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Midtown Manhattan - New York Guide

Packed with skyscrapers, apartment buildings and legendary hotels, the two square-mile core of Midtown is the official heart of New York...



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By Rowena Carr-Allinson

Midtown? Isn't that really touristy?

Yes. But in the best possible way. Stretching from 32nd Street to 59th Street and from 3rd to 9th Avenues and covering Broadway, Times Square and the Rockefeller Center, Midtown is home to many of the city's most famous landmarks including the Empire State Building, the Chrysler Building and Grand Central Station. As well as being a tourism hub, though, it's also a buzzing business district with hundreds of commercial and financial company headquarters, most of the major television networks, and the UN Headquarters. Recognised as the centre of American theatre entertainment, it's also where you'll find cultural hotspots like Madison Square Gardens, MOMA and Carnegie Hall. It's basically the only place for the first-time visitor to New York to start...

Where can I grab some breakfast in Midtown? (And lunch? And dinner?)

Midtown is obviously famous for its vast choice of eateries. If Starbucks won't quite cut it for breakfast, go local at Ess-a-Bagel on 3rd Avenue. A proper New York experience, the legendary bagels come in all sorts of flavours with hundreds of toppings. Cinnamon and raisin beats them all. More of a cupcake fan? Try the Magnolia Bakery on 6th Avenue where it's all about Betty Crocker-style baking behind the lacy curtains. (But get there early, because the queue sometimes goes around the block.) Another place for the sweet-toothed is the Buttercup Bake Shop on Second Avenue, a teeny tiny 50s-style retro bakery specialising in red velvet, sour-cream spice cupcakes and huge slices of cake. Our favourite? The carrot cake.

For lunch on the hop, while you shop, the Armani Ristorante in Giorgio's Fifth Avenue store has a menu by Michelin-starred chef Lorenzo Viani. BG (5th Avenue at 58th Street), Bergdorf Goodman's sleek, seventh-floor restaurant, is an institution. It oozes sophistication thanks to Kelly Wearstler's stylish décor - all cool blues and greens, hand-painted de Gournay chinoiserie wallpaper and low-slung 18th-century-style chairs for post-retail therapy relief.

Dinnertime? Treat yourself to a slice of history at the 21 Club (21 West 52nd Street). This Midtown institution, and one-time speakeasy has a cosy gentleman's club feel to it and an impressive collection of high-class celebrity memorabilia from the likes of JFK and John McEnroe. For something really chic (and pricey), try Alain Ducasse's Adour at the St Regis hotel (2 East 55th Street at 5th Avenue). Splash out on an indulgent tasting menu which will spoil you with sautéed duck, foie gras, Maine lobster medallions, beef in truffle sauce and a raspberry sable... amongst countless other yummy things.

And for cocktails?

It would be rude to be in Midtown and not sample a cocktail, Carrie-style, at one of the many swanky bars. The illustrious Rainbow Room's Grill on the 65th floor of the Rockefeller Center is expensive, but worth it for the fantastic view of South Manhattan, especially at sunset. Invest in a Bellini, Whiskey Sour or a Cosmopolitan and take in New York in all its glory. Wine-lovers should head to Aureole on Bryant Park for its 15,000 bottles stored in the glass wine mezzanine.

Another surefire way to find a great bar: hotels. Try Whisky Mist at the W, the Aspen Social Club in Vikram Chatwal's Stay Hotel or even better, The Hudson's Sky Terrace on West 58th Street, an urban oasis, complete with a hammock and mean martinis, like the Pink Prozac. To rub shoulders with New York's glitterati, try the hip lounges on Madison like Gilt, with its OTT décor and legendary barman, or Duo, a chic bar with cool LED menu displays and great Signature Sippers. Small, hard-to-find speakeasy-style watering holes are also really popular in New York at the moment, but you'll have to go beyond Midtown to the East Village to find them.

Anything else not to miss?

During the day, take some time out in Central Park. It's what keeps New Yorkers sane, walking, jogging or strolling in this haven of greenery amidst the concrete jungle. After dark, head to the Empire State building observation deck on the 86th floor to get a twinkling view of the city - a classic rendezvous spot for lovers since *An Affair to Remember* and *Sleepless in Seattle*.

What about culture?

Where to start? Midtown might be tourist-central but this has its bonuses, especially in the arts and culture stakes. An absolute must is the MOMA, The Museum of Modern Art. Dedicated to modern and contemporary art, it's easy to spend an entire day wandering the corridors and floors packed with a selection of the finest, ever-changing exhibits including everything from painting and sculpture through architecture and design, to illustrated books and photography as well as film and video. For something a little different, meanwhile, try the American Folk Art Museum on 53rd Street.

Another Midtown must-do? Take in a show on Broadway. It might sound like something only visitors do, but locals also like to get their dose of glam and glitz hot off the boards. Whether it's a long-running classic like *Mamma Mia* or a more obscure off Broadway play, don't miss a slice of New York's finest show business.

And how do I get around?

One of the best things about Midtown has to be the convergence of all known subway lines at Times Square. Whichever way you want to go, just pop into the underground and pick a line... Taxis are obviously the other way to get around New York pain-free, though you'll need to be patient in the traffic. Or, if you're wearing good shoes and don't mind a bit of a walk, count the blocks and set off on foot...

And the shopping in Midtown?

Why miss the obvious? Fifth Avenue is a veritable global shopping mecca. You'll find some of the world's greatest flagship stores along the avenue, from Abercrombie & Fitch to Gap and luxury brands such as Parisian shirt designer Anne Fontaine, Asprey's, Cartier and Bottega Veneta - not to mention shopping emporiums Macy's, Bergdorf Goodman or Saks Fifth Avenue.

Madison Avenue is another must with Bally, Charles Tyrwhitt and Davidoff (the spot for cigar aficionados), and Alden Shoes home to Indiana Jones' famous boots. For high street brands, you'll find Aeropostale sitting alongside The Body Shop and Nine West, as well as the usual food courts in Manhattan Mall. Just for a look, it's worth popping into Donald Trump's Tower on 5th Avenue, a lesson in bling. (Beginner's note - remember New York state has an additional sales tax which doesn't appear on the price tag.)

Where are the best places to stay in Midtown?

To mingle with models and beautiful people (in the dark), check into The Royalton. A designer dream, the hotel is known for its swanky, techno-inclined rooms, complete with iPads, snazzy bathrooms, stylish décor and very cool attitude. Design-conscious visitors might also like the W on Lexington Avenue. 'Cozy', 'Fantastic' or 'Wonderful' rooms are available with the usual W style: designer rooms and a contemporary, urban and hip ambience. There's a Bliss Spa, gym and Heartbeat bar and restaurant, as well as the famous Whiskey Bar cocktail lounge. For those on a budget, there's the funky no-frills Roommate Grange just off Times Square. Although it's not fancy, it comes with everything you need, including well thought-out rooms, fun design, an indoor pool, bagels for breakfast and a great location.

Ok. So how do I get there?

Virgin Atlantic flies five times daily from London Heathrow to New York City and is offering return fares from £395 per person. For further information go to www.virginatlantic.com or call 0844 2092 770. For more information on Midtown Manhattan and New York, generally, check out www.nycgo.com.

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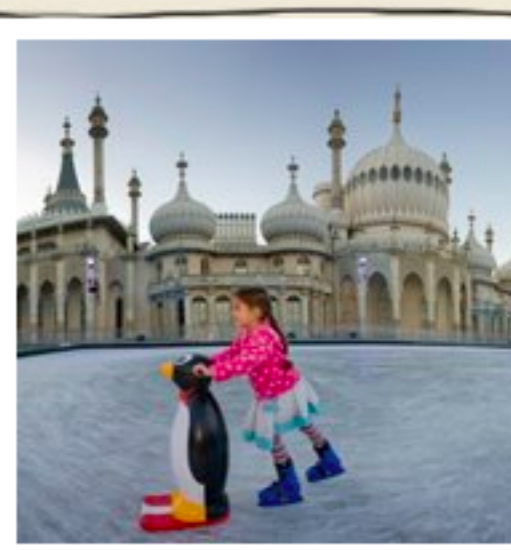
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