



TRAVEL New York

A luxurious slice of the Big Apple

As cities across the world jostle to become the next must-see destination, New York retains its crown as one of the finest places to visit on Earth, writes **Scott Armstrong**

You can almost hear Gershwin's Rhapsody in Blue as you stare out of the panoramic wall-to-ceiling windows which, from your 49th floor vantage point, give you a stunning view of the city below. New York with all its grandeur rolls out before you as you look down the famed Madison Avenue, floating even above the spires of St Patrick's Cathedral from your lofty position.

A tapestry of skyscrapers which climb out of the sprawling grid of city streets a dizzying distance below compete for your attention, but ultimately it's the queue of yellow anti-like NYC taxi cabs battling through the Midtown traffic which romantically wins.

From here you could almost imagine you are the King of New York, especially as you have checked into a palace...the New York Palace, to be exact, one of the finest properties in the metropolis.

I chose this hotel for two reasons: its location on Madison Avenue, one of the most prestigious streets in Midtown Manhattan, a shopping must which runs parallel with the explosion of stores that is Fifth Avenue. Secondly, its twin sister in London is The Dorchester.

The New York Palace sits among the Dorchester Collection and, like its UK relation, it occupies a superior position, oozing class and history rather than the anonymous modernity favoured by many "top" hotels across the world. Give me sumptuous over sparse anytime: distinction is the order of the day here.

Perhaps the hotel's crowning jewel is its exclusive Towers section which soars over the city, giving its lucky inhabitants such a powerful and breathtaking view of New York. The access to the Towers Club, featuring complimentary breakfast, dinner and wine throughout the day also ticks a box for the weary traveller.

Venturing out of the hotel you are spoilt by an overwhelming choice of activities, but of them all a walk into the heart of the city will reap rewards, passing the likes of the nearby Trump World Tower towards the spectacle that is Broadway and Times Square. By day, but most especially night, this has to become a feature of any trip to the Big Apple. A neon circus of lights and

electronic billboards, there are few sights like it, save for maybe Tokyo and, to a much lesser extent, London. It screams 'Big City' at you as you gawp, slack-jawed.

There are two ideal ways to explore New York.

You can choose Shank's Pony with a bit of good, old-fashioned shoe-leather, and the city will pay you back for your effort, for everywhere you wander you come across another spectacular structure which makes your neck ache as you strive to spy the top, or another hidden-away park where office workers take their coffee and sandwiches. And of course, you stumble upon shop after shop. It can be a battle between two parties over who gets more exercise: you, or your credit card.

And yet... while it might not be in keeping with the plush surroundings of the New York Palace, your common-ox-garden city tour bus is another great way to take in the different sectors, and diverse cultures, of this bustling place.

Many will compete for the pound in your pocket, well the dollar. One of the best is the New York Gray Line, which offers a 48-hour hop-on hop-off tour featuring two loops. Both loops take about two hours or so (if you don't get off) and sitting on the top deck you get to take in Greenwich Village, Times Square, the Empire State Building, the Flatiron building, Union Square, Soho, Chinatown, Little Italy, the Lower East Side, the East Village, Rockefeller Centre and Central Park West. Oh, and then there's the Lincoln Centre, the Dakota Apartments, the American Museum of Natural History, the Cathedral of St. John the Divine, Grant's Tomb, the Apollo Theatre, Harlem Market, the Museum Mile and Fifth Avenue.

It would be hard any other way to take in all those sights in one day, but you do take pot luck with your tour guides. During my experience one seemed barking mad and just interested in tips, while the other was a total showman who really enjoyed his job, loved his city and tried his hardest to make you see things his way.

You can also try the Circle Line Sightseeing Cruise, a two-hour journey through the harbour and around Manhattan Island. This really is a highlight of the day, with a fantastic tour guide who treats his job

more like theatre than employment and the added bonus of a great view of the Statue of Liberty.

After a hard day's shopping, sightseeing or simply meandering it remains a pleasure to retire to your hotel and soak up the carpet of lights from your room in the sky. What also helps the Palace carve out a royal reputation is its service, akin to that of The Dorchester, for you will want for nothing.

The secret to navigating New York for me comes down to mixing your expenditure. Splish out on the accommodation, and explore it the old-fashioned way - unless, of course, you've enough spare change left for a helicopter tour.

Fact file

Scott stayed at the New York Palace in Madison Avenue. For more details visit www.newyorkpalace.com

To find out more about the New York Gray Line tour Scott took visit www.newyorksightseeing.com



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