

Home & Away

Four Days—Four Neighborhoods

Leaving Manhattan helps visitors unearth local flavor in New York.

By Elizabeth Hey

Glamour and glitz are the first images of New York that most likely come to mind: Times Square, Broadway, Wall Street and Manhattan. But the city's magnetism isn't merely skin deep. The Big Apple's appeal extends past those well-deserved highlights into the boroughs where locals live and work. Beyond upper and lower Manhattan lies a melting pot of cultures and sights just waiting to be explored.

Game Plan

Admitted newbies to the Big Apple, my daughter and I decided to meet for a long weekend in the city. We wanted to take in well-known sights and poke around in the neighborhoods of Brooklyn, Staten Island, the Bronx and Queens. After landing at LaGuardia, our prearranged car service was waiting curbside—often the same price as a cab and a swanky start to our trip.

To keep things simple, we chose two strategically located hotels and stayed two nights at each.

Residence Inn by Marriott World Trade gave us easy access to Brooklyn and Staten Island, as well as Lower Manhattan. Newly opened last year in a restored 1939 building, the hotel's contemporary rooms feature mini kitchens with dishwashers and full-size refrigerators. Add in a complimentary, hot breakfast buffet for a homey, yet upscale, city oasis.

Hotel Edison, part of the family-owned NYC brand Triumph Hotels, located a mere half-block off Times Square and steps from superb dining and the theaters, is convenient to the Bronx and Queens via the subway. One of the original grand dames of Times Square, this affordable, historic property dates to the 1930s. Recently renovated in Art Deco style, many of the generously sized signature rooms and suites feature terraces overlooking the action below.

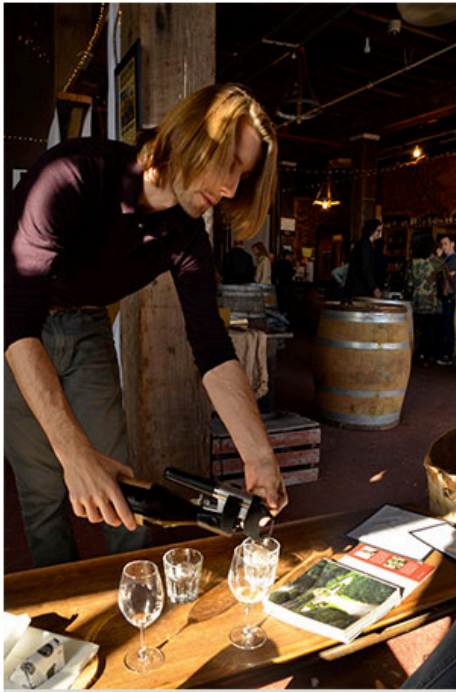
That first evening, we walked two blocks from the Residence Inn World Trade to the 9/11 Memorial Museum—most poignant were the roses placed beside victim's names on the outside plaza. From the One World Observatory, our view was semi-shrouded in high fog, but the 360-degree panorama of twinkling lights was still spectacular from the 100th floor. Afterward, we headed to classy Pier A Harbor House that overlooks the water. With a striking downstairs bar and upstairs menu that served top-notch steaks and lamb, we toasted our first night on the town.

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Brooklyn's Red Hook Winery sells wines made from grapes grown in New York.
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Day One: Brooklyn Heights

A walk from Lower Manhattan over the 130-year-old Brooklyn Bridge affords views of the skyline and leads to Brooklyn Heights—the city's first suburb filled with historical brownstones. Exiting the bridge to the right, the Promenade hugs the waterfront with first glimpses of the Statue of Liberty.

Brooklyn's 2.6 million residents, many who work in Manhattan, live on quiet streets that juxtapose bustling, commercial districts such as popular DUMBO (Down Under Manhattan Bridge Overpass) and Brooklyn Bridge Park. Neighborhood gems include the Brooklyn Women's Exchange boutique that sells handcrafted items and has been managed by Catholic Charities since 1854. Underground in a former subway station, the New York Transportation Museum invites visitors to board dozens of vintage New York City Subway cars sitting on tracks. For many locals, lunch at Junior's is a tradition that harkens to the 1950s with a bona-fide lunch counter, ruby-red decor and iconic cheesecake in scrumptious flavors such as lemon coconut and chocolate dream.

In Brooklyn's Red Hook neighborhood along the water, the comfy tasting room at Red Hook Winery features the winery's New York grapes and unique, skin-fermented white wines. This up-and-coming area is filled with galleries, boutiques and interesting tastes. Cacao Prieto produces organic chocolates from Dominican beans roasted on-site and flights of house-made rum and whiskey. Trendy Pioneer Works, located in a former ironworks plant, opens its doors on second Sundays for live music, art demos and food trucks. An added bonus, the round-trip to Lower Manhattan via the IKEA Express Ferry is free on weekends, and it chugs right by the Statue of Liberty.

Day Two: Staten Island

Staten Island, once the playground for New Yorkers looking for an urban escape, is known as the "green borough" with the city's highest concentration of parks. Fabulous views of the Statue of Liberty make the free, Staten Island Ferry a memorable journey. Next year, the 630-foot tall New York Wheel is expected to open—rides will last almost an hour with 40 passengers per car; a boutique hotel and the city's only designer outlet mall are slated to open concurrently.

Adjacent to the ferry terminal, the National Lighthouse Museum highlights the state's colorful history of lighthouses and their keepers, including the woman who manned the New York Harbor lighthouse and sent her kids to school in a rowboat.

Snug Harbor Cultural Center & Botanical Garden lies a quick bus ride from the pier. The campus' Greek Revival buildings were once the "last port of call" for retired sailors—1,000 sailors lived here at its heyday. The center's renovated Staten Island Museum displays a broad collection in its compact three stories; and every artifact, from Mastodon teeth to oil paintings, has been found, created or collected on Staten Island.

Day Three: The Bronx

The Bronx delivers a cross-cultural experience, especially on Arthur Avenue known as "Little Italy of the Bronx." It's easy to spend the better part of a day exploring Arthur Avenue, watching shop owners make fresh pasta and mozzarella and wandering the Arthur Avenue Retail Market. Family-owned bakeries sell a rainbow of Italian cookies, and locals and tourists dine al fresco on Italian fare.

Several blocks away, nature lovers can meander the paths of the 250-acre New York Botanical Garden that celebrates its 125th anniversary this year. Seasonal exhibits are housed in the Enid A. Haupt Conservatory, a visual treat in itself—the Victorian-style glasshouse is considered a New York City landmark. Not to be missed is the garden's fabulous gift shop. If there's time, the nearby Bronx Zoo ranks as one of the world's largest metropolitan zoos, boasting some 4,000 animals that represent approximately 650 species.

Day Four: Queens

According to one local's opinion, "In Queens, we have everything that Manhattan has, but we're still a hidden treasure." Queens encompasses JFK and La Guardia airports, the Mets play at City Field, and neighborhoods bustle with local eateries. Popular Astoria serves as a melting pot for numerous cuisines, such as authentic Greek dishes at family-owned Ovelia bistro and the Bohemian Hall and Beer Garden that recently celebrated 100 years.

The borough's outstanding Museum of the Moving Image takes visitors on a behind-the-scenes journey of movie-making. Inspired by the film 2001 Space Odyssey, the dazzling, white interior showcases screen culture in all forms—famous costumes, face molds, artifacts from Star Trek and Star Wars, soundtracks, digital media and more. This year, the Jim Henson gallery will open with hundreds of puppets, props and costumes. More than 400 screenings per year range from American classics to contemporary foreign films.



All sorts of fruits and vegetables fills an outdoor neighborhood market in Queens.
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Back in midtown Manhattan on our final evening, my daughter and I dined on Cuban fare at posh Victor's Cafe before we watched a mesmerizing performance of *Les Misérables* at the Imperial Theatre. Our whirlwind introduction to the city had been a success. Although we barely scratched the surface, we had experienced much more than the average tourist.

For us, New York's allure extends well beyond its celebrated sites—the soul of the city lives in the boroughs and neighborhoods that New Yorkers call home.

Planning Your Trip

For more information about New York and to purchase a New York Explorer Pass and/or CityPASS that admits visitors into numerous attractions, log on to nycgo.com. For travel- planning assistance, visit your local AAA Travel agent or AAA.com/travel.

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