



New York City:

Navigating Manhattan's Primary Sights and Attractions

by Monica Frim

Known worldwide for its shimmer and sass, New York captures people with its vibrancy and energy. It takes them on a magic carpet ride through cultures that appear to have been plucked from around the world and dropped in overlapping patterns into boroughs that, together, make up the most culturally and linguistically diverse city in the world. Almost 800 languages are spoken in New York, which has always been the major point of entry for immigrants, starting with centuries' worth of European migrations to today's predominantly Asian and Caribbean sources. The largest Chinese community outside Asia is in New York, as is the largest Jewish community outside Israel and the largest Puerto Rican community outside Puerto Rico.

The city seems to have a hold not only on immigrants in search of a better life, but also on American and global travellers in search of a better holiday. Roughly 41 million domestic visitors and 11 million international travellers flocked to New York's

NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL TRAVEL DESTINATIONS

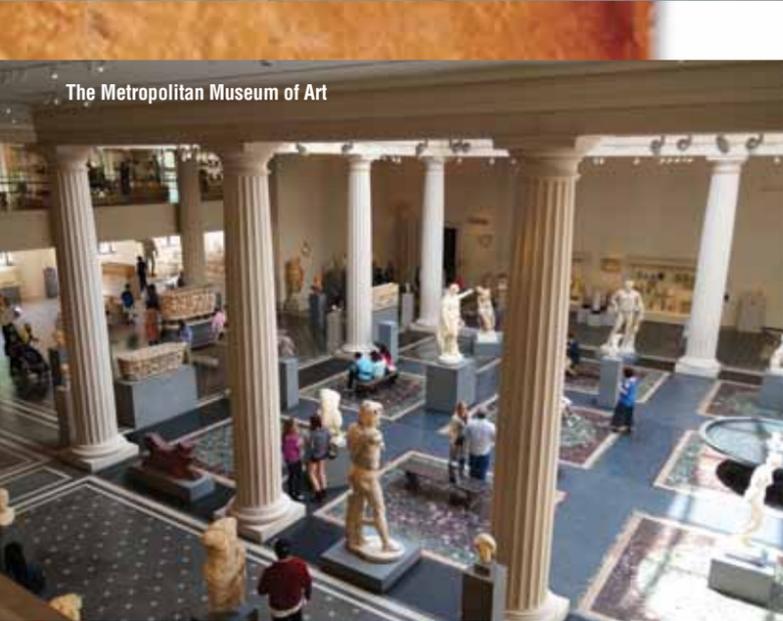
Join Monica Frim on her travels to New York City — a city with a giant heartbeat that resonates with creativity. From skyscrapers, bridges and galleries to international restaurants and statue-be-decked parklands, New York's diverse attractions abound on Manhattan Island.

Photography by John Frim PhD and Monica Frim

Travel with us



Viewed from the Top of the Rock, the Empire State Building is Manhattan's most distinctive landmark.



The Metropolitan Museum of Art



Pier 59 Driving Range

renowned landmarks in 2012, and more are expected this year. For the first-time visitor, the city's excesses can be daunting. The sheer number of skyscrapers, international restaurants, museums, galleries, parks, theaters, shops, bridges and historic buildings, combined with loud celebrity-studded nightclubs, ubiquitous honking yellow taxis and rumbling subways can frazzle even the most organized brain. As Neil Diamond said, "It's a beautiful noise." Taking that into account, the first-time visitor could probably use a hand navigating through all that exuberance.

Or a boat. In general, when people mention New York City they are referring to the island of Manhattan, New York's birthplace and crowning jewel, whose familiar skyline has been celebrated in movies, television shows and travel brochures ever since the first skyscrapers popped out of the bedrock. Circle Line Cruises offers a 2 1/2-hour narrated cruise around the island as well as shorter routes to select sights, but it's worth paying extra for the full tour. As Manhattan's history unfolds port side, first New Jersey and then the boroughs of Brooklyn, Queens and the Bronx pass by on the starboard side. They, too, have their stories, but it's Manhattan that drives the plot.

The Dutch purchased the island in 1626 for \$24 in trinkets and beads, and named it "New Amsterdam." When the English wrested it from the Dutch, they called it "New York" after the Duke of York, who later became King James II. The name "Manhattan" is a throwback to the Algonquian language of the Lenape people who inhabited the area at the time Henry Hudson, an Englishman sailing for the Dutch, first mapped the area. The name "Manhattan" has many

interpretations including "island of many hills" and "place of intoxication." Given the modern city's preponderance of bars and nightclubs, the intoxication moniker could still be apt, but the hills of New York's birthing grounds have grown into skyscrapers of concrete, glass and steel.

As the boat backs into the Hudson River, Hell's Kitchen comes into view. This once gritty bastion of down-and-out Irish-Americans now shows signs of gentrification thanks to up-and-coming actors who have been lured to the area by the proximity of Broadway theaters and an acting school. Farther to the south is Chelsea where modern art galleries and funky new apartment buildings jazz up the streetscape behind the Chelsea Piers. The luxury liners of the early 1900s pulled in here (the Titanic was heading for Pier 60), but today the piers are more likely to moonlight as parks and entertainment complexes. Pier 59, for example, is now a golf driving range with a steel curtain to keep balls out of the Hudson River.

History jumps spasmodically around the island. In the Financial District, the spacey, shimmering shaft of the new One World Trade Center (1WTC) boldly pierces the sky in a tribute to victims of terrorism and the prevailing spirit of the American people. Its pinnacle height of 1,776 feet symbolizes the year of the signing of the Declaration of Independence and makes 1WTC the world's tallest all-office building and the third tallest skyscraper. Viewed from the river, the surrounding streets cut multi-hued canyons among giant stalagmites of concrete and steel. Depending on the position of the boat and the time of day, the scene is reminiscent of either Superman's Metropolis or Batman's Gotham City.

In the middle of New York Harbor, Ellis Island was once

the gateway to freedom for more than 14 million immigrants whose chance at a better life was determined in the island's four-towered immigration inspection station. Two percent were rejected and more than 600 committed suicide. Nearby, the Statue of Liberty, representative of Libertas, the Roman goddess of freedom, was the first welcoming delegate to the newly arriving. The statue, designed by Frédéric Auguste Bartholdi, was France's gift to the United States in 1886. At that time, Lady Liberty's copper coating was shiny as a new penny. She's aged gracefully since then, albeit with the aid of a few reconstructive surgeries, and settled comfortably into her famous oxidized green state. Her torch-bearing arm is still raised skyward in greeting. After numerous historical closures, the latest in the wake of Hurricane Sandy, Lady Liberty is once again welcoming visitors to her private island.

Historically, Governor's Island, at the mouth of the East River, was reserved for the exclusive use of New York's royal governors. But when the War of 1812 loomed, a round fortification with eight-foot thick sandstone walls was built to defend New York Harbor. Named after Jonathan Williams, the chief engineer of the Corps of Engineers, it became the prototype for coastal forts for the next 50 years. Since the 1830s, Castle Williams served various military and penal purposes, eventually coming under the authority of the U.S. Coast Guard in 1966. When the Coast Guard base closed in 1997, the castle was in a dire state of neglect. It was stabilized, reinforced and revamped, and, for the first time ever, opened for public tours in 2012.

Heading up the profusely-bridged East River, which is not really a river but a 14-mile long tidal strait that separates



Belvedere Castle, Central Park



Harlem River Floating Boathouse

soaring Art Deco General Electric Building, also known as 30 Rock, as in the identically-named television show, provides unparalleled views of the Empire State Building. The Rock's larger observation deck, built to resemble an ocean liner, also accommodates more people, which makes for shorter waiting times than for the Empire State.

But to many people, the Empire State Building is still the grand dame of panorama and romance. Storylines of dozens of movies have featured 86th floor kisses that have sealed the Empire State as a bucket-list destination for romantic celebrants from near and far. With all of New York in view, a kiss above America's favorite city has become the classiest way to turn a marriage proposal, birthday or anniversary into a quintessential New York moment—especially at night when the lights of the downtown buildings shimmer like a cascade of prisms. Although it has been many years since the Empire State reigned as the world's tallest building, its 86th- and

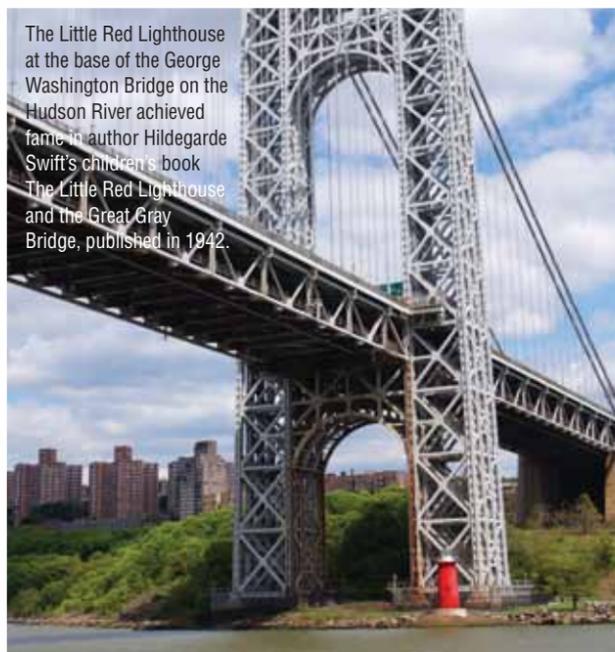
102nd-floor observatories are still the most popular in the world, visited by three to four million people every year.

It's easy to succumb to skyscraper overload in a city where dizzying vistas practically slide off the buildings and scurrying pedestrians sometimes outpace the taxis, but New York is also full of parks and gardens that provide a quiet reprieve from the noise and chaos of 24-hour fuss and fervor. Toward that end, Central Park, the city's largest oasis, is the placid eye in a smoldering storm. It's a place where harried New Yorkers can doff the stresses of urban life and stroll through meadows and gardens, jog or cycle along meandering pathways or bob in a boat on the simply-named "Lake."

It may come as a surprise to some, but New York has been designated the greenest metropolis in the United States. One of its most ingenious parks is the High Line—an old elevated freight train track that's been reincarnated as a skinny mile-and-a-half-long park that runs above New York City's West



Chinatown, New York



The Little Red Lighthouse at the base of the George Washington Bridge on the Hudson River achieved fame in author Hildegard Swift's children's book *The Little Red Lighthouse and the Great Gray Bridge*, published in 1942.

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The Statue of Liberty



The immigration screening station on Ellis Island operated from 1900 until 1954.

Manhattan on the west from Brooklyn on the east, the Circle Line tour approaches the BMW trio—the Brooklyn, Manhattan and Williamsburg bridges—the first of Manhattan’s 20 bridges along the tour route. All but one—the George Washington Bridge on the Hudson River—are on the east side of the island.

Each bridge tells a story. The Brooklyn Bridge’s begins in 1869 when it first opened to trains, followed by busses and trolleys. Today, more than 6,000 cars a day cross the bridge, as do many pedestrians who undertake the 30-minute walk for a reward of Brooklyn pizza and ice cream at the other end. Many attach ‘love-locks,’ padlocks inscribed with their names or other information, to the bridge as a public declaration of their everlasting love.

The tour guide deftly interweaves the stories of each bridge with Manhattan’s distinctive landmarks: the green United Nations building with the alphabetically arranged flags of its 193 member countries; the ire of the Trump Tower neighbors who complained the tower blocked their view and the affluent Silk Stocking District that has the greatest concentration of wealth in the world. Gracie Mansion, the official residence of the mayor of New York City, is here, although current billionaire mayor Michael Bloomberg lives elsewhere. He uses the mansion only for meetings or as accommodation for official visitors.

Hell Gate, found at the confluence of the East and Harlem Rivers, is where the converging tide-driven currents from New York Harbor and other channels have contributed to numerous shipwrecks and drownings over the years. In one version of the story for the name, the Dutch blamed the devil for the turbulent waters.

While an unknown force may indeed rule the watery underworld, New York’s land-based hero is, arguably, a man few people outside New York would know. Yet for 44 years, Robert Moses was the most powerful man in New York. In New York City alone, he built: several traffic tunnels, 13 bridges (including the Triboro and Henry Hudson Bridges), thousands of housing units, 658 playgrounds and 416 miles of parkways, including the Grand Central Parkway, the first interstate highway. Not bad for a man who was chauffeured everywhere because he didn’t have a driver’s license. His rescue missions included: saving the Little Red Lighthouse under the George Washington Bridge from demolition, converting the famous Tavern on the Green into a restaurant, reorganizing Central Park and developing Riverside Park into a long green strip of public space. He also lobbied for bringing the U.N. to Manhattan instead of Philadelphia. Yet, for all his admirers, there were many who saw him as a ruthless powerbroker who destroyed traditional neighborhoods by building expressways through them and, in clearing the land for redevelopment, destroyed almost as many homes as he built.

The bridges over the Harlem River are tight, low and profuse. Many are swing bridges in which the central part of the bridge detaches and rotates to allow tall boats to pass through. Boat traffic moves slowly here, which gives camera clickers plenty of time to photograph the surrounding sights: the aqueduct known as the High Bridge and its pressure equalization tower; the floating Harlem River Boathouse, which is its own island; and the 207th Street Subway Yard that holds old subway cars waiting to be taken to Delaware where they will be sunk to become a marine habitat.

As the boat circles back into the Harlem River at the pivoting Spuyten Duyvil Rail Bridge, one can almost picture Henry Hudson biding his time here, waiting out a storm. This section of the Hudson River is a tidal estuary, with saltwater from the Atlantic Ocean mingling with fresh run-off from Manhattan Island. Native tribes long ago named the waterway “Mahicantuck,” which loosely means “river that flows two ways.”

Across the Hudson River in New Jersey, the sheer, precipitous walls of the Palisades remain much the same as Henry Hudson would have seen them. Atop the cliffs on the Manhattan side, The Cloisters perch like some medieval abbey plucked straight out of rural France. Which indeed, it is. They are five cloistered abbeys, whose disassembled bricks were shipped to New York and reassembled in the 1930s on 700 acres of land that John D. Rockefeller Junior donated for a museum amid the gardens of Fort Tryon Park. Rockefeller also bought and donated several hundred acres of the Palisades on the New Jersey side of the Hudson River to preserve the view for The Cloisters, now part of the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

The riverside exterior view of The Cloisters is a mere tease to the medieval art collection housed inside. Also

donated by Rockefeller, the collection comprises about 5,000 artifacts—sculptures, paintings, tapestries, precious churchly objects, jewelry, manuscripts, illuminated books, stained glass windows, medieval furnishings, architectural elements and noble tombs—from mainly Western Europe. Rockefeller also purchased the entire medieval collection that American sculptor George Grey Barnard had acquired on his travels in Europe and included it in his endowment to the Metropolitan Museum of Art. Outside, the medieval-styled herb gardens of the central Cuxa Cloister present a relaxing place for visitors to unwind. They complement the adjacent gardens of Fort Tryon where vivid splashes of perennial spring flowers vie with purple-pink heather along walkways lined with more than 200 varieties of shrubs and flowers.

If there’s one thing to be gleaned from cruising around Manhattan, it’s that a boat allows you to pack all of New York City into one place, with individual landmarks mentally stored for later retrieval. Back on land, you can achieve a similar effect from the 360-degree viewing platforms at the Top of the Rock or the Empire State Building Observatory. Each skyscraper has its advantages. The Top of the Rock in the Rockefeller Center’s



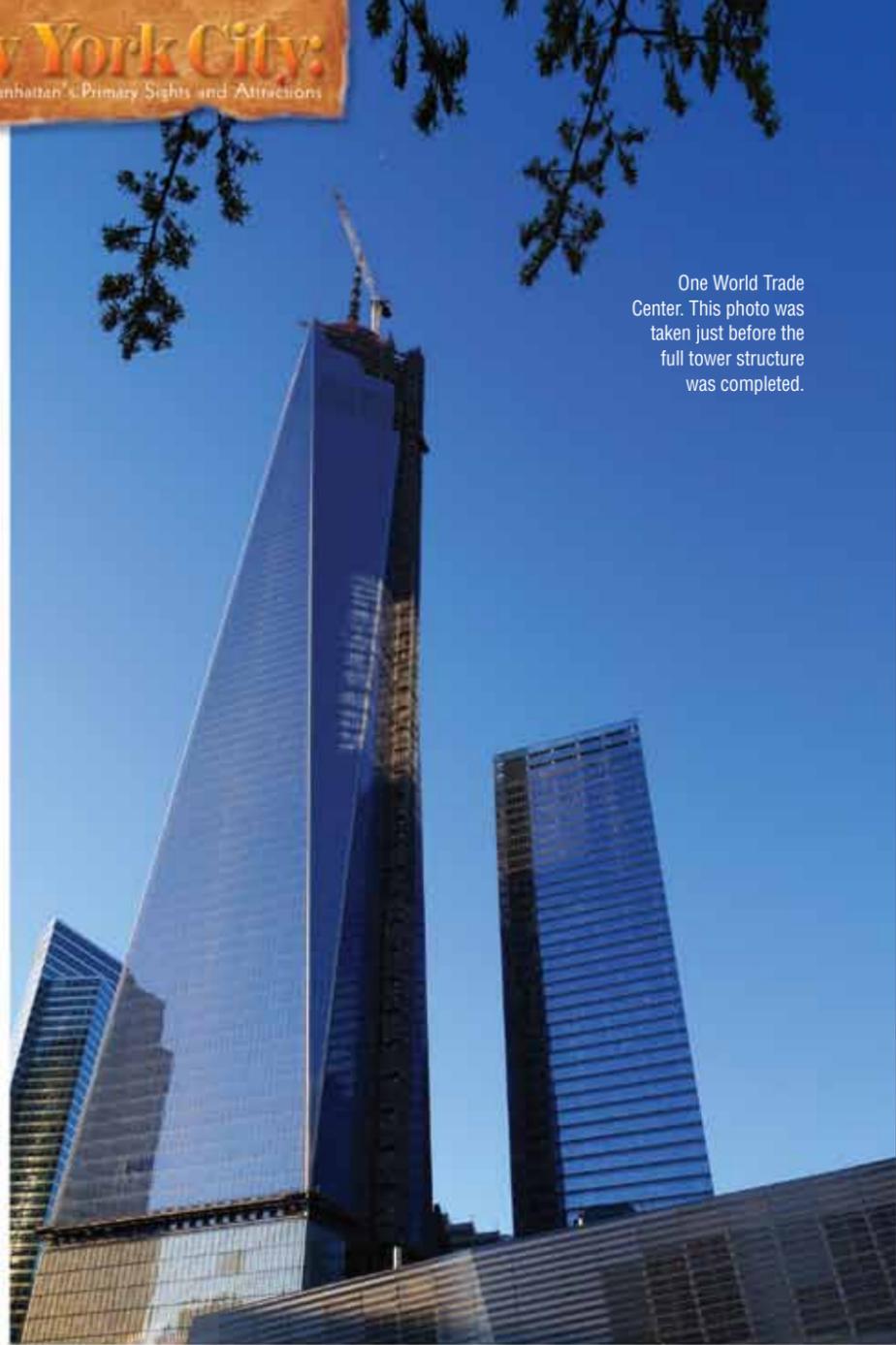
New York Water Taxi

Side. It starts as a pedestrian sky-way in the Meat Packing District and meanders among splotches of wildflowers and prairie grasses that combine in artful ways with concrete, rusty metal, wood and Zen-like empty spaces. Benches double as sculptures while trendy bars and restaurants give pedestrians creative vantage points from which to ponder the interplay of art and nature that's deliberately kept unstructured and wild.

New York abounds with galleries and museums, from tiny, quirky specialty museums, whose sometimes shocking exhibits are scattered in parks and hard-to-find places, to world-famous headliners that draw the crowds with their predictably sophisticated exhibits. While weird can be wonderful, the tried and true safely eases newcomers into proven territory. Manhattan's top "fab four" galleries/museums include: the expansive American Museum of Natural History, famous for its displays of dinosaurs and interconnected planetarium; the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the largest art museum in the United States with more than two million works spaciouly exhibited and distributed among 17 departments; the Museum of Modern Art, considered the most influential museum of modern art in the world; and the cylindrical Guggenheim, designed by Frank Lloyd Wright to showcase impressionist, post-impressionist, early modern and contemporary art.

At the south end of the island, the top drawing card sprouts from a 16-acre grave once known as "Ground Zero." Its most prominent feature is the new One World Trade Center, but its eight-acre memorial plaza bearing the watery footprints of the towers in the form of two sunken granite pools sends goose bumps spine-ward. The 3,000 victims' names are cut into the bronze surface, and some bereaved people have stuck stems of flags and flowers into the slots of the letters to honor their lost friends or relatives. Visitors can take guided walking tours through the National September 11th Memorial and Museum to learn more about the destruction and the rebuilding process.

Walking is, in fact, the real deal that ranks right up there with shopping, eating and taking in a Broadway play. Guided tours can ease the process, but for a more serendipitous experience it's best to simply grab a map and plunk yourself in

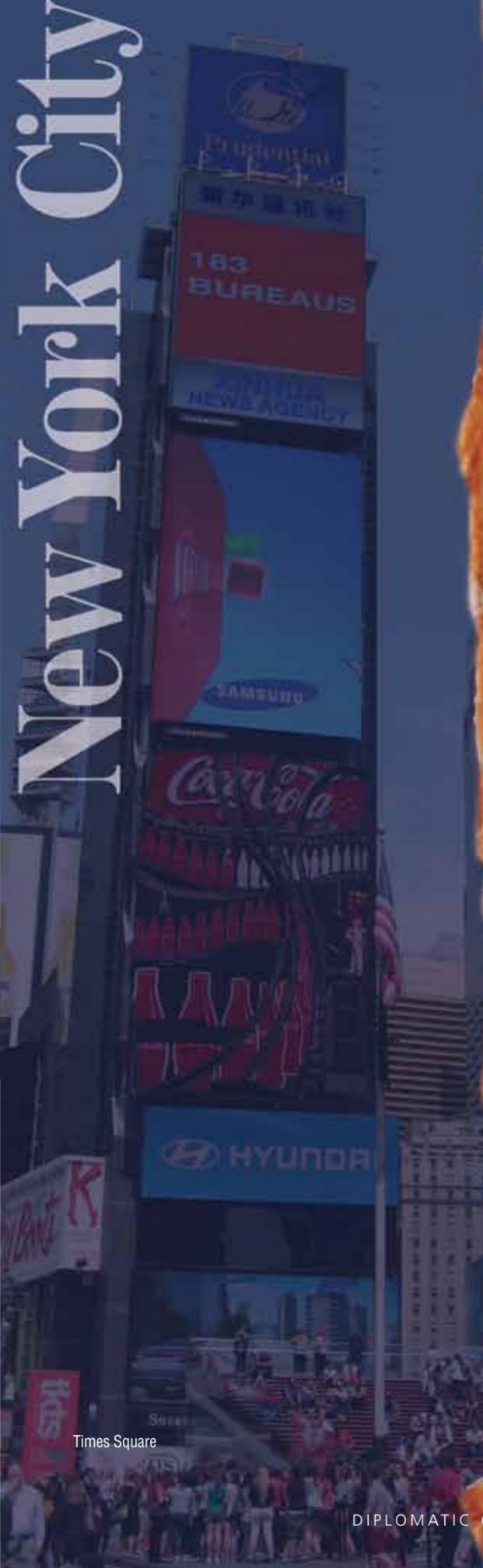


One World Trade Center. This photo was taken just before the full tower structure was completed.

any of New York's colorful neighborhoods: Chelsea, Greenwich Village, NoHo (North of Houston Street), SoHo (South of Houston), NoLiTa (North of Little Italy), TriBeCa (Triangle below Canal Street) or Chinatown. The whimsical names practically scream out their coordinates. Except for a few winding streets that may well be the progeny of bygone cow paths south of 14th Street, most of the city is laid out in a predictable grid, making it easy to find landmarks and figure out distances (20 blocks north-south equal one mile).

There's an amazing amount of fun to be had in getting lost in New York. But at the end of the day, in the city that never sleeps, you're bound to. ■

New York City



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