

THE 7 MOST EPIC SIGHTS PEOPLE MISS ON THEIR FIRST TRIP TO NEW YORK CITY

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New York, the “Large Apple that Rarely Sleeps,” has got some serious tourist attractions, having basically invented, and then transformed into the epitome of, the term “tourist trap.” The Empire State Building, Central Park, the Brooklyn Bridge and the Metropolitan Museum are packed with awestruck visitors year-round, and for good reasons.

However, I have not once heard someone say, “let’s go to where the tourists are,” be it in New York or any other city. And guess what, tourists tend to love the aforementioned locales. Thankfully New York, seeing as it is actually a pretty big place, is full of equally amazing alternatives. Sure, the Williamsburg Bridge may not look at all like the Brooklyn Bridge, but will your friends from Tampa really be able to tell the difference with that poorly aimed selfie-stick shot you took?

1. The Cloisters

For some reason, a lot of the poorly laminated tourists maps that you find at places like Penn Station pretend that Manhattan ends at 145th Street, which might explain why so few tourists make it up to this offshoot of the Metropolitan Museum. Nonetheless, this is truly a gem of New York City.

Constructed out of parts of ruined Spanish and French monasteries next to the last natural forest on Manhattan, the Cloisters is a gallery for the

Met's Medieval European artifacts. There is a lovely café in the museum and the surrounding gardens have an impeccable view of the Hudson. Just like its bigger sibling on the Upper East Side, admission to the Cloisters is a suggested donation and it can be reached by subway (although it is a longer train ride if you are coming from midtown).

2. The Museum of Natural History

Resting just across the park from the world famous Met, and likely the largest Romanesque brownstone in the city, this museum has a spectacular array of taxidermy dioramas featuring African mammals (a few of which were hunted by the legendary gun-toting outdoorsman and badass who happened to be president for a hot minute, Teddy Roosevelt). Add that to the splendor of the modern Hayden Planetarium and a handful of exhibits that appear to have been unchanged for decades, and you not only get a vision of natural history, but one of the history of American museums. Just like the Met, admission price is a suggested donation.

3. The New York Botanical Gardens

This 250-acre tribute to the natural world just barely makes the cut of being in NYC, seeing as it is located at the top of the Bronx. Still, it blows the Brooklyn Botanical Gardens out of the water in terms of sheer scale.

Built in the 1890's, walking through this botanical garden felt to me like stepping into an impressionist's dream, with several new additions that gave it some modern flair. The Enid A. Haupt Conservatory is a massive complex of desert, tropical and temperate climates, affording any visitor an escape from whatever horrid rain/blizzard/heat wave has hit New York during their visit. Though ticket prices are on the spendier side, with weekend adult admissions at \$25, being close to the Metro North White Plains line means getting to the New York Botanical Gardens is an easy 30-minute ride from Grand Central.

4. Big Italy (Fordham/Belmont area)

News flash: the “Little Italy” on your map of Manhattan is about as Italian as a meatball sub at the Olive Garden. Thanks largely to rent increases, the old Italian eateries have slowly closed up shop in Lower Manhattan. Fortunately, what was once downtown is now in the Bronx, where the pasta is still hand-pressed daily, sausages are still cured in the cellar, and the calzone and cannoli recipes have been “family secrets” for generations. All it takes is a venture out to Arthur Ave and 186th Street on the Metro North line from GCT to find the best examples of original Italian-American fare.

5. Staten Island Ferry

This is more of a local secret than a tourist attraction, but it can certainly be enjoyed by anyone who is looking to see Lady Liberty up-close-and-personal without forking over a single penny.

SI tickets are free, and if you’re like me you’ll find that taking a late afternoon/early evening ride across the Hudson Bay is easily the best way to see the city from the perspective most immigrants must have encountered it, as they passed through Ellis Island over the last several centuries. And if you’re not weirdly into history, it’s just an extra rad (read: free) way to view the city and Lady Liberty. Sure, you don’t actually get to go inside the Statue of Liberty, but who cares about that old bird anyway? Leave that to the tourists who aren’t as thrifty as you are.

6. Cathedral of St. John The Divine

Also known as St. John’s The Unfinished (thanks to a 120-plus year construction period) this might be *secretly* the largest cathedral in the world, which is amazing since next to no one actually knows this tidbit.

Definitely one of the most bizarre buildings in New York City to look at on the outside and in, the cathedral design has changed from Byzantine/Romanesque-revival to Gothic over the years, and faced numerous fires as well as years of seemingly random French, Spanish and Norman additions. There are also busts of MLK Jr., Einstein, Gandhi and Susan B. Anthony. St. John’s is also regularly used as an

art gallery for some pretty massive projects, including Phoenix by Xu Bing. So yeah, eat your heart out Gaudí.

7. The Williamsburg Bridge

The second oldest bridge on the East River, it is seriously about damn time we show this architectural beauty some love.

When it was completed, it was the longest suspension bridge on Earth. It suffered through years of decay in the 20th century, but now it has the best bike and pedestrian pathways out of any of the East River bridges. Both are raised above the car and train traffic and separated from each other in wide caged skyways. And being elevated means that the views of Downtown Manhattan, Brooklyn and Midtown are virtually uninterrupted. Plus, the bridge connects the Lower East Side to Williamsburg, two of the hippest 'hoods in town.

Where does the Brooklyn Bridge go to again? A massive intersection and the civic center of Manhattan? That's what everyone comes all the way to NYC to see, right?