

# Travel review: New York City

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BY [EAMONN O'NEAL](#)

Taking a huge bite out of the Big Apple on a short break



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The Roger Smith Hotel on Lexington Avenue, New York City

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No skyline is more familiar than Manhattan and being in the Big Apple leaves you feeling you're in familiar territory. This was only our second ever visit, and although we still had many of the obvious tourist attractions to tick off, we also wanted to try and get under the skin of this great city.

Travelling to New York from Manchester is easy with lots of options. We flew with **Delta Air Lines**, which is about to mark 25 years of its association with Manchester Airport. It was a lunchtime flight direct to JFK. We were lucky enough to fly out Business Class and enjoyed the Delta One experience; fine dining, 180-degree flat-bed seats and premium entertainment. The benefits of Business Class make a huge difference to how you spend your time in the air although that obviously comes at extra cost.

Arriving in NYC the week before St Patrick's Day, we felt obliged to kick off in a couple of Irish bars. Draught 55, unsurprisingly on 55th Street, and the Pig & Whistle around the corner on 2nd Avenue both offered great service an amazing selection of drinks and some of the best bar food in town. It set the scene for the next four days.

James Knowles is an artist and sculptor known across New York not only for his own work but for his showcasing of local talent. James is CEO of **The Roger Smith**, a family-owned hotel in the heart of Manhattan. For more than twenty years the hotel's public spaces have been used to celebrate artists' work and to encourage the creative communities to mix and mingle with locals and tourists.



A suite at The Roger Smith Hotel, New York City

The exhibitions, which are subtle and unobtrusive, offer the chance for artisans to connect directly with an audience in a unique way. Sipping coconut water and prosecco in Lily's Bar with James, his wife Sue and colleague Brenda, it was fascinating to hear how he folds his passion and his business into one seamless project.

We stayed at this hotel for all those reasons and its amazing rooftop bar. Also because the location is perfect for the sightseer. We were booked into a huge suite which comprised a large living room, bedroom and bathroom adorned with floor and ceiling tiles boldly designed by James Knowles himself.



Henry's Rooftop Bar at The Roger Smith Hotel

Stepping out from the hotel onto Lexington Avenue and 47th, we virtually fell into the world famous Grand Central Terminal. I can't add any more meaningful superlatives to the many descriptions of Grand Central - just go there and see it for yourself.

We found the best time to enjoy the building was Sunday morning just before 8am. Few of the shops are open but there is space and time to enjoy the 360 degree splendour before heading over the road to Pershing Square for breakfast. Right opposite the station, Grand Central Cafe is the place to start the day New York style. Once I understood the difference between over-easy and sunnyside up, I was away.



Grand Central Station

A subway ride downtown to what we know as Ground Zero should be high on everyone's list. As well as the Twin Towers, five other buildings were destroyed on that terrible day and are in the process of being rebuilt. The original footprints of the Twin Towers have become thoughtful and poignant memorials, with gently cascading water falling through the centre of spaces etched with the names of everyone who perished. Tower One is already complete and splendid. There is also a museum which commemorates the past and looks to the future.

Close by, on the edge of the Battery Park area, the National Museum of the American Indian is definitely worth popping into as it tells the full story of the indigenous people. It's never as busy as other New York attractions and it's free admission.



The Manhattan skyline behind passengers on the Liberty Island Ferry

Taking a long walk back uptown we ventured through Soho and Greenwich village. En-route we stumbled across a gem of a cafe called Tortaria, in the university district. It doesn't look much from the outside and it doesn't look much from the inside, to be honest. However it is authentic and the street-style Mexican food was outstanding. If you want to mingle with real locals over tortillas, salsa and beer, you'd enjoy this place.

Just off Times Square, on 44th Street, Sardi's Restaurant and Bar is in the heart of theatre-land. We settled into the cocktail bar and demolished a few Tom Collins and Manhattans. The TV programme Mad Men is shot in California but the producers have recreated Sardi's down to the last detail, so once again, as often happens in New York, you feel you're on a film set.



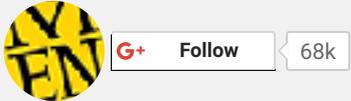
Eamonn and Sheila O'Neal at the Top Of The Rock with the Empire State Building in the background

It wasn't all eating and drinking. We did the Rockefeller Centre, Liberty Island ferry, Central Park, and even caught Serena Williams playing Caroline Wozniacki in an exhibition tennis match at Madison Square Garden, amongst other obvious places, but I think we achieved our aim of trying to behave more like locals than tourists.

Nicely exhausted, we flew back with Delta in Economy rather than Business and everything from the leg-room, seat pitch, service and comfort on the overnight flight was excellent. We arrived back in Manchester at 8.30am having spent five days and four nights in a city of endless possibilities and high energy.

**Roger Smith Hotel, 501 Lexington Avenue @ 47th Street New York 10017, reservations phone number: +212 755 1400, Ext 339. Book online, with rates starting from: \$250 per night, plus taxes.**

**Delta Air Lines flies daily to New York-JFK from Manchester. Main Cabin fares start from £565.95, including all taxes, with Delta One fares from £2,220.62, including all taxes.**

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