



Not NYC's most famous freebie, but with a jaw-dropping view and great flicks, the Brooklyn Bridge Movies With a View film series is one of the city's treasures. See p. 56.

BEST OF THE FREE & DIRT CHEAP APPLE

A lot of great bargains in this world don't withstand close scrutiny. Anyone who's ever "won" a free weekend at a North Carolina timeshare can attest to that. New Yorkers are lucky, however, in having a menu of freebies and cheapies that aren't just discards or traps. From Shakespeare in the Park to car-less drive-in movies to kayaking along the Hudson, there's a host of remarkable activities here that can't be had in other cities for any price. In the dirt cheap realm, the Big Apple's big volume creates bargain opportunities left and right. From cheap ethnic food to giveaway avant-garde theater, an urban adventurer can go far on very little. What follows is the best of the best.

1 Best Entertainment Bets

-  **Best Manhattan Parade:** New Yorkers are pros at assembling en masse. My favorite pageant is one of the city's most inclusive, the **Greenwich Village Halloween Parade**, at which elaborate costumes and a healthy dose of gallows humor make the festive spirit infectious. See p. 26.
-  **Best Outer-Borough Parade:** As New York events become more and more commercialized, it's nice to have one occasion that's defiantly do-it-yourself. Coney Island's **Mermaid Parade** brings low-budget finery to the Atlantic shore. Classic cars serve as the chariots for a procession of mermaids and Neptunes who will never stand accused of being overdressed. See p. 23.
-  **Best Festival: Harlem Week** began as a single day 30 years ago and now stretches across the entire month of August. Film, jazz, and food festivals are among the highlights to be found along lovely brownstone blocks Uptown. See p. 24.
- **Best DIY Rock Show:** Why trek out to the Nassau Coliseum to watch some aging monsters of rock, when the Lower East Side offers up the same three chords for free? **Arlene's Grocery** (95 Stanton St.; ☎ 212/358-1633) is the tri-state's best place to play rock star, with a real-live rock band standing in for soulless laser discs. See p. 77.
- **Best Cultural Center with Beer: Pete's Candy Store** (709 Lorimer St.; ☎ 718/302-3770) does its part to keep Williamsburg elevated and enlightened, bringing in a bushel of live music and readings. Quiz, spelling, and Scrabble nights round out a full schedule of free diversions. See p. 83.
- **Best New-York-Studio-Sized Music Venue:** The stage is tiny and the seats are few, but the back room of the **Lakeside Lounge** (162 Ave. B; ☎ 212/529-8463) brings in improbably big acts. Rock and rock tributaries can be found on most nights, and there's never a cover. See p. 31.
- **Best Jazzy Venue:** Low-pretense Brooklyn meets Euro sophistication over pints of Hoegaarden at Williamsburg's **Zebulon** (258 Wythe Ave.; ☎ 718/218-6934). Afrobeat, funk, and improv jazz can be heard here for no cover. See p. 34.
- **Best Concerts for Skipping Out on the Office:** The worker bees of the Financial District have

long taken advantage of the great classical performances heard during the “**Concerts at One**” series at **Trinity Church** (74 Trinity Place; ☎ 212/602-0747) and **St. Paul’s Chapel** (Broadway and Fulton St.). St. Paul’s hosts lunchtime Mondays, and Trinity handles Thursdays. The acoustics are great in both churches, and the \$2 suggested donation doesn’t begin to reflect the caliber of talent. See p. 38.

- **Best Summer Music Festival:** Every year **SummerStage** (Central Park; ☎ 212/360-2777) seems to get better organized, efficiently channeling music fans into a stage area just off the Rumsey Playfield in the middle of Central Park. Though several shows a year are benefit performances with steep ticket prices, the calendar is still littered with huge names playing for free. See p. 48.
- **Best Summer Music Festival That’s Not SummerStage:** The massive **Lincoln Center Out of Doors** (70 Lincoln Center Plaza; ☎ 212/546-2656) festival presents hundreds of acts every August. The range is staggering, covering jazz and dance and opera and everything in between. See p. 45.
- **Best Movie Screenings with a Roof:** David Maysles’s new Harlem institution, the **Maysles Cinema** (343 Malcolm X Blvd.; ☎ 212/582-6050), shows provoking films and documentaries several nights a week, usually for only \$7 a pop. See p. 51.
- **Best Movie Screenings Without a Roof:** Forty-Second Street welcomes movie fans with an eclectic selection of classics during the **HBO Bryant Park Summer Film Festival** (☎ 212/512-5700). The lawn crowds up quickly, but that only enhances the festive atmosphere. See p. 54.
- **Best Movie Screenings on a Roof:** Come summer nights, God dims the overheads, and indie films play on rooftops (and a schoolyard) across Brooklyn. **Rooftop Films** (☎ 718/417-7362) is quickly becoming a local institution, with quirky, well-selected fare. See p. 51.
- **Best Movie Date Night:** Friday nights the **Rubin Museum of Art** (150 W. 17th St.; ☎ 212/620-5000) throws open its doors. You can tour intriguing Himalayan art for free, and for \$7 you can treat yourself to a martini and a movie. The **Cabaret Cinema** series brings an eclectic selection of films, along with the occasional related celebrity, for just the

price of a tippie or a snack at the bar. See p. 50.

- **Best Outdoor Summer Theater:** Forsooth, New York's greatest summer asset is no secret. **Shakespeare in the Park** (☎ 212/539-8750) hooks up tens of thousands of bard hounds with the best in Elizabethan drama (using some of today's best actors and directors). The Delacorte Theater's site in the middle of Central Park is well nigh enchanted. See p. 63.
- **Best Outdoor Summer Theater That Isn't Shakespeare in the Park:** Energetic performances substitute for big names and big budgets in downtown's alternative **Shakespeare in the Park(ing) Lot** (☎ 212/877-0099). The setting couldn't be less formal, but somehow the troupe manages to cast its spell. See p. 63.
- **Best Free Dance:** Modern and experimental dance has a home during **Movement Research at the Judson Church** (55 Washington Sq. S.; ☎ 212/539-2611). Dancers and choreographers vary from week to week, but the talent level stays consistently high. The series only seems to be getting better, especially now that the Judson Church has installed its lovely new dance floor. See p. 76.
- **Best Comedy Troupe:** The founders of the **Upright Citizens Brigade** (307 W. 26th St.; ☎ 212/366-9176) have gone on to movie and television fortune and fame, but the institution's classes continue to crank out rapier wits. Improv nights here are cheap when they're not free, and the legendary ASSSSCAT 3000 is not to be missed. See p. 82.
- **Best Readings:** The great writerly look of **KGB Bar** (85 E. 4th St.; ☎ 212/505-3360) is well matched by the great writers who come through almost every night of the week. Enough quality words have been spilled beneath the Soviet-kitsch furnishings to justify the publishing of KGB anthologies, in addition to a journal. See p. 94.
- **Best Readings in a Bookstore:** New York has many great literary events at its mom and pop shops, but the little players don't have quite the juice to bring in huge names every time. The **Union Square branch of Barnes & Noble** (33 E. 17th St.; ☎ 212/253-0810) has no difficulty booking the literati glitterati—check out their calendar for a steady stream of famous scribes. See p. 89.

2 Best Cheap Eats

- **Best Investment of \$1 (Bagel):** New York exported the bagel to the four corners of America, but after the indignities that have been performed (piña colada bagels?) we should ask for them back. Fortunately, New York still has the best, and a single bill will let you sample one at **Kossar's Bialys** (367 Grand St.; ☎ 212/473-4810). With flavor and texture honed to perfection, you can't make a better carb investment. See p. 130.
- **Best Investment of \$1.25 (Hot Dog):** For cheap protein and quick bursts of patriotic fervor, New York's dogs can't be beat. **Gray's Papaya** (2090 Broadway; ☎ 212/799-0243; plus other locations) is the best of the fruit drink-and-wiener purveyors, with flavorful, lightly charred links that'll only set you back a buck and a quarter. See p. 123.
- **Best Investment of \$2 (Tacos):** Served in a double layer of supple corn tortillas and garnished with fresh tomatillo sauce, the tacos at **Zaragoza** (215 Ave. A; ☎ 212/780-9204) burst with flavor. At just \$2 for standouts like enchilada and roast pork, they're the cheapest way to pay a visit south of the border without leaving NYC. See p. 124.
- **Best Investment of \$2.25 (Sesame Pancake):** The dumplings at **Vanessa's Dumpling House** (118 Eldridge St.; ☎ 212/625-8008) are justly famous and a total steal at four for \$1. Less publicized but equally delicious are the sandwiches—a big wedge of sesame pancake with fresh cilantro, carrot, and tender Peking duck. See p. 109.
- **Best Investment of \$2.50 (New York Slice):** First-time visitors to **Sal's & Carmine's Pizza** (2671 Broadway; ☎ 212/663-7651), spurred to spontaneous compliments by the spectacular pies, can expect to hear back from the eponymous proprietors, "Well, where the hell you been this whole time?" One taste of the crispy crust and character-full sauce and you'll be asking yourself the same question. See p. 131.
- **Best Investment of \$3.50 (Buffet):** The competition between two Chinatown buffet restaurants has driven prices into the ground. An almost comical price of \$3.50 covers four fresh, tasty Chinese entrees over rice at my favorite, **Yi Mei Gourmet Food** (51 Division St.; ☎ 212/925-1921). See p. 110.

- **Best Investment of \$3.75 (Sandwich):** For me, a bánh mì sandwich is more than just an ingenious blending of French and Vietnamese flavors—a French baguette filled with pork pâté, pickled carrots, daikon, onion, and cilantro—it’s one of the apexes of human civilization. You’ll find my favorite at the back counter of **Bánh Mì Saigon Bakery** (138-01 Mott St.; ☎ 212/941-1541). See p. 117.
- **Best Dirt Cheap Sit-Down Meal with Atmosphere:** Cheap Asian too often means over-lit, dingy cafeteria settings. Not so at **Galanga** (149 W. 4th St.; ☎ 212/228-4267), where a stylish, modern interior makes for a perfect date spot. With such great atmosphere, the spicy, fresh Thai food seems almost a lagniappe. See p. 126.
- **Best Burger:** New Yorkers have voted with their palates by keeping the **Corner Bistro** (331 W. 4th St.; ☎ 212/242-9502) busy at every hour. With the succulent, unpretentious \$5.75 burgers here, it’s no wonder. The city’s expense-account \$15 rivals at the fancy-shmancy places don’t even come close. See p. 125.

3 Best Living Bets

- **Best Free School:** With college tuitions spiking endlessly upward, **Cooper Union** (Cooper Sq.; ☎ 212/353-4120) is a definite anomaly: The 1,000 students here get their education for exactly \$0 and 0¢. The rest of us are invited in for exhibitions, readings, and a great series of lectures. See p. 149.
- **Best Free Smarts:** The **Graduate Center at the City University of New York (CUNY)** (365 Fifth Ave.; ☎ 212/817-8215) keeps adults educated with a terrific selection of lectures, seminars, and panel discussions. Fees are reasonable, and big chunks of the program are on the house. See p. 150.
- **Best Cheap Bed:** Who needs a mint on his pillow and a bill for \$250, when **Big Apple Hostel** (119 W. 45th St.; ☎ 212/302-2603) can provide a good night’s sleep for under \$40? You’ll get a high-rent location, too: right in the heart of the Theater District. See p. 165.
- **Best Gyms:** Stay thin without a fat wallet. For less than 14¢ a day, 29 gyms and rec centers can belong to you. The facilities of the **Department of Parks and**

Recreation (☎ 212/360-8222) include tracks, weight rooms, dance studios, and boxing rings. For \$75 a year (\$25 more), you get access to the swimming pools, too. See p. 175.

- **Best Grooming:** Style-conscious New Yorkers flock to Bumble and bumble salon for the latest looks. Savvier souls sign up for the model calls at their school, **Bumble and bumble.University** (415 W. 13th St.; ☎ 866/7-BUMBLE [728-6253]). If you're selected for the stylist training program, you'll get a free cut, a

head full of styling products, and an invitation to call back in a few months to do it all over again. See p. 168.

- **Best Boat Ride:** Transform yourself into river traffic through the programs at the **Downtown Boathouse** (Pier 40, Pier 96, and at 72nd St.; ☎ 646/613-0375). They'll loan you a kayak and let you paddle around their west side piers. If you get your strength up, you'll be eligible for a longer ride into New York Harbor. See p. 179.

4 Best Shopping Bets

- **Best Thrift Shopping: Housing Works Thrift Shop** (143 W. 17th St.; ☎ 212/366-0820, plus other locations) brings the prices of fashionable clothes and furniture down to levels real people can afford. The inventory is lightly used and quick to turn over, and the money you spend goes to support a great cause (housing, services, and advocacy for people living with HIV and AIDS). See p. 196.
- **Best Department Store: Century 21** (22 Cortlandt St.; ☎ 212/227-9092) is the Shakespeare in the Park of shopping—everybody knows about it, it's in great demand,

and despite New Yorkers' high expectations it rarely comes up short. Amazing selection and equally amazing prices draw in the crowds 7 days a week. See p. 206.

- **Best Gourmet Food Shop for Tightwads:** Tracking down fancy fromage is not a difficult task in NYC, but to actually purchase a wedge without emptying your purse is another issue. Thank the cheese gods then for the **East Village Cheese Store** (40 Third Ave.; ☎ 212/477-2601), which has a gigantic selection at \$2.99 per pound. This is the ideal place for cocktail party hosts and hostesses to fortify themselves. See p. 212.

New York's Top Five Best-Kept Free Secrets

- 1 As far as New York vistas go, it's hard to beat the Brooklyn Bridge at night with the Manhattan skyline twinkling in the background. The Brooklyn Bridge **Movies With a View film series** (📞 718/802-0603) does its best to enhance the skyline by projecting film favorites against the epic scenery. Compared to its Manhattan competitors, this event is much more under control, with a hip, friendly, and quiet crowd. See p. 56.
- 2 Though the **National Museum of the American Indian** (1 Bowling Green; 📞 212/514-3700) has seen the bulk of its collection moved to the Mall in D.C., the three gallery spaces here still put on great exhibits of contemporary and historic Native American art. The building itself, a magnificent Beaux Arts customs house, is worthy of a visit of its own. See p. 240.
- 3 The former military base that is **Governors Island** (📞 212/440-2202) opens up to the public in summer months, with picturesque free ferry rides through New York Harbor leading to the city's best picnic grounds. Programming has been quickly metastasizing—an arts fest and folk and world music concerts have been added to the existing roster of historical tours. See p. 255.
- 4 The **New York Earth Room** (141 Wooster St.; 📞 212/989-5566) is just that: 140 tons of soil hidden away in a SoHo loft. Even after multiple visits it's a completely unexpected sight, and a few whiffs of the earthy scent can be oddly rejuvenating. See p. 263.
- 5 Malcolm Forbes's affection for his idiosyncratic collections is obvious from the well-crafted displays at the **Forbes Magazine Galleries** (62 Fifth Ave.; 📞 212/206-5548). As you wind through model boats, toy soldiers, Monopoly boards, and trophies, you just may find Forbes's enthusiasm rubbing off on you. See p. 237.

5 Best Exploring Bets

- **Best Exhibits:** The main branch of the public library, formally known as the **Humanities and Social Sciences Library** (Fifth Ave. and 42nd St.; ☎ **212/869-8089**), puts on terrific shows in the hushed interiors behind the lions. Rare editions and manuscripts are often on display, accompanied by thoughtful captions that make equally illuminating reading. See p. 258.
- **Best Tour:** The mayor and the city council still have their offices in graceful old **City Hall** (Broadway, at Murray St.; ☎ **212/788-2170**). This under-publicized free tour allows you to catch glimpses of NYC politico celebs, while admiring gorgeous portraiture and architecture. See p. 271.
- **Best Use of a Former Factory Space in Queens:** The perfunctory design of MoMA QNS couldn't touch Long Island City's **SculptureCenter** (44-19 Purves St.; ☎ **718/361-1750**). Maya Lin left a lot of rough edges, but the overall effect is reminiscent of a cathedral, complete with a catacomb-like basement. The intriguing sculptures and installation art shown here further justify the trip to Queens. See p. 243.
- **Best New Giveaway:** Okay, so the new building that houses the **New Museum** (235 Bowery; ☎ **212/219-1222**) screams maximum security prison, but the free Thursday nights are a great time. Contemporary artwork that skews low-fi, playful, and international fills the upstairs galleries, and the LES comes out to mingle. See p. 250.
- **Best Art Museum:** The **P.S. 1 Contemporary Art Center** (22–25 Jackson Ave.; ☎ **718/784-2084**) puts on great art shows just a stop away from Manhattan in Long Island City. The museum is a beautiful conversion of a Renaissance Revival public school, and the interior spaces have been inventively redone to complement the cutting-edge art displayed here. Entrance is by suggested donation. See p. 256.
- **Best Dirt Cheap Date Night:** **First Saturdays** at the **Brooklyn Museum of Art** (200 Eastern Pkwy.; ☎ **718/638-5000**) are among the best parties of the year. You can generate conversation fodder at exhibits, films, and lectures. You'll also find live music, should all that talk lead to a little dancing. See p. 247.

- **Best Natural Oasis:** Visions of rhododendron valleys, waterfalls, and wetlands conjure up only one place in New York: the Bronx. If you've never seen the **New York Botanical Garden** (200th St. and Southern Blvd.; ☎ 718/817-8700), you'll be amazed at the biological diversity here. It's arguably the country's greatest public garden. See p. 274.
-  **Best Elephant Procession:** Forget Republican conventions—New York's best elephant show occurs when the **Ringling Brothers and Barnum & Bailey** circus (☎ 212/465-6741) comes to town. Once a year around midnight, the elephants (sometimes accompanied by zebras and camels) stroll through the Queens–Midtown Tunnel and across town to Madison Square Garden. As far as New York wildlife goes, this spectacle is hard to beat. See p. 279.

