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Travel

Find a slice of the Big Apple that's right for you

Look beyond the classic sights and discover the authentic side of New York's five boroughs, says Tyler Wetherall



DEAN BELCHER FOR THE TELEGRAPH

You have eaten the famous pas-trami sandwich at Katz's Deli and paid £21 for the pleasure. You have battled the crowds taking selfies with Monet's *Water Lilies* at MoMa. You have waited more than an hour for a table at any number of Lower East Side restaurants, to be met with a confusion of small plates. And you have found yourself asking, how does anyone *live* here? For the most part, we don't.

When visitors think of New York City, they are really thinking "Manhattan". For all its allure - which it has in abun-

dance - Manhattan is just one of five boroughs that comprise New York City, and the smallest, most densely populated and most expensive (in the whole of the US, no less). While Brooklyn now features on many tourist itineraries, Queens, Staten Island and the Bronx are often wholly ignored by visiting Brits, and by doing so they are missing out on some of the most exciting, culturally relevant and affordable parts of the city.

"I have this problem when my friends come to visit - it's all about Manhattan, but that's not really what's up any

more," said Brooklyn-born-and-raised Ben Howell, an alumnus of the iconic Gramercy Tavern, and now the general manager at Rolo's, a newish bistro in Queens. "The scene in a lot of neighbourhoods in Manhattan has been watered down over the years. If you are looking for something that feels like the East Village 15 years ago, it's not the East Village any more."

It is Bed-Stuy or Gowanus in Brooklyn; it is Astoria or Ridgewood in Queens; or it is Mott Haven in the Bronx. These are parts of the city where

people can still afford to rent apartments, open businesses, innovate, create, make mistakes and thrive. And beyond those places on the cusp of change, there are the neighbourhoods where New Yorkers live and work which offer an authentic experience of the city. Groups practising tai chi in Sunset Park at dawn; food trucks lining Roosevelt Avenue; and kids playing Little League in Prospect Park: these NYC scenes are missed by most visitors.

And this is the moment to return. New York City positively hums come

▲ Dumbo in Brooklyn is all cobblestone streets and cool converted warehouses

summertime, as everyone goes outside to share in the collective experience of surviving the sweltering heat. But this year, that hum is more vibrant than ever, thanks to certain pandemic-era policies that the city carried forward. The Open Streets (www1.nyc.gov) scheme closes whole blocks to traffic each weekend, bringing communities together for live music and outdoor dining, in what feels like a distinctly New

York take on an Italian piazza. Take-away drinks were a way to keep bars afloat during lockdown, but they have proved a hit and are here to stay (albeit when ordered with food). And many of the cabins, cubbies and pavement tables that facilitated the long winter of outdoor dining will remain.

As autumn arrives and the midsummer heat wanes, this resilient, no-nonsense city truly comes into its own - and now is the time to book.

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New York



◀ Claw-some views: watch the sun set over dinner at Brooklyn Crab

BROOKLYN

There was a time when Manhattan-dwellers wouldn't deign to cross the Brooklyn Bridge, but those days are long gone, as are the cheap rents that originally fostered the artists and musicians who made this borough a byword for hip the world over.

It has become a parody, too: quinoa milk lattes, tattoo parlours on every block, and unwanted innovations such as rainbow bagels and bars inside bars-bars. But there was a Brooklyn long before any of this, and a Brooklyn that lies beyond the reaches of gentrification still. It is reductive, in fact, to talk about Brooklyn as a whole – if it were a city, it would be the third most populous in the United States and each Brooklyn neighbourhood has its own distinct vibe and calling card.

Williamsburg and Greenpoint are well-trodden by tourists, the first neighbourhoods to gentrify and still generating some of the city's hottest dining destinations – just try to get a table at Cantonese American spot Bonnie's (bonniesbrooklyn.com). But the red brick artist lofts and gritty dives that once gave it character have given way to luxury condos and pricey cocktails, and it can feel like a hipster Disneyland.

Further south, Fort Greene hits that sweet spot between harbouring genuine local culture and excellent fodder for any visitor. Catch a show at Brooklyn Academy of Music (bam.org), then stroll along DeKalb Avenue to find dinner – the eagerly awaited Saraghina Caffè (saraghinacaffe.com) just opened there) – finishing at nearby Vanderbilt Avenue (vanderbiltavenue.org) for one of the city's best Open Streets.

From here, it is a short stroll to Prospect Park, designed by Frederick Law Olmsted and Calvert Vaux of Central Park fame. At weekends, the borough's de facto backyard is a ruckus of run-

ners, cyclists, competing barbecues and birdwatchers, weddings and *quinceañera* birthday celebrations. On its north side, the Brooklyn Museum (brooklynmuseum.org) is at the forefront of culture (Duke Riley and Virgil Abloh are now showing), and the bandstand hosts the BRIC Celebrate Brooklyn! Festival (prospectpark.org). In the evenings, fireflies dart between the picnicking attendees while music plays.

But go deeper into Brooklyn still. To Gowanus, where the clean-up of its notoriously polluted canal is almost complete (you can now take sunset canoe rides, bookable at gowanuscanal.org), ushering in a new era of development around clusters of great spots: Threes Brewing (threesbrewing.com) for craft beer; Insa (insabrooklyn.com) for Korean barbecue and karaoke; and the charming old-world Jalopy Theatre (jalopytheatre.org) for folk music.

Further south, Green-Wood Cemetery (green-wood.com) offers tours of its 478-acres of ostentatious mausoleums and notable internees, such as artist Jean-Michel Basquiat and composer Leonard Bernstein. More recently, it has evolved into a cultural destination for the living, with outdoor movie screenings and pop-up performances such as the brilliantly titled Hot Dogs, Hooch, & Handel. End a visit on the waterfront in Red Hook, with a shrimp basket and sunset views at Brooklyn Crab (brooklynrcrab.com).

Getting there
Brooklyn is well serviced by multiple subway lines (J, M, Z, F, B, D, N, Q, A, C, 2, 3, R, 4, 5, G) plus buses and the NYC Ferry (ferry.nyc)

Where to stay
The Ace Brooklyn (001 718 313 3636; acehotel.com) offers double rooms from £189 per night

▶ Urban oasis: Little Island offers live performances, food stalls and landscaped gardens

—MANHATTAN—

It can be hard work, but ultimately, if you game it right, Manhattan delivers in droves. Don't go to museums when it's raining; choose neighbourhood restaurants that have stood the test of time but no longer make the "best of" lists; and find the lesser-visited sights that allow you the time and space to absorb what you are seeing.

Manhattan comprises six islands in total, plus a small section of the mainland, called Marble Hill, usually assumed to be the Bronx. If you feel you have seen it all, try visiting the other islands. Governors Island (govisland.com), just minutes from Lower Manhattan by ferry, has been transformed over the past decade and is now packed with art, educational centres and some beautifully restored historic buildings.

There is also an array of wellness experiences at QC NY spa (qcnyc.com) and the beautifully designed Island Oyster (crewyny.com), which has views of Manhattan from the outdoor bar. The 172-acre island is car-free; hire a bike and explore at leisure.

Last summer saw the opening of the first hotel on Roosevelt Island. The 224-room Graduate (graduatehotels.com), on the campus of Cornell Tech, is spectacular, with a chic rooftop bar and dining room in anticipation of more visitors arriving on the aerial Roosevelt Island Tramway.

The island is best known for quarantining smallpox patients and prisoners, but these days it is mainly open parkland, which many New Yorkers first discovered during lockdown.



As well as the lesser-known parts of Manhattan, there are also new attractions for a return visitor. Little Island (littleisland.org), near the Meatpacking District, is an extravagant floating 2.4-acre park, free to visit and offering an amphitheatre with live performances, food stalls and landscaped gardens. Summit One Vanderbilt (summitov.com) is a new sky-high viewing experience, this one including a dizzying 42-second ride in a light and mirrored lift.



In anticipation of a 70 per cent increase in tourism in 2022, the line-up of exhibits this summer is impeccable, from Jean-Michel Basquiat: King Pleasure (kingpleasure.basquiat.com) at the

▶ Prepare to be wowed (and scared!) by the views from Summit One Vanderbilt

Starrett-Lehigh Building, conceived by the artist's sisters and featuring never-before-seen works, to the Whitney Biennial (whitney.org) returning for its 80th rendition. The Museum of Broadway (themuseumofbroadway.com), the first museum dedicated to Broadway, will open in Times Square later this summer, and the Lincoln Center's David

THE BRONX

Visitors come to the Bronx for its three main attractions: the Yankee Stadium (try to catch the Bronx Bombers on their home turf; mlb.com); the Bronx Zoo, which is as vast as it is impressive (the aerial treetop adventure reopened this spring; bronzozoo.com); and the New York Botanical Garden, the country's largest with a million plants and a gorgeous Victorian-style glasshouse (nybg.org). The latter two are adjacent to Arthur Avenue, far and wide considered the real Little Italy (Mario's Restaurant is the stuff of red sauce legend). All of these are worth the ride and could fill a three-day itinerary on their own.

But there is more to the borough than its big hits. Affluent 19th-century New York families built their summer houses amid the greenery of the northwest Bronx, and many remain standing today. The 18th-century Van Cortlandt House has been restored as a museum, and its surrounding land is now the 1,146-acre Van Cortlandt Park. Nearby, Wave Hill (wavehill.org) was a private estate visited by Charles Darwin, Mark Twain, and Theodore Roosevelt, but is now a serene public garden, looking out over the Hudson River.

There are also unexpected architectural gems, such as the historic district of the Grand Concourse, originally modelled on the Champs-Élysées, or the Bronx Community College, a National Historic Landmark designed by Stanford White. Once a Roman-style aqueduct, the High Bridge (nycgov-parks.org) was recently restored and reopened as a footbridge connecting Washington Heights in Manhattan and the Bronx, making for the most magnificent entry to the borough. And they have their very own quaint seaside escape; City Island is a 1½-mile-long fishing community, packed with sea-

food restaurants, local galleries and boat culture.

But none of that gets to the heart of what the Bronx is about: vibrant, tight-knit and eclectic. "It's a hidden gem," says Bronx-born Alfredo Angueira, a local restaurateur who previously worked in economic development here. "People always make assumptions about it until you actually experience it, and realise there is culturally so much richness to the borough."

That richness has been fostered in recent years by huge investment from developers, mostly benefiting the South Bronx waterfront. With easy access to Manhattan, the previously industrial neighbourhood of Mott Haven has been slowly, quietly burgeoning. Two of Angueira's restaurants are here: Bricks & Hops (bricksandhops.com) and Beatstro (beatstro.com), the only hip-hop restaurant to his knowledge, hosting "Beats n' Brunch", which should kick off any Sunday visit. Other local businesses to check out include indie bookstore and live bar the Lit Bar (thelitbar.com); Bronx Native (bronznative.com), a clothing line in homage to the designers' home turf; Mottley Kitchen (mottleykitchen.com), a café with rooftop yoga and fresh juices; and the Port Morris Distillery (portmorrisedistillery.com), which draws hundreds of visitors every weekend for its *pitorro*, otherwise known as Puerto Rican moonshine.

Getting there
Take the 1, 2, 5, B, or D subway lines north to reach the Bronx, or the Metro-North commuter train from Grand Central station

Where to stay
Wingate by Wyndham (001 929 526 5900; wyndhamhotels.com) offers double rooms from £133 per night



◀ Bust some moves: make sure you visit hip-hop restaurant Beatstro in the Bronx

QUEENS

Some of the best views of the Manhattan skyline are from the Gantry Plaza State Park (parks.ny.gov) in Long Island City. But it would be a disservice to this borough to use it solely as a vantage point to its glitzier neighbour. Queens is one of the most ethnically diverse boroughs in the United States, with more languages spoken here than anywhere else on the planet. This diversity breeds a wildly rich food culture with 6,000 restaurants representing 120 nationalities. If nothing else, come here to eat your way around the world.

Corona is famed for its Latin American kitchens; Elmhurst veers more pan Asian; and Jackson Heights is the go-to for Indian, Mexican, Nepali and more. Queens' own Chinatown, Flushing, is the largest outside Asia. The New World Mall food court (newworldmallny.com), meanwhile, is the go-to for affordable and diverse Chinese cuisine.

If navigating between *momos* and *chivitos* is overwhelming, Culinary Backstreets (culinarybackstreets.com) offers a foodie walking tour of Queens to help you find that hole-in-the-wall Thai eatery you might otherwise overlook. Another way to taste it all is to head to Queens Night Market (queensnightmarket.com) in Flushing Meadows' Corona Park on a Saturday, with live music and dishes capped at \$5 (£4).

Down in the leafy residential neighbourhood of Ridgewood, gentrification has started to cross the border from Brooklyn's Bushwick. Multipurpose arts venue Nowadays (nowadays.nyc), with its massive outside space and dance parties, has a lot to do with the changes. Recent restaurant openings such as Rolo's (rolosnyc.com) and Pizzeria Panina (theinfatuation.com), both helmed by impressive hospitality talent, have set out to create long-standing neighbourhood restaurants rather than flash-in-the-pan successes.

But Queens is more than its food (or, at least, in between eating, there is plenty to entertain). The contemporary arts institution MoMA PS1 (moma.org) is certainly responsible in part for heralding a new era in Long Island City, such was its impact. In Astoria, the Museum of the Moving Image (movingimage.us), with its permanent Jim Henson Exhibition, is an immersive audiovisual experience too often overlooked. And Corona's Louis Armstrong House (louisarmstronghouse.org) is undergoing an expansion to create a new cultural centre, expected to debut later this year.

Queens stretches all the way down to the Rockaways, a 10-mile-long peninsula of sandy beaches merely an A-train ride from the city. Devastated by Hurricane Sandy in 2012, the Rockaways has been undergoing a creative resurgence, with cute beachy boutiques such as the



Swellife (theswellife.com) selling cover-ups and global textiles, stylish bistros such as Bar Maseille (barmarseille.com), and cool community hubs including the Locals Collective (localscollective-nyc.com), a surf school, café and shop-HQ for a tousled beach crowd.

Getting there
The 7 subway train traverses most of Queens; for the Rockaways, take the Far Rockaway-bound A train or the Rockaway Park-bound shuttle
Where to stay
The Rockaway Hotel & Spa (001 718 474 1216; therockawayhotel.com) offers double rooms from £315 per night

▶ Cool escape: after a day in the city, head to Rockaway for some R&R





▶ Step back in time at Historic Richmond Town, home to a restored 17th-century village



STATEN ISLAND

It's a New York City tourism hack to ride the Staten Island Ferry instead of coughing up for a boat trip to visit the Statue of Liberty. After all, the ferry is free, beer is served on board, and it glides right past Lady Liberty herself. But many visitors make a U-turn and head straight back.

Staten Island has an entrenched outsider status – they did vote to secede from New York City in 1993 – and is closer geographically and culturally to New Jersey. Nicknamed “the forgotten borough”, and overlooked by tourists and tourism investment (though the ferry line has expanded), it quietly boasts many unsung treasures.

“There's a whole different atmosphere here; we have white picket fences and dogs,” says Meredith Toback, co-founder of family- and women-run tour guide company Cititrek (cititrek.com). “They could build this up to be one of the best tourist spots. It's a mini version of what New York is all about.”

With a population just shy of 500,000, Staten Island is the least populated of the boroughs, but also the greenest, with a 2,800-acre greenbelt cutting across its centre and flocks of wild turkeys. Freshkills Park (freshkillspark.org), once fully open to the public, will add yet more green space, and will represent an unlikely ecological success story, replacing what was formerly the world's largest landfill.

The attractions are fewer than those of her sister boroughs, but nonetheless intriguing – such as the Jacques Marchais Museum of Tibetan Art (tibetmuseum.org), the largest collection outside Tibet, so groundbreaking that the Dalai Lama visited in 1991. Another example is the Snug Harbor Cultural Center & Botanical Garden (snugharbtor.org), which comprises 14 botanical gardens, three museums (the Staten

Island Museum is a great place to get some historical bearings), two art galleries and an urban farm which supplies restaurants across the city.

The entire borough is steeped in history. Visit the South Shore's Conference House where Revolutionary War peace talks were held, or the Historic Richmond Town (historicrichmondtn.org), home to 40 restored properties on the site of a 17th-century village, including the Dutch-style Voorlezer's House, the nation's oldest schoolhouse.

St George is a good spot to base yourself with its cluster of dining options. Enoteca Maria (enotecamaria.com) has grandmas from around the world cooking up a storm; and acclaimed beer outlet Clinton Hall (clintonhallny.com) has just opened there. The Flagship Brewing Company (flagshipbrewery.nyc) launched in 2014 and brought new energy to the area; and an award-winning IPA and have a pizza delivered to the bar from nearby Pier 76 (pier76si.com). The prize for best pizza is keenly contested, thanks to the borough's Italian roots, but Joe & Pat's (joepatpatsny.com) usually takes the title.

Public transport on the island is limited. An easy way to take in the sights is through one of Toback's Cititrek tours, which range from a pub crawl through the borough's many Irish bars to a tour of its infamous mob haunts, with insider tidbits that only a born-and-bred Staten Islander could share.

Essentials

British Airways (ba.com) flies from London to New York with fares from £356 return. Covid rules: All travellers must show proof of full vaccination.

Getting there
The Staten Island Ferry runs every 15 to 20 mins from the Whitehall Ferry Terminal in Manhattan; tickets are free and the trip takes about 25 mins.

Where to stay
Fairfield Inn & Suites New York Staten Island (001 718 698 8811; marriott.com) offers double rooms from £137 per night.

It can be hard work, but if you game it right, Manhattan delivers in droves

EVINGE GETTY IMAGES/ALAMY

Geffen Hall will reopen in the autumn after a complete revamp.

The Rockefeller Center is receiving a \$50 million (£42 million) makeover to make it somewhere visitors – and New Yorkers – might actually want to go. There is an outpost of Rough Trade records, which will host gigs; a pop-up of hip homewares store Beverly's; and

Lodi, an Italian café from star chef Ignacio Mattos. Food halls continue to crop up to great fanfare, such as Citizens (ctzns.com) by Hudson Yards, and Alkebulan (alkebulandininghall.com), a yet-to-open African food hall from a James Beard Award-winning chef.

But you don't come to New York just for the sights. “The energy is palpa-

ble,” says acclaimed restaurateur Sabato Sagaria of the reopened city. “It's like revisiting New York all over again, even if you live here.”

Where to stay
Civilian Hotel (001 646 692 8012; civilianhotel.com) offers double rooms from £151 per night.



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