

TIMES SQUARE

Introduction



Nothing can prepare you for the sensory overload the first time you step into Times Square. The sidewalks are filled with a tremendous concentration of humanity—roughly 300,000 pedestrians pass through every day—and the intersection's high-wattage marquees ensure that it's always bright, even late at night. Named for *The New York Times*, whose 1 Times Square address served as the newspaper's headquarters from 1904 to 1913, the area is now an entertainment district and business hub, serviced by one of the busiest subway stations in the world. During the latter half of the 20th century the neighborhood turned seedy, but over the past two decades it has become a safe, family-friendly destination that no visitor will want to miss. It's the

place to catch the famous New Year's Eve ball drop, the glittery shows on Broadway and an array of other attractions. In this slideshow, we've collected tips on what to see, where to shop, what to eat and even insider info on some of the many colorful characters waiting to be discovered on its streets.

Where it is: Times Square proper encompasses 42nd to 47th Streets, from Broadway to Seventh Avenue, but the area really extends from around 40th to 50th Streets, between Sixth and Eighth Avenues.

How to get there: Take the 1, 2, 3, 7, A, C, E, N, R, Q or 42nd Street Shuttle to Times Square-42nd Street/Port Authority Bus Terminal subway station.

Broadway Theaters



Seven days a week, visitors and locals pour into Broadway's 40 theaters, eager to experience the award-winning musicals, critically acclaimed revivals and star-studded plays that define Midtown's Theatre District. Each season (June–May) typically sees on average 40 new productions, and attendance for the 2013–14 year surpassed 12 million. It's this dedicated fan base that has made *The Phantom of the Opera* the longest-running show currently (and actually ever) on Broadway—more than 11,200 performances and counting. It's also why the Tony Awards, held regularly in Radio City Music Hall, were established in 1947—though the history of theater on Broadway dates back to the 1890s, when the Empire, Olympia and Victoria were all constructed.

(Note: the Lyceum and New Amsterdam are the oldest theaters that remain, both originally built in 1903).

The Great White Way remains a quintessential part of New York City culture, a place not just to see the latest musical but to revel in the glamour of the entertainment scene; a gaze west down 44th or 45th Street from Seventh Avenue reveals marquee after marquee—just as magical as the lights along Broadway. Helen Hayes is the smallest Broadway



Square. Bonus: the glass-enclosed booth is under some bleacher-style steps, ideal for resting weary legs and surveying the scene.

Off Broadway...and Beyond



hosts work by new and established American dramatists at; and classic works at the Signature Theatre, notable for its \$25 cap on ticket prices and for its architect—one Frank Gehry.

New World Stages features shows ranging from downsized Broadway musicals like *Avenue Q* to new spectacles like the *Gazillion Bubble Show* and *Clinton*, which celebrate the magic of super-sized soapy orbs and a saxophone-blowing president, respectively. There are also cabaret-style shows at Don't Tell Mama on Restaurant Row, a reliable place to see Broadway singers in a more intimate setting. The newly reopened Diamond Horseshoe, beneath the Paramount Hotel, offers a glamorous throwback experience. The main attraction here is an extravagant variety-style spectacle called *Queen of the Night*, which features acrobats, showgirls and audience participation. There's quirkier material at the Laurie Beechman Theatre, a 100-seat space that's hosted the likes of one-acts and one-man/woman shows. Its current Thursday night mainstay, *Broadway Sessions*, is a late-night revue featuring local actors who stop in for a song after their curtain calls.

But the music scene in Times Square goes beyond show tunes: B.B. King Blues Club and Grill, the Best Buy Theater and the Town Hall all host a reliable slate of touring pop and rock acts, and jazz lovers can hear some of the genre's best every night at Birdland.

Showstopping Sustenance

If you're looking for a dining experience as entertaining as the performances in the Theatre District, look no further than Times Square. The biggest new restaurant on the scene might be cavernous Urbo, which is actually multiple establishments in one: choose food from one of three open kitchens in the ground-floor restaurants; enjoy some baked

theater among them, at just under 600 seats (look the other direction on 44th to see the sign and neoclassical facade of the Belasco, another intimate, historic venue). Connecting 44th and 45th mid-block between Seventh and Eighth Avenues is Shubert Alley, home to a free outdoor concert the week before the Tonys and an annual fall flea market and auction fundraiser, and just a place to mill about during intermission. The Landmarks Preservation Commission has created a handy historical guide to lead you on a walking tour and put some Broadway landmarks in perspective.

For deals of up to 50% off same-day tickets to productions, visit the TKTS Discount Booth in Duffy



goods and Blue Bottle coffee at the café; or head upstairs for a fancy cocktail and bar fare. But still commanding attention since its opening in 2012 is the brash Guy's American Kitchen & Bar. Why not stop by and see what all the fuss is about? Proprietor Guy Fieri, best known as the host of Food Network's *Diners, Drive-Ins and Dives*, promises to take guests to "Flavor Town" with sashimi tacos, bacon mac'n'cheese burgers and "triple double" pie.

If you want the dinner-theater experience, check out Ellen's Stardust Diner. The waitstaff there will serenade you with show tunes as you chow down on American favorites like burgers and malts. The rising stars here have already made it on Broadway (so to

speak), as that's where the 1950s-style venue is located (at the corner of West 51st Street).

Even a familiar place like McDonald's gets a glitzy spin in Times Square. A visit to the location on West 42nd Street (open 24 hours a day) is quite a production: its grand marquee makes those walking in feel as if they're about to see a Broadway show. Along the same lines, Times Square is home to the world's largest Applebee's (at Broadway and West 50th Street). The three-story eatery is also one of the few Applebee's that opens early (at 7am) and serves breakfast.

Times Square Dining

The quickest treatment for the sensory overload of Times Square is a restorative meal. Hidden amidst the glitz are independent, insider eateries of all stripes. The no-frills Kung Fu Little Steamed Buns Ramen will satisfy cravings for Chinese soup dumplings, dim sum and noodles. Lazzara's Pizza is the answer if you're hungry for a cheesy pepperoni pie. The Cuban comfort food at Margon is worth waiting in line for. This is especially true of the meaty sandwiches, octopus salad and fried fish with rice, beans and sweet plantains. Actually, the district's cultural panorama of restaurants is as diverse as the crowds taking selfies. The tiny Gazala's Place offers delicious Druze food, Num Pang Times Square builds creative Cambodian sandwiches and the Kati Roll Company features fragrant, filling Indian wraps.

For light, casual Japanese food, look no further than Yakitori Totto—which serves grilled chicken on a stick—and Ippudo Westside for savory, flavorful ramen. Belgian beers and moules frites are the draws at BXL Café, while there are English and Scottish ales to go with a mind-boggling Scotch list and solid pub food at St. Andrews Restaurant & Bar. More into wine? Aldo Sohm Wine Bar has a luxurious feel (it's a spin-off of Le Bernardin, after all), yet there are some steals among the bottles and epicurean snacks on offer. The food and drinks at the hip Bea are all over the map, and ideal for post-theater dining since it's open nightly until 1am. Most of these places aren't glittery, but they're gold.

Really, Really Big Retail

Like almost everything else located in the area, Times Square's stores promise larger-than-life experiences—and they deliver. Take, for instance, the 1,700-square-foot MAC Cosmetics flagship. The exterior is illuminated in LED tiles, while its sleek interior features numerous makeup stations, touch-screen computers and many makeup artists working the floor.

As big as it is, the MAC store is dwarfed by Forever 21's massive 90,000-square-foot location, which includes 151 fitting rooms and over 30 cash registers ringing up the brand's affordably priced merch. In addition to three floors of women's apparel, makeup and accessories, there's also a floor devoted to menswear—rare for the brand—and girls' clothing. Night owls, take note: the emporium is open until 2am.

By way of contrast, the minimalism at Muji is refreshing. Located in the New York Times Building, this 4,350-square-foot space, which overlooks a tranquil garden, resembles a downtown loft. Its high ceilings and glass windows augment the brand's restrained approach. The store stocks more than 2,000 quality products, ranging from stationery and colored pencils to furniture, clothing and bed linens.

Meanwhile, H&M's 42nd Street outpost clocks in at an impressive 42,000 square feet, with 44 dressing rooms and 24 cash registers that'll hopefully keep long lines at bay. The store has a high-tech, collaborative feel with interactive mannequins, a virtual catwalk and social media lounge that boasts space to relax, free WiFi and iPads. Another useful aspect of the store is that it allows customers to check out from the dressing room, thereby impeding any last-minute decision to stock up on unneeded accessories at the register.

Old-School Times Square



When Times Square underwent an extensive facelift in the 1990s, there were some, well, less-than-savory establishments peppering the area that bit the dust. But there were also enduring, perfectly reputable businesses that survived those changes—even if some, like 2014 casualties Café Edison and Smith's Bar & Restaurant, eventually succumbed. So the ones that remain must have something special. One such place is Kaufman's Army and Navy, which has been in its current location since 1946. Looking for BDUs, a watch cap or a bridge coat? You've got a good chance of finding it, or pretty much any other military-surplus supplies, in the packed aisles. A few spots are music related: namely, Rudy's Music and Alex Musical Instruments, both founded in the late

1970s and part of what was once the City's so-called Music Row (48th Street, between Sixth and Seventh Avenues). The former is a two-story guitar emporium, with knowledgeable sales folk and a lovely array of electric and acoustic axes; the latter specializes in accordions, providing a true time warp in its appointment-only Accordion Museum.

Continuing the arts theme, the Drama Book Shop has been around in some form since 1917, providing a nice complement to the theaters. If you want to delve past the *Playbill* you get when attending a show, just detour here to find all kinds of manuscripts, memorabilia and theater-related literature. A number of longstanding local hangouts—Sardi's, Joe Allen, Café Un Deux Trois—do pre- and post-theater dining, but if you want to eat at a real throwback, hit up bare-bones Margon, on 46th Street. This Cuban diner, around since 1970, is fast, inexpensive and delicious; fight your way to a spot for your octopus salad or Cuban sandwich. Whatever you've done during the day, you can't go wrong by ending your night at boxing-themed dive bar Jimmy's Corner. Friendly bartenders, well-priced drinks, a low-key vibe and a local crowd make this the oldest-school of hostelries in the hood.

Times Square Secrets



Although Times Square is among the world's most recognizable places, it still holds its fair share of surprises for starry-eyed visitors and even seasoned locals.

One of the biggest secrets is an event that actually occurs every single night. If you're in Times Square just before midnight—11:57pm to be exact—you'll see more than 15 screens simultaneously shut off their glitzy advertisements and display a coordinated work of digital art (sometimes even incorporating sound) until the clock strikes midnight. The display is part of a creative effort called "Midnight Moment," in which commerce temporarily gives way to art.

There is, of course, one night where this doesn't happen: New Year's Eve, an event that has a secret or two of its own. For example, the confetti that rains down at midnight contains wishes that are digitally submitted by visitors to the Times Square Alliance website.

If you're looking somewhere a little clandestine to dine or knock back a beer, check out the underground Sake Bar Hagi, which features Japanese izakaya fare (and, owing to its hidden storefront, isn't filled to the brim with tourists—though it's plenty crowded).

Some other “secrets” involve the area's old theaters. For example, there is a beautiful Greco-like mural in the AMC Empire 25 leftover from the original Empire Theatre, and the Hard Rock Cafe was once the Paramount Theater, where legends like Frank Sinatra and the Beatles performed—though more interesting is the fact that the clock at the top of the tower, some 33 floors up, chimes as a curtain reminder for theatergoers.

Finally, the famous 1 Times Square building has but one true tenant: Walgreens. Owing to the advertisements that cover its skin, however, the tower still earns many millions in income.

Do You Like Comedy?



If you spend more than a few moments in Times Square, chances are someone will ask you if you like comedy. They're not just curious—these intrepid young men and women want to sell you tickets to shows at venues like Stand-Up New York (which is actually on the Upper West Side).

Dyler Crews is one of the folks who want to know whether you enjoy listening to people tell jokes. His motivation was twofold: first, he got cash for selling tickets. And second, it was a way for the aspiring comedian, who'd moved to New York City from Georgia, to get a foot in the door at Stand-Up New York. “It's all about who you know,” he reasoned. While he hadn't yet taken the mic in prime time, he'd scored “a couple bits of stage time toward the

later end of the night.” Dyler said he's a pretty successful salesman and had no trouble making a living (“In a day, I can make anywhere from \$200 to \$400”), but that sometimes New Yorkers are not happy to hear his pitch. “They're like, ‘I'm from here.’” He doesn't approve of such reactions. “I'm offering you dirt-cheap tickets and alcohol! It's a good time.”

Perhaps, but it must be said: if you do like comedy and want to be sure what you're spending your hard-earned cash on, you can always buy ahead of time to see an act you already know. Times Square's Carolines on Broadway—which hosts headline sets by big-name performers like Louis C.K. and Wanda Sykes—doesn't hawk tickets on the street. If you're looking for passes to one of its shows, you'll have to buy online or at the box office. Other good bets (outside the neighborhood) include Gotham, and the Comedy Cellar, while a number of other venues citywide offer cheap or free shows.

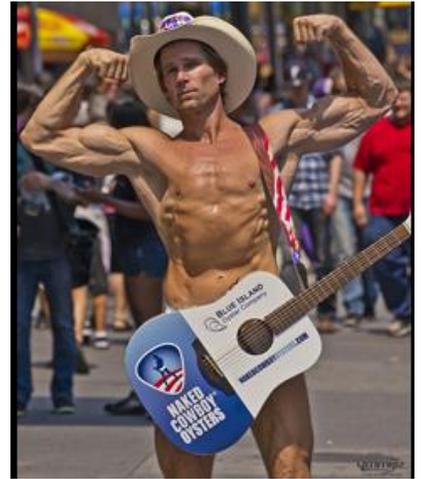
Times Square Characters

Even by New York City standards, Times Square offers a dense concentration of colorful, attention-getting gentlemen and ladies. Take, for example, the Naked Cowboy (aka Robert Burck), a young man who has parlayed playing acoustic guitar in a cowboy hat and skivvies into a full-fledged career (follow your dreams, kids.) While his act and the concept behind it are whimsical, he takes the pursuit very seriously, and has sued his rival, the so-called Naked Cowgirl, for

trademark infringement. He eventually dropped the charges but did start licensing out his image to other aspiring Naked Cowboys and Cowgirls. He even announced a run for president in 2012, although it seems no serious campaigning ever took place.

Another prominent Times Square presence is the abundance of renegade Disney, Marvel and Sesame Street characters. These individuals are not officially licensed by the characters' creators, and usually wear costumes that seem a tad different from the genuine article. You may want to keep your distance—and keep in mind that you're never obligated to pay or tip them.

On a happier note, costumed Broadway show promoters (we've seen ones wearing cheerleader outfits for *Bring It On* and cabaret gear for *Chicago*) frequently use their talent and creativity to lure passersby into their shows. And while jaded New Yorkers may not often stop to take advantage of the services offered by caricaturists, for visitors the drawings can be a fun personalized keepsake.



Times Square Billboards

As anyone who has walked through Times Square can attest, the blazing wonderland—a collection of brightly lit advertisements that recalls the art direction in Ridley Scott's *Blade Runner*—is a sight to behold. It should come as no surprise to learn, for instance, that there is 115,000 square feet of LED billboard space in the area, and that's not even counting traditional signage, street pole banners, trash-receptacle advertising and other neon displays positioned throughout the neighborhood.

In Times Square, if there's a surface, it can be sponsored. With an average of 300,000 visitors or so to the area per day, competition for attention is intense. So bigger usually means better—as does brighter, louder and, lately, more interactive.



The latest mega screen, located on Broadway between 45th and 46th Streets, is eight stories high, and, as *The New York Times* reports, nearly as wide as a football field. Then there's MTV's 44½, a digital display across the street from the 1530 Broadway headquarters of the youth-oriented television network, which broadcasts the channel's programming live to the street below. There's also retailer Forever 21's 61-foot-wide interactive digital "spectacular" (the traditional name for large Times Square displays). The live models on screen take images of the crowd assembled below, occasionally singling out an individual and dropping him or her into a virtual shopping bag. All this makes the news ticker that scrolls across 1 Times Square seem positively old school. Speaking of 1 Times Square, that building—formerly the headquarters of *The New York Times*—now hosts some of the most valuable signage on the planet. Among its offerings are the Fox Screen by Sony, which plays high-definition video, and Walgreens' 17,000-square-foot multi-panel display, which weighs a staggering 250,000 pounds.

Family Fun

Back in the day, no responsible parent would let their child within 100 feet of Times Square—but those times are long gone. Now, kid-friendly offerings are in no short supply. Families can play around inside Toys “R” Us, home to a 60-foot-high Ferris wheel with toy-themed cars, a life-size Barbie dollhouse and an animatronic T-Rex measuring in at a towering 20 feet. Over on 45th Street, little fans of Mickey, *Frozen*’s Elsa and other Disney characters can peruse toys, apparel, housewares, DVDs and other goodies at the Times Square Disney Store. Visitors with a sweet tooth should find suitable snacks at Hershey’s Chocolate World Times Square, where Hershey’s-brand treats, souvenirs and clothing await behind a 16-story facade. There’s even a machine that lets you customize wrappers on Hershey’s bars. Once they’ve filled their baskets with sugar, kids can submit a message and then head outside to see it on the store’s scrolling marquee. Over at M&M’s World New York, families can pose for photos with a towering, candy-coated Statue of Liberty; discover their “M&M’s personality” by stepping into the Color Mood Analyzer (scientific validity questionable); and print images onto their confections.



Budding culture vultures and pop-culture aficionados will love Discovery Times Square Exposition, which tells the stories and secrets behind engaging topics past and present. Previous interactive exhibitions have focused on King Tut, Legos and Harry Potter. Pop culture fans will be likewise thrilled inside the Madame Tussauds New York wax museum, which recently debuted a lifelike replica of everyone’s favorite dystopian heroine, Katniss Everdeen. She joins likenesses of over 200 celebrities including Marilyn Monroe, Madonna, Robert Pattinson, Miley Cyrus, Justin Bieber and Selena Gomez. Go ahead and pretend you met them; your Instagram followers may not know the difference (well, maybe they’d know with Marilyn). And just because Times Square is now family friendly doesn’t mean it lacks oddities. Exhibit A is Ripley’s Believe it or Not! where shrunken heads, a giant hairball and a cow with six legs are the norm. If none of that seems high minded enough, consider taking in a show at the family-friendly New Victory Theater, whose productions cater to kids.

Times Square in Pop Culture

Even those who haven’t yet experienced Times Square in person have almost certainly seen it in photographs, on TV, in the movies or even in video games. Here are a few familiar representations; for more, keep your eyes open. **V-J Day in Times Square:** The word *iconic* has lost luster over the years, but it’s fair to say that this photograph passes the test. The instantly recognizable image of a sailor kissing a nurse in celebration of Allied victory in World War II has been oft imitated over the years.

Empire State of Mind: The video for this song, which you’ve no doubt heard gaggles of high schoolers sing as they traipse through the “concrete jungle where dreams are made of” (the description is exuberant, if nonsensical), features Alicia Keys tickling the ivories with abandon at the stairs near the TKTS booth.

Vanilla Sky: This movie, not universally beloved by critics, distinguished itself by depicting the usually bustling Times Square as completely empty during a dream sequence.

Spider-Man: The young gentleman who “does whatever a spider can” swings his way through Times Square (or a digitized version of it) in various blockbusters (*Spider-Man*, *The Amazing Spider-Man 2*). The Times Square Alliance

even named him the Official Superhero of Times Square, for what it's worth. Sponsorship deals notwithstanding, we get the feeling they wouldn't reject help from Superman if push came to shove.

Taxi Driver: No movie captures the bad old days of Times Square with more grittiness than this Scorsese classic.

Grand Theft Auto IV: The popular video game features a facsimile of Times Square. Keep your kids away from it.

Times Square Timeline

Here's a very quick look at the evolution of the neighborhood.

1800s: John Jacob Astor purchases Eden Farm, a swath of which makes up modern-day Times Square, for \$25,000 in 1803. Eventually, the area is referred to as Longacre Square and serves as a locus for the carriage horse industry.

December 1903–January 1904: *The New York Times* headquarters opens on New Year's Eve. The celebration—which includes fireworks—draws a big crowd and serves as the seed for the Times Square New Year's Eve tradition.



April 1904: Times Square takes its name from the *Times* headquarters. The newspaper later moves (twice), but the name endures, and that skyscraper still serves as the site of the famous ball drop.

1920s: Broadway theater, formerly concentrated downtown, has by now moved into the Times Square vicinity. According to *The Encyclopedia of New York City*, the 1927–28 season brings a record 264 productions in 76 theaters.

1930s–1980s: The area experiences a long decline and becomes known for vice and crime.

1986: The City introduces a peculiar regulation to ensure Times Square's character: minimum brightness for signs in the area.

1990s: Attempts to revitalize Times Square bear fruit, with unsavory businesses making way for stores and tourist attractions. The transition invites some controversy, but makes the area much more family friendly.

2009: Parts of Times Square are closed to automotive traffic, creating the pedestrian plazas you see today.