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COOL PLACES MANHATTAN NEW YORK CITY, NORTH AMERICA, UNITED STATES

# A Monstrously Good Time in New York City

Adrian Brijbassi / February 4, 2020

I never thought I would visit the Empire State Building again. Before I left metro New York in 2005, after living in Long Island for 10 years, I made sure to see anything I hadn't yet seen and to take in favourite attractions one more time, believing my return visits to Manhattan would be filled with get-togethers with friends and family, as well as work itineraries.

The Empire State Building has always been a worthwhile attraction but for many travellers it has fallen into the been-there-done-that category of tourist draws. An icon you visit because of FOMO, not from a deep desire to connect with the tower. After all, it's the building of Kong and Fay Wray, Hanks and Ryan, how could it be yours?



The Empire State Building's view is as splendid as ever but the rest of its visitor experience is vastly improved. Now, King Kong (at top) is a predominant character in a reimagined tour of the tower. (Adrian Brijbassi photos for VacayNetwork.com)

As I discovered, a 21st-century makeover empowers the Empire State Building to captivate more than your gaze. It steals your imagination and earns your affection with Disney-esque magic. A newly imagined visitor experience has done wonders for the Big Apple's most glorious skyscraper by telling the tale of the Empire State Building with a storyteller's imagination and an artist's eye for perfect flourishes that surprise and induce joy.

The experience begins when you enter on 34th Street, where you encounter a 20-foot replica of the tower as you climb to the second floor. It's here where a new museum experience blends multimedia content with antiques from the 1930s, during the time of the Empire State Building's construction. Exhibits document the history of the building and the Herculean construction efforts, which included 60,000 tons of steel, most of it shipped in from Pennsylvania, some of it still hot when it arrived on the construction site at the corner of Fifth Avenue. The Empire State Building was completed in 1938 after only 13 months.

Soon after it was finished, it leapt into filmmaking immortality when “King Kong” turned the building into his own jungle gym in one of Hollywood’s most enduring moments. And it is Kong who again steals the show in the updated Empire State Building. The highlight of the tour is an area created to look like an office worker’s space during Kong’s epic 1933 star turn. Visitors are in this office looking out through windows that show scenes from “King Kong” where the mighty gorilla is battling with bi-planes and also peering inside the tower. It’s ingenious creativity that makes you feel like you’re in a ride as well as on a museum tour.



The new multimedia exhibits at the Empire State Building include films showing workers constructing the iconic building. (Adrian Brijbassi photo for VacayNetwork.com)

The real thrill, of course, is the view at the top. Even the updated elevator ride is invigorated with a video that plays on the ceiling of construction of the tower taking place as you ride to the 80th floor. After a short visit to see the view and some more multimedia content, visitors ascend to the 86th floor on another elevator ride. You can step outside and walk around to see the immense cityscape spread out for you.

Signs with fonts resembling Grand Central Station let you know what direction you’re looking in. The most thrilling views are south, where the Statue of Liberty can be seen far in the distance, as well as the yawning mouth of the Hudson River. The 102nd Floor Observation Deck provides even more views that will cause your body to shutter. And make you want to return again soon to experience it all.

# Where to Stay in New York City



Staypineapple's New York hotel features comfortable beds and playful decor in its rooms. (Adrian Brijbassi photo for VacayNetwork.com)

A trend in the hotel industry is hip, low-cost hotels that are light on amenities but rich with customer service and style. **Staypineapple, An Artful Hotel, Midtown New York** fits that mold. Launched in January 2019 with 89 rooms, the hotel is a real find, particularly given its location. It is on West 36th Street between 8th and 9th avenues, one block from Penn Station and Madison Square Garden, and three blocks east of the Javits Convention Center and the Hudson River.

The rooms are compact but still comfortable and with more furniture and fixtures than some of Staypineapple's counterparts. Best of all is the comfort of the beds, which are large and plush, easy to sink into and tempting to extend the number of hours spent in a supine position. Adding to an environment conducive to a restful night's sleep are blackout curtains and excellent noise control. I only heard one siren from the Manhattan streets during my three-night stay — a borderline miracle as anyone who has spent time in Midtown Manhattan can attest.



The lobby at Staypineapple in New York features inviting decor and ambiance. (Adrian Brijbassi photo for VacayNetwork.com)

The pineapple — the global symbol of hospitality — is throughout the hotel. It's featured on accent pillows and art pieces. Water in the lobby is infused with pineapple slices and a pineapple cake is available for purchase in the room.

The lobby includes a long, modern fireplace and cozy furniture. While a full breakfast isn't offered, guests can enjoy complimentary coffee and doughnuts in the morning, and cookies in the afternoon.

The property currently features a third-night-free promotion that adds to its attractiveness. It's one of many deals available in Manhattan at this time of year.

# Winter in New York City



Lovely Bryant Park joins Rockefeller Center and Central Park as venues with public ice-skating rinks in Manhattan.  
(Adrian Brijbassi photo for VacayNetwork.com)

Along with cheaper hotel rates than high season, winter in New York also means a variety of travel offers. Among the most popular is **Restaurant Week**, which features two-course lunches (\$26) and three-course dinners (\$42) at dozens of establishments. The promotion entices diners to try restaurants that may not be in their budget as well as give local chefs the chance to broaden their reach. If you're looking to dine near the Empire State Building, try **Breslin** (16 West 29th Street), a nose-to-tail gastropub that sources many of its ingredients from the metropolitan area and upstate Hudson Valley. Restaurant Week runs until February 9.

New York also has deals on theaters and attractions that offers 2-for-1 entry. **NYC Broadway Week** (until February 9) includes discounts on some of the hottest shows in North America, including "Come From Away" and "Jagged Little Pill". **NYC Off-Broadway Week** (February 10-23) features tickets to productions such as "Blue Man Group", "STOMP", and "The Office! A Musical Parody". Meanwhile, **NYC Must-See Week** (runs to February 9) offers 2-for-1 entry at 70 iconic attractions, including the Empire State Building and Guggenheim Museum.



The works of Wassily Kandinsky are among the highlights at the Guggenheim Museum, which is part of a 2-for-1 promotion happening at venues across New York City. The Guggenheim is installing a major exhibit and parts of it are closed, but will be fully re-opened on February 20. (Adrian Brijbassi photo for VacayNetwork.com)

All of these deals are part of the **NYC Winter Outing** promotion. Yet, some of the best times in New York in winter have nothing to do with indoor performance art or museums. Tying on a pair of ice skates and swirling around a rink with the skyscrapers of Manhattan vaulting above you while the aroma of warm pretzels tempt you as you turn is as much a part of the Big Apple experience as taking in a show or marveling at an eternal masterpiece. And, it's one of the few activities in New York you can only do in the cold, another reason to warm up to the idea of a winter getaway to the Empire State.



### Adrian Brijbassi

Adrian is the founder of VacayNetwork.com and Vacay.ca, and the co-founder of the travel-trivia app, Trippzy. A former editor at the Toronto Star and New York Newsday, Adrian has won numerous awards for his travel writing and fiction. He has worked with leading destination marketing organizations, developing digital and social media strategies, and providing them with content marketing solutions. He has visited more than 40 countries and spearheaded the Vacay.ca 20 Best Places to Visit in Canada annual list that debuted in 2012.