



Time Out New York / Issue 759 : Apr 14–22, 2010

Own This City

Non-touristy walking-tour companies

Even New York natives will learn something on these guided excursions.
By Stephan Lee

Big Onion Walking Tours

Designed and led by history buffs (all of whom are graduate students), Big Onion's 28 tours take walkers through the past and present of Brooklyn and Manhattan. You'll encounter fewer fanny packs than you might expect: A good 40 percent of tourgoers are NYC locals. Popular routes include Brooklyn Bridge and Heights, a trek across the famed landmark into one of Kings County's prettiest neighborhoods, and the Multi-Ethnic Eating Tour, a gastronomical trek through the Lower East Side (come hungry). *For more information and a schedule of upcoming tours, visit bigonion.com. \$15–\$20.*

Central Park Tours

The city's most famous park is stretched out across 843 acres; learn about every last nook and cranny of the green space on one of the Central Park Conservancy's free explorations (there are at least 10 offered year-round). Each one visits a different area of the park, including the North Woods (the design of which took inspiration from the Adirondack Mountains), the Conservatory Garden and more. Or try the self-guided [Central Park Audio Tour](#); celebs like Neil Patrick Harris and Sarah Jessica Parker tell stories about their favorite parts of the park. *For more information and a schedule of upcoming tours, call 212-360-2726 or visit centralparknyc.org.*

The Municipal Art Society of New York

The urban-planning advocates at the [Municipal Art Society](#) have been leading walking tours since 1956, all with a focus on the hidden architectural or artistic treasures found within New York's neighborhoods. Tours visit a variety of NYC 'hoods, including the much-maligned area surrounding Penn Station, the upper reaches of Washington Heights and more. *For more information and a schedule of upcoming tours, call 212-935-3960 or visit mas.org/tours. \$10–\$15.*

New York Gallery Tours

These largely indoor tours take culturehounds gallery-hopping in the dynamic, ever-changing art scenes of Chelsea, Soho, the Lower East Side and Midtown. For the Chelsea tour alone, former *Blade* art critic Rafael Risemberg scouts hundreds of galleries each month in search of the seven best exhibits. A special LGBT tour features queer-themed exhibits and serves as a mixer of sorts for art-loving gay men and lesbians. *For more information and a schedule of upcoming tours, call 212-946-1548. \$20; check website for a \$5 coupon off any tour (nygallerytours.com).*

NoshWalks

Bubbly epicure Myra Alpers uses food—and lots of it—to draw crowds to out-of-the-way neighborhoods in all five boroughs. A typical NoshWalk tempts you with treats from bakeries, groceries and restaurants; on past jaunts, Alpers has taken tourgoers to a kosher matzoh factory in Brooklyn and a Sri Lankan market in Staten Island. Oh, and there's some walking, too. *For more information and a schedule of upcoming tours, call 212-222-2243 or visit noshwalks.com. \$45–50.*

Rum and Blackbird Tasting Tours

Lifelong foodie Moira Campbell searched nearly every block in Hell's Kitchen to put together a unique, unexpected culinary experience. The trek embraces both the history and the future of the neighborhood, with mainstays like Poseidon Bakery and newer joints like Asian sandwich shop Xie Xie and Empanada Mama given equal importance. If you're lucky, a celebrity chef like *Top Chef* Master Anita Lo might join you on your gluttonous adventure. *For more information, reservations and an upcoming schedule of tours, call 212-209-3370 or visit rumandblackbird.com. \$49.*

Soundwalk

The brainchild of photographer and artist Stephan Crasneanski, Soundwalk's audio tours aren't so much place-to-place guides; instead, each one acts as a sort of narrated soundscape for a particular neighborhood. Storytellers range from colorful local legends (Timothy "Speed" Levitch leads you through Times Square) to actual famous people. Matthew Broderick narrates Bryant Park, while author Paul Auster leads a gut-wrenching tour of the area around the World Trade Center site. *For more information or to download a tour, visit soundwalk.com.*

Urban Oyster

Fun historical fact! In the 1800s, half of the world's oysters could be found in New York Harbor—until overharvesting and pollution decimated the population. How does this relate to walking tours? Well, Urban Oyster cofounder David Naczyczc considers local businesses and diverse neighborhoods the "oysters" of today's New York—as in, they're in danger of being wiped out. Get educated on the company's indie-focused tours: On Brewed in Brooklyn, you'll taste a sampling of Brooklyn Brewery drafts while learning about the rise and fall of breweries in Williamsburg. Meanwhile, a new walking tour of midtown Manhattan's food carts launches May 13. *For more information and a schedule of upcoming tours, call 347-559-1842 or visit urbanoyster.com. \$45–\$49.*