

Primadonna. A Madonna portrait in the Chelsea art exhibit

New York Minute

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How long does it take to fall in love? In New York City, it would take about a minute. Or at least that was how long it took me to completely lose my head. Though I was no stranger to the city, seeing it with the eyes of a single (and rather vulnerable) twenty-something was like stepping into a romantic movie. Heart palpitations? Check. Insufficient intake of oxygen? Check. Overall headiness and a smile that wouldn't rub off my face? Check, check.

I don't know what it was with the rather grimy subways; the summer heat wave;

the hawkers along Time Square selling paintings, t-shirts, souvenir what-nots and other unnamable curiosities; the hustle and bustle of the city's madness – I was head-over-heels, starry-eyed and giggly the second I stepped out of the JFK airport.

The City of Bright Lights. The City That Never Sleeps. A lot of people have made songs about the island and its five boroughs, shot movies in its streets. Needless to say, a lot have also been written about it, in an attempt to capture the hubbub of the Melting Pot.

Dear Spooks,

I wonder what you're doing right now. Staring out the window at rooftops of apartments? Chasing people's feet or surprising them from shadowy corners?

I've only been away for a few hours and I already feel a heavy weight in my heart. You would be able to tell instantly from my body language. Creatures like you are psychic that way. The truth of the matter is, I'm really heartbroken. I know only a few people will understand how this feels, to fall in love with a city, a way of life... You understand, don't you? Watching people all day...

You should see their freedom. You should see how they dance under the stars and sing under the moonlight. You should walk through their parks and watch the crowds gather for a free movie night or a Shakespeare play. And you should see their darkness. The people begging for spare change in the subways. The deranged talking to themselves in the dirty streets downtown. Darkness or light, I'm smitten.

I dream about it, you know. In my mind, I traverse its streets. When I wake up, the disappointment is palpable...

Anyway, I think I've bothered you enough. Go wash your face, drink milk or catch a bird or something.

Cordially,
Your visitor



1 Bright Lights, Big City. Time Square all a-glow with billboards and street lights. Make sure you plan an excursion out here at night.

2 The Times. What says more about the life and times of NYC than the *New York Times*? Just seeing this building was exhilarating. Make sure you grab a copy of the latest issue while you're there.

3 A Walk Down the Lane. With brownstone apartments and sidewalks shaded by tree branches, Riverside is a charming place to take an afternoon stroll in.

But what if you're in Manhattan only for a few days? What if, like me, you only get a shot at a fling, a romance that inevitably has to end way too soon? How can you maximize each day, each breathing moment before that excruciating goodbye?

As a local friend of mine told me, you can't exhaust New York City. There are literally hundreds of things you can do and the landscape changes all the time. Even true-blue Yorkers ("Yaw-kahs") themselves never presume to know the city like the back of their hand.

But what was it exactly that turned me into a pile of city-loving mush during my whirlwind romance with the place? Before I start fawning yearningly about the people, the energy and the thousand-and-one things that made me googly-eyed, here are some things you should check out that definitely put that pulsating heart between I and NYC.



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I ♥ Walks in the Park

If you're fond of sunshine and taking long, scenic walks, then you shouldn't miss taking a stroll along one of the many parks in the city. If you visit in the summer, you'll be pleased to find that a lot of events take place in parks either for free or for very minimal costs. In my case, there was Shakespeare in the Park (starring Al Pacino!) in Central Park and Summer Film Festival in Bryant Park with free movie Mondays under the stars.

I ♥ Broadway Brilliance

Welcome to the bright lights, baby. And nothing says bright lights and glamour than Broadway. Plus, there's nothing more exciting than getting all spiffed up for a night out to catch the latest play. Just a tip though: buy your tickets early. Tickets get sold out pretty fast, especially for popular plays. Also, prices tend to skyrocket the closer you get to the showing dates.

I ♥ Mr. Downtown

Whatever's hip and fly, it's happening Downtown. Take a peek around the old bohemian-paradise-turned-chic-district of Greenwich, check out the classy boutiques in what was once known as the Meat Packing District, look for one-of-a-kind items in the stylish streets of Soho or get into the art and literature scene in the vibrant East Village. If you want to have a feel of the city's culture and energy (and see where they party too!), let Mr. Downtown take you for a ride.

I ♥ Brooklyn

Gone are the days when Brooklyn was eclipsed by its more well-heeled counterparts. The once overlooked outer borough is now one of the coolest places in town. Head on to Williamsburg for some chic dining or to Bushwick for eye-popping art. And if you're feeling especially sentimental, walk across the Brooklyn Bridge at sunset or in the chilly breeze of early evening. ☑

4 Brooklyn Bridge. Don't think that walking down the Brooklyn Bridge is way too "touristy" for you. This arch affords some of the most breath-taking views of the city. So, if you're headed to Brooklyn from Manhattan anyway, don't be lazy and take a hike across the bridge.

5 The Terminal. Grand is definitely no misnomer for the Grand Central Terminal. No wonder this has been used as the set for Hitchcock and Coppola movies, to name a few.

6 The Love Train. Whether you're taking the C, B or any other alphabet line, you're bound to get where you're headed in a flash.

7 Chelsea Market. From organic food to pretty cupcakes, chic retail shops to bakeries, Chelsea Market's got it. Broaden your shopping experience by heading down to this industrial building turned hip, modern market place.

8 The Scene. A colorful midtown street.

9 City of Dreams. An example of a view that awaits you from the Brooklyn Bridge.

10 Bryant Park. Movies in the park? Ping-pong games on lazy afternoons? A ride on a carousel for the little tyke? There's hardly a dull moment here.

11 The Pigeons of 41st Street West. Also regarded by locals as "flying rats", pigeons are incredibly populous in this city. Feed the birds?

12 Take me to Broadway. *Wicked. The West Side Story. Phantom of the Opera.* Rent. If you haven't watched a Broadway play yet, this should definitely be on top of your list. Even if you're not the artsy/theater type. After all, in Broadway, there's something for everybody.



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FAST FORWARD >> New York City, USA



FLIGHTS

Most major airlines have flights going to New York from Manila, with total travel time dependent on stopovers

TIME DIFFERENCE

12 hours behind
(includes Daylight Saving Time)
New York City: UTC/GMT -4

DIALING CODES

USA: 1
Brooklyn: 718
Manhattan: 212

EXCHANGE RATES (subject to change)
USD 1 = PHP 44.885

WEATHER

By now the summer months are about to end, less heat, less tourist crowds. With the air getting cool and crisp, September onwards would be one of the best times to go, for that autumn in New York feel. Just in case, pack some sweaters.

THE RIDE

Taking the subway is the fastest and most convenient way to get around. You can get unlimited one week passes for a cheap price. Also, these passes can be used on buses too, just in case you get tired of being underground. And oh, make sure you wear comfortable shoes all the time. New York is a walking city and there's no better way to get a feel of it than on foot.

THE ROOM

If you have friends and relatives in Manhattan, book their couch if you can. Hotel rates can get pretty steep in New York City. However, if you really can't find a place to crash for free, you can try the **East Village Bed & Coffee** or **Chelsea Lodge**. Both will give you comfortable accommodations in good locations without burning a hole in your wallet.

THE GRUB

Spot Dessert Bar

13 St. Marks Place

If you're looking for something new and exciting to tease your tired palate, Spot is definitely the place. A favorite of the NYU crowd, they serve mouth-watering specialties with a unique twist. Try the Chocolate Marquis (mango tapioca over Yakult ice cream), White Miso Semifreddo (olive oil cake with raspberry and candied sesame topping) or Yuzu Eskimo (cheesecake-like with an Oreo crust, strawberries and passion fruit) and you'll keep coming back for more.

Café Lalo

201 West 83rd St. between Amsterdam and Broadway

Famous for being the rendezvous spot of Meg Ryan and Tom Hanks in the movie *You've Got Mail*. Even if you're not a fan of the romantic comedy, it's worth a try. Their desserts are popular in their own right



Les Halles

411 Park Avenue South between 28th and 29th Streets

The home kitchen of celebrity chef, Anthony Bourdain, this nice, sit-down brasserie serves authentic French fare. Don't be fooled with the rather spiffy interiors, the service crew at this restaurant is refreshingly friendly and helpful.

Udon West

12 St. Marks Place

On a budget? Udon West is a good place to get your satisfy your craving for Japanese food without emptying your wallet. Portions are big, so make sure you come hungry.

Hotdog stands

Your New York experience will not be complete without getting a bite of the good, old New York hotdog. These hotdog stands are practically everywhere, so keep your eyes open for one while enjoying the sights.



Katz's Deli

205 E Houston St.

The oldest delicatessen in the city, this Jewish-American establishment has become a part of NYC history. The food is simply excellent - there's no other way of putting it.