

City break

Eat... Brooklyn

No longer a bridge too far, New York's most populous borough is giving old NYC hands something new to explore. It's got culture, cool hotels, top-notch restaurants... Manhattan's getting a run for its money

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We Brits can't get enough of the Big Apple. Despite the pound's recent drop against the dollar, more than a million of us still visited New York in 2008, drawn by its winning combination of sights, restaurants and shops – emphasis on shops. But if you've done Manhattan to death and shopped till you dropped in the middle of Bloomingdales, perhaps, like me, you're wondering what else the city has up its sleeve. Keen to see if Brooklyn lives up to the hype, I decided to leave Manhattan behind and visit the 'wrong' side of the Brooklyn Bridge.

The Dutch first settled 'Breuckelen' in the 1630s, but today European, Asian, African and Latin American immigrants all call the borough on the southwest of Long Island home, along with increasing numbers of yuppies deserting overpriced Manhattan. Brooklyn's recent past is somewhat chequered – it was considered a no-go area by many New Yorkers from the 1970s to the mid '90s, but gentrification and a decline in crime figures over the past ten years have revitalised neighbourhoods such as Brooklyn Heights, Williamsburg, Boerum Hill and Park Slope. Tourists, previously frightened off by the area's gritty reputation, are also discovering Brooklyn's bounty – museums and glorious parks, cool bars and boutiques, Michelin-starred restaurants and mouthwatering street food. That, together with the cluster of hip hotels opening this year, means Brooklyn has finally become a legitimate destination in its own right.

"Brooklyn is now more authentically New York than Manhattan," says Isaac Komin, as we tuck into garlicky Cuban pork sandwiches on a bench in Sunset Park. "There aren't many ethnic enclaves left in Manhattan but here, despite being smartened up, there's still lots of character in the old neighbourhoods."

Komin leads Best of Brooklyn food tours and Sunset Park is today's last stop. Today, we've tasted *pierogi* and *kielbasa* sausage in the Polish area of Greenpoint; Yiddish *knish* (potato dumplings) and kosher wine in Williamsburg; and gourmet chocolates in arty Dumbo (Down Under the Manhattan Bridge Overpass). In Latino Sunset Park, old Dominican men play dominoes, young Cuban mothers meet for a lunchtime snack and Puerto Ricans walk their dogs. These locals share a secret: at the top of the hilly

Lower Manhattan and the famous bridge, as seen from Brooklyn Heights



Opposite, clockwise from top left: Ozzie's coffee, braised beef at Rose Water and the steaks at Peter Luger make eating out in Brooklyn a treat, as is a stay at Hotel le Bleu

Brooklyn address book

Restaurants and cafés

Peter Luger
Phenomenal steak is a given, but regulars also rave about the sides – such as crispy bacon and creamed spinach.
178 Broadway, Williamsburg.
Tel +1 718 387 7400; peterluger.com

Rose Water
This seasonal, organic restaurant is open for dinner every night and delicious brunches at weekends – try the fabulous winesap apple pancakes.
787 Union St, Park Slope.
Tel +1 718 783 3800; rosewaterrestaurant.com

Ozzie's Coffee
Local writers and yummy mummies love this laid-back coffee shop in Park Slope.
249 5th Avenue. Tel +1 718 768 6868; ozziescoffee.com

The Grocery
This acclaimed spot, on Brooklyn's restaurant row, serves seasonal fare.
288 Smith Street, Carroll Gardens. Tel +1 718 596 3335; tbegroceryrestaurant.com

Diner
This is an institution in trendy Williamsburg – its brunches are the stuff of local legend.
85 Broadway, Williamsburg.
Tel +1 718 486 3077; dinernyc.com

The River Café
A favourite with proposing males, this romantic spot has fab views of Brooklyn Bridge and downtown Manhattan.
1 Water Street, Brooklyn Heights.
Tel +1 718 522 5200; rivercafe.com

Saul
Michelin-starred restaurant serving 'New American' food.
140 Smith Street, Boerum Hill.
Tel +1 718 935 9844; saulrestaurant.com »

park is one of the best views in New York City – a panorama of the metropolis with the Empire State Building at its centre.

Park Slope, a once-edgy, now seriously des-res neighbourhood, is popular with writers, actors and musicians. Wandering its streets, I suffer real-estate envy eyeing up the gorgeous Victorian brownstones. There is row upon row of these houses, with their distinctive broad, steep steps, known as stoops. Outside many of them there are secondhand books left for neighbours to enjoy. The intelligentsia love Park Slope – residents include literary A-listers Paul Auster, Rick Moody and Jonathan Safran Foer and his wife, Nicole Krauss.

"Paul Auster and his wife, Siri Hustvedt, eat here a lot," says restaurateur John Tucker with a smile. From most people, this would sound boastful, but from the affable John it

comes across as just happy fact. It's not hard to work out what the couple see in Rose Water, John's adorable 'New American' spot on Union Street. The veranda is hung with strawberry plants and diners enjoy John's seasonal market menu by romantic tea light. Ingredients are sourced from regional farms in upstate New York – the sweetcorn soup and locally caught tilefish with organic vegetables I try for dinner are both superb.

On the western fringes of Park Slope, you'll find three of the borough's best attractions – the Botanic Garden, Prospect Park and the Brooklyn Museum. The latter is impressive. One of the largest art galleries and museums in the US, it has a collection comparable with that of Manhattan's better-known Met, but the crowds are much smaller. It boasts a staggering number of antiquities – I spend hours exploring room





Left: Waiters at Peter Luger's steakhouse, in their good old-fashioned uniforms, dish out wisecracks and wry smiles along with the famously succulent steaks

after room of mummies, statues and scrolls on the Egyptian floor; contemporary art is also taken care of, with major 20th-century American works from the likes of Mark Rothko, Edward Hopper and Georgia O'Keeffe. Next door to the dramatic Beaux Arts museum building are the serene Botanic Garden and expansive Prospect Park. Within its 585 acres there are meadows, a lake, a zoo and a forest. In the park, where a handful of nannies are pushing buggies and pairs of pensioners are admiring the greenery, I find it hard to believe I'm in a city at all, let alone one of the most frenetic metropolises on earth.

If Park Slope is Brooklyn's Notting Hill, Williamsburg is its Hoxton. Where once were factories, now there are loft apartments; hipsters rub shoulders with the long-standing Hasidic population. Defying the area's self-conscious edginess is the

wood-panelled steakhouse Peter Luger. At this institution, named for its original owner, the steak's the thing. And what steak! New Yorkers book weeks in advance. My friend Kimberley, a Manhattanite not known for her love of the outer boroughs, has made a rare jaunt over the bridge to share in the ritual – a Fred Flintstone-worthy porterhouse for two, served medium rare by Luger's waiters, whose seen-it-all good humour complements their starchy white shirts and black bow ties.

"I should come to Brooklyn more often," Kimberley laughs, as we clutch our full stomachs. Sometimes it takes a tourist to show locals their city through fresh eyes.

WFI travelled to Brooklyn with Continental Airlines (0845 607 6760: continental.com) and with the help of NYC & Company (nycvisit.com) and Visit Brooklyn (visitbrooklyn.org).

Hotels

New York Marriott at the Brooklyn Bridge

This swanky hotel has a great waterfront location, a stone's throw from Brooklyn Bridge.

Brooklyn Bridge, 333 Adams Street, Brooklyn Heights. Tel +1 718 246 7000; marriott.com

Hotel le Bleu

Boutique joint on the outskirts of Park Slope; rooms are spotless and stylish.

370 4th Avenue. Tel +1 718 625 1500; hotellebleu.com

Nu Hotel

Recently opened, with quirky touches such as hammocks and blackboards in some rooms, and yoga in the gym.

85 Smith Street, Brooklyn Heights/Boerum Hill. Tel +1 718 852 8585; nubotelbrooklyn.com

Sights and activities

Brooklyn Museum

See main feature.

Suggested contribution \$8 adults; children under 12 free.

200 Eastern Parkway. Tel +1 718 638 5000; brooklynmuseum.org

Brooklyn Botanic Garden

Perfect for an afternoon's idling; highlights include the Japanese Garden and the Cranford Rose Garden.

Entrance \$8 adults; children under 12 free. Closed Mondays.

900 Washington Avenue. Tel +1 718 623 7200; bbg.org.

Tours and passes

The Brooklyn Pass

Grants visitors entrance for two days to 11 different attractions including Brooklyn Museum, the Botanic Garden, Prospect Park Zoo and the New York Aquarium.

\$25 adults; \$15 children. brooklynpass.com

Best of Brooklyn Food Tour

Block out a morning for this driving, walking and, of course, eating tour with a local foodie.

Tickets \$95. thebrooklyntour.com