

# Planning Your Trip to New York City

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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.

## 1 Visitor Information

Before you leave home, your best information source (besides this book, of course) is **NYC & Company**, at 810 Seventh Ave., New York, NY 10019. You can call ☎ **800/NYC-VISIT** to request the *Official NYC Guide* detailing hotels, restaurants, theaters, attractions, events, and more. The guide is free and will arrive in 7 to 10 days. (**Note:** I've received complaints that they sometimes take longer.)

You can find a wealth of free information their website, **www.nycvisit.com**. To speak with a live travel counselor, call ☎ **212/484-1222**, weekdays from 8:30am to 6pm EST, weekends from 8:30am to 5pm EST.

You will need a decent map of the city, and also a transit map, which you can get at the **Times Square Visitors Center**, 1560 Broadway, between 46th and 47th streets; ☎ **212/869-1890**; ([www.timessquarenyc.org](http://www.timessquarenyc.org)) or at most larger subway stations. Look inside the back cover of this book for a map of most of the Manhattan subway lines.

**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 during the winter holidays, 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 can 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 still might 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 worst when it comes to scoring an affordable hotel room; 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](http://www.weather.com); I like to balance it against CNN's online 5-day forecast at [www.cnn.com/weather](http://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. Confirm before you make plans around a specific event. Call the venue or the NYCVB at ☎ **212/484-1222**, go to [www.nycvisit.com](http://www.nycvisit.com), or buy a copy of **Time Out New York** for the latest details.

For a huge list of events beyond those listed here, check <http://events.frommers.com>, where you'll find a searchable, up-to-the-minute roster of what's happening in cities all over the world.

### January

**Restaurant Week.** Twice a year some of the best restaurants in town 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 restaurants in 2008 included standouts such as Aquavit, Fiamma, and Union Square Café. Call ☎ **212/484-1222** for info, or visit [www.nycvisit.com](http://www.nycvisit.com). Late January.

### February

**Chinese New Year.** Every 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. The parade 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 January 26 in 2009, and it's the Year of the Ox.

### 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 early if you want a good spot. Call ☎ **212/484-1222**. March 17.

**Easter Parade.** Once upon a time, New York's gentry came out to show off their tasteful but discreet toppers. Today, if you were planning to slip on a tasteful little number—say something delicately woven in straw with a simple flower—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 in for free. It generally runs Easter Sunday from about 10am to 3 or 4pm. Call ☎ **212/484-1222**. April 12, 2009.

## 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 U.S. Held at the Javits Center, many concept cars that will never roll off the assembly line but are fun to dream about are on display. Call ☎ **800/282-3336** or visit **www.autoshowny.com** or **www.javitscenter.com**. Call for dates.

**TriBeCa Film Festival.** Conceived in 2002 by the unofficial mayor of TriBeCa, Robert De Niro, the festival has grown in popularity and esteem every year. In 2008, the 12-day festival featured over 250 films and included such events as a Family Festival Street Fair, music performances and art exhibitions, and outdoor "drive-in" films. Call ☎ **212/941-2400** or visit **www.tribecafilmfestival.org**. Last week in April/early May.

## May

**Fleet Week.** About 10,000 Navy and Coast Guard personnel are "at liberty" in New York for the annual Fleet Week. You can watch the ships 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 white uniforms. It's wonderful—just like *On the Town* come to life. Call ☎ **212/245-0072**, or visit **www.fleetweek.navy.mil** (your best source for a full list of events) or **www.intrepidmuseum.org**. Late May.

## June

**Parades, parades, parades.** During the summer there is a parade for almost every holiday, nationality or ethnicity. June is the month for (among others) the sometimes raucous but very colorful **Puerto Rican Day Parade** and the **Lesbian and Gay Pride Week and March**, where Fifth Avenue goes wild as the LGBT 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 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 play each season—most often with stars on the stage. For details, see “Park It! Shakespeare, Music & Other Free Fun,” in chapter 5. Call ☎ **212/539-8500**, or visit **www.publictheater.org**. June through August.

## July

**Independence Day Harbor Festival and 4th of July Fireworks Spectacular.** Start the day amid the crowds at the Great July 4th Festival in lower Manhattan, then catch Macy’s fireworks extravaganza over the East River (the best vantage point is from FDR Drive, which closes to traffic). Call ☎ **212/484-1222** or Macy’s Visitor Center at 212/494-3827. July 4.

**Lincoln Center Festival 2009.** This festival celebrates the best of the performing arts from all over—theater, ballet, contemporary dance, opera, even puppet and media-based art. Recent editions have featured performances by Ornette Coleman, the Royal Opera, and the New York Philharmonic. Schedules are available in mid-March, and tickets go on sale in May or early June. Call ☎ **212/546-2656**, or visit **www.lincolncenter.org**. Throughout July.

## August

**Lincoln Center Out of Doors.** This series of free music and dance performances is held outdoors on the plazas of **Lincoln Center**. Call ☎ **212/875-5766** or 212/546-2656, or visit **www.lincolncenter.org** for the schedule (usually available in mid-July). Throughout August.

**Harlem Week.** The world’s largest black and Hispanic cultural festival spans almost the entire month, to include the Black Film Festival, the Harlem Jazz and Music Festival, and the Taste of Harlem Food Festival. 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 at **Flushing Meadows Park** in Queens. Tickets go on sale in May or early June. The event sells out immediately because many tickets are held by corporate sponsors who hand them out to customers. You can buy scalped tickets outside the complex (an illegal practice, of course). The last few matches are the most expensive, but you’ll see more tennis

early on, when your ticket allows you to wander the outside courts. Call ☎ **866/OPEN-TIX** (it's always busy) or 718/760-6200 well in advance; visit **www.usopen.org** or **www.usta.com** for 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), 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**, or visit **www.wiadca.org**. Labor Day.

## October

**Big Apple Circus.** New York City's homegrown, performing-arts circus is a favorite with children and anyone who's young at heart. Big Apple is committed to maintaining the classical circus tradition with sensitivity, and only features animals that have a traditional working relationship with humans. A tent is pitched in **Damrosch Park** at **Lincoln Center**. Call ☎ **800/922-3772**, or visit **www.bigapplecircus.org**. Late October through January.

**Greenwich Village Halloween Parade.** This is Halloween at its most outrageous. Drag queens and other flamboyant types parade through the Village in creative costumes. The route has changed over the years, but recently it has started after sunset at Spring Street and marched up Sixth Avenue to 23rd Street or Union Square. Call the *Village Voice* Parade hot line at ☎ **212/475-3333**, ext. 14044, visit **www.halloween-nyc.com**, or check the papers for the exact 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 runners from around the world participate in the largest U.S. marathon, and more than a million fans cheer them on as they follow a route that touches all five New York boroughs and finishes at Central Park. Call ☎ **212/423-2249** or 212/860-4455, or visit **www.nyrr.org**, for info and applications. First Sunday in November. November 2, 2008.

**Radio City Music Hall Christmas Spectacular.** A rather gaudy extravaganza, but lots of fun, this event stars 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 ☎ **212/307-1000**, or visit **www.radiocity.com**; you can also

buy tickets at the box office or via Ticketmaster's **Radio City Hot Line** (☎ 212/307-1000), or visit [www.ticketmaster.com](http://www.ticketmaster.com). November through early January.

**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 Rocky and Bullwinkle, Snoopy, the Pink Panther, Bart Simpson, and other cartoon favorites are the best part. The night before, you can usually see the big blow-up on Central Park West at 79th Street; call in advance to see if it will be open to the public. Call ☎ 212/484-1222 or Macy's Visitor Center at 212/494-2922. November 27, 2008.

**Lighting of the Rockefeller Center Christmas Tree.** The annual lighting ceremony is accompanied by ice skaters, 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](http://www.rockefellercenter.com). 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 beribboned with red bows, 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 staging of *The Nutcracker*, traditional holiday events include *A Christmas Carol* at **The Theater at Madison Square Garden** (☎ 212/465-6741 or [www.thegarden.com](http://www.thegarden.com); for tickets, ☎ 212/307-7171 or [www.ticketmaster.com](http://www.ticketmaster.com)). At **Avery Fisher Hall** is the National Chorale's singalong performances of Handel's *Messiah* (☎ 212/875-5030; [www.lincolncenter.org](http://www.lincolncenter.org)) a week before Christmas. Don't worry if the only words you know are "Alleluia, Alleluia!"—you'll get a lyrics sheet. Throughout December.

**Lighting of the Hanukkah Menorah.** 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 giant electric candles. December 21, 2008.

**New Year's Eve.** The biggest party of all is in **Times Square**, where raucous revelers count down the year's final seconds until

the ball drops at midnight at 1 Times Sq. This one, in the cold surrounded by thousands of drunks, is a masochist's delight. Call ☎ **212/768-1560** or 212/484-1222, or visit **www.timessquarenyc.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 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.

Most hotels are ADA-compliant, with suitable rooms for wheelchair-bound travelers as well as those with other disabilities. But before you book, **ask lots of questions based on your needs**.

**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 the invaluable **HAI Hot Line** (☎ **212/575-7676**), which offers accessibility information for hotels, restaurants, attractions, cultural venues, and much more. This nonprofit organization also publishes *Access for All*, a guidebook on accessibility, available free-of-charge 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](http://www.bigapplegreeter.org)). All of its employees are well versed in accessibility issues. They can provide a resource list of city agencies that serve those with disabilities, and they sometimes have 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.

Many hotels offer senior discounts; **Choice Hotels** (which include Comfort Inns, some of my favorite affordable Midtown hotels), for example, gives 30% off their published rates to anyone over 50, if you book your room through their nationwide toll-free reservations number (not directly with the hotels or through a travel agent). For a list of Choice Hotels, visit [www.hotelchoice.com](http://www.hotelchoice.com).

Many reliable agencies and organizations target the 50-plus market. **Elderhostel** (☎ 800/454-5768; [www.elderhostel.org](http://www.elderhostel.org)) arranges worldwide study programs (including some in New York City) for those ages 55 and over.

## FOR GAY & LESBIAN TRAVELERS

Gay and lesbian culture is as much a part of New York's identity as yellow cabs, high-rises, and Broadway theater. Indeed, in a city with one of the world's largest, loudest, and most powerful GLBT populations, homosexuality is squarely in the mainstream.

The **Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual & Transgender Community Center**, known as "The Center," is at 208 W. 13th St., between Seventh and Eighth avenues (☎ 212/620-7310; [www.gaycenter.org](http://www.gaycenter.org)). The center is the meeting place for more than 400 LGBT organizations. The online calendar lists hundreds of happenings—lectures, dances, concerts, readings, films—or call for the latest. Their site offers links to gay-friendly hotels and guesthouses in and around New York, plus tons of other information; the staff is friendly and helpful in person or over the phone.

Other good sources for lesbian and gay events are the two free weekly newspapers, *Gay City News* ([www.gaycitynews.com](http://www.gaycitynews.com)) and the

*New York Blade* ([www.nyblade.com](http://www.nyblade.com)), and the free magazines *HX* ([www.hx.com](http://www.hx.com)), *Next* ([www.nextmagazine.com](http://www.nextmagazine.com)), and *GO NYC* ([www.gomag.com](http://www.gomag.com)), which is lesbian-oriented. You'll also find lots of information on their websites.

**The International Gay and Lesbian Travel Association (IGLTA;** ☎ 800/448-8550 or 954/776-2626; [www.igлта.org](http://www.igлта.org)) is the trade association for the GLBT travel industry, and offers an online directory of gay- and lesbian-friendly businesses and tour operators.

**Gay.com Travel** ([www.gay.com/travel](http://www.gay.com/travel)) provides current information about gay-owned, -oriented, and -friendly lodging, dining, sightseeing, nightlife, and shopping in every important destination worldwide. British travelers should click on the "Travel" link at [www.uk.gay.com](http://www.uk.gay.com) for advice and gay-friendly trip ideas.

## 4 Playing It Safe

Sure, there's crime in New York City, but millions of people spend their lives here without being robbed or assaulted. In fact, New York is safer than any other big American city and is listed by the FBI as somewhere around 150th in the nation for total crimes. While that's encouraging for all of us, it's still important to take precautions.

Men should carry their wallets in their front pockets and women should keep hold of their purse straps. Cross camera and purse straps over one shoulder, across your front, and under the other arm. Never hang a purse on the back of a chair or on a hook in a bathroom stall; keep it in your lap or between your feet, with one foot through a strap and up against the purse itself. Avoid carrying large amounts of cash. You might carry your money in several pockets so that if one is picked, you won't be without cash. Skip the flashy jewelry and keep valuables out of sight when you're on the street.

Panhandlers are seldom dangerous and can be ignored. If a stranger walks up to you on the street with a sob story ("I live in the suburbs and was just attacked and don't have the money to get home" or whatever), it's likely a scam. Be wary of an individual who "accidentally" falls in front of you or causes some other commotion, because he or she may be working with someone else who will take your wallet when you try to help. And remember: You *will* lose if you place a bet on a sidewalk game of chance.

**SUBWAY SAFETY TIPS** In general, the subways are safe, especially in Manhattan. There are panhandlers and questionable characters like anywhere else in the city, but subway crime has gone down

to 1960s levels. Still, stay alert and trust your instincts. Always keep a hand on your personal belongings.

When using the subway, **don't wait for trains near the edge of the platform** or on extreme ends of a station. During non-rush hours, wait for the train in view of the token-booth clerk or under the yellow DURING OFF HOURS TRAINS STOP HERE signs, and ride in the operator's or conductor's car (usually in the center of the train). Choose crowded cars over empty ones—there's safety in numbers.

Avoid subways late at night, and splurge on a cab or take the bus after about 10 or 11pm.

## 5 For International Travelers

### VISAS

The U.S. Department of State has a **Visa Waiver Program (VWP)** allowing citizens of the following countries 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.

(**Note:** This list was accurate at press time; for the most up-to-date list of countries, consult [www.travel.state.gov/visa](http://www.travel.state.gov/visa).) Canadian citizens may enter the United States without visas; they will need to show passports (if traveling by air) and proof of residence, however.

**Note:** Any passport issued on or after October 26, 2006, by a VWP country must be an **e-Passport** for VWP travelers to be eligible to enter the U.S. without a visa. Citizens of these nations also need to present a round-trip air or cruise ticket upon arrival. E-Passports contain computer chips capable of storing biometric information, such as the required digital photograph of the holder. (You can identify an e-Passport by the symbol on the bottom center cover of your passport.) If your passport doesn't have this feature, you can still travel without a visa if it is a valid passport issued before October 26, 2005, and includes a machine-readable zone, or between October 26, 2005, and October 25, 2006, and includes a digital photograph. For more information, go to [www.travel.state.gov/visa](http://www.travel.state.gov/visa).

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 U.S., and (2) a tourist visa, which may be obtained without charge from any U.S. consulate.

As of January 2004, many international visitors traveling on visas to the United States will be photographed and fingerprinted on arrival at Customs in airports and on cruise ships in a program created by the Department of Homeland Security called **US-VISIT**. Exempt from the extra scrutiny are visitors entering by land or those that don't require a visa for short-term visits. For more information, go to the Homeland Security website at **www.dhs.gov/dhspublic**.

## 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.

## CUSTOMS

### WHAT YOU CAN BRING INTO THE U.S.

Every visitor older 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 within the preceding 6 months. It is forbidden to bring into the country almost any meat products (including canned, fresh, and dried meat products such as bouillon, soup mixes, and such). Generally, condiments, including vinegars, oils, and spices, coffee, tea, and some cheeses and baked goods are permitted. Avoid rice products, as rice can often harbor insects. Bringing fruits and vegetables is not advised, though not prohibited. Customs will allow produce depending on where you got it and where you're going after you arrive in the U.S. 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, which includes filing form CM 4790. For details consult your nearest U.S. embassy or consulate, or **U.S. Customs** ([www.customs.ustreas.gov](http://www.customs.ustreas.gov)).

### WHAT YOU CAN TAKE HOME FROM THE U.S.

**Canadian Citizens:** For a summary of Canadian rules, get the booklet *I Declare*, from the Canada Border Services Agency ((☎ 800/461-9999 in Canada, or 204/983-3500; [www.cbsa-asfc.gc.ca](http://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 for a taxi on hand).

In most Manhattan neighborhoods, you can find a bank with **ATMs** (automated teller machines) every couple of blocks. Even in neighborhoods that aren't well served by banks, most delis and bodegas have ATMs (which usually tack on a service charge in addition to any fees your own bank charges).

### ATMs

The easiest and best way to get cash away from home is from an ATM. The **Cirrus** (☎ 800/424-7787; [www.mastercard.com](http://www.mastercard.com)) and **PLUS** (☎ 800/843-7587; [www.visa.com](http://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, allowing you to get extra cash 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.

## 7 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 International Airport** (☎ 973/961-6000) in nearby New Jersey, about 16 miles (45 min.) from Midtown. Information about all three is available online at [www.panynj.gov](http://www.panynj.gov); click on the "All Airports" tab.

Even though LaGuardia is the closest airport to Manhattan, it has a bad reputation for delays and terminal chaos, in ticket-desk lines and baggage claim. You may want to use JFK or Newark instead.

Almost every major domestic carrier serves at least one of the New York-area airports; most serve two or all three. Among them **American** (☎ 800/433-7300; [www.aa.com](http://www.aa.com)), **Continental** (☎ 800/525-3273; [www.continental.com](http://www.continental.com)), **Delta** (☎ 800/221-1212; [www.delta.com](http://www.delta.com)), **Northwest** (☎ 800/225-2525; [www.nwa.com](http://www.nwa.com)), **US Airways** (☎ 800/428-4322; [www.usairways.com](http://www.usairways.com)), and **United** (☎ 800/864-8331; [www.united.com](http://www.united.com)).

In recent years, there has been rapid growth in the number of start-up, no-frills airlines serving New York (and 2008 brought the demise of some of them, so check and see whether the following are still flying when you are planning your trip). You might check out Atlanta-based **AirTran** (☎ 800/AIRTRAN); Denver-based **Frontier** (☎ 800/432-1359; [www.flyfrontier.com](http://www.flyfrontier.com)), Milwaukee- and Omaha-based **Midwest Airlines** (☎ 800/452-2022; [www.midwestairlines.com](http://www.midwestairlines.com)), or Detroit-based **Spirit Airlines** (☎ 800/772-7117; [www.spiritair.com](http://www.spiritair.com)). The JFK-based cheap-chic airline **JetBlue** ✈ (☎ 800/JETBLUE; [www.jetblue.com](http://www.jetblue.com)) has taken New York by storm with its low fares and classy service. The nation's leading discount airline, **Southwest** (☎ 800/435-9792; [www.iflyswa.com](http://www.iflyswa.com)), flies into MacArthur (Islip) Airport on Long Island, 50 miles east of Manhattan.

## TRANSPORTATION TO AND 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](http://www.panynj.gov/airports); click on the airport at which you'll be arriving.

The Port Authority runs Ground Transportation Information counters on the baggage-claim level at each airport where you can get information and book transport. Most transportation companies have courtesy phones near the baggage-claim.

Generally, travel time between the airports and Midtown 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, especially during rush hour, holiday travel times, and if you're taking a bus.

**TAXIS** Despite significant rate hikes the past few years, 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 long line, but it generally moves pretty quickly. Fares, whether fixed or metered, do not include bridge and tunnel tolls (\$4–\$6) 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

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

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First the very good: A few years ago, a rail link revolutionized the process of connecting by public transportation to Newark-Liberty International Airport: **AirTrain Newark**, which now connects Newark-Liberty with Manhattan via a speedy 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 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 in Midtown.

The trip from my apartment on Manhattan's Upper West Side to the Newark Alitalia terminal, for example, was under a half-hour and cost me less than \$14 (\$11.55 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, compared to what it would have been 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), and depart from their own lobby/waiting area in Penn Station; you can check the schedules on monitors before you leave the airport terminal, and again at the train station. NJ Transit tickets can be purchased from vending machines at both the air terminal and the train station (no ticket is required to board the AirTrain). The one-way fare is \$11.25 (children 4 and under 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.

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



Now the not-so-very good: A few bumpy 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—only \$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 anywhere from 40 minutes to 90 minutes, depending on your connections. 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 Blvd.–Archer Ave. Station; and the A to Howard Beach/JFK Airport Station. The MTA is contemplating adding connections to the AirTrain in lower Manhattan sometime in the next decade, though 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 small children, skip the AirTrain. You'll find it easier to rely on a taxi, car service, or shuttle that can offer you door-to-door transfers.

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

For more information on AirTrain JFK, go online to **[www.airtrainjfk.com](http://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](http://www.mta.nyc.ny.us/mta/airtrain.htm)**.

will not be added. The flat rate does not apply on trips from Manhattan to the airport.

- **From LaGuardia:** \$24 to \$28, metered, plus tolls and tip.
- **From Newark Liberty:** The dispatcher 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. 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 \$69–\$75, 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 is that you can arrange your pickup in advance and avoid the hassles of the taxi line. Call at least 24 hours in advance (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 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. Note that curbside traffic can be chaotic during prime deplaning hours.

Vehicles range from sedans to vans to limousines and tend to be relatively 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 time. There may be waiting charges added if the driver has to wait for you due to flight delays when picking you up, but the car companies 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 212/888-8884; [www.legendslimousine.com](http://www.legendslimousine.com)); **Allstate** (☎ 800/453-4099 or 212/333-3333) and **Tel-Aviv** (☎ 800/222-9888 or 212/777-7777) also have reasonable reputations. (Keep in mind, though, that these services are only as good as the individual drivers—and sometimes there's a lemon in the bunch. If you have a problem, report it immediately to the main office.)

For a bit more luxury and service, the best option I've found is **Luxor Limo** (☎ 866/990-4111; [www.luxorlimo.com](http://www.luxorlimo.com)), where the

cars are spacious and the drivers as reliable as you will find, and with rates not much higher than the above companies.

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

**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 streets that make the ride much quicker than if you go with a taxi or car.

The blue vans of **Super Shuttle** (☎ 800/258-3826; [www.super-shuttle.com](http://www.super-shuttle.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.nyairport-service.com](http://www.nyairport-service.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 select Midtown 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 Terminal on the Park Avenue side every 15 to 30 minutes, depending on the time of day and the day of the week. To request shuttle service from your hotel, call 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.

## 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 (Robert F. Kennedy 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.

## BY TRAIN

**Amtrak** (☎ 800/USA-RAIL; [www.amtrak.com](http://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.

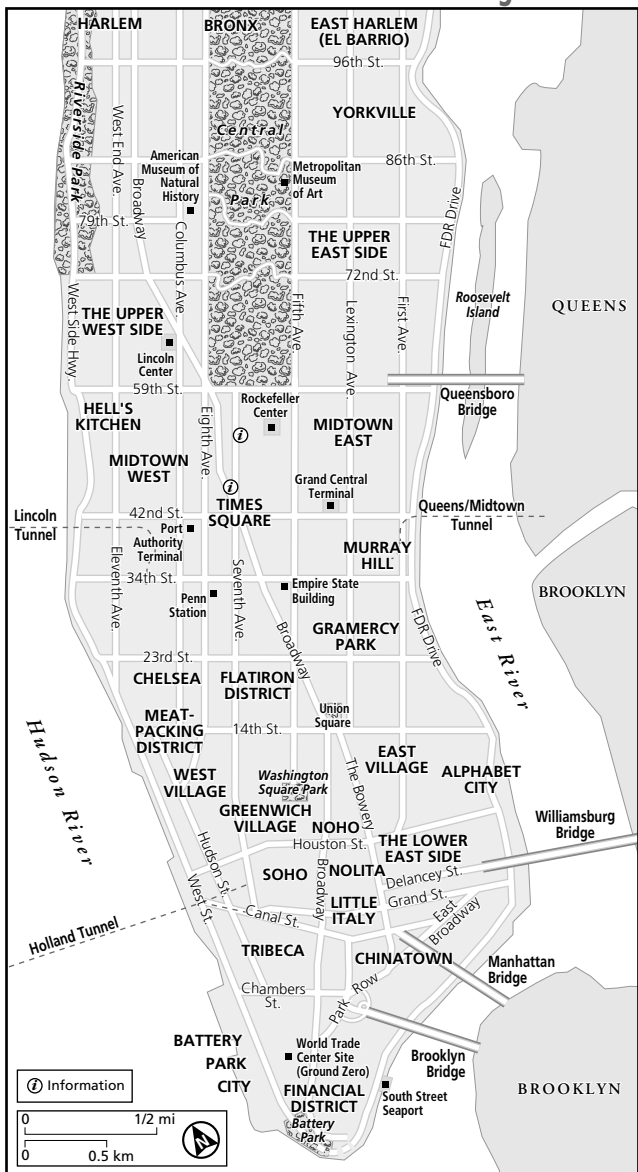
If you're traveling to New York from a city along Amtrak's Northeast Corridor—such as Boston, Philadelphia, Baltimore, or Washington, D.C.—Amtrak may be your best travel bet now that they've rolled out the high-speed Acela trains. The **Acela Express** trains cut travel time from D.C. down to 2½ hours, and travel time from Boston to a lightning-quick 3 hours. (If you book a seat on a Metro-liner or regular unreserved service, the fares are cheaper, but expect to spend longer on the train).

## MANHATTAN'S NEIGHBORHOODS IN BRIEF

### Downtown

**Lower Manhattan: South Street Seaport & the Financial District** At one time, this was New York—period. Established by the Dutch in 1625, New York's first settlements sprang up here, on the southern tip of Manhattan island; everything uptown was

# Manhattan's Neighborhoods



farm country and wilderness. While all that's changed, this is still the best place in the city to search for the past.

Lower Manhattan constitutes everything south of Chambers Street. **Battery Park**, the point of departure for the Statue of Liberty, Ellis Island, and Staten Island, is on the far southern tip of the island. The **South Street Seaport**, now touristy but still a reminder of times when shipping was the lifeblood of the city, lies a bit north on the east side; it's just south of the Brooklyn Bridge.

The rest of the area is considered the **Financial District**, which contains **Ground Zero**. Until September 11, 2001, the Financial District was anchored by the **World Trade Center**, with the World Financial Center and Battery Park City to the west, and **Wall Street** running crosstown a little south and to the east.

Just about all of the major subway lines congregate here before they either end or head to Brooklyn.

**TriBeCa** Bordered by the Hudson River to the west, the area north of Chambers Street, west of Broadway, and south of Canal Street is the *Triangle Below Canal Street*, or TriBeCa. Since the 1980s, as SoHo became saturated with chic, the spillover has been transforming TriBeCa into one of the city's hippest residential neighborhoods, where celebrities and families coexist in cast-iron warehouses converted into expensive apartments. Artists' lofts and galleries as well as hip antiques and design shops pepper the area, as do some of the city's best restaurants.

**Chinatown** New York City's most famous ethnic enclave is bursting past its traditional boundaries and has encroached on Little Italy. The former marshlands northeast of City Hall and below Canal Street, from Broadway to the Bowery, are where Chinese immigrants were forced to live in the 1870s. This booming neighborhood is now a conglomeration of Asian populations. It offers tasty cheap eats in cuisines from Szechuan to Hunan to Cantonese to Vietnamese to Thai. Exotic shops offer strange foods, herbs, and souvenirs; bargains on clothing and leather are plentiful. It's a blast to walk down Canal Street, peering into the electronics and luggage stores and watching crabs cut loose from their handlers at the fish markets.

The Canal Street (J, M, Z, N, R, 6, Q, W) station will get you to the heart of the action. The streets are crowded during the day and empty out after around 9pm; they remain quite safe, but the neighborhood is more enjoyable during the bustle.

**Little Italy** Little Italy, traditionally the area east of Broadway between Houston and north of Canal streets, is a shrinking community, due to the encroachment of thriving Chinatown. It's now

limited mainly to **Mulberry Street**, where you'll find most restaurants and just a few offshoots. With rents going up in the increasingly trendy Lower East Side, a few chic spots are moving in, further intruding upon the old-world landscape. The best way to reach Little Italy is to walk east from the Spring Street station (on the no. 6 line) to Mulberry Street; turn south for Little Italy (you can't miss the year-round red, green, and white street decorations).

**The Lower East Side** The Lower East Side boasts the best of both old and new New York: Witness the stretch of Houston between Forsyth and Allen streets, where Yonah Shimmel's Knish Shop sits shoulder-to-shoulder with the Sunshine Theater, an art-house cinema—and both are thriving.

There are some remnants of what was once the largest Jewish population in America along **Orchard Street**, where you'll find great bargain-hunting in its many old-world fabric and clothing stores still thriving between the boutiques and lounges. Keep in mind that the old-world shops close early on Friday and all day on Saturday (the Jewish Sabbath). The expanding trendy set can be found in the blocks between Allen and Clinton streets south of Houston and north of Delancey, with more new shops, bars, and restaurants popping up in the blocks to the east every day.

This area is not well served by the subway system (one cause for its years of decline), so your best bet is to take the F train to Second Avenue (you can get off closer to First) and walk east on Houston; when you see Katz's Deli, you'll know you've arrived. You can also reach the LES from the Delancey Street station on the F line, and the Essex Street station on the J, M, or Z lines.

**SoHo & Nolita** No relation to the London neighborhood, **SoHo** got its moniker as an abbreviation of "*South of Houston Street*." This fashionable neighborhood extends down to Canal Street, between Sixth Avenue to the west and Lafayette Street (1 block east of Broadway) to the east. It's easily accessible by subway: Take the N or R to the Prince Street station; the C, E, or 6 to Spring Street; or the F, B, D or V train to the Broadway-Lafayette stop (the Q train is not stopping at Broadway-Lafayette due to construction on the Manhattan Bridge).

An industrial zone during the 19th century, SoHo retains the cast-iron architecture of the era, and in many places, cobblestones peek out from beneath the asphalt. In the early 1960s, cutting-edge artists began occupying the drab and deteriorating buildings, soon turning it into the trendiest neighborhood in the city. SoHo is now a prime example of urban gentrification and a major New York attraction thanks to its impeccably restored buildings, fashionable

restaurants and boutiques. On weekends the cobbled streets and narrow sidewalks are packed with shoppers, with the prime action between Broadway and Sullivan Street north of Grand Street.

In recent years SoHo has been crawling its way east, taking over Mott and Mulberry streets—and Elizabeth Street in particular—north of Kenmare Street, an area now known as **Nolita** for its *North of Little Italy* location. Nolita is becoming increasingly well known for its hot shopping prospects, which include a number of pricey antiques and home-design stores. Taking the no. 6 train to Spring Street will get you closest by subway, but it's just a short walk east from SoHo proper.

**The East Village & NoHo** The **East Village**, which extends between 14th Street and Houston Street, from Broadway east to First Avenue and beyond to Alphabet City—Avenues A, B, C, and D—is where what's left of Manhattan's bohemia is. The East Village is a fascinating mix of affordable ethnic and trendy restaurants, upstart clothing designers and kitschy boutiques, punk-rock clubs and cafes. Several Off- and Off-Off-Broadway theaters also call this place home.

The East Village isn't very accessible by subway; unless you're traveling along 14th Street (the L line will drop you off at Third or First aves.), your best bet is to take the 4, 5, 6, N, Q, R, or W to 14th Street/Union Square; the N or R to 8th Street; or the 6 to Astor Place and walk east.

The area around Broadway and Lafayette between Bleecker and 4th streets is called **NoHo** (for *North of Houston*), and has a completely different character. As you might have guessed, this area has developed much more like its neighbor to the south, SoHo. Here you'll find a crop of trendy lounges, stylish restaurants, cutting-edge designers, and upscale antiques shops. NoHo is fun to browse; the Bleecker Street stop on the no. 6 line will land you in the heart of it, and the Broadway-Lafayette stop on the B, D, F, or V lines will drop you at its southern edge.

**Greenwich Village** Tree-lined streets crisscross and wind, following ancient streams and cow paths. Each block reveals yet another row of Greek Revival town houses, a well-preserved Federal-style house, or a peaceful courtyard or square. This is "the Village," from Broadway west to the Hudson River, bordered by Houston Street to the south and 14th Street to the north. It defies Manhattan's orderly grid system with streets that predate it, virtually every one chockablock with activity, and unless you live here, it may be impossible to master the lay of the land—so be sure to take a map along as you explore.



The Seventh Avenue line (1, 2, 3) is the area's main subway artery, while the West 4th Street station (where the A, C, or E lines meet the B, D, F or V lines) serves as its central hub.

The Village is probably the most chameleon-like of Manhattan's neighborhoods. Some of the highest-priced real estate in the city runs along lower Fifth Avenue, which dead-ends at **Washington Square Park**. Serpentine **Bleecker Street** stretches through most of the neighborhood and is emblematic of the area's historical bent. The anything-goes attitude in the Village has fostered a large gay community, which is still in evidence around **Christopher Street** and Sheridan Square (including the landmarked Stonewall Bar). The streets west of Seventh Avenue, known as the **West Village**, boast a more relaxed vibe and some charming historic brownstones. Three colleges—New York University, Parsons School of Design, and the New School for Social Research—keep the area thinking young.

Streets are often crowded with weekend warriors and teenagers, especially on Bleecker, West 4th, 8th, and surrounding streets, and have been known to become sketchy west of Seventh Avenue in the very late hours, especially on weekends.

## Midtown

**Chelsea & the Meatpacking District** **Chelsea** has come on strong in recent years as a hip address, especially for the gay community. A low-rise composite of town houses, tenements, lofts, and factories (with new high-rises popping up on seemingly every block), the neighborhood comprises roughly the area west of Sixth Avenue from 14th to 30th streets. (Sixth Ave. itself below 23rd St. is actually considered part of the Flatiron District; see below.) Its main arteries are Seventh and Eighth avenues, and it's primarily served by the C or E and 1 subway lines.

The **Chelsea Piers** sports complex to the far west and a host of shops (both unique boutiques and big names such as Williams-Sonoma), well-priced bistros, and thriving bars along the main drags have contributed to the area's rebirth. One of the most influential trends in Chelsea has been the establishment of far **West Chelsea** (from Ninth Ave. west) and the adjacent **Meatpacking District** (south of West Chelsea, roughly from 17th St. to Little W. 12th St.) as the style-setting neighborhoods for the 21st century. What SoHo was in the 1960s, this industrial west world (dubbed "the Lower West Side" by *New York* magazine) is today. New restaurants, cutting-edge shops, and hot bars pop up daily in the Meat-Packing District, while the area from West 22nd to West 29th streets between Tenth and Eleventh avenues is home to New

York's contemporary art scene. It's also the location for some of the city's hottest dance clubs. With galleries and bars in converted warehouses and former meat lockers, browsing can be frustrating, and the sometimes-desolate streets intimidating. Your best bet is to have a specific destination (and an exact address) in mind before you come.

**The Flatiron District, Union Square & Gramercy Park** These adjoining and, at places, overlapping neighborhoods are some of the city's most appealing. Their streets have been rediscovered by New Yorkers and visitors alike, thanks to the boom-to-bust dot-com revolution of the late 1990s; the Flatiron District served as its geographical heart and earned the nickname "Silicon Alley." These neighborhoods boast great shopping and dining and a central-to-everything location. A number of new hotels have been added to the mix over the last few years. The commercial spaces are often large, loftlike expanses with witty designs and graceful columns.

The **Flatiron District** lies south of 23rd Street to 14th Street, between Broadway and Sixth Avenue, and centers on the historic Flatiron Building on 23rd (so named for its triangular shape) and Park Avenue South, which has become a sophisticated, new Restaurant Row. Below 23rd Street along Sixth Avenue (once known as the Ladies' Mile shopping district), mass-market discounters such as Filene's Basement, Bed Bath & Beyond, and others have moved in. The shopping gets classier on Fifth Avenue, where you'll find a mix of national names and hip boutiques.

**Union Square** is the hub of the entire area; the N, Q, R, W, 4, 5, 6, or L trains stop here, making it easy to reach from most other neighborhoods. Long in the shadows of the more bustling (Times and Herald) and high-toned (Washington) city squares, Union Square has experienced a major renaissance. Local businesses joined forces with the city to rid the park of drug dealers, and now it's a delightful place to spend an afternoon. Union Square is best known as the setting for New York's premier greenmarket every Monday, Wednesday, Friday, and Saturday.

From about 16th to 23rd streets, east from Park Avenue South to about Second Avenue, is the leafy, largely residential district known as **Gramercy Park**.

**Times Square & Midtown West** **Midtown West**, the area from 34th to 59th streets west of Fifth Avenue to the Hudson River, encompasses several famous names: Madison Square Garden, the Garment District, Rockefeller Center, the Theater District, and Times Square. This is New York's tourism central, where you'll

find the bright lights and bustle that draw people from all over. As such, this is the city's biggest hotel neighborhood, with options running from cheap to chic.

The 1, 2, 3 subway line serves the neon-lit station at the heart of Times Square, at 42nd Street between Broadway and Seventh Avenue, while the F, V, B, D line runs up Sixth Avenue to Rockefeller Center. The N, R, W line cuts diagonally across the neighborhood, following the path of Broadway before heading up Seventh Avenue at 42nd Street. The A, C, E line serves the West Side, running along Eighth Avenue.

If you know New York but haven't been here in a few years, you'll be surprised by the "new" **Times Square**. New Yorkers like to kvetch about the glory days of the old peep-show-and-porn-shop Times Square that this cleaned-up, Disneyfied version supplanted. And there really is not much here for the native. The revival, however, has been nothing short of an outstanding success for tourism. Expect dense crowds, though; it's often tough to make your way along the sidewalks.

To the west of the Theater District, in the 40s and 50s between Eighth and Tenth avenues, is **Hell's Kitchen**, also known as Clinton, an area that is much nicer than its ghoulish name and one of my favorites. The neighborhood resisted gentrification until the mid-1990s but has grown into a charming, less-touristy adjunct to the neighboring Theater District. Ninth Avenue, in particular, has blossomed into one of the city's finest dining avenues; stroll along and you'll have a world of dining to choose from, from American diner to sexy Mediterranean to traditional Thai.

Unlike Times Square, **Rockefeller Center** has needed no renovation. Situated between 46th and 50th streets from Sixth Avenue east to Fifth, this Art Deco complex contains some of the city's great architectural gems. If you can negotiate the crowds, holiday time is a great time to be here, as ice-skaters take over the central plaza and the Christmas tree twinkles against the night sky.

Between Seventh and Eighth avenues and 31st and 33rd streets, **Penn Station** sits beneath unsightly behemoth **Madison Square Garden**, where the Rangers, Liberty, and the Knicks play. Taking up all of 34th Street between Sixth and Seventh avenues is **Macy's**, the world's largest department store; exit Macy's at the southeast corner and you'll find more famous-label shopping around **Herald Square**. The blocks around 32nd Street just west of Fifth Avenue have developed into a thriving Koreatown, with mid-priced hotels and bright, bustling Asian restaurants offering some of the best-value stays and eats in Midtown.

**Midtown East & Murray Hill** **Midtown East**, the area including Fifth Avenue and everything east from 34th to 59th streets, is the more upscale side of the Midtown map. This side of town is short of subway trains, served primarily by the Lexington Avenue 4, 5, 6 line.

Midtown East is where you'll find the city's finest collection of grand hotels, mostly along Lexington Avenue and near the park at the top of Fifth. The stretch of **Fifth Avenue** from Saks at 49th Street extending to the 24-hour Apple Store and F.A.O. Schwarz at 59th St. is home to the city's most high-profile haute shopping, including Tiffany & Co. Magnificent architectural highlights include the recently repolished **Chrysler Building**, with its stylized gargoyles glaring down on passersby; the Beaux Arts tour de force that is **Grand Central Terminal**; **St. Patrick's Cathedral**; and the glorious **Empire State Building**.

Far east, swank Sutton and Beekman places are enclaves of beautiful town houses, luxury living, and pocket parks that look out over the East River. Along this river is the **United Nations**, which isn't officially in New York City, or even the United States, but on a parcel of international land belonging to member nations.

Claiming the territory east from Madison Avenue, **Murray Hill** begins somewhere north of 23rd Street (the line between it and Gramercy Park is fuzzy), and is most clearly recognizable north of 30th Street to 42nd Street. This brownstone-lined quarter is largely a quiet residential neighborhood, most notable for its handful of good budget and mid-priced hotels.

## **Uptown**

**Upper West Side** North of 59th Street and encompassing everything west of Central Park, the Upper West Side contains **Lincoln Center**, one of the world's premier performing-arts venues; the **Time Warner Center** with its upscale shops; **Jazz at Lincoln Center**; the **Mandarin Oriental Hotel**; the **Whole Foods Market**, and possibly the most expensive food court in the world, with restaurants such as **Per Se** and **Masa**. You'll also find the **American Museum of Natural History** here.

Two major subway lines service the area: the 1, 2, 3 line runs up Broadway, while the B and C trains run up Central Park West, stopping at the historic Dakota apartments (where John Lennon was shot and Yoko Ono still lives) at 72nd Street, and at the Museum of Natural History at 81st Street.

**Upper East Side** North of 59th Street and east of Central Park is some of the city's most expensive residential real estate. This is

New York at its most gentrified: Walk along Fifth and Park avenues, especially between 60th and 80th streets, and you're sure to encounter some of the wizened WASPs and Chanel-suited socialites that make up the most rarefied of the city's population. Madison Avenue from 60th Street well into the 80s is the moneyed crowd's main shopping strip, recently vaunting ahead of Hong Kong's Causeway Bay to become the most expensive retail real estate *in the world*—so bring your platinum card.

The main attraction of this neighborhood is **Museum Mile**, the stretch of Fifth Avenue fronting Central Park that's home to no fewer than 10 terrific cultural institutions, including Frank Lloyd Wright's **Guggenheim**, and anchored by the mind-boggling **Metropolitan Museum of Art**. But the elegant rows of landmark town houses are worth a look alone: East 70th Street, from Madison east to Lexington, is one of the world's most charming residential streets. If you want to see where real people live, move east to Third Avenue and beyond; that's where affordable restaurants and active street life start popping up.

The Upper East Side is served by the packed Lexington Avenue line (4, 5, 6 trains), so wear walking shoes (or bring taxi fare) if you're heading here to explore.

**Harlem** Harlem has benefited from a dramatic image makeover, and with new restaurants, clubs, and stores, is becoming a neighborhood in demand. Harlem is actually several areas. **Harlem proper** stretches from river to river, beginning at 125th Street on the West Side, 96th Street on the East Side, and 110th Street north of Central Park. East of Fifth Avenue, **Spanish Harlem (*El Barrio*)** runs between East 100th and East 125th streets. The neighborhood is benefiting greatly from the revitalization that has swept so much of the city, with national-brand retailers moving in, restaurants and hip nightspots opening everywhere, and visitors arriving to tour historic sites related to the golden age of African-American culture.

**Washington Heights & Inwood** At the northern tip of Manhattan, Washington Heights (the area from 155th St. to Dyckman St., with adjacent Inwood running to the tip) is home to a large segment of Manhattan's Latino community, plus an increasing number of yuppies who don't mind trading a half-hour subway commute to Midtown for lower rents. **Fort Tryon Park** and **the Cloisters** are the two big reasons for visitors to come up this way. The Cloisters houses the Metropolitan Museum of Art's stunning medieval collection, in a building perched atop a hill, with excellent views across

the Hudson to the Palisades. Committed off-the-beaten-path sightseers might also want to visit the **Dyckman Farmhouse**, a historic jewel built in 1783 and the only remaining Dutch Colonial structure in Manhattan.

## 8 Getting Around

Frankly, Manhattan's transportation systems are a marvel. It's miraculous that so many people can gather on this little island and move around it. For the most part, you can get where you're going pretty quickly and easily using some combination of subways, buses, and cabs; this section will tell you how to do just that.

But between gridlock and subway delays, sometimes you just can't get there from here—unless you walk. Walking can be the fastest way to navigate the island. During rush hours, you'll easily beat car traffic while on foot, as taxis and buses stop and groan at gridlocked corners (don't even *try* going crosstown in a cab or bus in Midtown at midday). You'll also see a lot more by walking than you will if you ride beneath the street or fly by in a cab. So pack your most comfortable shoes and hit the pavement—it's the best, cheapest, and most appealing way to experience the city.

### BY SUBWAY

Run by the **Metropolitan Transit Authority (MTA; [www.mta.info/nyct/subway](http://www.mta.info/nyct/subway))**, the subway system is the fastest way to travel around New York, especially during rush hours. Some 4.5 million people a day seem to agree with me, as it's their primary mode of transportation. The subway is quick, inexpensive, relatively safe, and efficient, as well as being a genuine New York experience.

The subway runs 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. The rush-hour crushes are roughly from 8 to 9:30am and from 5 to 6:30pm on weekdays; the rest of the time the trains are much more manageable.

### Paying Your Way

The subway fare is \$2 (half-price for seniors and those with disabilities); children under 44 inches ride free (up to three per adult).

Tokens are no longer available. People pay with the **MetroCard**, a magnetically encoded card that debits the fare when swiped through the turnstile (or the fare box on any city bus). Once you're in the system, you can transfer freely to any subway line that you can reach without exiting your station. MetroCards also allow you **free transfers** between the bus and subway within a 2-hour period.

MetroCards can be purchased from staffed token booths, where you can only pay with cash; at the ATM-style vending machines in

every subway station, which accept cash, credit cards, and debit cards; from a MetroCard merchant, such as most Rite Aid drugstores; Hudson News, at Penn Station and Grand Central Terminal; or at the MTA information desk at the **Times Square Information Center**, 1560 Broadway, between 46th and 47th streets.

MetroCards come in a few different configurations:

**Pay-Per-Ride MetroCards** can be used for up to four people by swiping up to four times (bring the entire family). You can put any amount from \$4 (two rides) to \$80 on your card. Every time you put \$7 or more on your Pay-Per-Ride MetroCard, it's automatically credited 15%—that's one free ride for every \$15 you spend. You can buy Pay-Per-Ride MetroCards at any subway station; most stations have automated MetroCard vending machines, which allow you to buy MetroCards using your major credit card or debit card. MetroCards are also available from many shops and newsstands around town in \$10 and \$20 values. You can refill your card at any time until the expiration date on the card, usually about a year from the date of purchase, at any subway station.

**Unlimited-Ride MetroCards**, which can't be used for more than one person at a time or more frequently than 18-minute intervals, are available in four values: the **daily Fun Pass**, which allows you a day's worth of unlimited subway and bus rides for \$7.50; the **7-Day MetroCard**, for \$25; a **14-day MetroCard** for \$47; and the **30-Day MetroCard**, for \$81. Seven-, 14- and 30-day Unlimited-Ride MetroCards can be purchased at any subway station or from a MetroCard merchant. Fun Passes, however, cannot be purchased at token booths—you can only buy them at a MetroCard vending machine; from a MetroCard merchant; or at the MTA information desk at the Times Square Information Center. Unlimited-Ride MetroCards go into effect the first time you use them—so if you buy a card on Monday and don't begin to use it until Wednesday, Wednesday is when the clock starts ticking on your MetroCard.

A Fun Pass is good from the first time you use it until 3am the next day, while 7- and 30-day MetroCards run out at midnight on the last day. These MetroCards cannot be refilled. (At press time there were strong rumors that the 7-Day Metro Card and 30-Day Metro Card rates were going up).

**Tips for using your MetroCard:** The swiping mechanisms at turnstiles are the source of much grouching. If you swipe too fast or too slow, the turnstile will ask you to swipe again. If this happens, ***do not move to a different turnstile***, or you may end up paying twice.

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## Subway Service Interruption Notes

Subway service is always subject to change, for reasons ranging from “a sick passenger” to regularly scheduled construction. Contact the **Metropolitan Transit Authority (MTA)** for details at ☎ **718/330-1234** or **[www.mta.nyc.ny.us](http://www.mta.nyc.ny.us)**, where you’ll find system updates that are thorough, timely, and clear. (You can also sign up online to receive service advisories by e-mail.) Also read any posters that are taped up on the platform or notices written on the token booth’s whiteboard.

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If you’ve tried repeatedly and really can’t make your MetroCard work, tell the token booth clerk; chances are good, though, that you’ll get the movement down after a couple of uses.

If you’re not sure how much money you have left on your MetroCard, or what day it expires, use the station’s MetroCard Reader, usually located near the station entrance or the token booth (on buses, the fare box will also provide you with this information).

To locate the nearest MetroCard merchant, or for any other MetroCard questions, call ☎ **800/METROCARD** (out of NYC only) or **212/METROCARD** (212/638-7622) Monday through Friday between 7am and 11pm, Saturday and Sunday from 9am to 5pm. Or go online to **[www.mta.nyc.ny.us/metrocard](http://www.mta.nyc.ny.us/metrocard)**, which can give you a full rundown of MetroCard merchants in the tri-state area.

## Using the System

As you can see from the subway map on the inside back cover of this book, the subway system basically mimics the lay of the land above-ground, with most lines in Manhattan running north and south, like the avenues, and a few lines east and west, like the streets.

To go up and down the east side of Manhattan (and to the Bronx and Brooklyn), take the 4, 5, or 6 train.

To travel up and down the West Side (and to the Bronx and Brooklyn), take the 1, 2, or 3 line; the A, C, E, or F line; or the B or D line.

The N, R, Q, and W lines first cut diagonally across town from east to west and then snake under Seventh Avenue before shooting out to Queens.

The crosstown S line, the Shuttle, runs back and forth between Times Square and Grand Central Terminal. Farther downtown, across 14th Street, the L line works its own crosstown magic.



**Lines** have assigned colors on subway maps and trains—red for the 1, 2, 3 line; green for the 4, 5, 6 trains; and so on—but nobody ever refers to them by color. Always refer to them by number or letter when asking questions. Within Manhattan, the distinction between different numbered trains that share the same line is usually that some are express and others are local. **Express trains** often skip about three stops for each one that they make; express stops are indicated on subway maps with a white (rather than solid) circle. Local stops are usually about 9 blocks apart.

**Directions** are almost always indicated using “uptown” (northbound) and “downtown” (southbound), so be sure to know what direction you want to head in. The outsides of some subway entrances are marked UPTOWN ONLY or DOWNTOWN ONLY; read carefully, as it’s easy to head in the wrong direction. Once you’re on the platform, check the signs overhead to make sure that the train you’re waiting for will be traveling in the right direction. If you do make a mistake, it’s a good idea to wait for an express station, such as 14th Street or 42nd Street, so you can get off and change to the other direction without paying again.

The days of graffiti-covered cars are gone, but the stations—and an increasing number of trains—are not as clean as they could be. Trains are air-conditioned (move to the next car if yours isn’t),

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### **Tips For More Bus & Subway Information**

For additional transit information, call the Metropolitan Transit Authority’s **MTA/New York City Transit’s Travel Information Center** at ☎ **718/330-1234**. Extensive automated information is available at this number 24 hours a day, and travel agents are on hand to answer your questions and provide directions daily from 6am to 9pm. Customers who don’t speak English can call ☎ **718/330-4847**. For online information that’s always up-to-the-minute, visit [www.mta.nyc.ny.us](http://www.mta.nyc.ny.us).

To request system maps, call the **Map Request Line** at ☎ **718/330-3322** (although realize that recent service changes may not yet be reflected on printed maps). Riders with disabilities should direct inquiries to ☎ **718/596-8585**; hearing-impaired riders can call ☎ **718/596-8273**. For MetroCard information, call ☎ **212/METROCARD** (638-7622) weekdays from 7am to 11pm, weekends 9am to 5pm, or go online to [www.mta.nyc.ny.us/metrocard](http://www.mta.nyc.ny.us/metrocard).

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though during the dog days of summer the platforms can be sweltering. In theory, all subway cars have PA systems to allow you to hear the announcements, but they don't always work well. It's a good idea to move to a car with a working PA system in case sudden service changes are announced that you'll want to know about.

## BY BUS

Less expensive than taxis and more pleasant than subways (they provide a mobile sightseeing window on Manhattan), MTA buses are a good transportation option. Their big drawback: They can get stuck in traffic, sometimes making it quicker to walk. They also stop every couple of blocks, rather than the 8 or 9 blocks that local subways traverse between stops. So for long distances, the subway is your best bet; but for short distances or traveling crosstown, try the bus.

### Paying Your Way

Like the subway fare, **bus fare** is \$2, half-price for seniors and riders with disabilities, and free for children under 44 inches (up to three per adult). The fare is payable with a **MetroCard** or **exact change**. Bus drivers don't make change, and fare boxes don't accept dollar bills or pennies. You can't purchase MetroCards on the bus, so you'll have to have them before you board; for details on where to get them, see "Paying Your Way," under "By Subway," above.

If you pay with a MetroCard, you can transfer to another bus or to the subway for free within 2 hours. If you pay cash, you must request a **free transfer** slip that allows you to change to an intersecting bus route only (transfer points are listed on the transfer paper) within 1 hour of issue. Transfer slips cannot be used to enter the subway.

### Using the System

You can't flag a city bus down—you have to meet it at a bus stop. **Bus stops** are located every 2 or 3 blocks on the right-side corner of the street (facing the direction of traffic flow). They're marked by a curb painted yellow and a blue-and-white sign with a bus emblem *and the route number or numbers, and usually an ad-bedecked Plexiglass bus shelter*. Guide-a-Ride boxes at most stops display a route map and a hysterically optimistic schedule.

Almost every major avenue has its own **bus route**. They run either north or south: downtown on Fifth, uptown on Madison, downtown on Lexington, uptown on Third, and so on. There are **crosstown buses** at strategic locations all around town: 8th Street (eastbound); 9th (westbound); 14th, 23rd, 34th, and 42nd (east- and westbound); 49th (eastbound); 50th (westbound); 57th (east- and westbound); 65th (eastbound across the West Side, through the

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### *Tips* Take a Free Ride

The Alliance for Downtown New York's **Downtown Connection** offers a free bus service that provides access to downtown destinations, including Battery Park City, the World Financial Center, and South Street Seaport. The buses, which run daily, every 10 minutes or so, from 10am to 7:30pm, make stops along a 5-mile route from Chambers Street on the west side to Beekman Street on the east side. For schedules and more information, call the Downtown Connection at ☎ **212/566-6700**, or visit **www.downtownny.com**.

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park, and then north on Madison, continuing east on 68th to York Ave.); 67th (westbound on the East Side to Fifth Ave., and then south on Fifth, continuing west on 66th St., through the park and across the west side to West End Ave.); and 79th, 86th, 96th, 116th, and 125th (east- and westbound). Some bus routes, however, are erratic: The M104, for example, starts at the East River, then turns at Eighth Avenue and goes up Broadway. The buses of the Fifth Avenue line go up Madison or Sixth and follow various routes around the city.

Most routes operate 24 hours a day, but service is infrequent at night. During rush hour, main routes have "limited" buses, identifiable by the red card in the front window; they stop only at major cross streets.

To make sure that the bus you're boarding goes where you're going, check the map on the sign that's at every bus stop, get your hands on a route map, or **just ask**. The drivers are helpful, as long as you don't hold up the line too long.

While traveling, look out the window not only to take in the sights but also to keep track of cross streets so you know when to get off. Signal for a stop by pressing the tape strip above and beside the windows and along the metal straps, about 2 blocks before you want to stop. Exit through the pneumatic back doors (not the front door) by pushing on the yellow tape strip; the doors open automatically. Most city buses are equipped with wheelchair lifts. Buses also "kneel," lowering down to the curb to make boarding easier.

### **BY TAXI**

If you don't want to deal with public transportation, finding an address that might be a few blocks from the subway station, or sharing your ride with 3.5 million other people, then take a taxi. The

biggest advantages are, of course, that cabs can be hailed on any street (provided you find an empty one—often simple, yet at other times nearly impossible) and will take you right to your destination. I find they're best used at night when there's little traffic and when the subway may seem a little daunting. In Midtown at midday, you can usually walk to where you're going more quickly.

**Official New York City taxis**, licensed by the Taxi and Limousine Commission (TLC), are yellow, with the rates printed on the door and a light with a medallion number on the roof. You can hail a taxi on any street. *Never* accept a ride from any other car except an official city yellow cab (livery cars are not allowed to pick up fares on the street, despite what the driver tells you when he pulls over to see if he can pick up a fare).

The base fare on entering the cab is \$2.50. The cost is 40¢ for every  $\frac{1}{2}$  mile or 40¢ per 60 seconds in stopped or slow-moving traffic (or for waiting time). There's no extra charge for each passenger or for luggage. However, you must pay bridge or tunnel tolls (sometimes the driver will front the toll and add it to your bill at the end; most times, however, you pay the driver before the toll). You'll pay a \$1 surcharge between 4 and 8pm and a 50¢ surcharge after 8pm and before 6am. A 15% to 20% tip is customary.

Most taxis are now equipped with a device that allows you to pay by credit card, though some drivers will claim the machine is broken (there is a transaction fee for credit cards that cuts into their income) and ask you to pay in cash. You can choose to either add the tip to the credit card, or tip the driver in cash.

The TLC has posted a **Taxi Rider's Bill of Rights** sticker in every cab. Drivers are required to take you anywhere in the five boroughs, to Nassau or Westchester counties, or to Newark Airport. They are supposed to know how to get you to any address in Manhattan and all major points in the outer boroughs. They are also required to provide air-conditioning and turn off the radio on demand, and they cannot smoke while you're in the cab. They are required to be polite.

You are allowed to dictate the route. It's a good idea to look at a map before you get in a taxi. Taxi drivers have been known to jack up the fare on visitors who don't know better by taking a circuitous route between points A and B.

On the other hand, listen to drivers who propose an alternate route. These guys spend 8 or 10 hours a day on these streets, and they know where the worst traffic is, or where Con Ed has dug up

an intersection that should be avoided. A knowledgeable driver will know how to get you to your destination quickly and efficiently.

Another important tip: **Always make sure the meter is turned on at the start of the ride.** You'll see the red LED readout register the initial \$2.50 and start calculating the fare as you go. I've witnessed unscrupulous drivers buzzing unsuspecting visitors around the city with the meter off, and then overcharging them at drop-off time.

**Always ask for the receipt**—it comes in handy if you need to make a complaint or leave something behind.

**A taxi driver is obligated to take you to your destination.** If a taxi driver refuses to take you to your desired destination (which happens on occasion when you want to go to an outer borough or very far uptown), get the driver's name and medallion number (on his license in the divider between the front and back seats) and file a complaint with the Taxi and Limousine Commission.

For all driver complaints, including the one above, and to report lost property, call ☎ **311** or 212-NEWYORK (outside the metro area). For details on getting to and from the local airports by taxi, see "By Plane," under "Getting There," earlier in this chapter. For further taxi information—including a complete rundown of your rights as a taxi rider—point your Web browser to **[www.ci.nyc.ny.us/taxi](http://www.ci.nyc.ny.us/taxi)**.

## BY CAR

Forget driving yourself around the city. It's not worth the headache. Traffic is horrendous, and you don't know the rules of the road (written or unwritten) or the arcane alternate-side-of-the-street parking regulations. You don't want to find out the price of parking violations or have to claim your car from the tow pound.

If you arrive in New York City by car, park it in a garage (expect to pay at least \$25–\$45 per day) and leave it there for the duration of your stay. (In our hotel chapter, we note if a hotel has a garage, or offers discounted parking, and the rate). If you drive a rental car in, return it as soon as you arrive and rent another when you leave.