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Introduction

The most beguiling city in the world, New York is an adrenaline-charged, history-laden place that holds immense romantic appeal for visitors. Wandering the streets here, you'll cut between buildings that are icons to the modern age – and whether gazing at the flickering lights of the midtown skyscrapers as you speed across the Queensboro bridge, experiencing the 4am half-life downtown, or just wasting the morning on the Staten Island ferry, you really would have to be made of stone not to be moved by it all. There's no place quite like it.

While the events of September 11, 2001, which demolished the World Trade Centre, shook New York to its core, the populace responded resiliently under the composed aegis of then-Mayor Rudy Giuliani. Until the attacks, many New Yorkers loved to hate Giuliani, partly because they saw him as committed to making their city too much like everyone else's. To some extent he succeeded, and during the late Nineties New York seemed cleaner, safer, and more liveable, as the city took on a truly international allure and shook off the more notorious aspects to its reputation. However, the maverick quality of New York and its people still shines as brightly as it ever did.

Even in the aftermath of the World Trade Centre's collapse, New York remains a unique and fascinating city – and one you'll want to return to again and again. You could spend weeks in New York and still barely scratch the surface, but there are some key attractions - and some pleasures - that you won't want to miss.

There are the different ethnic neighbourhoods, like lower Manhattan's Chinatown and the traditionally Jewish Lower East Side (not so much anymore); and the more artsy concentrations of SoHo, TriBeCa, and the East and West Villages. Of course, there is the celebrated architecture of corporate Manhattan, with the skyscrapers in downtown and midtown forming the most indelible images. There are the museums, not just the Metropolitan and MoMA, but countless other smaller collections that afford weeks of happy wandering.

In between sights, you can eat just about anything, at any time, cooked in any style; you can drink in any kind of company; and sit through any number of obscure movies. The more established arts - dance, theatre, music - are superbly catered for; and New York's clubs are as varied and exciting as you might expect. And for the avid consumer, the choice of shops is vast, almost numbingly exhaustive in this heartland of the great capitalist dream.

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Highlights

New York City comprises the central island of Manhattan along with four outer boroughs - Brooklyn, Queens, the Bronx, and Staten Island. Manhattan, to many, is New York – whatever your interests, it's here that you'll spend the most time and are likely to stay.

New York is very much a city of neighbourhoods and is best explored on foot. Offshore, the Statue of Liberty and Ellis Island comprise the first section of New York (and America) that most nineteenth century immigrants would have seen.

The Financial District takes in the skyscrapers and historic buildings of Manhattan's southern reaches and was hardest hit by the destruction of perhaps its most famous landmarks, the Twin Towers of the World Trade Centre. Just northeast is the area around City Hall, New York's well-appointed municipal centre, which adjoins TriBeCa, known for its swanky restaurants, galleries, and nightlife.

Moving east, Chinatown is Manhattan's most populous ethnic neighbourhood, a vibrant locale that's great for food and shopping. Nearby, Little Italy bears few traces of the once-strong immigrant presence, while the Lower East Side, the city's traditional gateway neighbourhood for new immigrants, is nowadays scattered with trendy bars and clubs.

To the west, SoHo is one of the premier districts for galleries and the commercial art scene, not to mention designer shopping. Continuing north, the West and East Villages form a focus of bars, restaurants, and shops catering to students and would be bohemians - and of course tourists.

Chelsea is a largely residential neighbourhood that is now mostly known for its gay scene and art galleries that borders on Manhattan's old Garment District. Murray Hill contains the city's largest skyscraper and most enduring symbol, the Empire State Building.

Beyond 42nd Street, the main east-west artery of midtown, the character of the city changes quite radically, and the skyline becomes more high-rise and home to some of New York's most awe-inspiring, neck-cracking architecture. There are also some superb museums and the city's best shopping as you work your way north up Fifth Avenue as far as 59th Street. Here, the classic Manhattan vistas are broken by the broad expanse of Central Park, a supreme piece of nineteenth-century landscaping, without which life in Manhattan would be unthinkable.

Flanking the park, the mostly residential and fairly affluent Upper West Side boasts Lincoln Centre, Manhattan's temple to the performing arts, the American Museum of Natural History, and Riverside Park along the Hudson River. On the other side of the park, the Upper East Side is wealthier and more grandiose, with its nineteenth-century millionaires' mansions now transformed into a string of magnificent museums known as the "Museum Mile" the most prominent being the vast Metropolitan Museum of Art.

Alongside is a patrician residential neighbourhood that boasts some of the swankiest addresses in Manhattan, and a nest of designer shopping along Madison Avenue in the seventies. Immediately above Central Park, Harlem, the historic black city-within-a-city, has a healthy sense of an improving go-ahead community; a jaunt further north is most likely required only to see the unusual Cloisters, a nineteenth century mock-up of a

medieval monastery, packed with great European Romanesque and Gothic art and (transplanted) architecture.

When to Go

New York's climate ranges from the sticky hot and humid in mid-summer to well below freezing in January and February: deep midwinter and high summer (many people find the city unbearable in July and August) are much the worst time you could come.

Spring is gentle, if unpredictable, and usually wet, while fall is perhaps the best season: come at either time and you'll find it easier to get things done and the people more welcoming. Whatever time of year you come, dress in layers: buildings tend to be overheated during winter months and air conditioned to the point of iciness in summer.

Also bring comfortable and sturdy shoes - you're going to be doing a lot of walking!

| | F° | | C° | | Rainfall | |
|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|----------|-----|
| | Avg | | Avg | | Avg | |
| | Max | Min | Max | Min | In | MM |
| Jan | 38 | 26 | 3 | -3 | 3.5 | 89 |
| Feb | 40 | 27 | 4 | 3 | 3.1 | 79 |
| Mar | 50 | 35 | 10 | 2 | 4 | 102 |
| Apr | 61 | 44 | 16 | 7 | 3.8 | 97 |
| May | 72 | 54 | 22 | 12 | 4.4 | 112 |
| Jun | 80 | 63 | 27 | 17 | 3.6 | 91 |
| Jul | 85 | 69 | 29 | 21 | 4.4 | 112 |
| Aug | 84 | 67 | 29 | 19 | 4.1 | 104 |
| Sep | 76 | 60 | 24 | 16 | 4 | 102 |
| Oct | 65 | 50 | 18 | 10 | 3.4 | 86 |
| Nov | 54 | 41 | 12 | 5 | 4.4 | 112 |
| Dec | 43 | 31 | 6 | -1 | 3.8 | 97 |

Arriving By Air

Three major airports serve New York. International and domestic flights are handled at:

John F Kennedy (JFK), Tel: 718/244-4444, in the borough of Queens

Newark, Tel 973/961-6000, in northern New Jersey

La Guardia, Tel 718/533-3400, also in Queens, handles domestic flights only.

Taxis are the easiest option if you are in a group or are arriving at an antisocial hour. Expect to pay \$16-22 from La Guardia, a flat rate of \$35 from JFK and \$35-55 from Newark; you'll be responsible for the turnpike and tunnel tolls - an extra \$5 or so. And don't forget a tip of 15% – 20%.

Another good way into Manhattan is by bus, the two Manhattan terminals, used by all airport buses, being Grand Central Station and the Port Authority Bus Terminal.

City Transportation

Getting around the city is likely to take some getting used to; public transit here is on the whole quite good, extremely cheap, and covers most conceivable corners of the city, whether by bus or subway. Don't be afraid to ask someone for help if you're confused.

You'll no doubt find the need for a taxi from time to time, especially if you feel uncomfortable in an area at night; you shouldn't ever have trouble tracking one down - the ubiquitous yellow cabs are always on the prowl for passengers

Subway

The New York subway is intimidating and initially incomprehensible. It's also the fastest and most efficient way to get from A to B in Manhattan and the outer boroughs, and it is safer and more user-friendly than it once was. Put aside your qualms: Six million people ride the subway every day, quite a few for the first time. Any subway journey costs \$1.50, payable by token purchased at any booth, but if you are going to be take more than a couple of rides, it's more efficient to purchase a Metro Card. This allows you to transfer (for free) from subway to bus, bus to subway or bus to bus within a period of two hours.

It's available, from token booths and vending machines, in several forms: cards can be bought for \$3 to \$80; \$15 purchases allow eleven rides for the cost of ten, and \$30 purchases allow 22 rides for the cost of twenty. Unlimited-ride cards allow unlimited travel for a certain period of time: a seven-day pass for \$17, a thirty-day pass for \$63 and a daily "Fun Pass" for \$4.

Buses

The bus system is simpler than the subway, and you can see where you're going and hop off at anything interesting. It also features many more cross town routes. The major disadvantage is that they can be extremely slow - in peak hours almost down to walking pace, and extremely full to boot. In response to cries of overcrowding along several routes, the MTA recently introduced "accordion buses" - two buses attached with a flexible rubber accordion, which helps the big vehicle turn corners.

However, because these run slightly less frequently than the ones they replaced, they still get crowded. Bus maps, like subway maps, can be obtained at the main concourse of Grand Central or the Convention and Visitors Bureau at 53rd Street and Seventh Avenue.

Anywhere in Manhattan the fare is \$1.50, payable on entry with either a subway token, a Metro Card (the most convenient way) or with the correct change - no bills.

Taxis

Taxis are always worth considering, especially if you're in a hurry or in a group or late at night. Always use medallion cabs, immediately recognizable by their yellow paintwork and medallion up top; gypsy cabs, unlicensed, uninsured operators who tout for business wherever tourists arrive, should be avoided. Up to four people can travel in an ordinary medallion cab.

Fares are \$2 for the first fifth of a mile and 30¢ for each fifth of a mile thereafter or for each ninety seconds in stopped or slow traffic. The basic charge rises by 50¢ from 8pm to 6am. Trips outside Manhattan can incur toll fees; not all of the crossings cost money, however, and the driver should ask you which route you wish to take. The tip should be 15% - 20% of the fare; you'll get a dirty look if you offer less.

Drivers don't like splitting anything bigger than a \$10 bill, and are in their rights to refuse a bill over \$20.

Walking

Few cities equal New York for street-level stimulation. Getting around on foot is often the most exciting - and tiring - method of exploring. Figure fifteen minutes to walk ten north-south blocks - rather more at rush hour. However you plan your wanderings you're still going to spend much of your time walking. Footwear is important (sneakers are good for spring/summer; winter needs something waterproof).

So is safety: a lot more people are injured in New York carelessly crossing the street than are mugged. Pedestrian crossings don't give you automatic right of way unless the WALK sign is on - and, even then, cars may be turning, so be prudent.

Eating and Drinking

Cafes, Snacks and Light Meals

New York's cafés and bakeries run the gamut of its population's ethnic and cultural influences. They can be found in every neighbourhoods, with the usual French, Italian and American favourites probably most visible. The city also has a number of coffee houses and tearooms, which outside of the obvious also might offer fruit juices, pastries, light snacks and, on occasion, full meals.

Most places more suitable for sit-down dinners we've listed under "Restaurants".

Restaurants

New York is a rich port city that can get the best foodstuffs from anywhere in the world, and, as a major immigration gateway, it attracts chefs who know how to cook the world's cuisines properly, even exceptionally. As you stroll through the streets of New York, heavenly odours seem to emanate from every corner; it's not hard to work up an appetite.

Outside of American and continental cuisines (more or less including New American, which can either dazzle with its inventive fusions or fail miserably and pretentiously), be prepared to confront a startling variety of ethnic food. In New York, none has had so dominant an effect as Jewish food, to the extent that many Jewish specialties - bagels, pastrami, lox and cream cheese - are now considered archetypal New York. Others retain more specific identities.

Chinese food includes the familiar Cantonese, as well as spicier Szechuan and Hunan dishes - most restaurants specialize in one or the other. Japanese food is widely available and very good; other Asian cuisines include Indian and a broad sprinkling of Thai, Korean, Vietnamese and Indonesian restaurants.

Italian cooking is widespread and not terribly expensive, and typically a fairly safe bet. French restaurants tend to be pricier, although there are an increasing number of bistros and brasseries turning out authentic and reliable French nosh for attractive prices. Somewhat similar in spirit are Belgian brasseries and steak frites joints, a surprising number of which opened in the last half-decade (and many of which subsequently closed).

There is also a whole range of Eastern European restaurants - Russian, Ukrainian, Polish and Hungarian - that serve well priced, filling fare. Caribbean, Central and South American restaurants are on the rise in New York, and often offer a good deal and a large, satisfying and often spicy meal.

Other places include weird hybrids like Chinese-Peruvian, Japanese-Brazilian, and any number of vegetarian and whole food eateries to cater to any taste or fad. As for where you'll be going for these foods, we've divided our selections by neighbourhood (and then cuisine), and have given very brief descriptions for what you might expect to find in those areas.

For the most part you won't have to walk very far to find a good place in almost any district, but many of the ones listed here are worth a trip on the subway or in a cab. Note that most restaurants open at lunchtime, which is often a good opportunity to sample fine food at nearly half the cost of dinner; also, dim sum in Chinatown makes for a memorable lunch experience.

Drinking

You can't walk a block along most Manhattan avenues (and many of the side streets) without passing one or two bars. The bar scene in New York City is a varied one, with a broader range of places to drink than in most American cities, and prices to suit most pockets.

Bars generally open from mid-morning (around 10am) to the early hours - 4am at the latest, when they have to close by law. Bar kitchens usually stop operating around midnight or a little before. The best spots are below 14th Street, where the West Village takes in a wide range of taste, budget and purpose, and equally good hunting grounds can be found in the East Village, NoLita, SoHo and the more western reaches of the Lower East Side.

There's a decent choice of midtown bars, though bars here tend to be geared to an after-hours office crowd and (with a few notable exceptions) can consequently be pricey and rather dull. The Upper West Side has a small array of bars, some interesting, although most tend to cater to more of a clean-cut and dully yuppie crowd; and the bars of Harlem, while not numerous, offer some of the city's most affordable jazz in a relaxed environment.

While most visitors to New York may not have time or occasion to check out the bar scenes in the outer boroughs, those that venture to Williamsburg, Park Slope, Brooklyn Heights and Fort Greene in Brooklyn or to Astoria in Queens will find both some of the hippest and also most neighbourly spots around. Whether you wind up sipping a martini in a swank lounge or downing a pint in a seedy dive, you'll be expected to tip; figure about a buck a drink. Remember to that the legal drinking age is 21.

Many bars have happy hours, typically 5-7pm, when drinks might be two for one, or some bar food is available for free.

Entertainment

Live Music and Clubs

New York's music scene reflects the city's diversity. Traditional and contemporary jazz are still in abundance, with the annual JVC and Knitting Factory's "What Is Jazz?" festivals bringing top international talent to the city every year.

The downtown avant-garde scene and its attendant art noise bands - the most famous being Sonic Youth - continue to influence the area's musicians. Spoken-word performers, along with the current crop of singer/songwriters, are reviving the Beats' poetry scene.

If you travel uptown or to the outer boroughs, you'll find pockets of Brazilian music, West Indian music, reggae and hip-hop, but if you stay downtown, indie rock will fill your ears. Techno, hip-hop, and electronica - and every hybrid form thereof, from classical violin played over squawking German beats on the subway to experiments in mixology at your local bar - are everywhere; dance music has finally taken New York and New York is playing it in every place it can.

Despite what the designers on any avenue would like you to believe, New York is not uptight about appearance. In the most expensive, glitzy clubs, however, appearances do matter: acolytes must adhere to the current look, with bouncers guarding the doors against the gauche. But if you just want to dance, there are plenty of more-casual places, especially the city's gay clubs, which often offer more creative music and less hassle.

The sections that follow provide accounts of the cream of current venues. Remember, though, that the music - and especially the club scenes - changes continually. Consult weekly listings publications. Excellent freebies include the Village Voice (www.villagevoice.com), New York Press (www.nypress.com), Homo Xtra (www.hx.com) and the monthly club sheet Flyer which all contain detailed club, theatre and venue listings for the straight and gay scenes; you can find them in corner self-serve newspaper boxes and music stores.

Also on the web and on the ball are Time Out New York (www.timeoutny.com) and City Search (www.newyork.citysearch.com). It may seem a ridiculous and puritanical requirement, but you will undoubtedly be "carded" at the door in New York, so it's imperative to bring your ID (driver's license or passport) with you when you go out.

Venues and bars do enforce the legal drinking age of 21 and you must be 18 to enter some music venues.

The Performing Arts and Film

From Broadway glitter to Lower East Side grunge, the range and variety of the performing arts in New York is exactly what you might expect. Broadway, and even Off-Broadway theatre, is notoriously expensive, but if you know where to look, there are a variety of ways to get tickets cheaper, and on the Off-Off-Broadway fringe you can see a play for little more than the price of a movie ticket.

As for dance, music and opera, the big mainstream events are extremely expensive, but smaller ones are often equally as interesting and far cheaper. New York gets the first run of most American films (and many foreign ones before they reach Europe) and has a very healthy art house and revival scene. Listings for the arts can be found in a number of places.

The most useful sources are the clear and comprehensive listings in Time Out New York, the free Village Voice (especially the pullout "Voice Choices" section), or the also-free New York Press, all especially useful for things downtown and vaguely "alternative."

For tonier events try the "Cue" section in the weekly New York Magazine, the "Goings on about Town" section of the New Yorker, or Friday's "Weekend" or Sunday's "Arts and Leisure" sections of the New York Times.

Specific Broadway listings can be found in the free Official Broadway Theatre Guide, available at theatre and hotel lobbies or at the New York Convention and Visitors' Bureau.

Kid's New York

New York can be a wonderful city to visit with children. Obvious attractions include museums, skyscrapers and ferry rides, as well as the simple pleasures of just walking the streets, seeing the street entertainers and taking in the shopping scene.

Free events, especially common in the summer, range from puppet shows and nature programs in the city's parks to storytelling hours at local libraries and bookstores. In addition, many museums and theatres have specific children's programs. For a further listing of what is available when you're in town, see Friday's Daily News or New York Times, and "Activities for Children" in the weekly New York magazine, as well as Time Out and the Village Voice.

An excellent automated directory of family-oriented current events all around the city is available through the New York Convention and Visitors Bureau, 810 7thAve (between

52nd and 53rd streets), NY 10019 Tel 212/484-1222 (Mon-Fri 8.30am-6pm, Sat & Sun 9am-5pm).

Museums

One could spend an entire holiday just checking out the city's many museums, which almost always contain something of interest for the kids; the following is a brief overview of the ones that should evoke more than just the usual enthusiasm.

American Museum of Natural History and the Rose Centre for Earth and Space Central Park W at 79th St. Sun-Thurs 10am-5.45pm, Fri & Sat 10am-8.45pm; \$10, students \$7.50, children \$6; IMAX films, the Hayden Planetarium and certain special exhibits cost extra; Tel 212/769-5100, www.amnh.org. The planetarium is sure to satisfy most kid's intergalactic desires, and the dinosaurs are also a sure-fire attraction.

Children's Museum of the Arts 182 Lafayette St (between Broome and Grand streets). Wed noon-7pm, Thurs-Sun noon-5pm; \$5, under 1 free; Tel 212/274-0986. Art gallery of works by and for children. Children are encouraged to look at different types of art and then create their own, with paints, clay, plaster of Paris and any other simple medium.

Children's Museum of Manhattan, 212 W 83rd St (between Broadway and Amsterdam Ave). Tues-Sun 10am-5pm; \$6, under 1 free; Tel 212/721-1234, www.cmom.org. A terrific participatory museum, with exhibit space over five floors; not to be missed is "Seuss!" - A whimsical area with decor inspired by the Dr Seuss books, where kids can (literally) cook up some green eggs and ham. For ages 1-12, and highly recommended.

Fire Museum; 278 Spring St (between Hudson and Varick streets). Tues-Sun 10am-4pm; \$4, students \$2, under 12 \$1; Tel 212/691-1303. More popular than ever now, this unspectacular but pleasing homage to New York City's fire-fighters, and indeed fire people everywhere, has fire engines from yesteryear, helmets, dog eared photos and a host of other motley objects.

Intrepid Sea-Air-Space Museum W 46th St and 12th Ave at Pier 86. April-Sept Mon-Fri 10am-5pm, Sat-Sun 10am-7pm; Oct-March Tues-Sun 10am-5pm, last admission 1 hour prior to closing; \$12, children 12-17 \$9, children 6-11 \$6, children 3-5 \$2, under 2 free; Tel 212/245-0072, www.intrepidmuseum.org. The world's fastest spy plane, a guided missile submarine, and other modern and vintage air and sea craft are all here; not recommended for kids under five years.

Museum of the City of New York 1220 5th Ave (103rd St). Wed-Sat 10am-5pm, Sun noon-5pm, Tues 10am-2pm for preregistered tour groups only; suggested donation \$7, students \$4, families \$12; Tel 212/534-1672, www.mcny.org. The New York Toy Stories is a super way to bring young ones back to simpler times, before video games, when wooden toys, rubber balls, and board games were just about the only options in the late 1800s. For girls (and grownups) there is a worthwhile and surprising group of dollhouses.

National Museum of the American Indian (Smithsonian Institution) 1 Bowling Green (at Battery Park). Daily 10am-5pm, Thurs until 8pm; free; Tel 212/514-3700, www.si.edu/nmai. Kids will enjoy looking at the ancient dolls and feathered headdresses and the replicas of a reservation home and schoolroom. Programs often include theatre troupes, performance artists, dancers and films.

The following museums are free at the stated times:

Tuesday

Cooper-Hewitt (5-9pm)

International Centre of Photography (5-8pm, pay what you wish)

Jewish Museum (5-9pm)

Thursday

Asia Society Gallery (6-8pm)

New Museum of Contemporary Art (6-8pm)

Friday

Guggenheim (6-8pm, pay what you wish),

Museum of Modern Art (4.30-8.15pm, pay what you wish),

Whitney (6-9pm, pay what you wish).

Central Park Year-round

Central Park provides sure-fire entertainment for children. In the summer it becomes one giant playground, with activities ranging from storytelling to rollerblading to rowboating. The following are merely a few of the highlights.

The Carousel 64th St mid-park for just \$1, children can take a spin on the country's largest hand-carved horses.

Central Park Wildlife Conservation Centre (Zoo), 5th Ave at 64th St. A small but enjoyable zoo, with sea lions, polar bears, monkeys and the Tisch Children's zoo.

Hans Christian Andersen statue 72nd St on the East Side (next to the Boat Pond). A forty-or-so-year tradition of storytelling sessions; Wed & Sat 11am-noon, June to Sept.

Loeb Boathouse 72nd St mid-park. Rent a rowboat on the Central Park lake and enjoy the views or take a gondola ride in the evening. Bike rentals available too.

Wollman Rink 62nd St mid-park; Tel 212/396-1010. Roller/in-line skating during the summer and ice-skating during the winter. Skate rental and instruction available.

Sights and Entertainment

Bronx Zoo (formally, the International Wildlife Conservation Park) Bronx River Parkway at Fordham Rd. March-Oct Mon-Fri 10am-5pm, Sat & Sun 10am-5.30pm; Nov-Feb daily 10am-4.30pm; \$9, kids \$5, free on Weds, rides and some exhibits are an additional charge; Tel 718/367-1010, www.wcs.org.

The largest urban zoo in America has more than 4000 species of animals, reptiles and birds on display, many in huge simulated natural habitats. A children's section allows kids to climb around on large exhibits, including a giant spider web, and pet some of the tamer animals.

New York Aquarium W 8th St and Surf Ave, Coney Island, Brooklyn (Mon-Fri 10am-5pm, Sat & Sun 10am-5.30pm; \$9.75; Tel 718/265-FISH). The aquarium is largely a series of darkened halls containing creatures from the deep, but open-air shows of whales and

dolphins are held several times daily, as are the shark, sea otter and walrus feedings. Call for daily show/program info.

Skyride 350 5th Ave (at 34th St) in the Empire State Building. Daily 10am-10pm; \$13.50, 4-12 \$10.50; combination ticket to Skyride and observatory \$17 and \$10; Tel 212/279-9777. The Skyride, in the Empire State Building, is a big-screen thrill ride through the most well-known sights in the city, complete with tilting seats and surround sound. Bring a strong stomach; it may be too much for small children.

Shops – Toys, Books and Clothes

Books of Wonder 16 W 18th St (between 5th and 6th avenues) Tel 212/989-3270. Excellent kids' bookstore, with a great story-hour on Sun at 11.45am, and author appearances Sat in the spring and fall.

F.A.O. Schwarz 767 5th Ave (at 58th St) Tel 212/644-9400. Showpiece of a nationwide chain sporting three huge floors of everything a child could want. Fans of Barbie will want to check out the Barbie store, in the back of F.A.O. Schwarz, with its own Madison Ave entrance.

New Victory Theatre 209 W 42nd St Tel 646/223-3020. There is always a rich mix of affordable theatre, music, dance, storytelling, film and puppetry, in addition to pre-performance workshops and post-performance participation. Everything about this theatre is child-oriented, including the duration of performances (60-90 minutes). Closed during the summer.

Thirteenth Street Repertory Company 50 W 13th St (between 5th and 6th avenues) Tel 212/675-6677. Sat & Sun 1pm and 3pm, year-round; \$7. Forty-five-minute original musicals - such as "Rumplewho?" - specifically created for "little humans." Reservations needed, as these are very popular shows.

Penny Whistle Toys 1283 Madison Ave (at 91st St) Tel 212/369-3868; also 448 Columbus Ave (at 81st St) Tel 212/873-9090. Wonderful shop selling a fun, imaginative range of toys that deliberately eschews guns and war accessories, including replicas of old-fashioned toys rarely seen these days. Highly recommended.

Red Caboose 23 W 45th St (between 5th and 6th avenues); lower level - follow the flashing railroad sign in back of lobby Tel 212/575-0155. A unique shop specializing in models, particularly trains and train sets.

Tannen's Magic Studio 24 W 25th St (between Broadway and 6th Ave) Tel 212/929-4500. Kids will never forget a visit to the largest magic shop in the world, with nearly 8000 props and magic sets. The staff consists of magicians who perform free shows throughout the day.

Circuses

Barnum & Bailey Circus Madison Square Garden Tel 212/465-6741. This large touring circus is usually in New York between the end of March and the beginning of May.

Big Apple Circus Lincoln Centre Tel 212/546-2656. Small circus that performs in a tent in Damrosch Park next to the Met, from late Oct to early Jan. Tickets \$10-45.

Media

The days are long gone when New York could support twenty daily newspapers. Today, only three remain: the New York Times and tabloids; the Daily News and the New York Post.

The New York Times (75¢), an American institution, prides itself on being the "paper of record" - the closest thing America has to a quality national paper. It has solid, sometimes stolid, international coverage, and places much emphasis on its news analysis.

The Sunday edition (\$3) is a thumping bundle of newsprint divided into a number of supplements that take days to read. The legendary crossword puzzles in Sunday's New York Times Magazine should keep you occupied all day. Its archrivals concentrate on local news, usually screamed out in banner headlines.

The Daily News (50¢) is renowned as a picture newspaper but with intelligent features and many racy headlines.

The New York Post (25¢), the city's oldest newspaper, started in 1801 by Alexander Hamilton, has been in decline for many years. It is known for its sensationalism and conservative slant.

Of the weekly papers, the Village Voice (Wed, free in Manhattan, \$1.25 elsewhere) is the most widely read, mainly for The Definitive Guide to New York, its comprehensive arts coverage and investigative features. Catch it early enough on Wednesday morning (or late Tuesday night at select locations around the city) and grab a free pass to a new movie the following week; look for the full-page ad that tells you where to wait in line.

Its main competitor, the New York Press, is an edgier alternative, angrier and not afraid to offend just about everyone. Its listings are quite good.

City Tours

There are many different ways to take in the city: exploring streets and neighbourhoods on your own; heading up to the tops of buildings, like the Empire State to get a good perspective on the lay of the land, or going on any number of city tours, which might let you experience New York from angles never before thought of.

If you're nervous about exploring New York, or overwhelmed by the possibilities the city offers, look into Big Apple Greeter, 1Centre St, 19th floor, NY 10007 (212/669-8159 fax 669-3685, information@bigapplegreeter.org, www.bigapplegreeter.org), a non-profit organisation that matches visitors with their corps of 500 trained volunteer "greeters."

Bus Tours

Apart from equipping yourself with a decent map, perhaps the most obvious way to orient yourself to the city is to take a bus tour. These are extremely popular, though frankly you're swept around so quickly as to scarcely see anything. Still, the tops of double deckers are a great place to figure out what's where for later explorations.

In general, an all-city tour over two days will cost \$30-\$45, although you can also have half-day or limited area tours for around \$25. Buses run seven days a week, from (approximately) 9am to 6pm, with special rates and times for evening tours. Best bets are City Sightseeing (Coach), 1040 6th Ave, NY10018 (Tel 1-800/876-9868 for tickets and locations. Terminal: 8th Ave and 53rd St), and Gray Line Sightseeing Terminal, Port Authority at 42nd Street and Eighth Avenue, NY 10019 (Tel 1-800/669-0051 for tickets and locations).

Helicopter Tours

A more exciting option is to look at the city from the air, by helicopter. This is expensive, but you won't easily forget the experience. Liberty Helicopter Tours, at the western end of 30th Street or from the Wall Street heliport at Pier 6 (Tel 212/967-4550, closed on weekends), offers flights ranging from \$59 (for four-and-a-half minutes) to \$187 (fifteen minutes). If you leave from 30th Street, the best seat for photos is on the right in the back.

Helicopters take off regularly between 9am and 9pm everyday unless winds and visibility are bad; you don't need a reservation, but in high season (and nice weather) you may have quite a wait if you just show up.

Tours on Water

A great way to see the island of Manhattan is a voyage on the Circle Line ferry (Tel 212/563-3200, www.circleline.com). Departing from Pier 83 at W 42nd Street and Twelfth Avenue, it circumnavigates Manhattan, taking in everything from the tall buildings of downtown Manhattan to the subdued stretches of Harlem and the Bronx - complete with a live wisecracking commentary; the three-hour tour is \$24 (\$12 for children under twelve). Another interesting option is the Harlem Spirituals Gospel Cruise, two-hour tours for \$25 that depart from Pier 16 at South Street Seaport.

One of the city's true bargains is the free Staten Island ferry, which leaves from South Ferry on the lower tip of Manhattan and offers great views of New York Harbour and the Statue of Liberty.

Walking Tours

Options for walking tours of Manhattan or the outer boroughs are many and varied. Usually led by experts, they offer fact-filled wanders through neighbourhoods or focus on particular subjects. You'll find fliers for some of them at the various Visitor The Definitive Guide To New York Centres; for what's happening in the current week, check the New York Times (Fri or Sun), the weekly Village Voice or New York Press (both out on Wed), or any of the free weekly papers around town.

Detailed under "Organisations" are some of the more interesting tours: they don't all operate year-round, the more esoteric only setting up for a couple of outings at specific times of the year. Phone ahead for the full schedules.

Staten Island Ferry

The bargain that still can't be beaten, even more so now that the fare has been eliminated, is the free Staten Island ferry (Tel 718/390-5253), which leaves from its own terminal in lower Manhattan's Battery Park. It's a commuter boat, so avoid crowded rush hours if you can; at other times, grab a spot at the back (going out) and watch the skyline shrink away.

Departures are every 15-20 minutes at rush hours, every thirty minutes, midday and evenings, and every hour late at night – weekend services are less frequent.

Parades and Festivals

Major cultural holidays are celebrated with parades and festivals. The city takes these, especially the parades, very seriously. Almost every large ethnic group in the city holds an annual get-together, often using Fifth Avenue as the main drag. The events are often political or religious in origin, though now are just as much an excuse for music, food and dance.

Whatever your flavour, chances are your stay will coincide with at least one such celebration. For more details and exact dates, phone 1-800/NYC-VISIT, or go to www.nycvisit.com. Also, look at listings in New York magazine's "CUE" section, the New Yorker magazine's "Goings on About Town," the Village Voice's "Cheap Thrills," or the weekly "Obsessive guide to impulsive entertainment," in Time Out New York magazine.

JANUARY

Chinese New Year and Parade

First full moon between Jan 21 and Feb 19A noisy, colourful occasion celebrated from noon to sunset around Mott St. Though dragons still dance in the street, firecrackers no longer chase away evil spirits because former Mayor Giuliani banned them for most events. The chances of getting a meal anywhere in Chinatown at this time are slim; Tel212/431-9740.

Winter Antiques Show

Mid-January, this is the foremost American antiques show in the country, at the Seventh Regiment Armoury, Park Ave and 67th St Tel 212/777-5218.

FEBRUARY

Twenty-four-Hour Marriage Marathon

Valentine's Day; Get hitched or watch while more than fifty couples take the plunge 110 stories and 1377ft above Manhattan on the Observation Deck of the Empire State Building Tel 212/323-2340.

Empire State Building Run Up Foot Race

Mid-Feb; Sponsored by the New York Road Runners Club, contenders race up the 1575 steps of this New York City landmark Tel 212/423-2229, www.nyrrc.org.

MARCH

St Patrick's Day Parade

March 17; Celebrating an impromptu march through the streets by Irish militiamen on St Patrick's Day in 1762, this has become a draw for every Irish band and organization in the US and Ireland. Usually starting just before noon, it heads up 5th Ave between 44th and 86th streets Tel 212/484-1222.

Greek Independence Day Parade

Late March; Not as long or as boozy as St Pat's, more a patriotic nod to the old country from floats of pseudo-classically dressed Hellenes. When Independence Day falls in the Orthodox Lent, the parade is shifted to April or May. It usually kicks off from 62nd St and 5th Ave to 79th St Tel 718/204-6500.

The Circus Animal Walk

Late March to early April; At midnight the animals from Ringling Brothers' Barnum & Bailey Circus march from their point of arrival to Madison Square Garden prior to opening of circus; Tel 212/465-6741 for tickets or 212/302-1700 for information.

APRIL

Easter Parade

Easter Sun; From Central Park down to Rockefeller Centre on 50th St, New Yorkers dress up in outrageous Easter bonnets. 10am-5pm. There's also an Eggstravaganza, a children's festival including an egg-rolling contest in Central Park, on the Great Lawn.

New Directors, New Films

Early April; Lincoln Centre and MoMA have presented this popular two week film festival for more than 25 years, showcasing films of overlooked or emerging filmmakers Tel 212/875-5638, www.filmlinc.com.

MAY

Ukrainian Festival

Mid-May; This extravaganza fills a weekend on E 7th St between 2nd and 3rd avenues with marvellous Ukrainian costumes, folk music and dance, plus authentic foods. At the Ukrainian Museum (12th Stand 2nd Ave) there's a special exhibition of pysanky – traditional hand-painted eggs Tel 212/674-1615.

Martin Luther King Jr Parade

Mid-May; Celebrating Dr King's contribution to civil rights, the parade covers 5th Ave from 66th to 86th streets. It also pays tribute to African-Americans who have served in the US military Tel 212/374-5176.

Ninth Avenue International Food Festival

Mid-May; The festival closes down 9th Ave between 37th and 57th streets for the weekend and offers tantalizing food, delicious scents, colourful crafts and great deals Tel 212/484-1222.

Fleet Week

End of May; the annual welcome of sailors from the US, Canada, Mexico the UK, among others, held at the Intrepid Sea-Air-Space Museum; activities and events Tel 212/245-0072.

JUNE

Museum Mile Festival

First Tues evening; On 5th Ave from 82nd St to 105th St. Museums, including the Museum of the City of New York, Jewish Museum, Guggenheim, the Met and others are open free 6-9pm Tel 212/606-2296, www.museummile.org.

Puerto Rican Day Parade

Second Sun; The largest of several Puerto Rican celebrations in the city, seven hours of bands and baton-twirling from 44th to 86th streets on 5th Ave, then east to 3rd Ave Tel 718/401-0404, www.nationalpuertoricanparade.org.

Lower East Side Jewish Spring Festival

Check the Jewish Weekly for date and location. Kosher foods, Yiddish and Hebrew folk singing and guided tours of the Jewish Lower East Side.

Mermaid Parade

First Sat after June 21; at this hilarious event, participants dress like mermaids and King Neptune and saunter down the Coney Island boardwalk, after which everyone throws fruit into the sea. If you're around - don't miss it Tel 718/392-1267, www.coneyislandusa.com.

Lesbian and Gay Pride Week

Late June; the world's biggest Pride event kicks off with a rally and ends with a parade, street fair and dance Tel 212/807-7433, www.nycpride.org.

Washington Square Music Festival

Late June to early July; A series of free Tuesday night classical, jazz and big-band concerts at this outdoor venue Tel 212/431-1088.

JULY

Independence Day

July 4; The fireworks from Macy's, South Street Seaport and the display over the East River are visible all over Manhattan, but the best place to view them is either from the Seaport, Battery Park, the Esplanade at Brooklyn Heights or from atop almost any building at about 9pm Tel 212/484-1222 or 560-4060.

New York City Tap Festival

Mid-July; the weeklong festival features hundreds of tap dancers who perform and give workshops Tel 646/230-9564, www.nyctapfestival.com.

AUGUST

Harlem Month

Culminates with Harlem Day on the third Sun; The month long celebration of African, Caribbean and Latin culture includes a children's festival, a dance show, a fashion parade, talent contest and other festivities, such as the Black Film Festival and the Taste of Harlem Tel 212/862-7200.

Dance Theatre of Harlem Street Festival

Usually the second week; A variety of dance performances plus events for children, on 152nd Street between Amsterdam and Convent avenues; Tel 212/690-2800.

New York International Fringe Festival

Usually mid-Aug; Cutting-edge performance art, theatre, dance, puppetry, etc. at many different venues on the Lower East Side; Tel 212-420-8877, www.fringeny.com.

SEPTEMBER

West Indian-American Day Parade and Carnival

Labour Day; Brooklyn's largest parade, modelled after the carnivals of Trinidad and Tobago, features music, food and dance; Tel 718/774-8807 or 212/484-1222.

Broadway on Broadway

Sun after Labour Day; Free performances feature songs by casts of virtually every Broadway musical, culminating in a shower of confetti; held in Times Square Tel 212/768-1560 or 563-BWAY.

Festival of the Feast of San Gennaro

Ten days in mid-Sept; boisterous event in honour of the patron saint of Naples, held along Mulberry St. The saint's statue is carried through the streets with donations of dollar bills pinned to his cloak Tel 212/764-6330.

African-American Day Parade

Late Sept; Runs from 111th St and Adam Clayton Powell Blvd to 142nd St, then east toward 5th Ave, Harlem Tel 212/862-7200.

New York Film Festival

Two weeks late Sept to mid-Oct; One of the world's leading film festivals unreels at Lincoln Centre Tel 212/875-5610, www.filmlinc.com/nyff/nyff.

OCTOBER

Columbus Day Parade

On or around Oct 12; one of the city's largest binges pays tribute to the city's Italian heritage and commemorates the day America was put on the map; 5th Ave from 44th to 79th streets Tel 212/249-2360.

DUMBO Art - Under the Bridge Festival

Mid-Oct; More than 700 emerging and professional artists show their work in 250 open galleries. The Parade of Concept (robots, remote-controlled vehicles and floats) kicks off the show in the neighbourhood of DUMBO (Down Under the Manhattan Bridge Overpass) - in Brooklyn between the Manhattan and Brooklyn bridges Tel 718/624-3772, www.dumboartscentre.org.

Greenwich Village Halloween Parade

Oct 31; In the 7pm procession on 6th Ave from Spring to 23rd streets you'll see spectacular costumes, wigs and make-up. The music is great and the spirit is wild and gay. Get there early for a good viewing spot Tel 212/475-3333 ext 4044, www.halloweennyc.com.

NOVEMBER

Veteran's Day Parade

Nov 11; The United War Veterans sponsor this annual event on 5th Ave from 39th to 23rd streets Tel 212/693-1475.

Fall Antiques Show

Mid-Nov; Foremost American antiques show in the country, at the Seventh Regiment Armoury, Park Ave and 67th St Tel 212/777-5218

Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade

Thanksgiving Day; New York's most televised parade, with floats, dozens of marching bands from around the country, the Rockettes, and Santa Claus's first appearance of the season. More than two million spectators watch it from 77th St down Central Park W to Columbus Circle, then down Broadway to Herald Square, 9am noon Tel 212/494-4495, www.macysparade.com.

DECEMBER

Rockefeller Centre Christmas tree Lighting

Early Dec; The lighting of the tree begins the festivities Tel 212/632-3975.

Chanukah Celebrations

Usually in mid-Dec; During the eight nights of this holiday, usually in mid-Dec, a menorah-lighting ceremony takes place at Brooklyn's Grand Army Plaza Tel 718/778-6000.

Holiday Windows

Beginning Dec 1; The windows on 5th Ave, especially those of Lord & Taylor and Saks Fifth Avenue, are well worth waiting on their long lines for.

New Year's Eve in Times Square

Dec 31; some 200,000-plus revellers party in the cold streets Tel 212/768-1560, www.timessquarebid.org. There are also fireworks at the South Street Seaport, Central Park and Brooklyn's Prospect Park. More family-oriented, alcohol-free First Nights with dancing, music and food take place throughout the city Tel 212/818-1777.

Shops and Markets

New York's shops cater to every possible taste, in any combination and in many cases at any time of the day or night. As such, they're a great reason for visiting the city, even if the invasion of chains, like Barnes & Noble, Filene's Basement and even the world's largest K-Mart have caused some worry.

Nevertheless, many of the oddest and oldest stores remain, and nothing beats discovering a quirky, independent shop that may specialise only in vintage cufflinks or rubber stamps. Remember that an 8.25% sales tax will be added to your bill; this is bypassed sometimes when paying cash in a market or discount store. Finally, wherever you're shopping, be careful. Manhattan's crowded, frenzied stores are ripe territory for pickpockets and bag-snatchers.

Antiques New York is the premier antique source in the country, excellent for browsing, with museum-quality pieces available (typically costing a fortune) as well as lots of interesting, fairly priced stuff at the junk end of the market. Prime locations are the East and West Villages, SoHo, Chelsea, Lower Broadway and the Upper East Side.

Chameleon 231 Lafayette St (between Spring and Prince streets) Tel 212/343-9197. Interesting collections of antique lighting fixtures dating from the nineteenth century to the 1960s, many from New York residences.

Chelsea Antiques Building 110 W 25th St (between 6th and 7thaves) Tel 212/929-0909. Better quality, better condition, and higher prices than above listings. 150 dealers on twelve floors offer exceptional estate treasures and collectibles. Open Mon-Fri 10am-6pm, Sat-Sun 8.30am-6pm.

The Showplace 40 W 25th St (between 6th Ave and Broadway) Tel 212/741-8520. Indoor market of more than 100 dealers of antiques and collectibles plus an espresso bar. Mon-Fri 9am-6pm, Sat & Sun 8.30am-5.30pm.

Clothes, Fashion and Accessories

If you are prepared to search the city with sufficient dedication you can find just about anything, but it's the designer clothes and the snob values that go with them that predominate. Second-hand clothes, of the "vintage" or "antique" variety, have caught on of late.

If you're looking for things to complete your look, plenty of shoe stores are available, especially around W8th Street; and there's no shortage of make-up emporia as well.

Chain Stores

Ann Taylor 575 5th Ave (at 47th St; flagship store) Tel 212/922-3621; Mid-priced business and elegant casual clothing for women. More than ten branches throughout the city.

Benetton 597 5th Ave (at 48th St) Tel 212/317-2501. Italian chain offering youthful, contemporary, casual, bright coloured clothing for women, men and children.

Brooks Brothers 346 Madison Ave (at 44th St) Tel 212/682-8800. Something of an institution in New York, this flagship store, founded in 1915, offers classic conservative style, selling tweeds and quietly striped shirts and ties.

Burberry's 9 E 57th St (between 5th and Madison avenues) Tel 212/371-5010. Classic plaids and tweeds, with a distinctly British feel to the conservative design.

Diesel 770 Lexington (at 60th St) Tel 212/308-0055. One of five US stores that sell this Italian-designed label. Funky, some vintage-inspired club wear, lots of denim. The two floors include a café.

Eileen Fisher 103 5th Ave (between 17th and 18th streets) Tel 212/924-4777. This is the largest of their five NY shops full of loose and elegantly casual clothes for women. Their outlet is on 9th St between 1st and 2nd avenues Tel 212/529-5715.

Gap 60 W 34th St and Herald Square (flagship store) Tel 212/643-8960. Branches are on every other corner of the city; check the phonebook for locations. Circular sale racks in the back of many stores offer terrific reductions.

Designer Stores

Anna Sui 113 Greene St (between Prince and Spring streets) Tel 212/941-8406.

Bagutta 402 West Broadway (at Spring St) Tel 212/925-5216. A confluence of top designers including Helmut Lang, Prada, Gaultier, Plein Sud, Dolce & Gabbana.

Beau Brummel 421 West Broadway (between Prince and Spring streets) Tel 212/219-2666.

DKNY 655 Madison Ave (at 60th St) Tel 212/223-3569.

Dolce & Gabbana 825 Madison Ave (between 68th and 69thsts).

Emporio Armani 110 5th Ave (at 16th St) and 601 Madison Ave (between 57th and 58th streets).

Gianni Versace 647 5th Ave (between 51st and 52nd streets) Tel 212/317-0224 and 815 Madison Ave (at 68th St) Tel 212/744-6868.

Giorgio Armani 760 Madison Ave (at 65th St) Tel 212/988-9191.

Gucci 685 5th Ave (at 54th St) Tel 212/826-2600.

Helmut Lang 80 Greene St (at Spring St) tel 212/925-7214.

Hermes 11 E 57th St between 5th and Madison avenues) Tel 212/751-3181.

Pleats Please 128 Wooster St (at Prince) Tel 212/226-3600. Funky, Trendy, Hip

Canal Jean Co 504 Broadway (between Spring and Broome streets) Tel 212/226-1130. Enormous warehouse store sporting a prodigious array of jeans, jackets, T-shirts, dresses, hats and more, new and secondhand. Young, fun and reasonably cheap.

Diesel StyleLab 416 West Broadway (at Spring St) Tel 212/343-3863. The ultrahip top-shelf branch of this Italian chain has taken New York by storm.

New York Firefighter's Friend 263 Lafayette (between Spring and Broome streets) Tel 212/226-3142. Get those NY Fire Dept tees and trucks here; an NYPD section is next door.

Old Japan 382 Bleecker St (at Perry St) Tel 212/633-0922. Gorgeous, authentic Japanese clothes and trinkets, with a fantastic selection of antique kimonos.

X-Large 267 Lafayette (between Prince and Spring streets) Tel 212/334-4480. Check out the Mini line for women, X-Large for men. Cutting edge street wear for B-boys and gals. Sonic Youth's Kim Gordon and the Beastie Boys' Mike D are part owners.

Vintage/Secondhand Allan & Suzi 416 Amsterdam Ave (at 80th St) Tel 212/724-7445. Beautiful far-out fashion from the last several decades. Claims to have single-handedly restarted the platform shoe craze.

Darrow Vintage 7 W 19th St (between 5th and 6th avenues) Tel 212/255-1550. Designer and never-worn vintage, with a friendly and helpful staff, popular with top models.

The Fan Club 22 W 19th St (between 5th and 6th avenues) Tel 212/929-3349. An amazing selection of vintage clothes, many from movies, TV and theatre, with a good supply of Marilyn Monroe frocks usually on display in the front window. The store benefits three AIDS charities.

Love Saves the Day 119 2nd Ave (at 7th St) Tel 212/228-3802. Cheap vintage as well as classic lunchboxes and other kitschy nostalgia items, including valuable Kiss and Star Wars dolls.

Screaming Mimi's 382 Lafayette St (between 4th St and Great Jones) Tel 212/677-6464. One of the most established vintage stores in Manhattan. Vintage clothes (including lingerie), bags, shoes and housewares at reasonable prices.

Tokio 7 64 E 7th St (between 1st and 2nd avenues) Tel 212/353-8443. Attractive second-hand and vintage designer consignment items- a little pricier than most, but a good selection.

Thrift Stores

Housing Works Thrift Shop 143 W 17th St (between 6th and 7thaves) Tel 212/366-0820. Upscale thrift shop where you can find second hand designer wear in very good condition. All proceeds benefit Housing Works, an AIDS social service organisation.

Discount Clothing

Dave's Army & Navy Store 581 6th Ave (between 16th and 17thsts) Tel 212/989-6444. The best place to buy jeans in Manhattan. Helpful assistants, no blaring music, and brands other than just Levi's.

Loehmann's 101 7th Ave (between 16th and 17th streets) Tel 212/352-0856. New York's best-known department store for designer clothes at knockdown prices. No refunds and no exchanges, but there are individual dressing rooms.

Shoes and Other Accessories

Kate Spade 454 Broome St (at Mercer St) Tel 212/274-1991. All the rage, these boxy fabric bags with the little logo-label are a generic assertion of "Manhattan chic."

Kenneth Cole 353 Columbus Ave (at 77th St) Tel 212/873-2061. Classic and contemporary shoes, beautiful bags, excellent full grain leather. Call for more locations.

Mary Quant Colour Concept Shop 520 Madison Ave (at 53rd St) Tel 212/980-7577. Mod make-up in every conceivable shade, all with the so-cool 1960s' flower motif.

Otto Tootsi Plohound 137 5th Ave (at 20th St) Tel 212/460-8650 and 38 E 57th St (near Park Ave) Tel 212/231-3199. If you want to run with a trendy crowd, these shoes will help. Very current designs.

Robert Marc 575 Madison Ave (between 56th and 57th streets), Tel 212/319-2000, and four other locations. Exclusive New York distributor of designer frames like Lunor and Kirei Titan; also sells Retrospecs, restored antique eyewear from the 1890s to the 1940s. Very expensive and very hot.

Sephora 636 5th Ave (at 51st St) Tel 212/245-1633. Breathtaking "warehouse" of perfumes, make-up and body-care products. You have to see (or smell) it to believe it.

Department Stores and Malls

Department Stores

Barney's 600 Madison Ave (at 61st St) Tel 212/826-8900. Mon-Fri 10am-8pm, Sat 10am-7pm. Though a proper department store, Barney's actually concentrates on clothes, particularly men's, with the emphasis on high-flying, up-to-the-minute designer garments and women's wear.

Bergdorf Goodman 754 5th Ave (at 57th St) Tel 212/753-7300. Mon-Fri 10am-8pm, Sat 10am-7pm, Sun 11am-6pm. Come if only to ogle the windows, which approach high art with their rhinestone-encrusted diaphanous dress displays. Everything about Bergdorf's speaks of its attempt to be New York City's most elegant and wealth-oriented department store. The men's store is across 5th Ave.

Bloomingdale's 1000 3rd Ave (at 59th St) Tel 212/705-2000. Mon-Fri 10am-8.30pm, Sat 10am-7pm, Sun 11am-7pm. It has the atmosphere of a large, bustling bazaar, packed with concessionaires offering perfumes and designer clothes.

Henri Bendel 712 5th Ave (between 55th and 56th streets) Tel 212/247-1100. Mon-Wed, Fri & Sat 10am-7pm, Thurs 10am-8pm, Sun noon-6pm. This store, more gentle in its approach than the biggies – its refinement thanks in part to its classy reuse of the Coty perfume building, with windows by Rene Lalique - has a name for exclusivity and top modern designers.

Lord & Taylor 424 5th Ave (at 39th St) Tel 212/391-3344. Mon, Tues & Sat 10am-7pm, Wed & Fri 10am-8.30pm, Thurs 9am-8.30pm, Sun 11am-7pm. The most venerable of

the New York specialty stores, in business since 1826 and to some extent the most pleasant, has a more traditional feel than Macy's or Bloomingdale's. Still good for classic designer fashions, petites, winter coats, household goods and accessories and the more basic items.

Macy's 151 W 34th St (on Broadway at Herald Square) Tel 212/695-4400 or 1-800-289-6229. Mon-Sat 9am-9pm, Sun 11am-7pm. Quite simply, the largest department store in the world with two buildings, two million square feet of floor space and ten floors (four for women's garments alone). Unfortunately, most merchandise is of mediocre quality, although real fashion is steadily returning.

Saks 5th Avenue 611 5th Ave (at 50th St) Tel 212/753-4000. Sun-Wed, Fri & Sat 10am-6.30pm, Thurs 10am-8pm. The name is virtually synonymous with style, and, although Saks has retained its name for quality, it has also updated itself to carry the merchandise of all the big designers. The first floor is lovely when decorated with sparkling white branches at Christmas time.

Takashimaya 693 5th Ave (between 54th and 55th streets) Tel 212/350-0100. Mon-Sat 10am-8pm, Sun noon-5pm. This beautiful Japanese department store offers a scaled-down assortment of expensive merchandise, simply displayed, and exquisitely wrapped purchases. The café, The Tea Box, on the lower level, has an assortment of teapots and loose tea.

Shopping Malls

South Street Seaport 12 Fulton St Tel 212/732-7678. Mon-Sat 10am-9pm, Sun 11am-8pm. The barn-like building and its historic surroundings of ships, docks and old warehouses are fascinating and fun, the river views from the deck are lovely, and The Sharper Image stocks some terrifying and ingenious toys for adults.

Trump Tower 725 5th Ave (between 56th and 57th streets) Tel 212/832-2000. Mon-Sat 10am-6pm, Sun noon-5pm. Donald Trump's retail triumph was constructed in his own image. This gaudy caterer to the wealthy offers a range of exclusive boutiques set around a deep, marbled atrium with a several story gold tone waterfall - a tourist attraction in itself.

The Diamond District

The strip of 47th Street between Fifth and Sixth avenues is known as the Diamond District. Crammed into this one block are more than 100 shops: combined they sell more jewellery than any other block in the world. The industry has traditionally been run by Hassidic Jews, and you'll run into plenty of black-garbed men with payess (side locks) here. Some good starting points are:

Andrew Cohen, Inc (579 5th Ave, 15th floor), for diamonds

Myron Toback (25 W 47th St), a trusted dealer of silver findings

Bracie Company Inc (6085th Ave, suite 806), a friendly business specialising in antique and estate jewellery.

Once you buy, there's AA Pearls & Gems (10 W 47th St), the industry's choice for pearl and gem stringing; and, if you want to get your gems graded, the Gemmological Institute of America (580 5th Ave, 2nd floor)

Food and Drink

Food - the buying as much as the consuming of it - is a New York obsession. Though you can find a deli on pretty much any corner, it's in the gourmet markets and specialty shops - cheese, bread, smoked fish, what have you - that the city really shines.

Gourmet Markets Around the Clock Centre

Chelsea Market 75 9th Ave (between 15th and 16th streets) Tel 212/243-6005. A complex of eighteen former industrial buildings, among them the late nineteenth-century Nabisco Cookie Factory.

Balducci's 424 6th Ave (between 9th and 10th streets) Tel 212/673-2600. The long time rival of the Upper West Side's Zabar's, this is a family-run store that's no less appetizing - though some say it's slightly pricier.

Dean and DeLuca 560 Broadway (between Prince and Spring streets) Tel 212/226-6800. One of the original big neighbourhood food emporia. Very chic, very SoHo and not at all cheap. There's also a café on Prince St.

Fairway 2127 Broadway (between 74th and 75th streets) Tel 212/595-1888. Long-established Upper West Side grocery store that for many locals is the better-value alternative to Zabar's. They have their own farm on Long Island, so the produce is always fresh, and their range in some items is enormous. Fantastic organic selection upstairs.

Russ & Daughters 179 E Houston St (between Allen and Orchard streets) Tel 212/475-4880. Technically, this store is known as an "appetizing" - the original Manhattan gourmet shop, set up about 1900 to sate the appetites of homesick immigrant Jews, selling smoked fish, caviar, pickled vegetables, cheese and bagels. This is one of the oldest.

Zabar's 2245 Broadway (between 80th and 81st streets) Tel 212/787-2000. The apotheosis of New York food-fever, Zabar's is still the city's most eminent food store. Choose from an astonishing variety of cheeses, cooked meats and salads, fresh baked bread and croissants, excellent bagels, and cooked dishes to go. Not to be missed.

Cheese and Dairy

Alleva Latticini 188 Grand St (at Mulberry St) Tel 212/226-7990. Oldest Italian cheesery in America; also a grocer. Makes own smoked mozzarella and ricotta.

Joe's Dairy 156 Sullivan St (between Houston and Prince streets) Tel 212/677-8780. Family store considered New York's best bet for fresh mozzarella in several varieties.

Murray's Cheese Shop 257 Bleecker St (between 6th and 7th avenues) Tel 212/243-3289. A variety of more than 300 fresh cheeses and excellent fresh Panini sandwiches, all served by knowledgeable staff. Free tastings on Sat afternoons.

Fish and Seafood

Barney Greengrass 541 Amsterdam Ave (between 86th and 87th streets) Tel 212/724-4707. "The Sturgeon King" - an Upper West Side smoked-fish brunch institution since 1908 that also sells brunch-makings to go.

Citarella 2135 Broadway (at 75th St) Tel 212/874-0383. The largest and most varied fish and seafood source in the city, now with gourmet baked goods, cheese, coffee, meat, and prepared food.

Petrossian 182 W 58th St (at 7th Ave) Tel 212/245-2214. This celebrated shop imports only the finest Russian caviar, alongside a range of other gourmet products - smoked salmon and other fish mainly - as well as pricey implements to eat it all with.

Health Food, Vegetarian and Spice Shops

Aphrodisia 264 Bleecker St (between 6th and 7th avenues) Tel 212/989-6440. For herbs, spices and seasoning oils only, this place is hard to beat.

Healthy Pleasures 93 University Place (between 11th and 12th streets) Tel 212/353-3663; 489 Broome St (between West Broadway and Wooster St) Tel 212/431-7434; and 2493 Broadway (between 92nd and 93rd streets). These giant stores have juice bars, incredible salad-bar selections and all manner of healthy delights. The bottom floor of the Broadway branch is entirely kosher.

Kalustyan's 123 Lexington Ave (between 28th and 29th streets) Tel 212/685-3451. The best of the groceries in the tiny Little India district of Manhattan. Good spice selection.

Tea and Coffee

Empire Coffee and Tea Co 568 9th Ave (between 41st and 42nd streets) Tel 212/268-1220. This store for the serious addict has been fuelling New York's caffeine habits since 1908.

Porto Rico Importing Company 201 Bleecker St (between 6th Ave and MacDougal Street) Tel 212/477-5421; 40 1/2 St Mark's Place (off 2nd Ave); and 107 Thompson St (between Prince and Spring streets). Best for coffee and local rumour has it that the house blends areas good as many of the more expensive coffees. The Thompson St branch has a smaller selection and is primarily a café.

Liquor Stores

Prices for all kinds of liquor are controlled in New York State and vary little from one shop to another. We've listed a few that have an especially good selection or tend to be

a touch less expensive. A state law forbids the sale of hard liquor and wine on Sundays; supermarkets may sell beer, but not wine or spirits.

Astor Wines and Spirits 12 Astor Place (at Lafayette St) Tel 212/674-7500. Manhattan's best selection and some of the city's most competitive prices. Good kosher and organic wine section.

Chelsea Wine Vault 75 9th Ave (in Chelsea Market) Tel 212/462-4244. These incredibly knowledgeable folk will sell, store and even teach you about wine.

Warehouse Wines and Spirits 735 Broadway (between 8th and Waverly Place) Tel 212/982-7770. The top place to get a buzz for your buck, with a wide selection and frequent reductions on popular lines.

Music

While the top music megastores in New York are the British chain HMV, Tower Records and the Virgin Megastore, specialty pop music stores are clustered in the East and West villages.

Chains

HMV 2081 Broadway (at 72nd St) Tel 212/721-5900. Also 1280 Lexington Ave (at 86th St) Tel 212/348-0800; 57 W 34th (at 6thAve) Tel 212/629-0900; and 565 5th Ave (at 46th St) Tel 212/681-6700. The most pleasant and most fun of the megastores.

J&R Music World 23 Park Row (between Beekman and Annests) Tel 212/238-9000. A large downtown store with a decent selection and good prices.

Virgin Megastore 1540 Broadway (at 45th St) Tel 212/921-1020; and 52 E 14th St (Union Square) Tel 212/598-4666.

Special Interest and Second Hand

Fat Beats 406 6th Ave, 2nd floor (between 8th and 9th streets) Tel 212/673-3883. The name says it all. It's the source for hip-hop on vinyl in New York City.

Footlight Records 113 E 12th St (between 3rd and 4th avenues) Tel 212/533-1572. The place for show music, film soundtracks and jazz. Everything from Broadway to Big Band, Sinatra to Merman. A must for record collectors.

Vinyl Mania 60 Carmine St (between Bleecker St and 7th Ave) Tel 212/924-7223. This is where DJs come for the newest, rarest releases, especially of dance music. Hard-to-find imports too, as well as homemade dance tapes.

Sporting Goods

The sporting goods scene is dominated by chains such as Foot Locker, The Athlete's Foot, Sports Authority and Modell's, though there are a few other options - "theme park" sports clothes stores, as well as stores tightly focused on one sport. Use them for merchandise as well as a wealth of information about that sport in NY.

Superstores

Niketown 6 E 57th St (between 5th and Madison avenues) Tel 212/891-6453. You can enter this sneaker temple through Trump Tower, literally hearing crowds cheer as you pass through the door. Every thirty minutes, a screen descends the full five stories of the store and shows Nike commercials.

Reebok Store 160 Columbus Ave (between 67th and 68th streets) Tel 212/595-1480. Not as dazzling as Niketown, but it does show ads on two big screens, houses the Reebok Sports Club and features European Reebok lines not found anywhere else in the States.

Speciality Stores

Bicycle Habitat 244 Lafayette St (between Spring and Prince streets) Tel 212/431-3315. This unassuming store is frequented by bike messengers. Buy a bike here, and they'll service your brakes forever.

Mason's Tennis Mart 56 E 53rd St Tel 212/755-5805. New York's last remaining tennis specialty store - they let you try out all racquets.

Sports and Outdoor Activities

Baseball

From April to October, New York Yankees and the New York Mets play 162 games (81 home games each; playoffs run through Oct), giving you plenty of excuses to head out for a sunny day at the ballpark, not to mention the fact that baseball games, of all spectator sports, are by far the least expensive.

The Yankees (lovingly called the Bronx Bombers) are the most successful baseball franchise in history, with the most World Series titles (26 through the year 2000). If you get to the game early, you can visit Monument Park, where all their greats are memorialised.

Yankee Stadium 161st St and River Ave, the Bronx; box office Mon-Sat 9am-5pm, Sun 10am-4pm; tickets \$8-65; Tel 718/293-6000, www.yankees.com. Subway #C, #D or #4 to 161st St Station.

The Mets have been on a roller-coaster ride ever since the lovably inept team of 1962 matured into the 1969 World Series champions, and then took a nose dive from their second World Series win in 1986 to the "worst team money can buy" in the early 1990 - and are back on the upswing.

Shea Stadium 126th St (at Roosevelt Ave), Queens; box office Mon-Fri 9am-6pm, Sat, Sun & holidays 9am-5pm; tickets \$12-33; Tel 718/507-8499, www.mets.com. Subway #7 to WilletsPoint.

Basketball

The National Basketball Association's regular season begins in November and runs through the end of April. The two professional teams in the New York area are the New York Knicks, who play at Madison Square Garden, and the New Jersey Nets, whose venue is the Continental Airlines Arena at the Meadowlands Sports Complex in New Jersey.

The New York Liberty of the Women's National Basketball Association also play their games at Madison Square Garden during the summer. The Knicks have a loyal following that counts such celebrities as Spike Lee, Woody Allen, Sarah Jessica Parker and a contingent of Baldwin brothers. It is hard to get tickets to see them play, even during down years.

Long playing in the long shadow of the Knicks, the Nets have emerged as one of the more exciting teams in the NBA, and if you are willing to make the pilgrimage to New Jersey, you should find it fairly easy to get tickets.

Madison Square Garden 7th Ave (between 31st and 33rd streets); tickets \$10-60; Tel 212/465-6741. Subway #1, #2, #3, #9, #A, #C and #E to 34th St Penn Station.

Continental Airlines Arena Meadowlands Sports Complex off routes 3, 17, and Turnpike exit 16W, East Rutherford, New Jersey; box office 9am-6pm, Sat 10am-6pm, Sun noon-5pm; tickets \$30-75; Tel 1-800/7NJ-NETS, www.nba.com/nets.

Bicycling

There are 100 miles of cycle paths in New York; those in Central Park, Riverside Park and the East River Promenade are among the nicest.

Transportation Alternatives (115 W 30th St tel212/629-8080, www.transalt.org), while concentrating on the environmental aspects, lobbies for funding for bike-related projects, like ramps for bridge access, free bike racks, and additional car-free hours in Central Park. They also sponsor the Century Bike Tour in September (a 35-, 50-, 75-, or 100-mile ride through the boroughs), and have some good maps.

Bicycle Habitat 244 Lafayette St Tel 212/431-3315. Known for an excellent repair service, they also offer rentals for \$25 a day (plus a deposit equal to the value of the bike) or \$7.50an hour, with a two-hour minimum. You can also have a tune-up (priced at \$75 and up). The very knowledgeable staff here helps cyclists of all levels of expertise.

Five Borough Bike Club Tel 212/932-2300 ext 115 for membership details. This club organises rides throughout the year, including the Montauk Century, a hundred-mile ride from New York to Montauk, Long Island.

Bowling

Bowlmor Lanes 110 University Place (between 12th and 13thsts) Tel 212/255-8188. Long-established and large bowling alley with a bar and shop. Open Mon & Fri 10am-4am, Tues & Wed 10am-1am, Thurs 10am-2am, Sat 11am-4am, Sun 11am-1am. \$6 per game per person before 5pm, \$7 after 5pm. \$4 shoe-rent.

Leisure Time Bowling 2nd floor of Port Authority, 625 8th Ave, near 40th St Tel 212/268-6909. The nicest place in the city to bowl. \$5 per game per person (\$6after 5pm), plus \$3.50 shoe-rent.

Football

The National Football League (NFL) season stretches from September until the Super Bowl, typically played on the fourth Sunday in January. Although tickets are sold out for both local teams, the Giants and Jets, well in advance, if you're willing to pay the price you can buy tickets outside the stadium before the game (from scalpers).

Both play at Giants Stadium in East Rutherford, New Jersey. With a twenty-year waiting list for season tickets, the Giants, who have won four NFL and two Super Bowls in 1987 and 1991, have a devoted following. Since 1984, the Jets have been subtenants of the Giants at Giant Stadium. While they have not had the historical success of the Giants, they are generally as competitive.

Giants Stadium The Meadowlands Sports Complex off routes 3, 17, and Turnpike exit 16W, East Rutherford, New Jersey; box office Mon-Fri 9am-6pm, Sat 10am-6pm, Sun noon-5pm; tickets \$45 and \$50; Tel 201/935-3900. Regular buses are available from Port Authority Bus Terminal on 42nd St and 8th Ave.

Gyms, Pools and Baths

You can join one of several newly renovated city recreation centres for \$25 per year (ages 18-54) or \$10 (kids 13-17 and seniors). All have gym facilities and most have an indoor and/or outdoor pool. Call Tel 212/447-2020 or look in the Manhattan Blue Pages (within the White Pages) under NY City Parks; centres are listed under "Recreation" and "Swimming Pools".

John Jay Pool 77th and Cherokee Place Tel 212/794-6566. Above the FDR Drive, this six-lane, fifty-yard pool is surrounded by playgrounds and park benches. Although it opened in 1940, it is in remarkably great condition. Free to anyone; bring a padlock.

Sutton Gymnastics and Fitness Centre 20 Cooper Square Tel 212/533-9390. One of the few gyms in New York where you need not be a member to use the facilities. Classes for around \$25, generally only in summer. Call for hours and class schedule.

Tenth Street Turkish Baths 268 E 10th St; Mon, Tues, Thurs & Fri 11am-10pm, Wed 9am-10pm, Sat-Sun 7.30am-10pm; men only Sun opening until 2pm; women only Wed opening until 2pm; co-ed otherwise; Tel 212/473-8806 or 674-9250. An ancient place,

something of a neighbourhood landmark and still going, with steam baths, sauna and an ice-cold pool, as well as massage and a restaurant. Free lockers, locks, shorts, towel, robe and slippers. Admission \$22, extra for massage, etc.

Horse Racing

Aqueduct, in Howard Beach, Queens, has thoroughbred racing from October to May. To get there by subway, take the #A train to the Aqueduct station. Belmont, in Elmont, Long Island, is home to the Belmont Stakes (June), one of the three races in which three-year-olds compete for the Triple Crown.

Belmont thoroughbred racing is open May-July and September-October. Take the #E or #F subway train to 169th St and then the #16bus to the track, or take the Long Island Railroad to the Belmont Race Track stop. For both Belmont and Aqueduct, call 718/641-4700. Admission at both tracks ranges from \$1 to \$4 depending on where you park and sit. Valet parking costs \$5 at Aqueduct and \$6 at Belmont.

Ice Hockey

The two New York National Hockey League teams are the Rangers, who play at Madison Square Garden, and the Islanders, whose venue is the Nassau Coliseum on Long Island. The New Jersey Devils play at the Continental Airlines Arena. The regular season lasts throughout the winter and into early spring, when the playoffs take place. Prices for games range \$14-85.

The Rangers ended a 54-year drought in 1994, when they won the Stanley Cup. Since then they have not had as much success, but are always competitive. The Islanders, New York's "other" hockey team, are undergoing a resurgence after years of mediocrity. The Devils won the Stanley Cup in 2000, and the 2001 campaign saw them battle (and ultimately lose to) the Colorado Avalanche in the finals.

Nassau Coliseum 1255 Hempstead Turnpike, Uniondale, New York; box office daily 10.45am-5.45pm; tickets \$14-85; Tel 516/794-9300. Take the Long Island Railroad to Hempstead, then bus #N70, #N71 or #N72 from Hempstead bus terminal, one block away.

Ice Skating

In winter, the freezing weather makes for good ice skating. In milder weather, roller skating is popular, on the paths in Central Park and specifically near the northwest corner of the Sheep Meadow, in Riverside Park and in many smaller open spaces.

Rockefeller Centre Ice Rink Between 49th and 50th streets, off 5th Ave Tel 212/332-7654. Without doubt the slickest place to skate, though you may have to wait in line and it's pricier than anywhere else. Call for hours and prices.

Sky Rink Chelsea Piers Tel 212/336-6100.

Wollman Rink 62nd St, Central Park Tel 212/396-1010. Lovely rink, where you can skate to the marvellous, inspiring backdrop of the lower Central Park skyline – incredibly impressive at night. Call for hours and prices.

In-Line Skating

You'll see commuters to free stylists on in-line skates – also known as rollerblades - in New York. For the best place, go to the skate circle near Naumberg Band shell in Central Park at 72nd Street. World-class bladers manoeuvre between cones with all kinds of fancy footwork just inside Central Park's Tavern on the Green entrance, near W 68th Street. Other than Central Park, the best place to skate is Battery Park.

Blades 128 Chambers St (between West Broadway and Church St) Tel 212/964-1944; 120. W 72nd St (between Columbus and Broadway) Tel 212/787-3911; 160 E 86th St (between Lexington and 3rd avenues) Tel 212/996-1644. Rents skates out for \$20 for 24hours.

Jogging

Jogging is still very much the number one fitness pursuit in the city. A favourite circuit in the park is 1.57 miles around the reservoir; just make sure you jog in a counter clockwise direction.

For company, contact the New York Road Runners Club, 9 E89th St (Tel 212/860-2280, www.nyrrc.org) to get their schedule for Central Park and elsewhere. The East River Promenade, Riverside Park and almost any other stretch of open space long enough to get up speed are also well jogged.

Pool

Along with bars and nightclubs, a good option for an evening in Manhattan is to play pool, not in dingy halls but in gleaming bars where yuppies mix with the regulars.

The Billiard Club 220 W 19th St (between 7th and 8th avenues) Tel 212/206-7665. A pool club with a nice, vaguely European atmosphere and a small bar serving beer, liquor and soft drinks.

Chelsea Billiards 54 W 21st St (between 5th and 6th avenues) Tel 212/989-0096. A casual place with both snooker and pool tables. Bar serves beer and soft drinks.

Soccer

The New York/New Jersey Metrostars, who play at Giants Stadium, are the metropolitan area's Major League Soccer representatives; tickets are typically available and range \$15-30. The season takes place from May until September.

Tennis

The US Open Championships, held each September at the National Tennis Centre, in Flushing Meadows-Corona Park, in Queens, is the top US tennis event of the year. Tickets go on sale the first week or two of June at the Tennis Centre's box office (Tel

718/760-6200), open Mon-Fri 9am-5pm and Sat 10am-4pm. Promenade level at the stadium costs \$22-69 (better seats can cost several hundred dollars), and seats are more expensive at night and closer to the finals.

Tickets for the big matches are incredibly hard to get. If you'd like to play, there are courts public and private all round the city, but getting on can be difficult; the former are all controlled through the City Parks department, and require a \$50 permit (Tel 212/360-8133). The nicest such courts are probably at Central Park, but they are also the most crowded; try Riverside Park instead.

Otherwise, rates at places like Sutton East Tennis Club, York Ave and 59th Street (Tel 212/751-3452) and Midtown Tennis Club, 341 8th Ave (Tel 212/989-8572), can run anywhere from \$30 to \$90 per hour, depending on the season and time of day.

Chelsea Piers

The Chelsea Piers complex, entered at W 23rd St and the Hudson River covers six blocks (Tel 212/336-6666), and is comprised of four completely renovated piers, on which all manner of activity takes place.

The Sports Centre at Pier 60 features a quarter-mile running track, the largest rock-climbing wall in the northeast, three basketball / volleyball courts, a boxing ring, a 24-yard swimming pool and whirlpool, indoor sand-volleyball courts, exercise studios offering more than 100 classes weekly, a cardiovascular weight-training room, a sundeck right on the Hudson River and spa services. Day-passes are available for \$50. Mon-Fri 6am-11pm, Sat & Sun 8am-9pm. Tel 212/336-6000.

The Roller Rinks are on Pier 62. They are outdoors and open year-round, weather permitting. Daily session starts at noon, exact times vary. \$6.50; children under 12 \$5.50. Rentals available. Tel 212/336-6200.

The Sky Rink is on Pier 61. Ice-skate year-round on this indoor rink. Daily sessions start at noon, exact times vary. \$11.50; children under 12 \$8; seniors \$7.50. Rentals \$5. Tel 212/336-6100

Central Park

Central Park is an obvious focus for recreation. From croquet and chess to soccer and swimming. Joggers, in-line skaters, walkers and cyclists have the roads to themselves on weekdays 10am-3pm & 7-10pm and all day on weekends.

In addition, boaters can head to the Loeb Boathouse (Tel 212/517-2233; \$10/hr), which hires out rowboats in warm weather months. To find out what is going on where and when, try the Arsenal, at 830 5th Ave at 64th Street, and pick up the Green Pages, which tell you about every activity, from archery to wild-food walks.

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