

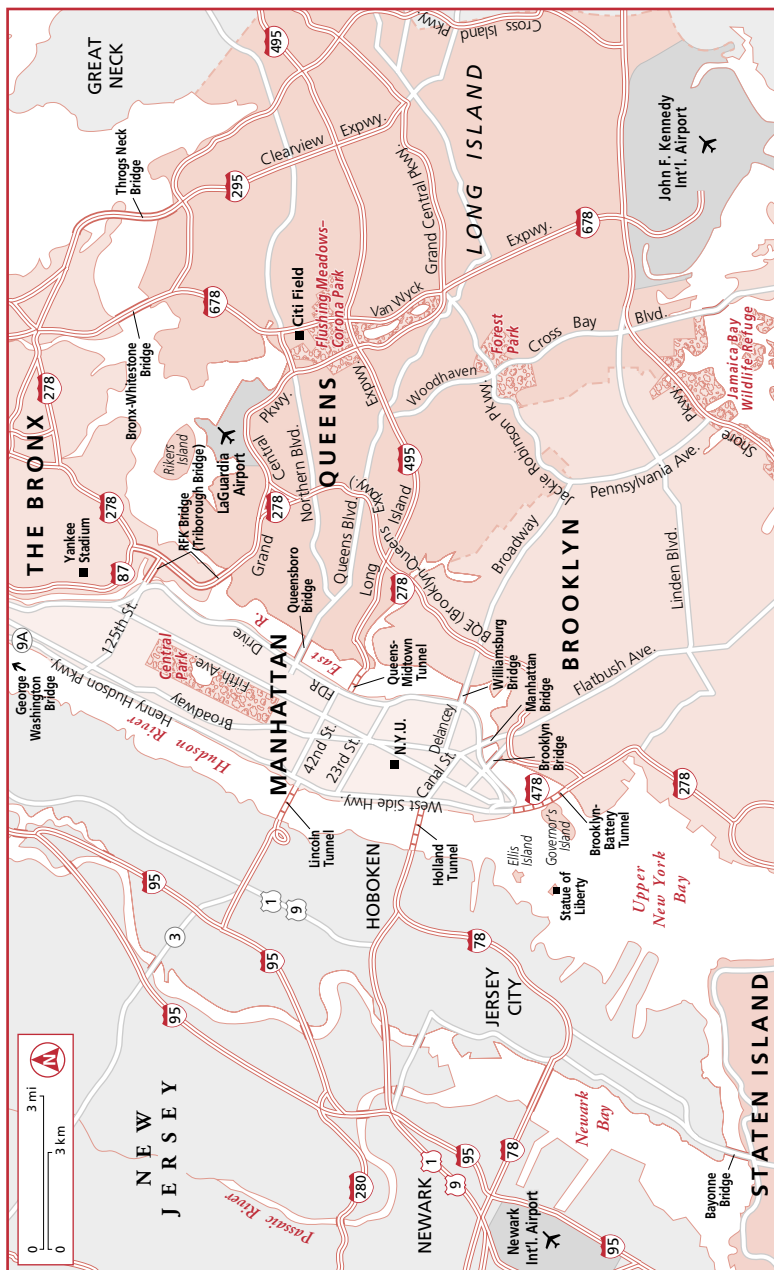
The Best of the Big Apple

We all have our personal tastes; what we like to listen to in terms of music, what kind of food we enjoy, what we relate to in art and architecture. Personal taste is a subjective matter; and I only pay attention to raves, whether they are for a restaurant, artist, musician, or film, if they are universal. If everyone likes it, it has to be good. Well, not always. Anyway, I've compiled, below, my personal favorites we can call the "best of" in many areas from experiences to restaurants. You may not agree, but that's what makes these "best of" lists fun. Just don't take them too seriously.

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. 238.
- **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. 231.
- **Walking the Brooklyn Bridge**: Manhattan has five major bridges connecting the island to other shores, and the most historic and 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, walk across from Manhattan to Brooklyn. See p. 230.
- **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. 264.
- **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 overwhelmed with the music, the variety of stores, the restaurants, the stalls selling everything from homemade CDs to bean pies, and the street prophets and musicians. The energy is relentless.

New York Metropolitan Area



- **Traveling underground:** Don't be afraid of the subways. Go underground, MetroCard in hand, and use the fastest means of transport in the

city. On the way, you might see music, art, even history in many of the city's refurbished stations.

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 costumes, and the Caribbean food make this unforgettable. If you're lucky enough to be in town on Labor Day, don't miss it. See p. 36.
- **Best Season in New York: Christmas.** Come see the Christmas trees on Park Avenue, the big snowflake on 57th and Fifth, the trees at Rockefeller Center and Lincoln Center, the 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—and 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. 229.
- **Best Art Museum: Metropolitan Museum of Art.** Not just the best art museum in New York, but the best in North America. The number of masterworks is mind-boggling. See p. 233.
- **Best-Looking Museum: Museum of Modern Art.** Though the sight of the Guggenheim is the most memorable, and the New Museum of

Contemporary Art is oddly attractive, MoMA's \$450-million renovation makes it the coolest-looking museum, inside and out, in town. See p. 235.

- **Best New York Museum about New York: Museum of the City of New York.** Start here and get a feel of what the city is like—from past to present. There are always fascinating exhibits. See p. 250.
- **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 steel-and-glass skyscrapers, there are still many historic marvels standing, and the best is this Beaux Arts gem. This railroad station, built in 1913, was restored in the 1990s to recapture its brilliance. See p. 233.
- **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, such as the Empire State Building's. 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. See p. 261.

5 Best Parks in New York City

- **Best Park: Central Park.** One of the world's greatest urban refuges—a center of calm and tranquility among the noise and bustle that is Manhattan. See p. 264.
- **Runners-Up for Best Park: Riverside Park.** This 4-mile-long park

along the 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 harbor with Lady Liberty standing sentinel. See p. 270.

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. 264.
- **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. 284.
- **New York Hall of Science:** This Queens' museum, in Flushing Meadows–Corona Park, has hands-on

exhibits that thrill children from preschool and up. And after the museum, the park offers a carousel, zoo, and boat and bike rentals. See p. 283.

- **Coney Island:** It's not a theme park (yet!), just an old-fashioned amusement park on the beach. There's also the nearby Aquarium and Nathan's Hot Dogs for nourishment. What more could anyone, much less a kid, want? See p. 290.

7 Best Places to Stroll in New York

- **The Upper West Side:** With museums, parks, some 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 relentless activity and crowded sidewalks, Chinatown might not seem like ideal strolling territory, but it's so colorful, it's worth braving the mobs.

- **Brooklyn Heights:** A designated historic district, on your stroll you will be awed by the pristine condition of 19th-century row houses and

mansions. But best of all is the view of Manhattan from Brooklyn Heights' famous promenade.

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 it for a great view of the Statue of Liberty, Ellis Island, New York Harbor, and the lower Manhattan skyline. You can't beat the price: free. See p. 237.
- **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. 261 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. 251 and 260.
- **Take in a Game at the West 4th Street Basketball Courts:** Located on West 4th Street and Sixth Avenue. I don't know what's more entertaining: the moves on the court or the inventive trash talk accompanying 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 around Arthur Avenue, known as the Little Italy of the Bronx, is the place for old-fashioned Italian charm, food, and ambience.
- **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. 247.
- **Roosevelt Island Tram:** Impress your family and friends with a spectacular view of the skyline from the Roosevelt Island Tram. During the 4-minute ride, you will be treated to a gorgeous vista down the East River, with views of the United Nations and the Queensboro, Williamsburg, Manhattan, and Brooklyn bridges. See p. 238.
- **Bike Along the Hudson River:** If walking is 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. 268.

- **Take a Food Tour:** You'll find lots of groups that offer tours centered around food, and it's a fantastic way to learn about a neighborhood. What could be better than seeing Brooklyn by way of its pizzerias, or exploring Harlem by sampling African, Caribbean, Latin-American, and soul foods along the way?
- **Ride the International Express:** The no. 7 train is sometimes known as the "International Express." Take it 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. 284) or the **New York Botanical Garden** (p. 286), and then head to **Arthur Avenue**, the Little Italy of the Bronx (see “Best Offbeat New York Experiences,” above), for an authentic Italian feast.
- **In Brooklyn:** You can take a look at what’s on at the always exciting **Brooklyn Museum of Art** (p. 288), 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. 214), on Flatbush Avenue. Or, head for **Coney Island**, whose face

will change forever within the life of this book. Go in the summer, hit the beach, the amusement park, the Aquarium, Nathan’s Famous hot dogs, and/or maybe a Cyclones baseball game. It’s a schlep, but one you will never forget. See. p. 290.

- **In Queens:** Take the 7 train, the **International Express** (see “Best Offbeat New York Experiences,” above), to the **Queens Museum of Art** (p. 296), 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; www.ritzcarlton.com): 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. 115.
- **The Mercer** (147 Mercer St.; ☎ 888/918-6060 or 212/966-6060; www.mercerhotel.com): 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, all with ceiling fans and luxurious bathrooms, are spectacular. See p. 106.
- **The Peninsula-New York** (700 Fifth Ave.; ☎ 800/262-9467 or 212/956-2888; <http://newyork.peninsula.com>): The combination of old-world elegance and 21st-century technology is best realized in this practically perfect hotel. See p. 129.
- **The Ritz-Carlton New York, Battery Park** (2 West St.; ☎ 212/344-0800; www.ritzcarlton.com): For

magnificent views of the Harbor and all its treasures, not to mention impeccable service on every level, it’s hard to top this Ritz. See p. 101.

- **Gramercy Park Hotel** (2 Lexington Ave.; ☎ 212/920-3300; www.gramercyparkhotel.com): Hotelier Ian Schrager and artist Julian Schnabel took a rundown 1925-built legend and restored it to contemporary grandeur. It feels like you’re staying in an eclectic museum, but a very comfortable one. See p. 111.
- **The Carlyle, A Rosewood Hotel** (35 E. 76th St.; ☎ 800/227-5737 or 212/744-1600; www.thecarlyle.com): You are in rarefied territory when you stay in The Carlyle. Service is 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. 140.
- **The Lowell** (28 E. 63rd St.; ☎ 212/838-1400; www.lowellhotel.com): 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. 140.

12 Best Moderately Priced Hotels in Manhattan

- **Casablanca Hotel** (147 W. 43rd St.; ☎ 888/922-7225 or 212/869-1212; www.casablancahotel.com): In the Theater District, the Casablanca offers clean, well-outfitted rooms at value rates, as well as nice extras such as complimentary breakfast, bottled water, free high-speed Internet, and a roof deck perfect for a cocktail on a balmy evening. See p. 121.
- **Inn on 23rd Street** (131 W. 23rd St. ☎ 877/387-2323 or 212/463-0330; www.innon23rd.com): 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. 110.
- **Sofitel New York** (45 W. 44th St.; ☎ 212/354-8844; www.sofitel.com): 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. 120.
- **Hotel Metro** (45 W. 35th St.; ☎ 800/356-3870 or 212/947-2500; www.hotelmetronyc.com): You'll find good deals and lots of extras at this Midtown hotel that's popular with Europeans. See p. 123.

13 Best Hotels for Families

- **Hotel Beacon** (2130 Broadway; ☎ 800/572-4969 or 212/787-1100; www.beaconhotel.com): 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. 137.
- **Doubletree Guest Suites Times Square** (1568 Broadway; ☎ 800/222-TREE or 212/719-1600; <http://doubletree1.hilton.com>): This hotel boasts an entire floor of childproof suites, complete with living rooms for spreading out and kitchenettes for preparing light meals. It's also just a block from kid-friendly chain restaurants and the Toys "R" Us superstore. See p. 117.

14 Best Incentives for Hotel-Hopping

- **Best Hotel Suite: Townhouse Suite in the Kitano New York** (66 Park Ave.; ☎ 212/885-7000; <http://kitano.com>). Each of the three one-bedroom suites in the townhouse that is part of this hotel features a 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. 131.
- **Best Inexpensive Hotel Restaurant: Burger Joint in Le Parker Meridien** (118 W. 57th St.; ☎ 800/543-4300 or 212/245-5000; www.parkermeridien.com). Hidden off the lobby, this joint has been discovered by locals, so the lines are long, but worth it. The burgers are fabulous (see "Best Burger," below) and under \$6. See p. 194.

- **Best Hotel Bar: Bemelmans Bar**, in the Carlyle (35 E. 76th St.; ☎ 800/227-5737 or 212/744-1600; www.thecarlyle.com). Named after illustrator Ludwig Bemelmans, who created the *Madeline* books and painted the mural, this romantic, charming bar features white-gloved service and classic cocktails. 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; www.elyseehotel.com). 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. 130.
- **Best Hotel Renovation: Jumeirah Essex House** (160 Central Park South; ☎ 212/247-0300; www.jumeirahessexhouse.com). Open since 1931, the Essex House was purchased by the Jumeirah Hotel Group, who spent \$90 million on renovations. The money was well spent; the rooms are larger, and state-of-the-art technology melds with the hotel's classy Art Deco look. See p. 118.
- **Best Hotel Swim-Up Bar: Hotel QT** (125 W. 45th St.; ☎ 212/354-2323; www.hotelqt.com). 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. 124.

15 The Most Unforgettable Dining Experiences in New York

- **Chanterelle** (2 Harrison St.; ☎ 212/966-6960; www.chanterellenyc.com): 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. 148.
- **The River Café** (1 Water St., Brooklyn; ☎ 718/522-5200; www.rivercafe.com): At the foot of the Brooklyn Bridge, there is no better dining view of Manhattan. Go at twilight as the lights of downtown begin to flicker on. Though the food at restaurants with views is usually not great, you won't be disappointed by the fare here. See p. 213.
- **Aquavit** (65 E. 55th St.; ☎ 212/307-7311; www.aquavit.org): Though its new digs are not nearly as charming as its former town-house setting, the service and the food are as good as ever. See p. 191.
- **Big Wong King** (67 Mott St.; ☎ 212/964-0540): Come here for the true Chinatown experience. You'll share tables with Chinese families, order bowls of *congee* with fried crullers, plates of stir-fried vegetables, and platters of roast pork and duck—all served by brusque no-nonsense waiters. I guarantee it will be unforgettable. See p. 154.

16 Best New Restaurants

- **BLT Market** (1430 Ave. of the Americas; ☎ 212/521-6125; www.bltmarket.com): The newest in the BLT (Bistro Laurent Tourondel) restaurant empire calls the Ritz Carlton Central Park home. The farm-house ambience is a bit of a stretch for the neighborhood, but when it

comes to the first-rate quality and freshness of the seasonal menu, I easily can forgive. See p. 179.

- **Ed's Lobster Bar** (222 Lafayette St.; ☎ 212/343-3236; www.lobsterbar.nyc.com): This seafood "shack" in NoHo brings the taste of New England downtown, thanks to chef/owner Ed McFarland's talent with seafood. They are cheaper in Maine, but Ed's signature lobster roll rivals pretty much anything you will find on that state's rocky coast. See p. 159.
- **Park Avenue Winter** (100 E. 63rd St.; ☎ 212/644-1900; www.parkavenyc.com): This somewhat gim-

micky restaurant serves seasonal fare but changes the complete look of the restaurant each season. The gimmick does not detract from the perfectly matched seasonal food you'll find here, whatever time of year you visit. See p. 209.

- **Fette Sau** (354 Metropolitan Ave., Williamsburg, Brooklyn; ☎ 718/963-3404): Not only does this place have the best name for a barbecue joint (it means "fat pig" in German), but the different cuts of meat, pork belly, rib chops, and so forth, are seasoned and smoked as well as I've had anywhere. See p. 214.

17 Best Bites for All Appetites

- **Best BBQ: RUB** (208 W. 23rd St.; ☎ 212/524-4300; www.rubbbq.net). Co-owner Paul Kirk brings his Kansas City pit prowess to New York, with mouth-watering results. Try the "Baron," a little bit of everything for a big crowd. See p. 171.
- **Best for Breakfast: Good Enough to Eat** (483 Amsterdam Ave.; ☎ 212/496-0163; www.goodenoughtoeat.com). They've been lining up on Amsterdam Avenue every weekend for over 20 years for chef/owner Carrie Levin's bountiful home-cooked breakfasts. But why wait in line? You're on vacation; go during the week. See p. 207.
- **Best for Brunch: Norma's**, at Le Parker Meridien hotel (118 W. 57th St.; ☎ 212/708-7460; www.parkermeridien.com). Though I am not a devotee of brunch (see box "Breakfast, Not Brunch," on p. 206), I make an exception for Norma's. Skip the traditional breakfast items and go for creative interpretations such as the asparagus-and-seared-rock-lobster omelet. See p. 185.
- **Best Jewish Deli: Katz's Delicatessen** (205 E. Houston St.;

☎ 212/254-2246; www.katzdeli.com). 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. 156.

- **Best Burger: Burger Joint**, at Le Parker Meridien hotel (118 W. 57th St.; ☎ 212/708-7414; www.parkermeridien.com). Who woulda thunk that a fancy hotel such as Le Parker Meridien would be the home to a "joint" that serves great burgers at great prices? See p. 194.
- **Best Pizzeria: Patsy's Pizzeria** (2287 First Ave.; ☎ 212/534-9783; www.patsypizzeria.com). 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. 187.
- **Best Pizza in an Italian Restaurant: La Pizza Fresca Ristorante** (31 E. 20th St.; ☎ 212/598-0141; www.lapizzafresca.com). The Italian menu and wine list is vast, but you won't spend much time on it after you've sampled the restaurant's magnificent, authentic Neapolitan pizzas straight

out of their own wood burning oven. See p. 177.

- **Best 20th-Century Steakhouse: Frankie & Johnnie's** (32 W. 37th St., ☎ 212/997-8940; and 269 W. 45th St., ☎ 212/997-9494; www.frankiesandjohnnies.com). Whether you choose the former speakeasy that is the original location in the Theater District or the newer branch in John Barrymore's former townhouse, your steak, particularly the house sirloin, will remind you why Frankie & Johnnie's has been around since 1926. See p. 181.
- **Best 21st Century Steakhouse: Porter House New York** (10 Columbus Circle; ☎ 212/823-9500; www.porterhousenewyork.com). New steakhouses sprout every year with much hype; this one in the Time Warner Center and helmed by chef Michael Lomonaco distinguished itself far ahead of the pack of new steakhouses. See p. 197.
- **Best Mutton Chop: Keens Steakhouse** (72 W. 36th St.; ☎ 212/947-3636; www.keens.com). 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 the stuffiness. See p. 181.
- **Best Greek Restaurant: Kefi** (222 W. 79th St.; ☎ 212/873-0200). In the space that formerly held Onera, chef Michael Psilakis has gone from nouveau Greek to traditional, with stunning results. You won't believe basic Greek taverna food could be so good. See p. 203.
- **Best for Families: Virgil's Real BBQ** (152 W. 44th St.; ☎ 212/921-9494; www.virgilsbbq.com). In Times Square, Virgil's, in a sense, is a theme restaurant, the theme being barbecue, but

they do an excellent job of it. It's loud, colorful, and has great options for children. See p. 185.

- **Best Cheap Meal: Gray's Papaya** (2090 Broadway; ☎ 212/799-0243). Though the \$3.50 "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. 205.
- **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; it's a tough combination to beat. See p. 214.
- **Best Bagel: Absolute Bagels** (2788 Broadway; ☎ 212/932-2052). They're not huge like some bagels these days, but they are always hot and baked to perfection. See p. 177.
- **Best Soul Food: Charles' Southern Style Kitchen** (2841 Eighth Ave.; ☎ 877/813-2920 or 212/926-4313). Not only does this Harlem restaurant serve the best soul food in the city, it also 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. 212.
- **Best New/Old Dining Room: Country** (90 Madison Ave.; ☎ 212/889-7100; www.countryinnewyork.com). Designed by architect David Rockwell, the upstairs restaurant in the Carlton Hotel is a marvel, with mosaic tiles, 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. 191.

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. 309.
- **Best Shopping Zone: SoHo, NoHo, and Nolita.** All three neighborhoods are within walking distance of one another and feature the newest, trendiest boutiques. See chapter 10.
- **Best Old World Italian Food Store: DiPalo's Dairy.** This 1910-originated store is one of the last vestiges of Old Little Italy, and is still in the DiPalo family. See p. 323.
- **Best Old World Jewish Food Store: Russ & Daughters.** This smoked-fish purveyor has been a mainstay on the Lower East Side since 1914. Like DiPalo's above, the Russ family has been in charge since the beginning. See p. 325.

19 Best Culture & Nightlife in New York

- **Best Performance Space: Carnegie Hall.** One of the world's great performance spaces, with an array of world-class talent on display almost every night. 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. 342.
- **Best Jazz Club: The Village Vanguard.** Acoustics and sightlines aren't great, but you can't do better for 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. 360.
- **Best Comedy Club: Gotham Comedy Club.** Comfortable and sophisticated, this is where the best come to hone their acts. See p. 368.
- **Best Cocktail: Pegu Club,** 77 W. Houston, 2nd floor. Supreme mixologist Audrey Saunders has opened a club where everything is top label and all juices and mixers are freshly made. See p. 371.
- **Best Pub: Ear Inn.** An old hanger-on in chic SoHo, this old joint continues to survive among 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. 377.
- **Best Beer Bar: Spuyten Dyvil.** This Williamsburg, Brooklyn bar is ground zero for local beer geeks. Enjoy a draft at this place, which also features a great jukebox. See p. 381.
- **Best Bar with a View: Rise Bar,** in the Ritz-Carlton Battery Park Hotel. With views of Lady Liberty, the harbor, and lovely sunsets. See p. 372.
- **Best Exclusive Bar: Rose Bar,** in the Gramercy Park Hotel. This magnificent room with its Schnabel originals, incredible sound system, beautiful people, and expensive cocktails is worth groveling to enter. See p. 376.