

Top Three Reasons I ♥ New York

I resisted buying an “I ♥ NY” T-shirt during our last visit to the Big Apple, but I couldn’t stop myself from expressing the sentiment. In fact, I was so enamored that I’m looking into apartment hotels on the Upper East Side for our next — much longer — visit.

New York is clean and safe, and local residents made us feel very welcome.

There are lots of other reasons to love New York, here are my top three:

Theater, Theater, And More Theater

Big musicals are my thing, but Broadway and off-Broadway stages offer a wide range of choices.

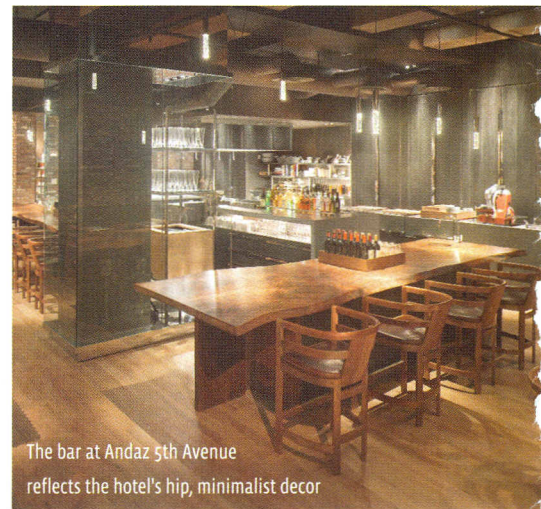
With only two free nights to see shows, we studied the “what’s on” guide weeks in advance and

purchased tickets through Telecharge.com. *Billy Elliot* and *Memphis* (which we’d somehow managed to miss at La Jolla Playhouse) were both really good.

However, after arriving in the city, we read the review of *A Little Night Music* with Bernadette Peters and Elaine Stritch — and knew we had to see it. The concierge at Andaz 5th Avenue called the box office and learned that our only option was to turn up and hope for the best. Andaz is well located for theater goers. In less than ten minutes we’d scored a pair of great seats — fourth row center — for the matinee, as well as a recommendation for a restaurant across the street from the theater.

Hurley’s is a real gem. Seated at a window table on the second floor, we watched people arriving at

The Walter Kerr Theatre for *A Little Night Music* and at the Longacre Theatre for *La Cage Aux Folles*. Hurley’s red leather chairs, exposed brick walls, and 19th century iron filigree created a wonderful old New York feel. (www.hurleynyc.com)



The bar at Andaz 5th Avenue reflects the hotel's hip, minimalist decor

Dine, Dine, Dine

This brings me to my second reason to love New York: wonderful restaurants, ranging from holes in the wall to purveyors of haute cuisine.

On this trip, our favorite find was Veselka, a Ukrainian restaurant in the East Village. In truth, we can’t take credit for discovering it. That honor goes to our friend and favorite La Jolla chef Urs Baumann who met owner Tom Birchard many years ago. The neighborhood eatery was opened by Tom’s father-in-law, a Ukrainian immigrant, in 1954 and has been serving authentic Eastern European dishes and American comfort food ever since. These days, that means 24 hours a day, seven days a week. (www.veselka.com)

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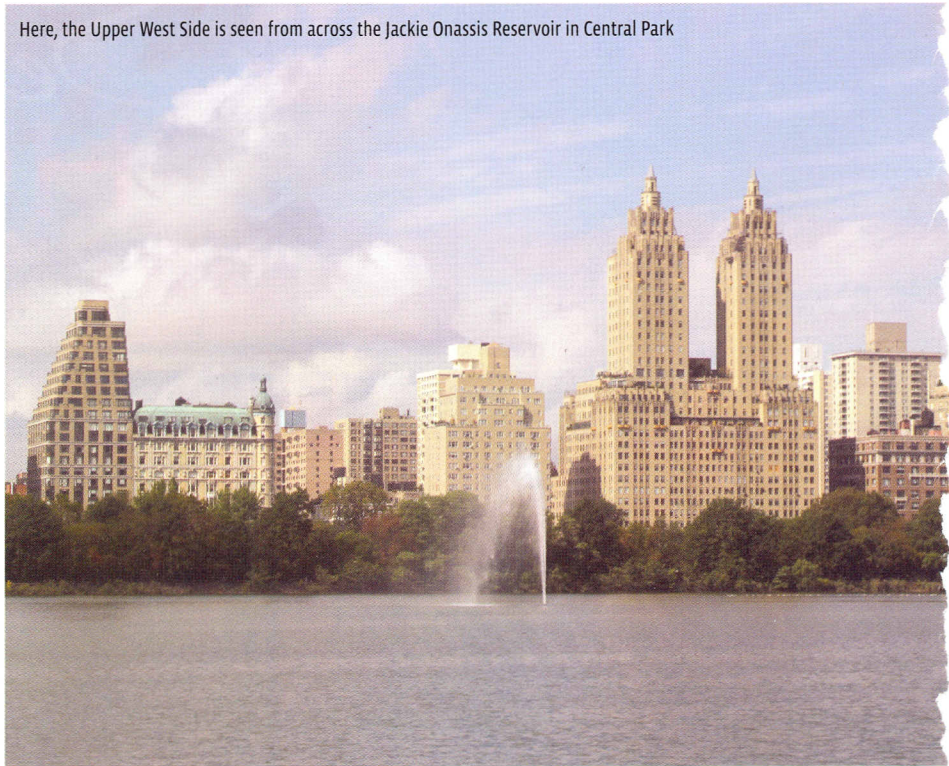


The lights of Times Square — the gateway to the theater district — are mesmerizing

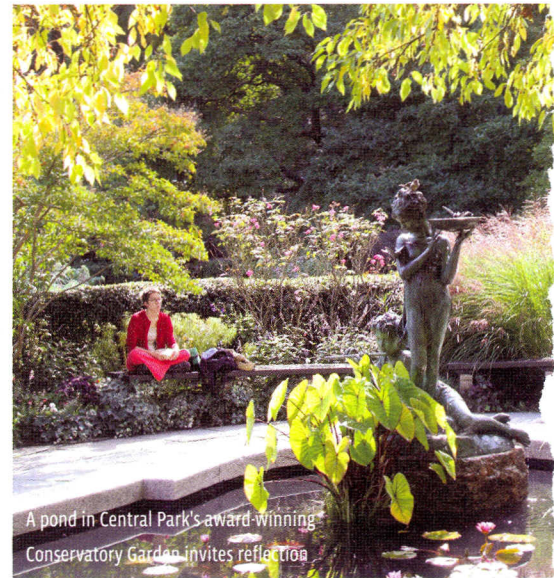
➤ Our lunch included the best borscht soup I have ever tasted, pierogi with a variety of fillings (the ones with spinach and cheese were my favorites), and some very good stuffed cabbage. Veselka, which means “rainbow” in Ukrainian, is a multicultural hangout for young and old New Yorkers.

Walk And Walk And Walk

After a lot of sitting and more than enough eating, we were definitely ready for some exercise, and New York offered several great options. We started by walking from one end of Central Park to the other, which took about two hours. If you’ve done this, you know that this legendary greenbelt is home to the Central Park Zoo, the Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis Reservoir (encircled by a popular jogging path), horse-drawn carriages, remarkable outdoor sculptures (including a kid-friendly bronze of Alice in Wonderland and the Mad Hatter), and all sorts of street performers.



What you may not know is that if you make it all the way up to 105th Street at Fifth Avenue, you will be rewarded by the sight of the Conservatory Garden, which is as pretty as any I have ever seen. Visitors enter this six-acre retreat through the wrought iron Vanderbilt Gate. Once inside, there are three distinct areas: the French Garden, the Italian Garden, and the English Garden. Each has its own distinct style and abundant plant life.



My nephew also tipped us off to the new(ish) High Line Trail, a park built on an old elevated railway line that runs along 10th Avenue south of 20th Street. This creatively landscaped path, which provides great views over the city and the Hudson River, is a fantastic example of adaptive re-use in urban design. (www.thehighline.org)

I thoroughly enjoyed our walk on the High Line Trail and —

even if I didn’t buy a T-shirt — I have to admit that I really do love New York.

For more details on the places we liked and ideas about other ways to have fun in New York, see www.ranchandcoast.net. You can also access my “Luxury Travel” and “Inside La Jolla” blogs on our Web site. ELIZABETH HANSEN

