

New York at Christmas

The first time we spent Christmas in New York is one of my favourite holidays. As we travelled over the Queensborough Bridge in an iconic yellow taxi from JFK airport toward Manhattan the sight of the famous skyline came into view and rendered us speechless.

Manhattan is somewhere you feel that you already know, from TV shows and films, however the size and pace of the city takes your breath away. Perhaps the only time I will ever feel like a film star is while posing in front of the Plaza Hotel or standing in the bustling Grand Central Station or wandering through the Central Park.

We spent Christmas Eve shopping on Fifth Avenue and in the evening went to St Thomas' Church for the evening service, which was amazing with wonderful music and awe-inspiring architecture. One of our favourite memories is of Rhianna with children of all ages at the front of the church while the Rector read the Lesson. The service finished just as it was getting dark and we went out into the cold night air with the carols resounding in our heads. It was the perfect end to Christmas Eve.

On Christmas morning we went skating in Central Park. The ice-rink is surrounded by grand historic buildings offering a different view of the skyline with every turn. Rhianna literally ran rings around us, so David and I felt that we had really earned our warming hot toddy afterwards!

During the trip Rhianna and I went on a TV and movie bus tour; mostly so we could see the location of the "Friends" TV Show apartment which was one of her obsessions. Our tour guide "Gary" worked in musical theatre and was an engaging and enthusiastic personality complete with jazz hands and anecdotes. He managed to get a busload of reserved Brits, American out-of-towners and non-English speaking tourists to join in with a spirited version of the Friends theme tune as we neared the site! The building is just used as an external shot as the series was filmed in LA, but that did not diminish Rhianna's enthusiasm for a photo opportunity and many pictures were taken!

We ate well, including a fabulous brunch at a side street café which we have never been able to locate since and had delicious pizza at an authentic family run Italian restaurant. Less impressive gastronomically was the meal we had at Ellen's Stardust Diner where the musical theatre entertainment was without a doubt a better standard than the food, but the performances by Broadway professionals more than made up for it.

We packed so much into that 4-day trip but there was still so much to experience. In later years we would visit Ground Zero, the Statue of Liberty and Ellis Island, marvel at the art on display in MoMA and much more but that first trip was very special. I am looking forward to a long overdue re-visit when things return to the new normal.