

Festive Spending: The Impact of the Holiday Season in NYC

November 2024

In 2024, New York City has reached record-high employment and labor force participation. With more jobs and a greater share of our population working than ever before, we know that the city's economy is strong. The vibrancy of New York shopping districts and their appeal as destinations are also important indicators of the city's economic strength.

Recent reporting from the City's Department of City Planning has shown that storefront vacancy across the city continues to improve.¹ This research provides further evidence that the cultural and commercial hubs that give New York its unique character are resilient and have had a strong comeback, and we expect the retail resurgence to further strengthen this holiday season.

From the Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade to the iconic Fifth Avenue window displays, NYC offers many world-renowned holiday activities that attract hundreds of thousands of visitors every year. The holiday season is also a time of celebration for many local businesses. The increased visitation and holiday spending stimulate the local economy, create 14,000 employment opportunities, and generate an annual economic impact of over \$500 million.

Shopping Districts Experience Increased Foot Traffic During the Holiday Season

Walking around New York City, it seems that November and December are the busiest time of the year for NYC shopping districts. Now with Placer.ai, we clearly see these trends in

Key Highlights

- The holiday season is the busiest time of the year for NYC shopping districts. In 2023, daily visitation during this period averaged 3.2 million visitors, a 14% increase from the average daily visitation of the year. Daily visitation in these districts peaked at 4.4 million visitors on the Saturday before Christmas.
- Manhattan retail hubs like Fifth Avenue, Bryant Park, Times Square, and SoHo are the most popular destinations for holiday shopping, with foot traffic increasing significantly on Black Friday as well as December weekends. In other boroughs, retail hubs like Downtown Flushing and the MetroTech area also attract large crowds.
- The Midtown hubs—Times Square, Bryant Park, and Fifth Avenue—are top attractions for tourists, especially during the holidays.
- Increased visitation leads to higher consumer spending near the end of the year. In NYC, spending during December weekends in 2023 was 20% higher than non-holiday weekends.
- The holiday season is also important for retail employment. Since 2020, the retail sector added an average of 14,000 jobs each holiday season, generating over \$500 million per year in economic impact.

visitation and foot traffic data. During the 2023 holiday shopping season (which we define as Black Friday plus the weekends in December), the city's 75 retail hubs averaged 3.2 million daily visitors, a 14% increase from the annual average daily visitation of 2.8 million people. Visitation in these districts peaked on the weekend before Christmas at 4.4 million daily visitors—2.8 times the population of Manhattan.² Citywide, 45 out of 75 retail hubs saw an increase in foot traffic during the 2023 holiday season, with the majority (26) being outside of Manhattan.

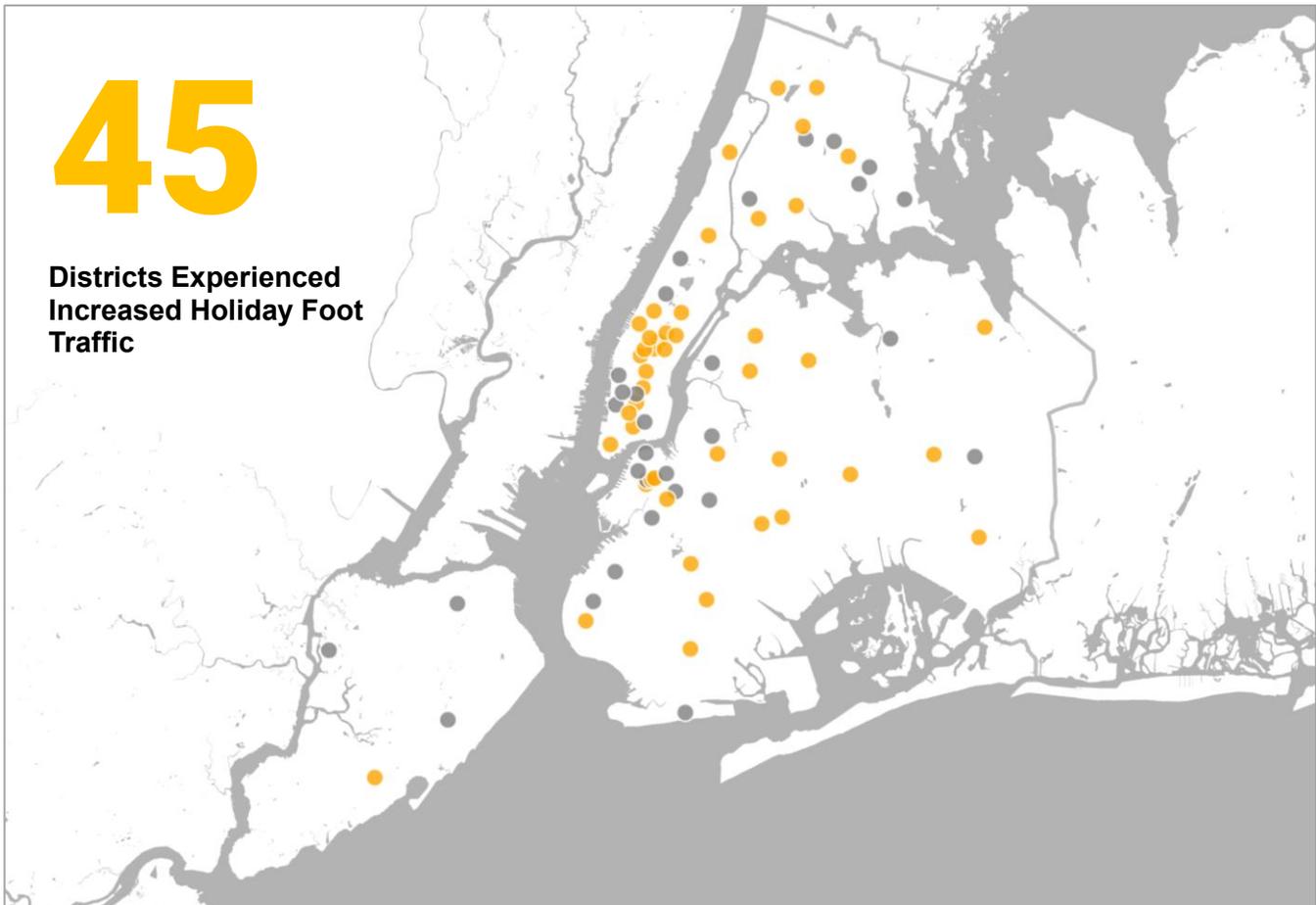
During the holiday shopping season, Manhattan retail hubs like Fifth Avenue, Bryant Park, Times

Square, and SoHo are the most popular destinations. Daily visitation to the Bryant Park area, for example, saw a 156% surge during Black Friday and the December weekends of 2023. On average, roughly 122,000 people visited Bryant Park and the surrounding area per day during these high-volume shopping days, as the holiday market and events at Bryant Park attracted large crowds.

Meanwhile, Times Square saw a total of 3.6 million visitors during the holiday season—an average of 325,000 daily visitors, which was 34% higher than an average weekend in 2023. Compared to average weekends, Fifth Avenue and SoHo were most popular on Black Friday,

Highlighted in Orange, 45 of the 75 Shopping Districts Experienced Increased Foot Traffic During the Holiday Season

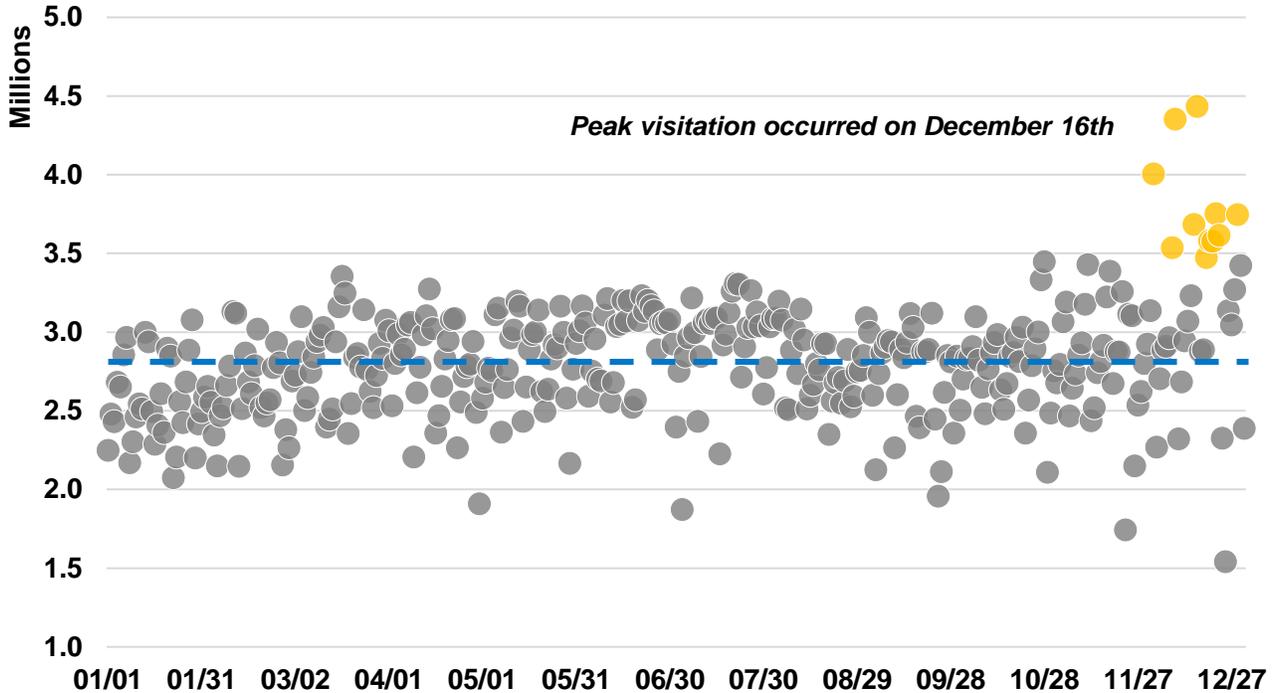
Figure 1: NYC Shopping Districts (75 Business Improvement Districts)



Source: NYCEDC analysis of data from Placer.ai

Highlighted in Orange, Visitor Foot Traffic Peaks During the Holiday Shopping Season

Figure 2: Daily Visitation to NYC Shopping Districts, 2023



Source: NYCEDC analysis of data from Placer.ai

hosting 124,000 and 107,000 visitors, an increase of 108% and 103%, respectively.

Retail hubs outside of Manhattan also attract large crowds. Downtown Flushing, for example, attracted over 115,000 visitors on Black Friday in 2023, an increase of 12% over an average weekend. In Brooklyn, the MetroTech area is another retail center that saw high visitation on Black Friday, attracting 86,000 visitors—12% higher than an average weekend.

Holiday visitation, just like tourism in NYC overall, is recovering from the pandemic low and has increased every year since 2020. During the holiday season in 2023, average daily visitation to the city’s 75 shopping districts was 3.2 million, which was 90% of the pre-pandemic level, but also a 16% increase from 2022, and a 24% increase from 2021. If this trend continues, holiday visitation is on track to

fully recover to, or potentially exceed, pre-pandemic level in 2024. One positive sign headed into the 2024 holiday season is from Broadway attendance, which surpassed pre-pandemic levels for the first time as of this November.³

This pattern holds across almost all major retail hubs in the city. Bryant Park and SoHo actually saw foot traffic fully recovered in 2023, another indication of how important these areas are to the city’s retail economy. This foot traffic recovery is consistent with NYC Department of City Planning’s finding that storefront vacancy is trending down across the city and has largely recovered since the height of the pandemic.⁴

Compared to other shopping centers, the Midtown hubs attract large numbers of tourists (defined as non-New Yorkers living outside of the city), especially during the holidays. In

Shopping Districts Across All Five Boroughs Experience Increased Foot Traffic During the Holiday Season

Table 1: Daily Visitation to Major Shopping Districts by Borough, 2023

	Black Friday Daily Visitation	Holiday Season Daily Visitation	Black Friday vs. Weekend Average	Holiday Season vs. Weekend Average
Manhattan				
Times Square	307,700	325,100	+27%	+34%
Fifth Avenue	123,800	114,100	+108%	+92%
Bryant Park	121,400	121,800	+155%	+156%
SoHo	107,500	61,600	+103%	+17%
Bronx				
The Hub	16,500	17,200	+11%	+16%
Brooklyn				
MetroTech	86,400	81,300	+12%	+5%
Fulton Mall	45,900	40,300	+34%	+18%
Queens				
Downtown Flushing	115,200	102,200	+12%	-1%
Downtown Jamaica	29,300	26,700	+14%	+4%
Staten Island				
Eltingville	21,500	24,500	-10%	+3%

Source: NYCEDC analysis of data from Placer.ai

2023, Times Square, Bryant Park, and Fifth Avenue saw 70% of their holiday weekend visitors traveling from outside of the city—9 percentage points higher than on an average weekend. In Times Square, for example, 72% of its holiday visitors were non-New Yorkers, with the majority living outside of the metro area. Bryant Park was the second highest at 70%, followed by Fifth Avenue at 66%.

Compared to pre-pandemic, these Midtown districts remain top spots for tourists and have shown steady recovery since 2020. Bryant Park, in particular, saw 802,000 tourists during the holiday season in 2023, which was 118,000 more than in 2019, while Fifth Avenue and Times Square were approaching their pre-pandemic tourism levels. Centers in other boroughs, meanwhile, serve mostly local residents. In 2023, New Yorkers accounted for

80% of the holiday visitors to Downtown Flushing and 88% of those visiting Fulton Street in Downtown Brooklyn.

Holiday Shopping Activity Brings Higher Consumer Spending

In NYC, spending during December weekends was 20% higher than non-holiday weekends in 2023, according to the Mastercard consumer spending index. Similar to the recovery in foot traffic, consumer spending has steadily improved every year since 2020, with holiday spending showing a stronger rebound, reaching 95% of the pre-pandemic level in 2023, higher than the 91% rebound seen during the rest of the year (after adjusted for inflation).

The major retail hubs showed similar trends. Spending in the Bryant Park area, which was

4.6 times the NYC average, almost fully recovered at 98% of the pre-pandemic level in 2023, followed by SoHo at 97% and Times Square at 95%. In other boroughs, spending in Downtown Flushing not only fully recovered, but saw an 18% growth from 2019.

Increased Foot Traffic and Spending Create Employment Opportunities that Benefit a Diverse Group of New Yorkers

In addition to foot traffic and holiday spending, the holiday season is also important for retail employment. Since 2020, the retail sector added an average of 14,000 jobs each holiday season, mostly in clothing stores and department stores. These seasonal jobs generate an annual economic impact of over \$500 million.⁵

These holiday jobs were even more important during the challenging times of the pandemic. In 2020, despite a significant decline of 60,000 retail jobs (a decrease of 17% from 2019), the city still saw 12,800 retail jobs added in December, thanks to the resilient and robust retail activities outside of Manhattan. Just one year later, when the retail sector only slightly recovered, the holiday season of 2021 marked

a strong comeback with 21,000 temporary jobs added citywide and 12,000 in Manhattan, signaling a strong recovery and the enduring strength of the local economy. In 2022 and 2023, temporary retail employment was 12,800 and 8,200, respectively.

Beyond their economic impact, these retail positions offer job opportunities to a diverse group of New Yorkers. Compared to the NYC workforce overall, retail workers are more likely to be BIPOC and live in boroughs outside of Manhattan. For example, while BIPOC workers account for 62% of NYC workforce, they account for 69% of retail workers. Over 70% of retail workers live in boroughs outside of Manhattan, compared to 62% of all NYC workers. Retail jobs also offer an accessible pathway for workers who don't have a bachelor's degree. The majority (61%) of retail workers do not hold a bachelor's degree, which is 13 percentage points higher than the NYC workforce overall. Finally, these holiday positions also provide accessible employment opportunities for young workers. Workers between 16 and 24 account for 17% of the retail workforce, double their 9% share citywide.⁶

About NYCEDC

New York City Economic Development Corporation is a mission-driven, nonprofit organization that works for a vibrant, inclusive, and globally competitive economy for all New Yorkers. We take a comprehensive approach, through four main strategies: strengthen confidence in NYC as a great place to do business; grow innovative sectors, with a focus on equity; build neighborhoods as places to live, learn, work, and play; and deliver sustainable infrastructure for communities and the city's future economy. Learn more at [edc.nyc](https://www.edc.nyc).

For more economic data, insights, and analysis from NYCEDC's Economic Research & Policy group, and to receive economic reports via email, visit [edc.nyc/insights](https://www.edc.nyc/insights).

Contact us: press@edc.nyc | **Follow us:** [@nycedc](https://twitter.com/nycedc)

Authors

Yu Zhong, Vice President

Matt Hutton, Assistant Vice President

¹ See NYCDPC Storefront Activity in NYC Neighborhoods (November 2024): https://www.nyc.gov/assets/planning/download/pdf/planning-level/housing-economy/nyc_dcp_storefront_report_1024.pdf

² The 75 retail hubs (or shopping districts) refer to the 75 Business Improvement Districts (BIDs) within the city.

³ See NYCEDC Economic Snapshot (November 2024): <https://edc.nyc/sites/default/files/2024-11/NYC-Economic-Snapshot-November-2024.pdf>

⁴ See NYCDPC Storefront Activity in NYC Neighborhoods (November 2024): https://www.nyc.gov/assets/planning/download/pdf/planning-level/housing-economy/nyc_dcp_storefront_report_1024.pdf

⁵ December is usually the peak of retail employment in each year. For holiday jobs, we compare retail employment in December to the average monthly employment for the rest of the year. Holiday hiring can vary significantly from year to year. 14,000 is the average of four years from 2020 to 2023.

⁶ We use ACS PUMS 2018-2023 5-Year data for the demographics analysis.