**, you should also carry documented proof with you—smuggling narcotics aboard a plane is a serious offense that carries severe penalties in the U.S.

For **HIV-positive visitors**, requirements for entering the United States are somewhat vague and change frequently. For up-to-the-minute information, contact **AIDSinfo** (☎ 800/448-0440 or 301/519-6616 outside the U.S.; www.aidsinfo.nih.gov) or the **Gay Men's Health Crisis** (☎ 212/367-1000; www.gmhc.org).

CUSTOMS

WHAT YOU CAN BRING INTO THE U.S.

Every visitor more than 21 years of age may bring in, free of duty, the following: (1) 1 liter of wine or hard liquor; (2) 200 cigarettes, 100 cigars (but not from Cuba), or 3 pounds of smoking tobacco; and (3) \$100 worth of gifts. These exemptions are offered to travelers who spend at least 72 hours in the United States and who have not claimed them in the preceding 6 months. It is forbidden to

bring foodstuffs (particularly fruit, cooked meats, and canned goods) and plants (vegetables, seeds, tropical plants). Foreign tourists may carry in or out up to \$10,000 in U.S. or foreign currency with no formalities; larger sums must be declared to U.S. Customs on entering or leaving. For details regarding U.S. Customs and Border Protection, consult your nearest U.S. embassy or consulate, or **U.S. Customs** (☎ 202/927-1770; www.customs.ustreas.gov).

WHAT YOU CAN TAKE HOME FROM THE U.S.

Canadian Citizens

For a clear summary of Canadian rules, write for the booklet *I Declare*, issued by the **Canada Border Services Agency** (☎ 800/461-9999 in Canada, or 204/983-3500; www.cbsa-asfc.gc.ca).

U.K. Citizens

For information, contact **HM Customs & Excise** at ☎ 0845/010-9000 (from outside the U.K., 020/8929-0152), or consult their website at www.hmce.gov.uk.

Australian Citizens

A helpful brochure available from Australian consulates or Customs offices is *Know Before You Go*. For more information, call the **Australian Customs Service** at ☎ 1300/363-263 or log on to www.customs.gov.au.

6 Money

You never have to carry too much cash in New York, and while the city's pretty safe, it's best not to overstuff your wallet (although always make sure you have at least \$20 in taxi fare on hand).

In most Manhattan neighborhoods, you can find a bank with **ATMs** (automated teller machines) every couple of blocks. The only places you may have some difficulty are in more far-flung neighborhoods, like the far East Village or far uptown in Harlem.

ATMs

The easiest and best way to get cash away from home is from an ATM, sometimes referred to as a "cash machine." The **Cirrus** (☎ 800/424-7787; www.mastercard.com) and **PLUS** (☎ 800/843-7587; www.visa.com) networks span the country. Look at the back of your bank card to see which network you're on, then call or check online for ATM locations. Be sure you know your personal identification number (PIN) and daily withdrawal limit. **Note:** Remember that many banks impose a fee every time you use a card at another bank's

ATM. In addition, the bank from which you withdraw cash may charge its own fee. To compare banks' ATM fees within the U.S., use www.bankrate.com. For international withdrawal fees, ask your bank.

CREDIT CARDS & DEBIT CARDS

Credit cards are the most widely used form of payment in the United States: **Visa** (Barclaycard in Britain), **MasterCard** (Eurocard in Europe, Access in Britain, Chargex in Canada), **American Express**, **Diners Club**, and **Discover**. They also provide a convenient record of all your expenses, and they generally offer relatively good exchange rates. You can withdraw cash advances from your credit cards at banks or ATMs, provided you know your PIN.

Visitors from outside the U.S. should inquire whether their bank assesses a 1% to 3% fee on charges incurred abroad.

It's highly recommended that you travel with at least one major credit card. You must have one to rent a car, and hotels and airlines usually require a credit card imprint as a deposit against expenses.

ATM cards with major credit-card backing, known as “**debit cards**,” are now a commonly acceptable form of payment in most stores and restaurants. Some stores enable you to receive “cash back” on your debit card purchases as well, allowing you to withdraw extra cash from your account when you make a purchase. The same is true at most U.S. post offices.

TRAVELER'S CHECKS

Traveler's checks are widely accepted in the U.S., but international visitors should make sure that they're denominated in U.S. dollars; foreign-currency checks are often difficult to exchange.

You can buy traveler's checks at most banks. Most are offered in denominations of \$20, \$50, \$100, \$500, and sometimes \$1,000. Generally, you'll pay a service charge ranging from 1% to 4%.

The most popular traveler's checks are offered by **American Express** (☎ 800/807-6233; ☎ 800/221-7282 for card holders—this number accepts collect calls, offers service in several foreign languages, and exempts Amex gold and platinum cardholders from the 1% fee.); **Visa** (☎ 800/732-1322)—AAA members can obtain Visa checks for a \$9.95 fee (for checks up to \$1,500) at most AAA offices or by calling ☎ 866/339-3378; and **MasterCard** (☎ 800/223-9920). If you choose to carry traveler's checks, keep a record of their serial numbers separate from your checks. If they are lost or stolen, you'll get a refund faster if you know the numbers.