

The Best of the Big Apple

“Of the city’s five boroughs, Manhattan, in particular, refuses to remain as it was. It is dynamic, not static. What seems permanent when you are twenty is too often a ghost when you are thirty,” Pete Hamill writes in his book *Downtown: My Manhattan*.

And the longer you live in this town, the more ghosts you will encounter. But New Yorkers adapt . . . sometimes painfully. Hamill explains: “The New York version of nostalgia is not simply about lost buildings or their presence in the youth of the individuals who lived with them. It involves an almost fatalistic acceptance of the permanent presence of loss. Nothing will ever stay the same. . . . Irreversible change happens so often in New York that the experience affects character itself. New York toughens its people against sentimentality by allowing the truer emotion of nostalgia. Sentimentality is always about a lie. Nostalgia is about real things gone.”

But though we might mourn loss, we also anticipate and expect change—it’s part of our way of life. We know that a restaurant, show, club, or store might be the hottest thing now, but a couple months later another has opened or been discovered and that once hot spot quickly becomes passé.

But some icons and institutions are so entrenched in our daily lives that we just could never accept their loss. What would we do without that reassuring sight of the Lady in the harbor or the gleaming spire of the Empire State Building? Or the perfect pizza? Or a Sunday in Central Park? Or the rumbling of the trains beneath the earth? Or the sounds of jazz from a Village club? So while New York is ever-changing, its core remains the same. And we wouldn’t have it any other way.

1 Most Unforgettable New York City Experiences

- **Sailing to the Statue of Liberty**, on Liberty Island in New York Harbor. If you have time to do only one thing on your visit to New York, sail to the Lady in the harbor. No other monument embodies the nation’s—and the world’s—notion of political freedom and economic potential more than Lady Liberty. It is also the ultimate symbol of New York, the personification of the city’s vast diversity and tolerance. See p. 241.
- **Visiting the Empire State Building Observatory at Dusk**: Like the Statue of Liberty, the Empire State Building, once again the tallest building in New York, is one of the city’s definitive icons. Arrive at dusk and watch the lights of the city come on. It’s pure magic. See p. 234.
- **Walking the Brooklyn Bridge**: Manhattan has five major bridges connecting the island to other shores, and easily the most historic and most fascinating is the Brooklyn Bridge. For a close-up look at what was a marvel of civic engineering when it was built in 1883, and a true New York experience, take the walk across the bridge from Manhattan to Brooklyn. See p. 232.

- **Taking the subway to Yankee Stadium for a Yankee game:** It doesn't sound very intriguing, does it? Good or bad, there's nothing like being crammed into a subway car packed with rabid Yankee fans. And it's an experience you'll not soon forget. See p. 243.
- **Jogging around the Central Park Reservoir:** Okay, you don't even have to jog it. You can walk the jogging path around the Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis Reservoir and take in the beauty of Central Park, the views of Central Park West, Fifth Avenue, and especially the skyline of midtown Manhattan. See p. 268.
- **Spending Sunday Morning in New York:** This might not sound so unforgettable, but to experience the city minus the noise and activity is something special. I've noticed quite a few tourists, usually jet-lagged Europeans, wandering the parks and streets early Sunday mornings.
- **Walking 125th Street:** Take a walk across this famous Harlem boulevard and your senses will be assaulted from the music, the variety of stores, the restaurants, the impromptu stalls selling everything from homemade CDs to fresh bean pies, and the street prophets and musicians. The energy on this street is relentless.

2 New York's Best Events & Seasons

- **Best Parade: West Indian–American Day Carnival and Parade.** Held on Eastern Parkway in Brooklyn, this is the biggest parade in New York. The music (calypso, soca, reggae, and Latin), the amazing costumes, and the incredible Caribbean food make this an unforgettable experience. If you're lucky enough to be in town on Labor Day, don't miss it. See p. 34.
- **Best Season in New York: Christmas.** Lighted Christmas trees on Park Avenue, the big snowflake on 57th and Fifth, the trees at Rockefeller Center and Lincoln Center, the Hanukkah menorah at Grand Army Plaza at Fifth and 59th Street, the decorations in department store windows, restaurants, and hotels. And even though the crowds, especially around Midtown and Rockefeller Center, might bring out the Scrooge in you, the atmosphere is almost always festive and like no other time of year.
- **Best Time of Year to Come to New York: Summer.** Most people prefer the temperate days of fall to visit New York, and that's when the city is most crowded. But my personal favorite season is summer, when the streets are empty, restaurants and shows are easier to get into, and free outdoor cultural events abound.
- **Best Day to Come to New York: New Year's Day.** The holidays are over. You've had enough festivity—see above. You've wisely skipped the insanity of New Year's Eve and arisen fresh and (relatively) sober. Get out on the town early; you'll have the city practically to yourself.

3 New York's Best Museums

- **Best Overall Museum: American Museum of Natural History.** You can spend your entire visit to New York at this 4-square-block museum; there is that much to see. From the famed dinosaur halls to the Hall of Ocean Life, the Museum of Natural History houses the world's greatest natural science collection. See p. 231.

- **Best Art Museum: Metropolitan Museum of Art.** Not only the best art museum in New York, but the best in North America as well. The number of masterworks housed here is mind-boggling. See p. 236.
- **Best-Looking Museum: Museum of Modern Art.** Though the sight of the Guggenheim is the most memorable, MoMA's \$450-million renovation

makes it the classiest- and coolest-looking museum, inside and out, in town. See p. 237.

- **Best Home Posing as a Museum: The Louis Armstrong House Museum.** This unassuming house in Queens was Satchmo's home for almost 30 years and it's been preserved almost exactly as it was when he died in 1971. See p. 295.

4 Best New York City Structures

- **Best Historic Building: Grand Central Terminal.** Despite all the modern steel-and-glass skyscrapers in New York, there are still many historic marvels standing, and the best of those is this Beaux Arts gem. This railroad station, built in 1913, was remarkably restored in the 1990s to recapture its initial brilliance. Even if you don't have to catch a train, make sure you visit. See p. 234.
- **Best Skyscraper: The Chrysler Building.** There is no observation

deck, but this Art Deco masterpiece is best viewed from outside or from other observation decks like the Empire State Building. See p. 257.

- **Most Impressive Place of Worship: Cathedral of St. John the Divine.** Construction began on the world's largest Gothic cathedral in 1892 and it's still going on. But this is one structure that benefits from being a work-in-progress.

5 Best Parks in New York City

- **Best Park: Central Park.** One of the world's greatest urban refuges—a center of calm and tranquillity amongst the noise and bustle that is Manhattan. See p. 265.
- **Runners-Up for Best Park: Riverside Park.** This 4-mile-long park

along the picturesque Hudson River is a welcome alternative to the sometimes-overcrowded Central Park. **Battery Park.** At the island's southern tip, walk the promenade and marvel at the busy harbor with Lady Liberty out there standing sentinel. See p. 271.

6 Best Places in New York to Take the Kids

- **Central Park.** With its lovely carousel, a zoo, two ice-skating rinks, and numerous playgrounds and ball fields, Central Park is a children's wonderland. See p. 265.
- **Bronx Zoo Wildlife Conservation Park.** This is one of the great zoos in the world—and you don't have to be a kid to love it. See p. 285.

- **U.S.S. *Intrepid* Sea-Air-Space Museum.** Climbing through a retired battleship beats the playground any day. With real planes on deck and interactive exhibits inside, kids are never bored here. Hurry, though: The *Intrepid* is heading into dry dock for renovation Oct. 1, 2006. See p. 247.

7 Best Places to Stroll in New York

- **The Upper West Side.** With museums, two great parks, some lovely old buildings and brownstones, inexpensive restaurants, and a residential feel, this is my favorite neighborhood to stroll.
- **Greenwich Village.** With its historic streets, hidden cafes, cozy restaurants, and eccentric characters, Greenwich

Village is a constant, but pleasant, barrage on the senses.

- **Chinatown.** With the constant din of activity and very crowded sidewalks, Chinatown might not seem like ideal strolling territory, but the neighborhood is so colorful, it's worth braving the mobs.

8 Best Things to Do for Free (or Almost) in New York

- **Ride the Staten Island Ferry.** The Staten Island Ferry is used daily by thousands of commuters. Ride with them for a great view of the Statue of Liberty, Ellis Island, New York Harbor, and the skyline of lower Manhattan. You really can't beat the price: It's free. See p. 240.
- **Attend a Gospel Service.** All around New York you'll find Sunday gospel services, but for some special soul-stirring, head to Harlem and the **Abyssinian Baptist Church** or Brooklyn and the **Brooklyn Tabernacle**. Services are free but when the basket is passed, don't be stingy. See p. 262 and 290.

- **Visit Free Museums.** Believe it or not, there are museums in New York that don't charge admission. Two of my favorites are the **National Museum of the American Indian** and the **Federal Hall National Memorial**. See p. 252 and 261.
- **Take in a Game at the West 4th Street Basketball Courts,** West 4th Street and Sixth Avenue. I don't know what's more entertaining here, the showtime moves on the court or the inventive, constant trash talk that accompanies the games.

9 Best Offbeat New York Experiences

- **Visit the Little Italy of the Bronx.** With the demise of Little Italy in Manhattan, the area centered around Arthur Avenue, known as the Little Italy of the Bronx, is the place to go for old-fashioned Italian charm, food, and ambience. Though it still qualifies as offbeat, word is out about Arthur Avenue. See p. 81.
- **Museum of Sex.** How many cities can claim their own Museum of Sex? Not too many! We got your Museum of Sex right here . . . but you must be 18 or older to enter. See p. 252.
- **Roosevelt Island Tram.** Impress your family and friends with a little-known but spectacular view of the

New York skyline by taking them for a ride on the Roosevelt Island Tram. During the 4-minute ride, you will be treated to a gorgeous view down the East River and the East Side skyline with views of the United Nations and the Queensboro, Williamsburg, Manhattan, and Brooklyn bridges. On a clear day you might even spot Lady Liberty. The Tram was shut down in the summer of 2006, but will be back in operation by the fall. See p. 240

- **Bike Along the Hudson River.** If walking is just not enough exercise for you, a good alternative is to rent a bike and ride the length of Manhattan

via the work-in-progress **Hudson River Park**. As of this writing, you can bike from Battery Park to Fort Tryon Park near the George Washington Bridge. There are detours along the way, which occasionally take you off the paths. For bike-rental info, see p. 269.

- **Ride the International Express.** The no. 7 train is sometimes known as the “International Express.” Take it out of Manhattan and through the borough of Queens and you will pass one ethnic neighborhood after another, from Indian to Thai, from Peruvian to Columbian, from Chinese to Korean.

10 Best Way to Spend a Day in a Borough Other Than Manhattan

- **In the Bronx:** Spend the morning at the **Bronx Zoo Wildlife Conservation Park** (p. 285) or the **New York Botanical Gardens** (p. 285) and then head to **Arthur Avenue**, the Little Italy of the Bronx (see “Best Offbeat New York Experiences,” above, and p. 285), for an authentic Italian feast.
- **In Brooklyn:** First, take a look at what’s on at the always exciting **Brooklyn Museum of Art** (p. 289), then get some fresh air with a stroll in nearby, lovely **Prospect Park** (p. 292).

Cap it off with a sandwich and a slice of cheesecake at **Junior’s** (p. 218) on Flatbush Avenue.

- **In Queens:** Take the 7 train, the **International Express** (see “Best Offbeat New York Experiences,” above), to the **Queens Museum of Art** (p. 297), on the grounds of the 1964 World’s Fair, or the **Louis Armstrong House Museum** (p. 295). On your way back, stop for a meal at any of the ethnic restaurants you will find within close proximity of the no. 7 train.

11 Best Splurge Hotels in Manhattan

- **Ritz-Carlton New York, Central Park**, 160 Central Park South (☎ 212/308-9100). The combination of a great location across from Central Park, large well-outfitted rooms, and excellent Ritz-Carlton service is as good as it gets. See p. 127.
- **The Mercer**, 147 Mercer St. (☎ 888/918-6060 or 212/966-6060). The best of the hip, downtown hotels, The Mercer is in the heart of SoHo. The high-ceilinged, loftlike rooms and suites, some with fireplaces and all with ceiling fans and luxurious bathrooms, are spectacular. See p. 117.
- **The Peninsula-New York**, 700 Fifth Ave. (☎ 800/262-9467 or 212/956-2888). The combination of old-world elegance and 21st-century technology is best realized in this practically perfect hotel. See p. 141.

- **St. Regis**, 2 E. 55th St. (☎ 212/753-4500). Across the street from The Peninsula, the St. Regis offers unrivaled luxury—Louis XVI furniture, crystal chandeliers, and silk wall coverings—and impeccable service, including personalized butler service. See p. 141.

- **Trump International Hotel & Tower**, 1 Central Park West (☎ 212/299-1000). Suites are huge and overlook Central Park. Service is so good they treat you like the Donald here. The great restaurant **Jean-Georges** offers room service, and guests have use of an excellent fitness club and pool. See p. 148.

- **The Carlyle: A Rosewood Hotel**, 35 E. 76th St. (☎ 800/227-5737 or 212/744-1600). You are in rarefied territory when you stay in The Carlyle. Service

is elegantly white-gloved and rooms are sumptuous. Many have incredible views of the city and Central Park. And don't forget **Café Carlyle** for cabaret and **Bemelmans Bar** for a cocktail. See p. 152.

- **The Lowell**, 28 E. 63rd St. (☎ 212/838-1400). Although smaller and more intimate than The Carlyle, The Lowell is just as elegant and romantic. Rooms are all unique; many have fireplaces while some have good-size terraces. See p. 153.

12 Best Moderately Priced Hotels in Manhattan

- **Casablanca Hotel**, 147 W. 43rd St. (☎ 888/922-7225). In the heart of the Theater District, the Casablanca not only offers meticulously clean, well-outfitted rooms at value rates, it also includes those little extras like complimentary breakfast, bottled water, free high-speed Internet, and a lovely roof deck perfect for a cocktail on a balmy evening. See p. 134.
- **Inn on 23rd Street**, 131 W. 23rd St. (☎ 877/387-2323 or 212/463-0330). You cannot do better than this charming inn for top-notch quality and extras. Rooms are rustic and uniquely designed but all have up-to-date

amenities. Breakfast is complimentary and served in a lovely library. See p. 122.

- **Sofitel New York**, 45 W. 44th St. (☎ 212/354-8844). This relatively new hotel exudes old-world (French) elegance. And you should be able to score some good weekend packages on the Internet. See p. 131.
- **Hotel Metro**, 45 W. 35th St. (☎ 800/356-3870 or 212/947-2500). You'll find very good deals and lots of extras at this conveniently located Midtown hotel that's popular with Europeans. See p. 135.

13 Best Hotels for Families

- **Hotel Beacon**, 2130 Broadway (☎ 800/572-4969 or 212/787-1100). Not only is this hotel a great deal—you can get good-size suites for much less than in Midtown—the Upper West Side, with its parks, the Museum of Natural History, and fun, inexpensive restaurants, is a great neighborhood for children. See p. 149.

- **Doubletree Guest Suites Times Square**, 1568 Broadway (☎ 800/222-TREE or 212/719-1600). This hotel boasts an entire floor of childproof suites, complete with living rooms for spreading out and kitchenettes for preparing light meals. Also just a block from kid-friendly chain restaurants and the Toys “R” Us superstore. See p. 129.

14 Best Incentives for Hotel-Hopping

- **Best Hotel Suite: Townhouse Suite in the Kitano New York**, 66 Park Ave. (☎ 212/885-7000). Each of the three one-bedroom suites built inside the landmark town house that is part of this hotel features a long hallway leading to a sunken living room with

original art, a state-of-the-art stereo system, and a tea maker with green tea. See p. 143.

- **Best Inexpensive Hotel Restaurant: Burger Joint in Le Parker Meridien**, 118 W. 57th St. (☎ 800/543-4300 or 212/245-5000). Discreetly hidden

off the lobby, this unnamed burger joint has been discovered by locals looking for cheap eats, so the lines are long, but worth it. The burgers are fabulous (see “Best Burger,” below) and under \$6. See p. 199.

- **Best Hotel Bar: Bemelmans Bar in The Carlyle**, 35 E. 76th St. (☎ 800/227-5737 or 212/744-1600). Named after book illustrator Ludwig Bemelmans, who created the *Madeline* books and painted the mural in the bar, this romantic and charming bar features white-gloved service and tremendous cocktails conceived by master mixologist Audrey Saunders. For more on Bemelmans, see p. 378.
- **Best Hotel for a Romantic Tryst: Hotel Elysée**, 60 E. 54th St. (☎ 800/535-9733 or 212/753-1066). This lovely old hotel, a favorite of mid-20th-century writers and actors, is

discreetly dwarfed between two mammoth office buildings and is the perfect romantic hideaway in the middle of Manhattan. See p. 143.

- **Best Hotel Renovation: Carlton Hotel**, 88 Madison Ave. (☎ 800/601-8500). This former flophouse has been restored to its 1904 Beaux Arts grandeur by architect David Rockwell. Its sweeping lobby with a two-story waterfall is a marvel. See p. 123.
- **Best Hotel Swim-Up Bar: Hotel QT**, 125 W. 45th St. (☎ 212/354-2323). New in 2005, this moderately priced addition to the Times Square hotel scene was a very welcome one. There is much to like about the Hotel QT, but I love the fact that it has a swimming pool—in the lobby—with a swim-up bar. You can’t ask for much more in the middle of Manhattan. See p. 135.

15 The Most Unforgettable Dining Experiences in New York

- **Chanterelle**, 2 Harrison St. (☎ 212/966-6960). You’ll be made to feel special here, from the impeccable, personalized service in a simple but lovely room to the exquisitely prepared food. Other restaurants try, but this is how it’s supposed to be done. See p. 161.
- **The River Café**, 1 Water St., Brooklyn (☎ 718/522-5200). At the foot of the Brooklyn Bridge in Brooklyn, there is no better dining view of Manhattan. Go at twilight as the lights of downtown begin to flicker on: It’s a magical experience. Though the food at restaurants with views is usually not very good, you won’t be disappointed

by the sophisticated fare here. See p. 218.

- **Aquavit**, 65 E. 55th St. (☎ 212/307-7311). Though its new digs are not nearly as charming as its former townhouse setting, the service and the food are as good as ever. See p. 197.
- **Big Wong King**, 67 Mott St. (☎ 212/964-0540). Come here for the quintessential Chinatown experience. You’ll share tables with Chinese families, order huge bowls of *congee* with fried crullers, plates of stir-fried vegetables, and heaping platters of roast pork and duck. I guarantee it will be an unforgettable dining experience. See p. 166.

16 Best New Restaurants

- **BLT Fish**, 21 W. 17th St. (☎ 212/691-8888). Chef Laurent Tourendel shows off his talent with fish. Downstairs is the “shack,” where you can chow on raw oysters, clams, a

remarkable lobster roll, while upstairs, in the more formal dining room, you can sample some of the freshest seafood in the city, prepared innovatively and flawlessly. See p. 185.

- **Mas**, 39 Downing St. (☎ 212/255-1790). This cozy, romantic West Village restaurant was created to replicate the feel and flavors of French farmhouse cooking. I can't say if it succeeded, since I am not familiar with French farmhouse cooking, but it has definitely created an inviting place to dine on all levels. See p. 178.
- **Maremma**, 228 W. 10th St. (☎ 212/645-0200). Chef Cesare Casella, formerly of Beppe, has put all his efforts into Maremma and his hard work has paid off. This quirky restaurant combines cowboy cuisine with Tuscan flavors. It sounds preposterous, but under Casella's direction, it works. See p. 180.

17 Best Bites for All Appetites

- **Best for Breakfast: Good Enough to Eat**, 483 Amsterdam Ave. (☎ 212/496-0163). They've been lining up on Amsterdam Avenue on weekend mornings for over 20 years to get a taste of chef/owner Carrie Levin's bountiful home-cooked breakfasts. But why wait on line? You're on vacation, go during the week. See p. 210.
- **Best for Brunch: Norma's**, at Le Parker Meridien hotel, 118 W. 57th St. (☎ 212/708-7460). Though I am not a devotee of brunch (see box "Breakfast, Not Brunch," on p. 211), I make an exception for Norma's. Traditional breakfast items are available, but skip them and go for creative interpretations like the asparagus-and-seared-rock-lobster omelet. See p. 192.
- **Best Dessert: Fiamma Osteria**, 206 Spring St. (☎ 212/653-0100). There are many impressive pastry chefs in town, but few of them can top the remarkable Elizabeth Katz. Everything on Fiamma's "Dolci" menu is outstanding, but her *torta* (dark chocolate praline cake layered with hazelnut brittle) and *gianduja gelato* (hazelnut-flavored chocolate gelato) are as close to perfection as you can get. See p. 171.
- **Best Jewish Deli: Katz's Delicatessen**, 205 E. Houston St. (☎ 212/254-2246). This is the choice among those who know their kreplach, knishes, and pastrami. No cutesy sandwiches named for celebrities here—just top-notch Jewish classics. See p. 170.
- **Best Burger: Burger Joint**, at Le Parker Meridien hotel, 118 W. 57th St. (☎ 212/708-7460). Who woulda thunk that a fancy hotel like Le Parker Meridien would be the home to a "joint" that serves great burgers at great prices? See p. 199.
- **Best Pizza: Patsy's Pizzeria**, 2287 First Ave. (☎ 212/534-9783). This great East Harlem pizzeria has been cranking out coal-oven pizza since 1932. You can also order by the slice here, but only do so if the pie is fresh out of the oven. See p. 195.
- **Best Seafood: Oceana**, 55 E. 54th St. (☎ 212/759-5941). You won't believe what chef Cornelius Gallagher can do with fish. His culinary creations look so good on the plate that they are worthy of museum status. What's really remarkable is that the food tastes as good as it looks. See p. 198.
- **Best Steak: Frankie & Johnnie's**, 32 W. 37th St. (☎ 212/997-8940) and 269 W. 45th St. (☎ 212/997-9494). Whether you choose the former speakeasy that is the original location in the Theater district or the newer branch located in the late actor John Barrymore's former town house, your steak, particularly the house sirloin, will remind you why Frankie & Johnnie's has been around since 1926. See p. 190.

- **Best Mutton Chop: Keens Steakhouse**, 72 W. 36th St. (☎ 212/947-3636). Of course, it might be the only restaurant in New York that offers a mutton chop, but that's not the only reason to head to Keens. The other "chops" are first-rate and the rooms—there are several—are like museum pieces without a museum's stuffiness. See p. 191.
- **Best for Families: Virgil's Real BBQ**, 152 W. 44th St. (☎ 212/921-9494). In kid-friendly Times Square, Virgil's, in a sense, is a theme restaurant, the theme being barbecue, but they do an excellent job of smoking their meats. It's loud, colorful, and has great options for children. See p. 192.
- **Best Cheap Meal: Gray's Papaya**, 2090 Broadway (☎ 212/799-0243). Though the \$2.45 "recession special"—two hot dogs and a fruit drink—is almost a \$1 increase from the previous recession, it's still a bargain. But is it any good? Witness the lines out the door every day for lunch. See p. 164.
- **Best Ice Cream: Brooklyn Ice Cream Factory**, Fulton Ferry Landing Pier, Brooklyn (☎ 718/246-3963). The perfect reward after a brisk walk across the Brooklyn Bridge. Rich homemade ice cream with a view of the Manhattan skyline, a tough combination to beat. See p. 218.
- **Best Bagel: Absolute Bagels**, 2788 Broadway (☎ 212/932-2052). They're not huge like some bagels these days, but they are always hot and cooked to perfection. See p. 188.
- **Best Soul Food: Charles' Southern Style Kitchen**, 2841 Eighth Ave. (☎ 877/813-2920 or 212/926-4313). Not only does this tiny Harlem restaurant serve the best soul food in the city, it offers the best buffet. For \$9.95 on weekdays and \$12 on weekends, the down-home offerings will tempt you to make any number of visits to the buffet line. See p. 216.
- **Best New/Old Dining Room: Country**, 90 Madison Ave. (☎ 212/889-7100). Designed by architect David Rockwell, the upstairs restaurant in the recently renovated Carlton Hotel is a marvel with restored mosaic tiles on the floor, dramatic chandeliers, nooks overlooking the hotel lobby, and most impressive a gorgeous Tiffany skylight dome that had been hidden for years and was uncovered during the renovation. See p. 198.

18 Best Shopping in New York

- **Best Store: Saks Fifth Avenue**. Not as overwhelming as other department stores, Saks is consistently good. And don't miss those window displays at Christmas. See p. 312.
- **Best Clothes Store: Barneys**. This store is the pinnacle, with prices to match. See p. 310.
- **Best Bookstore: Coliseum Books**. This book-lover's paradise is a mini-superstore (if there is such a thing) with the heart of an independent. See p. 315.
- **Best Music Store: Tower Records**. A huge selection and frequent sales make this my personal favorite. See p. 334.
- **Best Shopping Zone: Soho, NoHo, and NoLita**. All three neighborhoods are within easy walking distance of one another and feature the newest, trendiest boutiques. See p. 302.

19 Best Culture & Nightlife in New York

- **Best Performance Space: Carnegie Hall.** You can find few greater performance spaces in the world than this one. Visually and acoustically brilliant, Carnegie Hall regularly attracts an amazing array of talent. See p. 352.
- **Best Free Cultural Event: Shakespeare in the Park.** Imagine Shakespeare performed by stars, under the stars, in Central Park. No wonder it has become a New York institution. See p. 354.
- **Best Children's Theater: Paper Bag Players.** For children ages 4 to 9, this group performs in the winter and offers tales told in imaginative and original ways. See p. 344.
- **Best Jazz Club: The Village Vanguard.** The acoustics and sightlines aren't great, but you can't do better for consistent good-quality jazz. See p. 364.
- **Best Rock Club: Mercury Lounge.** This venue is intimate but not obscure. The Merc is the best for hard-edged rock 'n' roll. See p. 361.
- **Best Comedy Club: Gotham Comedy Club.** Comfortable and sophisticated, this is where the best come to hone their acts. See p. 368.
- **Best Pub: Ear Inn.** Located in an old hanger-on in chic SoHo, I hope it continues to survive amongst the lush lounges that surround it. See p. 369.
- **Best Dive Bar: Subway Inn.** Sure, I know you came to New York to go to a dive bar. Enter the Subway Inn, and it's as if you stepped into a 1940s film noir—minus the cigarette smoke, of course. See p. 376.
- **Best Bar with a View: Rise Bar,** in the Ritz-Carlton Battery Park Hotel. With views of Lady Liberty, New York Harbor, and incredible sunsets, this bar is worth seeking out even if you're not staying here. See p. 372.