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# the Unofficial Guide<sup>®</sup> to New York City



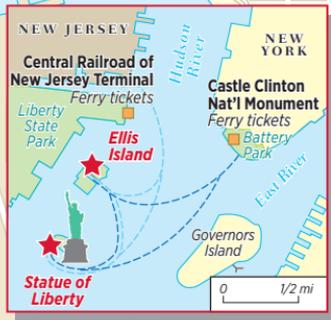
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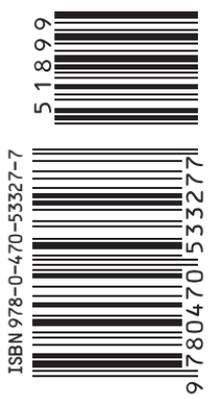
**Eve Zibart with Lea Lane and Aaron Starmer**

“Best Travel Series of the Year” —*Booklist*

# New York City's ★ ★ ★ Top Attractions



See inset map above left



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EVE ZIBART *with* LEA LANE  
*and* AARON STARMER



WILEY

Please note that prices fluctuate in the course of time and that travel information changes under the impact of many factors that influence the travel industry. We therefore suggest that you write or call ahead for confirmation when making your travel plans. Every effort has been made to ensure the accuracy of information throughout this book, and the contents of this publication are believed to be correct at the time of printing. Nevertheless, the publishers cannot accept responsibility for errors or omissions, for changes in details given in this guide, or for the consequences of any reliance on the information provided by the same. Assessments of attractions and so forth are based upon the authors' own experiences; therefore, descriptions given in this guide necessarily contain an element of subjective opinion, which may not reflect the publisher's opinion or dictate a reader's own experience on another occasion. Readers are invited to write the publisher with ideas, comments, and suggestions for future editions.

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Special thanks and a farewell toast to Johnny, who made the Oak Bar my favorite Manhattan sanctuary; and to Walter Weintz, who must have been a Zibart separated at birth.

Finally, this book is for my brother Michael, the best companion.

—*Eve Zibart*

# ABOUT *the* AUTHOR *and* CONTRIBUTORS

**EVE ZIBART** has written more about dining, entertainment, travel, and lifestyles than most people experience in a lifetime. In her early years as the pop-music-and-culture reporter for the (Nashville) *Tennessean* and then the *Washington Post*, Eve quickly exhibited a flair for scene and sensory detail. She rapidly moved through the ranks of the *Post* as a feature writer and spent her last ten years there as restaurant critic. She now freelances for *BookPage* and *Washingtonian* and has written for *Cosmopolitan*, *Four Seasons*, *Town & Country*, and *Playboy*. Given an amazing ability to turn 24 hours into 30, Eve has found time to author several books, including *The Ethnic Food Lover's Companion*; *The Eclectic Gourmet Guide to Washington, D.C.*; *The Unofficial Guide to New Orleans*; *The Unofficial Guide to Walt Disney World for Grown-Ups*; and *Inside Disney: The Incredible Story of Walt Disney World and the Man Behind the Mouse*.

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**AARON STARMER** is a writer and editor who has worked, dined, and played in New York City for more than ten years. Along with his wife, Catharine Wells, and his brother, Tim Starmer, he is coauthor of the guidebook *The Best in Tent Camping: New York State* (Menasha Ridge Press). His first novel, *DWEEB*, was published in 2009. A humorous adventure for the young and nerdy, it is set across the Hudson River from Manhattan, in the land of New Jersey.

# INTRODUCTION

## **“NEW YORK, NEW YORK, IT’S *a* HELLUVA TOWN . . .”**

IF YOU’RE EVER A PASSENGER IN A TAXICAB IN NEW YORK, look at the city map affixed to the back of the driver’s seat. Chances are, it will show only the tourist territories, cutting Manhattan off partway up Central Park, only hinting at Brooklyn, and likely dispensing with the Bronx, Long Island, and Staten Island altogether. Most guidebooks about New York do the same. They get you from the Staten Island Ferry (the landing point, at least) on the Battery to the Metropolitan Museum of Art at 82nd Street. A few mention Harlem and the River Café across the Hudson. But for the most part, it’s “East Side, West Side” rather than “all around the town.”

Worse, tour guides rarely draw connections, convey waves of progress, or point up ironies of development. In a city literally embraced by the spirits of multiculturalism—with the Statue of Liberty, that monumental icon of hope for immigrants, at one end, and the shrine of Mother Cabrini, their patron saint, at the other—most visitors peer through the most homogeneous of filters, the endless barrage of Big Apple boosterism and crime or inflation news trotted out every day. Watch enough TV and you’d think the whole city was painted with red ink, white ticker tape, pinstripes, and blue uniforms.

What a waste. New York City is one of the most original, elaborate, eccentric, and irresistible creatures—it clearly has a life of its own—you will ever encounter. And we want you to experience it all, in not just three but four dimensions: underground, above the cloud line, and most definitely at street level, and through time; its past, present, and future. And for that we need your cooperation. We need you to be open to the city’s charm. And we need you to turn off that damn TV.

We often speak of visiting a new place as “seeing” it. “See Rock City,” read those famous barns. “Join the Navy and see the world.”

But the strange thing about sightseeing is that people get too absorbed in the “sights” and forget about the “seeing.” It may sound odd for an author to say, but having your nose buried in a book, even this book, is not the way to travel.

Many guidebooks will tell you that New York is not for the faint-hearted; we would say that it is not for the unimaginative. Part of its fascination is its complexity: all the accents, the rhythms, the smells. In this most famous melting pot, New York has yet to produce a truly creole society; minorities here are not so much assimilated as incorporated. That means food, gifts, clothes, and “roots” of a hundred cultures. It’s a permanent World’s Fair, free for the strolling. Diversity isn’t just a souvenir of Ellis Island or dim sum in Chinatown; it’s daily life, the greatest attraction of them all.

**unofficial TIP**

Don’t miss the “outdoors” of New York. Every borough has a large public park—and no, Central Park is not the largest—and four have botanical gardens. There are five zoos and an aquarium, a wildlife refuge, and beaches and marinas.

New York is also the great silent witness to American culture. There is not a single block in the city, whether residential, renovated, commercial, or even crumbling, that does not speak of its restless and often reckless history: expansionist, extravagant, fickle, fashionable. All you have to do is look. Broadway or off-Broadway, here, all the world truly is a stage.

And a stage set: if there had not been such a thing as a skyline, New York would have had to invent it. Skyscrapers are the cathedrals of Manhattan’s private religion—commerce—just as the scores of exquisite churches and temples salute the spiritual. You can almost relive the evolution of the city by glancing around at the architecture, from the 18th-century purity of St. Paul’s Chapel to the 19th-century neoclassicism of Federal Hall, the French Renaissance of the Jewish Museum, and the Gothic Revival of St. Patrick’s; from the Beaux Arts Grand Central Terminal (with staircases copied from the Paris Opéra) and the Art Deco Chrysler Building to the Wright-stuff Guggenheim and the Bauhaus Seagram Building.

Even “ordinary” office buildings can have extraordinary features: friezes, carvings, gilding, capitals, cornice pieces, decorative sills—all of the showy elements of European palaces, only bigger and brasher and designed to make aristocrats out of merchants. For these are the great palaces of trade, tributes to the variety and vitality of American industry. New York was one of the first cities to abandon class distinction, at least as far as the purveyors were concerned, between the carriage trade and the merchant class, between the custom-tailored and the store-fitted. It was the natural preserve of the department store, with its abundance of luxuries (which gradually became, by long acquaintance and by the nature of human ambition, necessities). And, after all, it was those capitalist princes of old New York—the Rockefellers, Guggenheims, Fricks, and Morgans—whose

often-competitive collecting and philanthropy produced the great art collections that are now public treasures.

This book is about seeing New York. Not just Midtown Manhattan, but the whole city. It's about shopping and art-gazing and theatergoing, of course, but mostly it's about looking past the sales pitches to the piers, beyond the boutiques to the brownstones. It's about the green spaces as well as the grand hotels, about going off-Broadway as far as Brooklyn and seeing the Battery as the birthplace of America. If you want a top-ten list of tourist attractions, you can find one on any corner and at any souvenir stand; but if you want to know ten lovely things to do for yourself, ten splendors to share with your children, or ten places where beauty really is truth, read on.

## ABOUT *this* GUIDE

### "INSIDE" NEW YORK FOR OUTSIDERS

IT'S A FUNNY THING ABOUT NEW YORK TRAVEL GUIDES: most of them tell you too much, and a few tell you too little. This is because New York is such a complex city, so ornate and enveloping and layered with history that it's hard to stop acquiring good stories and passing them on. And the more time you spend there, the more you realize you don't know.

But statistics show that the majority of visitors to New York stay only three or four days—and even that average span likely includes time spent in business meetings or conventions. How much can you squeeze into a long weekend? How much do you want to see? This city's attractions are among the most frequently photographed in the world, yet package tours often haul you around as if you didn't already know what the Empire State Building looks like. Some tour books either skimp on shopping or endorse every dealer in town; some overlook any museum too small for blockbuster exhibits. Some short-change any theater outside Lincoln Center or Broadway, and any restaurant outside Manhattan. Some are too uncritical, some too "insider." Some have all the right stuff but are poorly organized; some are easy to read but oversimplified.

Not only that, but most guidebook writers also seem so attached to the modern stereotype of the city—the New York of loudmouthed cabbies, TV cop shows, the "if I can make it there" rat race, and the Wall Street shark pool—that they don't express the great romance of this rich, inimitable, and electrifying metropolis. It's an asphalt wonder, sure, but there are cobblestones still to be seen; a world-famous skyline, yes, but an architectural creation, not just a higher-rent district. It's a magnet for immigration, but that also means it's a tapestry of ethnic revival. And in an era when the Statue of Liberty is animated for a deodorant commercial, it's too easy to forget what an icon it really is and has been to millions of Americans and would-be Americans.

So as hard and heartbreaking as it is to limit a book like this, we've done so by doubling up whenever possible. The profiles in Part Five, New York's Neighborhoods, are partly geographical descriptions and partly historical romances: they're designed to help you get your bearings, but they include enough sights and stories to serve as do-it-yourself walking tours. In Part Six, Sightseeing, Tours, and Attractions in Depth, we've listed some attractions by type—family-style, theatrical, genealogical, and so on—to help you customize your visit. Major museums and sites in each neighborhood are explored in more detail and rated for interest by age group. In Part Eight, Shopping, we've combined best bets with do-it-yourself walking tours so you can see the sights and fill out your wish list at the same time. The maps are designed to help you with the logistics of arranging accommodations, dining, and sightseeing.

As for the hundreds of tourist attractions, we've tried to pick out the first-rate and special-interest best and skip the hype jobs. Truth is, even if you visit New York a dozen times, you won't be able to see as much as we've described for you, and by then you'll have discovered your own favorite places. But we don't want you to waste any of your time, either. If it isn't fun, if it isn't informative, if it isn't accurate, we don't want you to go. If there's a better alternative, we want you to know. We hope to keep the quality of your visit high and the irritation quotient low. (And if we'd known that would turn into a poem, we'd have let you know.)

We've covered these attractions in these various ways, often overlapping, because we want to make sure you can pick out the ones you'd most enjoy. And for those who don't wish to do it themselves

at all, we have listed a number of commercial and customized tours tailored to almost any interest, also in Part Six.

Even granting that your time will be tight, we've included a list of opportunities for exercise or play. That's partly because we at the *Unofficial Guides* try to keep up with our workouts when we're on the road, and also because you may be visiting old friends or old teammates. Even if you don't think you'll want to make time for a run or ride, experience has taught us that sightseeing and shopping can be exhausting, make you stiff, make you long for a little outdoors—or at least a little calorie countering.

### WHY "UNOFFICIAL"?

MOST GUIDES TO NEW YORK TOUT the well-known sights, promote the local restaurants and hotels indiscriminately, and leave out a lot of

#### *unofficial* TIP

Remember that prices and hours change constantly. We have listed the most up-to-date information we can get, but you should double-check times in particular (if prices of attractions change, it is generally not by much). And remember, this is one of the busiest tourist towns in the world, drawing more than 30 million visitors a year, so make your reservations early and reconfirm at least once.

good stuff. This one is different. We're reader-friendly. We sent in a team of evaluators—opinionated and often irreverent—to tour the museums, eat in the restaurants, perform critical evaluations of the hotels, and sample the wide variety of nightclubs. If a museum is boring, or standing in line for two hours to view a famous attraction is a waste of time, we say so—and, in the process, hopefully we will make your visit more fun, efficient, and economical. In fact, we got into the guidebook business in the first place because we were unhappy with the way travel guides make the reader work to get any usable information.

Most guidebooks are compilations of lists. This is true regardless of whether the information is presented in a list form or artfully distributed through pages of prose. There is insufficient detail in a list, and prose can present tedious helpings of nonessential or marginally useful information. Not enough wheat, so to speak, for nourishment in one instance, and too much chaff in the other.

And while many guides are readable and well researched, but they tend to be difficult to use. To select a hotel, for example, a reader must study several pages of text, and because each description essentially deals with the same variables, it's hard to recall what was said concerning a particular hotel. Readers generally must work through all the write-ups before beginning to narrow their choices. Restaurants, nightclubs, and attractions are treated the same way. Using such a guide means doing nearly as much research and comparison as starting from scratch, whereas we hope to simplify the task by narrowing travelers' choices to a thoughtfully considered, well-distilled, and manageable few.

## HOW UNOFFICIAL GUIDES ARE DIFFERENT

READERS CARE ABOUT THE AUTHORS' OPINIONS. The authors, after all, are supposed to know what they are talking about. This, coupled with the fact that the traveler wants quick answers (as opposed to endless alternatives), dictates that authors should be explicit, prescriptive, and, above all, direct. The authors of the *Unofficial Guides* try to be just that. They spell out alternatives and recommend specific courses of action. They simplify complicated destinations and attractions and allow the traveler to feel in control in the most unfamiliar environments. The objective of the *Unofficial Guide* authors is not to give the most information or all of the information, but to offer the most accessible, useful information.

An *Unofficial Guide* is a critical reference work. Our authors and research team are completely independent of the attractions, restaurants, and hotels described. *The Unofficial Guide to New York* is designed for individuals and families traveling for the fun of it, as well as for business travelers and conventioners, especially those visiting the Big Apple for the first time.

## Special Features

The *Unofficial Guide* offers the following special features:

- Friendly introductions to New York's most fascinating neighborhoods
- "Best of" listings giving our well-qualified opinions on things ranging from raw oysters to blackened snapper and five-star hotels to multistory views
- Listings that are keyed to your interests, so you can pick and choose
- Advice to sightseers on how to avoid the worst of the crowds; advice to business travelers on how to avoid traffic and excessive costs
- Recommendations for lesser-known sights that are away from Times Square but are no less worthwhile
- Maps to make it easy to find places you want to go to and avoid places you don't
- Expert advice on avoiding New York's notorious street crime
- A hotel chart that helps you narrow down your choices fast
- Shorter listings that include only those restaurants, clubs, and hotels we think are worth considering
- Insider advice on best times of day (or night) to go places

## HOW THIS GUIDE WAS RESEARCHED AND WRITTEN

ALTHOUGH MANY GUIDEBOOKS HAVE BEEN WRITTEN about New York City, very few of them have been evaluative. Some guides come close to regurgitating the hotels' and tourist offices' own promotional material. In preparing this work, team members not only visited each hotel, restaurant, shop, and attraction, evaluating them according to formal criteria, they interviewed tourists of all ages to determine what they enjoyed most and least during their New York visits. And while our observers are independent and impartial, they visited New York not as critics or VIPs but as tourists or business travelers, just as readers would.

In compiling this guide, we recognize that a tourist's age, background, and interests will strongly influence his or her taste in New York's wide array of attractions and will account for a preference for one sight or museum over another. Our sole objective is to provide the reader with sufficient description, critical evaluation, and pertinent data to make knowledgeable decisions according to individual tastes.

## LETTERS, COMMENTS, AND QUESTIONS FROM READERS

WE EXPECT TO LEARN FROM OUR MISTAKES, as well as from the input of our readers, and to improve with each new book and edition. Many of those who use the *Unofficial Guides* write to us asking questions, making comments, or sharing their own discoveries or lessons learned in New York. We seriously appreciate all such input,

both positive and critical, and we encourage our readers to continue writing.

## How to Write the Authors

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When you write, be sure to put your return address on your letter as well as on the envelope—sometimes envelopes and letters get separated. And remember, our work takes us out of the office for long periods of time, so forgive us if our response is delayed.

## Reader Survey

At the back of the guide you will find a short questionnaire that you can use to express opinions about your New York visit. Clip out the survey along the dotted line and mail it to the previous address.

## HOW INFORMATION IS ORGANIZED

IN ORDER TO GIVE YOU FAST ACCESS TO INFORMATION about the best of New York, we've organized material in several formats.

**HOTELS** Since most people visiting New York stay in one hotel for the duration of their trip, we have concentrated on the specific variables that differentiate one hotel from another—location, size, room quality, services, amenities, and cost—and summarized our ratings in charts and maps that will help you streamline your decision-making.

**RESTAURANTS** We provide plenty of detail when it comes to restaurants. Since you will probably eat a dozen or more restaurant meals during your stay, and since not even you can predict what you might be in the mood for on Saturday night, we provide detailed profiles of the best restaurants in and around New York.

**ENTERTAINMENT AND NIGHTLIFE** Visitors frequently try several different clubs or nightspots during their stay. Since clubs and nightspots, like restaurants, are usually selected once travelers are actually in the city, we provide tips on getting tickets to big-name shows and in-depth profiles of the best nightspots and lounges in Part Ten, Entertainment and Nightlife.

**SPECIAL TIPS** In addition to singling out not-to-be-missed sites in the city and attractions ideally suited to younger tourists, we've marked some insider tips, shortcuts, and “only in New York” features throughout the book.