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We'll take Manhattan

By Anne Bokma on July 20, 2016

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As a young girl growing up in small town Ontario in the 1970s, I dreamed of moving to New York City, becoming a writer and immersing myself in all the culture the city had to offer — great works of theatre on Broadway, great works of art at the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) and great works of literature at the New York Central Library. I pictured myself gliding past Patience and Fortitude, the famous pair of regal marble lions outside the Fifth Avenue library, and finding a cosy nook where I would spend hours curled up with my nose in a book.

I figured it would only be a matter of time before I got a job as a copywriter at *Seventeen* magazine and thus begin my ascent up the ranks of the Hearst Publishing Corporation.

Alas, I didn't make it there until I was 23 and I was on my honeymoon. I can still remember every detail of the best meal of our newly married lives — the beef that cut like butter, the garlicky Caesar, the bow-tied waiters and the impressive view of the Manhattan skyline — at Windows on the World, the restaurant on the 106th floor of the World Trade Center.

In the 30 years since, our family has travelled to NYC half a dozen times. We took our two girls, Ruby and Lucy, on a weeklong trip as soon as we figured they were old enough (8 and 11) to really appreciate the city's urban delights. If you've always thought NYC was too grown up a place to bring the kids, think again. Families represent about a third of the 60 million tourists who visit NYC every year. In fact, with the recent launch of the Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles as the city's official family ambassadors — part of a yearlong campaign promoting NYC as a family-friendly destination — it's expected to attract even more kids and parents.

On that first visit our kids immediately embraced all the charms NYC has to offer. They scrambled up the massive Alice in Wonderland sculpture and rode the carousel in Central Park, took in the epic views of the city from the top of the Empire State Building, learned about the lives of early immigrants on the Ellis Island and Statue of Liberty tour, checked out Monet's water lilies and Andy Warhol's soup cans at the MoMA, watched *Mary Poppins* fly across the stage of Broadway's Amsterdam Theatre and marvelled at *Wicked*'s vivid reimagining of *The Wizard of Oz* at the Gershwin Theatre. We've shared memorable meals at places such as Ellen's Stardust Diner, where Broadway actors double as wait staff and burst into song while serving your burger, the American Girl Cafe, where we savoured triple-stacked grilled cheese sandwiches as we dined with the three (yes, three) American Girl dolls my youngest daughter insisted on bringing on the trip (they were even given their own "treat seats"). One of our favourite finds was Alice's Tea Shop, which bills itself as "New York's most whimsical tea house," where we sampled pumpkin pancakes, roasted pears and the requisite scones with cream.

When each of my daughters turned 16, they could choose a weekend getaway and NYC was their top pick. These birthday trips included seeing Chicago, the longest running American musical on Broadway (20 years), shopping in SoHo, the 70-floor elevator ride to the Top of the Rock observation deck in Rockefeller Centre, stocking up on chocolate treats at the massive Hershey's and M&M's outlets in Times Square and a trek to the Lower East Side, where we learned the history of immigrant life at the Tenement Museum and took the free 25-minute ride on the Staten Island Ferry. We ended the day in quiet contemplation as our fingers grazed over some of the 3,000 names engraved in marble around the twin reflecting pools of the 9/11 memorial.

Now they have youthful dreams about the city — the 19-year-old economics major talks of living in a Manhattan brownstone one day. The 16-year-old budding artist says Greenwich Village would be her preferred choice.

And my childhood dreams have morphed into a short-term rental in TriBeCa where my husband and I will play pretend New Yorkers.

Because it's never too late to live your dream.

Bringing the kids to NYC? 10 tips for your trip

The best thing about taking the kids to NYC? You can have just as much fun right alongside them. That's because the city that never sleeps packs more things to see and do into one condensed area than any other place on earth. Here are 10 ways to make the most of your visit.

- 1. Get a New York CityPASS:** You'll save 40% on admission to six top NYC attractions. But note that many attractions are free for kids under 12, so do the math.
- 2. Take the subway:** It's easy, safe and fast. A reloadable MetroCard gets you anywhere you need to go. And kids under 12 are free.
- 3. Pack a picnic lunch:** Bring a knapsack and load up on fresh fruit and bagels at one of NYC's multitude of delicatessens.
- 4. Start your visit in Central Park:** This 843-acre urban oasis is our favourite way to get reacquainted with NYC. You can easily spend an entire day in the park strolling or biking along its paved paths, watching the model radio- and wind-powered miniature sailboats in the pond, climbing the massive Alice in Wonderland sculpture, taking a \$3 ride on the historic carousel, tossing a coin in the majestic Bethesda Fountain and seeing the sea lions sun themselves in the Central Park Zoo.
- 5. Score discounted Broadway tickets:** Save 20-50% on same-day Broadway tickets at one of three TKTS Discount Booths (the flagship location is in Times Square).
- 6. Take it to the top:** The Empire State Building, Top of the Rock and the new One World Observatory, located at the top of One World Trade Center, all offer breathtaking skyline views from the loftiest of perches.
- 7. Get caught up in museum mania:** NYC offers so many museums to pick from, but perhaps the most edifying – and entertaining — of them all is the American Museum of Natural History, the largest natural history museum in the world with 25 buildings spanning four city blocks.
- 8. Put on your walking shoes:** The best way to see NYC is by foot. [Big Apple Greeters](#) are volunteer New Yorkers who will show you around specific neighbourhoods for free (book three to four weeks in advance).
- 9. Sleep in style:** One of our favourite midtown Manhattan family-friendly boutique hotels is The Roger Smith, which features a rotating modern art display, book sharing program and free granola, yogurt and apples in the lobby to get your morning off to a good start. One of its special offers is a "Blooming Young Artist" creative package, which combines tours of attractions such as the MoMA and Central Park with a private hour-long art lesson.
- 10. Check out this one-stop NYC source:** The city's tourism [website](#) has both a Family Guide and a Free in NYC Guide with lots of ideas to help you plan your next family vacation.

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