

Urban Motorcycling

I ♥ NY MORE THAN EVER

by Richard J. Atkins (93162) / Photos by Charlie Spitaleri

"If you have friends or family who were planning on coming to New York City in the near future, tell them to come now. Not only will they have a great time at our world-renowned restaurants, shops, museums, ballparks and theaters, but they will be making an important statement that terrorists cannot stop us from being the land of the free and the home of the brave."

(Excerpt from former Mayor Giuliani's weekly column issued to all major news organizations)

Many of the rides and descriptions of journeys for motorcycles focus on areas of natural beauty. A host of tours can be found for the Grand Canyon, the Pacific Coast, Yellowstone and others. This article takes on a different twist: motorcycling in the city. Following urgings from former New York City Mayor Rudolph Giuliani, current Mayor Mike Bloomberg, State Governor George Pataki, and President George W. Bush, New York welcomes Big Apple tourism now more than ever. Remember, each dollar spent in New York is one more dollar for rebuilding.

"Our hearts are broken," stated the former Mayor at the September 16th promotions ceremony for NYC fire officials, "...but our hearts continue to beat, and they beat very, very strongly." The heart and soul of New York is her people. The City has begun its slow journey toward recovery. Manhattan's injury is healing. The scar, however, will remain forever. Despite that fact, the New York spirit is alive and well, inviting all to come and experience this treasure trove. With all that said, it's time to pack the saddlebags and remember that, with a little preparation, New York can be motorcycle-friendly.

The starting point for this journey is on the Grand Central Parkway where it intersects the Long Island Expressway. As we cruise west toward the city, the route takes us past Flushing Meadow – Corona Park, home to the World's Fair of 1939-1940, and 1964-1965. Originally the Corona ash dump, F. Scott Fitzgerald described this locale as the "Valley of Ashes" in his 1925 novel, *The Great Gatsby*. The park boasts the 700,000 lb. "Unisphere," a stainless steel, 140' high and 120' diameter model of the earth. Its inscription reads, "Dedicated to man's aspirations toward peace through mutual understanding and symbolizing his achievements in an expanding universe." The park also has two lakes, the site of the US Open – Arthur Ashe Stadium, and Shea Stadium, named after lawyer William Alfred Shea and home to the New York Mets. Continue on the GCP and look for LaGuardia Airport, formerly an amusement park, on the right.

Motoring a few miles further, we enter the longest span of the Triborough Bridge, one of three bridges, which meet on Randall's Island and connect Manhattan, Queens, and

the Bronx. To get a flavor of Spanish Harlem and Harlem, take 125th Street (Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Boulevard) across town. Between Adam Clayton Powell Jr. Boulevard and Frederick Douglass Boulevard, pass by the Apollo Theater on the right. Names like Duke Ellington, Count Basie, Ella Fitzgerald, the Jackson 5, and James Brown can all attribute some of their success to this theater. Go through Roosevelt Square and turn left on Broadway under the elevated train. Pass by the buildings of Columbia University (east), founded in 1754 as well as Barnard College (west).

Turn left on 114th Street and right on Amsterdam Avenue. On the left, we find the Cathedral of St. John the Divine, the largest Gothic Cathedral in the nation. Take note of the great columns and more than 150 stained glass windows. Within the gardens and grounds is a magnificent statue of the Archangel Michael's slaying of Satan.

Turn left on 110th Street and then cruise south by making a right on Central Park West. Central Park is a National Historical and New York City Landmark. Yearly, more than 20 million people visit the 843 acres that stretch from 59th to 110th Streets. On our right at 79th Street, we find The American Museum of Natural History, home to the Rose Center for Earth and Space featuring the Hayden Planetarium. Make a right at 72nd Street and a left on Columbus Avenue.

Driving down Columbus, between 66th and 62nd Streets, will bring us to Lincoln Center on the right. This cultural hub is home to the Metropolitan Opera, Avery Fisher Hall, New York State Theater, and the Juilliard School. Take a left on 57th Street to pass by the Hard Rock Café, on the left, and other tourist and shopping spots. Going right on Seventh Avenue, we pass by the famous Carnegie Hall on the left. Since 1891, Andrew and Louise Carnegie's performance tradition, as well as artists like Tchaikovsky, Mahler, Bernstein, Judy Garland and the Beatles have all helped shape the history of "America's most famous concert hall." Tours are available.

Riding past the Winter Garden Theater on the right, longtime home to Cats, Seventh Avenue, between 52nd and 40th Streets, brings us to Times Square, the "Crossroads of the World." The revitalized Times Square boasts the former New York Times Building, from which the Square derives its name and the place where the New Year's Eve Ball drops. Also, we find the NASDAQ Building, MTV studios, Disney's New Amsterdam Theater (The Lion King), and many others. Estimates claim that over 1.5 million people pass through this area each day to experience the over 200 restaurants, 600 stores, and more action than human beings should be allowed to experience! The Times Square Visitors Center is located at 1560 Broadway, between 46th and 47th Streets.

Look to the east to see the windows of Macy's (between 35th and 34th Streets), followed by Penn Station on the west side of Seventh Avenue. Right turns on 31st Street and Eighth Avenue put us in between Madison Square Garden and the New York General Post Office, which bears the inscription, "Neither snow nor rain nor heat nor gloom of

night stays these couriers from the swift completion of their appointed rounds." The Port Authority Bus terminal is on the left just before 42nd Street. Make a right on 46th Street, also known as "Restaurant Row." Pass by the Richard Rodgers Theater, the Lunt-Fontanne Theatre (Beauty and the Beast), and the Imperial Theatre (Les Misérables). Then make a left on Sixth Avenue, also known as Avenue of the Americas.

Spanning from 48th to 51st Streets and between Sixth and Fifth Avenue Avenues, we encounter a two-acre complex of 19 buildings, the National and New York City landmark known as Rockefeller Center. On Sixth Avenue, the offices, shops, restaurants, and broadcasting facilities of Rockefeller center are crowned at 50th Street with the city's largest theater, Radio City Music Hall, home of the Rockettes. The Music Hall's Great Stage measures 66.5 feet deep and 144 feet wide. Its interior, a contemporary Art Deco design, resembles a rising sun.

Turn left on 53rd Street and then make a right on Eighth Avenue. Straight ahead, navigator and explorer Christopher Columbus is honored with a monument at the southwest corner of Central Park. Columbus Circle is named for this man who discovered America purely by accident and named it for another Italian - Amerigo Vespucci. Follow the circle halfway around and make a right on 59th Street.

Cruising across Central Park South, admire the edifices of plush hotels such as the Ritz-Carlton. Turn right on Park Avenue. Now we're facing the former Pan Am building, currently bearing the MetLife name. At 45th Street, enter Park Avenue's elevated roadway that brings us around the newly restored Grand Central Station. Within, we find beautiful architecture, shops, eateries and, with free admission, the New York Transit Museum. The Grand Central Partnership and the Municipal Arts Society both provide free tours of the station. Stop by the information booth on the Grand Concourse for more information.

From Park Avenue, turn left on 34th Street and then left on First Avenue to pass the 189-member United Nations Building on the right. Each member-nation's flag is displayed in front. Established in 1945, the UN's purpose is to preserve and uphold peace and humanitarianism. Guided Tours are conducted every day. Make a right on 48th Street and enter the FDR Drive north.

Driving under the Queensboro Bridge, Roosevelt Island is on our right in the middle of the East River. Through the years, the island has been known as Long Island, Hogs Island, Blackwell's Island, and Welfare Island. It has been used as a penitentiary and as a "Municipal Lunatic Asylum." Metropolitan, City, and Smallpox Hospitals as well as a nursing school have all, at one time or another, called this island their home. The island's 1874 lighthouse overlooks Hellgate waters.

Simon & Garfunkel referred to the cantilevered 59th Street Bridge in their famous song, *Feelin' Groovy*. The Queensboro Bridge spans the East River between 59th Street in Manhattan and Long Island City in Queens. Coming into the city, the bridge provides breathtaking views of midtown, particularly the Empire State Building, the Chrysler Building, and the UN.

Exit the FDR at 96th Street and make a left. Turn left on Fifth Avenue, known at this point as, "Museum Mile," with Central Park now on the right. Driving down Fifth, the Jewish Museum, Cooper-Hewitt National Design Museum, and The Guggenheim Museum are on the left. Between 84th and 80th Streets is the Metropolitan Museum of Art. "The Met," completed in 1880, holds a vast collection. There are also guided tours, special exhibitions, concerts, lectures and other educational programs. A few blocks further on the left we come to the Frick Collection. The Central Park Zoo can be found in the low 60s just before Grand Army Plaza on the right. At this point, prepare to drive through "the shoppers' Fifth Avenue."

At 59th Street, take quick note of the world famous FAO Schwartz toy store on the left and Fifth Avenue's crown jewel, the Plaza Hotel, on the right. Two blocks further brings us to Donald Trump's Tower on the left between 57th and 56th Streets. Continue on to 51st Street. On our left is St. Patrick's Cathedral, the largest Gothic Roman Catholic Cathedral in the United States. The Cathedral is home to three pipe organs and, under the high altar, the burial crypt of the Archbishops of New York. Between 51st and 50th Streets, facing the Cathedral, Lee Lawrie's spectacular "Atlas" statue welcomes visitors to 30 Rockefeller Plaza, the 38-story International Building.

Access the Channel Gardens Promenade between 50th and 49th Streets. Surrounded by the central buildings of Rockefeller Center, the Promenade leads to the arcade/skating rink, which is dominated by the world-famous Christmas tree from November through January. Year-round, view Paul Manship's 8-foot high bronze gilded Prometheus statue (1934), weighing 8 tons. The ring supporting him bears the signs of the cosmos.

Further down on the right, after crossing 42nd Street is the New York Public Library, constructed in 1911. Visit the free exhibition areas and galleries or take a free 1-hour tour. The great lions that guard the entrance were once called Leo Astor and Leo Lenox after Lord Astor and Lady Lenox who were founders of the NYPL. More recently, the lions have been known as Patience and Fortitude.

At 34th Street, admire the tallest building in the City, the 102-floor Empire State Building. The top of this 1931 skyscraper has public viewing platforms and an interesting lighting system. The building can be illuminated in an array of color choices depending on the day, holiday or season.

The center of Greenwich Village is where Fifth Avenue ends, at Washington Square Park. Here, we are greeted with the hollowed-out Arch (similar to Arc de Triomphe in Paris), built in celebration of the 100th anniversary of George Washington's inauguration. NYU students, locals, and tourists flock to the fountain at the center of the park to be entertained by various performers.

Turn right on Washington Square North, left on Washington Square West/MacDougal Street and then left on Bleecker Street, where we find ourselves in the heart of the Greenwich Village music scene. Clubs such as Kenny's Castaways, The Back Fence, The Red Lion, and The Bitter End have been entertainment hot spots for years. Stop and take in some live music. Hungry for a snack? Turn right on LaGuardia Place, left on Houston Street and come to a stop at Ludlow Street for a Lower East Side hot dog, or more, at Katz's Delicatessen (212.254.2246).

From there, turn right on Ludlow Street, and right on Delancey Street. After crossing Bowery, we're on Kenmare Street. Go left on Mott Street toward Chinatown. Little Italy is one block over to the right or west, on Mulberry Street. In Chinatown, shops selling fresh vegetables, ginseng, roots, poultry, fish and a host of other items seem to go on endlessly. Restaurants are the name of the game here, the most famous being Wo Hop at 17 Mott Street.

Turn right on Canal Street and left on Broadway into the Canyon of Heroes. It is very fitting that the area further down on the right is the site of what used to be the World Trade Center. Take a moment and give thanks to a few heroes. There are plenty of them all around. Also, please keep in mind that the wreckage of the World Trade Center is not a tourist attraction. Many now refer to it as "sacred ground." Please afford it the respect it commands.

A few blocks down Broadway from Canal Street, on the left, is City Hall. Enjoy the restored appearance of the surrounding park. Restoration sought to bring the park back to its 18th-19th century condition. Note the refurbished clock tower as well as the Jacob Wrey Mould Fountain. South of the fountain is a nine-panel granite medallion that traces the history of City Hall Park from the 1600s through modern times. Construction of New York's City Hall took place between 1803-1812.

Buildings in this area are plentiful and each deserves some attention. Promise to park and do some walking. Lower Manhattan boasts impressive structures such as Federal Plaza, the United States Courthouse, the Municipal Building, and One Police Plaza. Going down Broadway, we encounter Frank Winfield Woolworth's Building – the 1913 "Cathedral of Commerce," St. Paul's Chapel where George Washington was a regular, and the wooden pews of Trinity Church (1766). For the financially interested, visit Wall Street, the New York Stock Exchange (20 Broad Street), The American Stock Exchange

(86 Trinity Place), and the Federal Reserve Bank (33 Liberty Street), just to name a few.

At the very tip of the island, Whitehall Terminal at Whitehall and South Streets houses the Staten Island Ferry. The New York Harbor Ferry leaves from Battery Park and goes to the Statue of Liberty. Liberty Enlightening the World (actual title of the 1886 statue) bears Emma Lazarus' inscription to those who pass Liberty Island: "Give me your tired, your poor, / Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free, / The wretched refuse of your teeming shore. / Send these, the homeless, tempest-tost to me, / I lift my lamp beside the golden door!" Walk up South Street to South Street Seaport, a veritable carnival of shopping, restaurants, and entertainment.

It's time now to get back in the saddle and make a left from Broadway onto on Park Row. Stay to the left to end up on the Brooklyn Bridge. It costs nothing to cross, and it's not for sale! Built over 100 years ago, the bridge closed the gap between Manhattan and the city of Brooklyn, which at the time was actually the 3rd largest city in America. A few blocks after entering Kings County, turn right On Atlantic Avenue and left on Court Street. On the right, stop at 238 Court Street and have a delicious Brooklyn-Italian dinner at Sam's Restaurant (718.596.3458). It's a real treat when "Brooklyn Lou" is your waiter so ask for him! This will be an unforgettable New York meal. My wife, other friends, out of town guests, and I have feasted here numerous times and refused using the menu. Just ask Lou for his recommendations.

From this point, rights on Kane and Clinton Streets followed by a left on Montague Street bring us to the stunning view of the Manhattan skyline from the Brooklyn Heights Promenade. After taking that in, make a left on Montague Terrace and a left on Remsen Street. Go right on Henry Street, right on Atlantic Avenue and bear right to take the Brooklyn-Queens Expressway (278) toward Queens-Long Island. From the Expressway, on the left is the great view of lower Manhattan. Crossing the Kosciusko Bridge, where the BQE crosses Newtown Creek, admire a more distant view of the great island. From there, exit onto 495 East, the Long Island Expressway.

And now a little something for dessert... Exit the LIE and turn left on 108th Street. Drive up to 52nd Avenue and visit The Lemon Ice King of Corona (718.699.5133) on the left. Since 1944, Peter Benfaremo has served delicious homemade ices. In the early days, when he and his father started the business, lemon and pineapple were their only flavors. Across the street diagonally, enjoy dessert at William E. Moore Park, also known as "Spaghetti Alley." On a warm night, the park is buzzing with some very serious bocce ball games and players.

And so our sample of New Amsterdam has ended. This one-time site of the Capital of the United States, as well as the site of George Washington's inauguration, offers a wealth of history. Although most of the sites mentioned here are, at best, given only a

passing glance, use this as a guide to determine which sites you will truly visit. The culture of New York is diverse and fascinating. Experience as much of it as you can!

Sleep is probably high on the agenda at this point. The City of New York offers lodging of all types, so make arrangements that are acceptable. Nassau and Suffolk Counties also are replete with hotels. Having just taken an accelerated course of NYC 101, it might be best to get some well-earned rest and get out again tomorrow to explore this gem more.

Richard Atkins (rich@improcomm.com) rides a 1999 R1200C. His company, IMPROCOMM, provides English Communication Skills Training (www.improcomm.com). For a few years, his workplace brought him on a daily motorcycle ride deep into Queens, close to the 59th Street Bridge. His lifelong love of Manhattan has been a source for numerous adventures throughout the island. Rich is also a doctoral candidate at St. John's University.

NOTES

- **Before venturing on a motorcycle in any city, make sure you are up to the task. The path described in this article is a strenuous one. It demands that the rider be highly vigilant of the frequently unpredictable traffic that surrounds her or him on any city street. Clearly, this is not a route for the lackadaisical admirer of scenery. It requires knowledge of the itinerary as it is traveled. Make it easy for yourself - create short lists of directions and arrange to stop and park to see some of the terrific points of interest. Of critical importance is having a good, detailed map.**
- **If you miss a turn or find that a street is closed, use your map to find an alternate. Things are not always predictable in Manhattan, so allow for variation in the route.**
- **Unless you drive every street on the island, you can't see every thing. If there's something overlooked in this article, adjust the route and see the things you want to see. Treat this as a preemptive apology!**
- **Finally, this ride is just a sampler. The best way to do this is to take the route suggested here and break the journey into numerous days to allow time to experience the City of New York.**

The City Of New York/City Hall/Municipal Building	www.nyc.gov
Brooklyn Bridge	www.ci.nyc.ny.us/html/dot/html/get_around/bridges.html
Metropolitan Transit Authority/ Penn Station	www.mta.nyc.ny.us/
Port Authority/LaGuardia Airport/Triborough Bridge/Grand Central Station/Transit Museum/Port Authority Bus Terminal	www.panynj.gov/
Staten Island/New York Harbor Ferries	www.ci.nyc.ny.us/html/dot/html/get_around/ferry/ferintro.html
Central Park	www.centralpark.org/
Flushing Meadow Corona Park/Arthur Ashe Stadium	http://nyc.gov/html/dpr/home.html
Shea Stadium – New York Mets	www.mets.com/
Washington Square Park	www.washingtonsquarepark.org/
Cathedral of St. John the Divine	www.stjohndivine.org/
St. Patrick's Cathedral	www.ny-archdiocese.org/pastoral/cathedral_about.html
Trinity Church/St. Paul's Chapel	www.trinitywallstreet.org/
Apollo Theater	www.apolloshowtime.com/
Carnegie Hall	www.carnegiehall.org/
Lincoln Center	www.lincolncenter.org
Madison Square Garden	www.thegarden.com/
Radio City Music Hall	www.radiocity.com/
Chinatown	www.chinatown-online.com/
Harlem	www.hatt.org/
Rockefeller Center	www.rockefellercenter.com
Roosevelt Island	www.roosevelt-island.ny.us/
Times Square	www.timessquarebid.org (Visitor's Center – 212.768.1560)
American Museum of Natural History	www.amnh.org/
Cooper-Hewitt National Design Museum	www.si.edu/ndm/
The Frick Collection	www.frick.org/
Guggenheim Museum	www.guggenheim.org/
Jewish Museum	www.jewishmuseum.org/
Metropolitan Museum of Art	www.metmuseum.org/
Empire State Building	www.esbnyc.com/
General Post Office	www.usps.com/history/history/his8.htm
New York Public Library	www.nypl.org (212.869.8089)
Police Plaza	www.nyc.gov/html/nypd/home.html
United Nations	www.un.org/ (212.963.TOUR)
United States Courthouse	www.nyed.uscourts.gov/
American Stock Exchange	www.amex.com/
Federal Reserve Bank	www.ny.frb.org/
New York Stock Exchange	www.nyse.com/
Katz's Delicatessen	www.homedelivery.com/katz.html (212.254.2246)
Lemon Ice King Of Corona	(718.699.5133)
Sam's Restaurant	(718.596.3458)