

New York

New York City is the largest and possibly the most famous city in the United States. Once there, you feel like you are in the middle of a film set, so familiar are the landmarks.

New York winters are cold and it often snows. Spring and autumn can be changeable ranging from cold and wet to hot and sultry. March and August have the heaviest rainfall, but an umbrella and raincoat are useful at any time of year. Summer is extremely hot with high humidity and is probably best avoided. December is a month in which it's customary for large numbers of people to visit the city. If you can handle the crowds this is a fantastic time to visit with all the Christmas build-up, otherwise choose a quieter month to do your shopping.

And shopping is precisely what New York City is great for! With the currently weak dollar and prices generally cheaper than the UK, be sure to leave plenty of space in your suitcases for the bargains you will pick up. The foremost shopping street is Fifth Avenue where you can browse premier boutiques such as Chanel and Gucci as well as department stores like Sak's and F.A.O. Schwarz, a wonderful toyshop. New York's famous Tiffany & Co. is located on Fifth Avenue too. A warning though, the price on the ticket is not the price you pay at the checkout as sales tax of around 8.5% is added to your purchases at the till.

As well as the sales tax, don't forget to factor in enough spending money for the tipping you will have to do. Tips of at least 15% are usual for meals and taxis. The easiest way to work it out is to double the tax on a restaurant bill. Bellboys at hotels expect a dollar per bag, and bartenders the same per drink.

New York is a very 'walkable' city, and this is often the best way to get around as the ubiquitous yellow cabs often get caught in the heavy traffic. The New York City Subway is easy to negotiate and unique in the world as most of the system stays open 24 hours a day.

The Statue of Liberty is one of the most recognisable images worldwide and is located on Liberty Island in New York Harbour and reached by ferry. You cannot climb up the statue but a museum and the ten-storey pedestal are open to visitors. However, you must have a Monument Access Pass that has to be purchased in advance and a maximum of 3000 passes are available daily. Ellis Island, also in New



York Harbour, was the place where all immigrants entering the United States were once processed.

The Art Deco Empire State Building is a 102-floor landmark soaring high into the sky. If you are willing to join the long queues, the reward is a magnificent view over the rest of New York City.

At night, it is spectacularly illuminated and the lights change colour depending on the season or which sports team is currently playing at home. Another gorgeous skyscraper is the Chrysler Building with its elegant steel spire and beautiful embellishments. Unfortunately you can't go in unless you work there!

Grand Central Station is a rather unusual tourist attraction, but is truly magnificent and a hub of fabulous restaurants and small shops. The main concourse is the focus of your visit – the ceiling is elaborately decorated with a depiction of the night sky, complete with constellations. There are two rather unusual irregularities to this ceiling: the stars are slightly misaligned and the constellations are back to front! This was either a monumental mistake or, as one explanation states, the ceiling was based on a medieval manuscript, which was created using a mirror and the stars have moved since then.

Finally, you must visit the massive Central Park located in the heart of the city. If you are feeling romantic, take a 20 minute horse and carriage ride to see the sites. The park has numerous outdoor activities such as skating rinks in the winter, walking or jogging tracks and even rock climbing. An amphitheatre shows plays in the summer and countless artists entertain and sell their wares around the area.

So, pack a comfortable pair of walking shoes and experience the constant bustle of "The City That Never Sleeps". Where else could you walk to the Stardust Diner at 5am for a full American breakfast and be serenaded by happy waiters?