

Times Square Looks Forward Post-Pandemic. Are Businesses Keeping Up?

After two years of city-wide COVID-19 restrictions and hardships, the iconic district undergoes changes as its businesses tackle pandemic recovery.



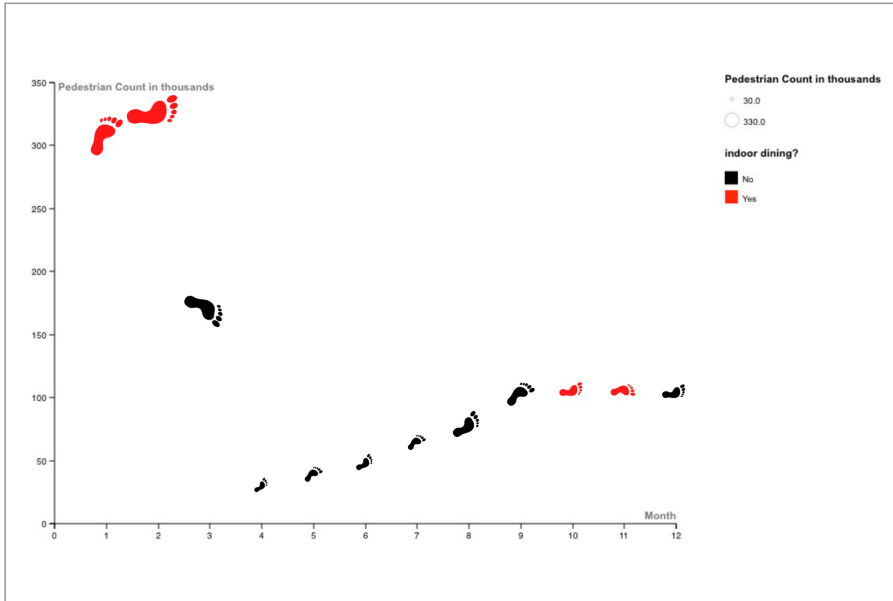
Employee attempts to hand out pamphlets to pedestrians as they enter Father Duffy Square.
Charli Reda for The School of The New York Times

By Sophia Cunningham, Kristina Kianovski, Eden Leavey & Charli Reda

July 25, 2022, 1:37 p.m. ET

NEW YORK CITY – It's been over two years since Times Square shut down due to the rapid spread of COVID-19, which sent its businesses into disarray as a result of the lack of pedestrians.

In May 2020, only 43,630 people stepped foot in Times Square — compared to the 331,026 people just three months prior in February 2020, [per the Times Square Alliance](#).



2020

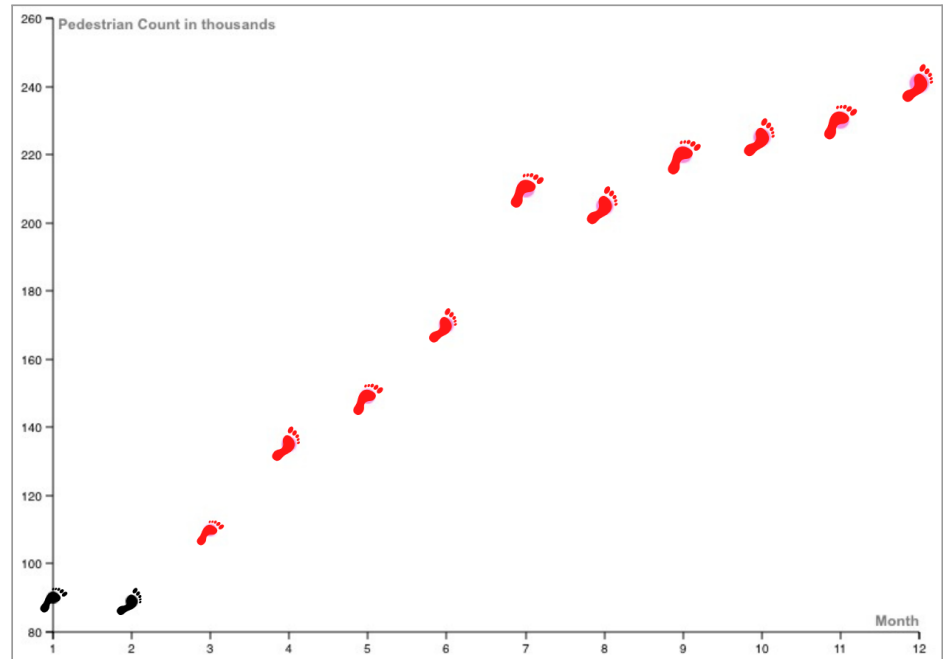
The graph to the left depicts the pedestrian counts by the thousand in every month of 2020. Months (footprints) where indoor dining is banned are shown in black, whilst months after the return of indoor dining are red.

Data per [The Times Square Alliance](#)

2021

The graph to the right depicts the same data for the year of 2021, showing us the growth in pedestrian counts of Times Square as dining returned and COVID-19 eased.

Data per [The Times Square Alliance](#)



As the ebb and flow of the pandemic begins to settle, one common theme among businesses is the endeavor to get New York, specifically Times Square, back to what it once was.

Big chain locations in Times Square have experienced success throughout the current recovery period, however, smaller family-owned businesses have continued to face challenges.

Jeff Idrizi, the owner of his family's pizza shop, Famous Famiglia, said the restaurant's business has not returned to what it was pre-pandemic whatsoever.

"It's bad. It's been very bad," said Idrizi.

Famous Famiglia worked with every major food delivery service well before the pandemic. But lack of funds and health concerns led the restaurant to close entirely during the lockdown, making the income from delivery most chain restaurants relied on inaccessible and business cuts inevitable.

Alvin Wright, a disabled war veteran who has lived in New York City for 16 years, had a similar experience. He worked in Times Square prior to the pandemic but closed down

his business during the pandemic due to financial troubles. He returned about a year and a half ago to continue selling New York merchandise such as baseball caps and T-shirts to tourists as the city began to pick up foot traffic.

“When your only means of support is [was] to be out and depend on the public, it was hard,” said Wright.



Alvin Wright, featured inside his car, keeps watch of his merchandise stand. Charli Reda for The School of The New York Times

Wright said businesses like his own were deeply challenged during the pandemic due to store closure and a weakened relationship with customers. He said the shutdown posed a threat for all small businesses while travel restrictions prevented tourists from visiting the places they had once breathed life into.

“If the world restricts their country to where people can't travel, then Times Square gets no business,” Wright said. “Not just me as a vendor, but other businesses in the area.”

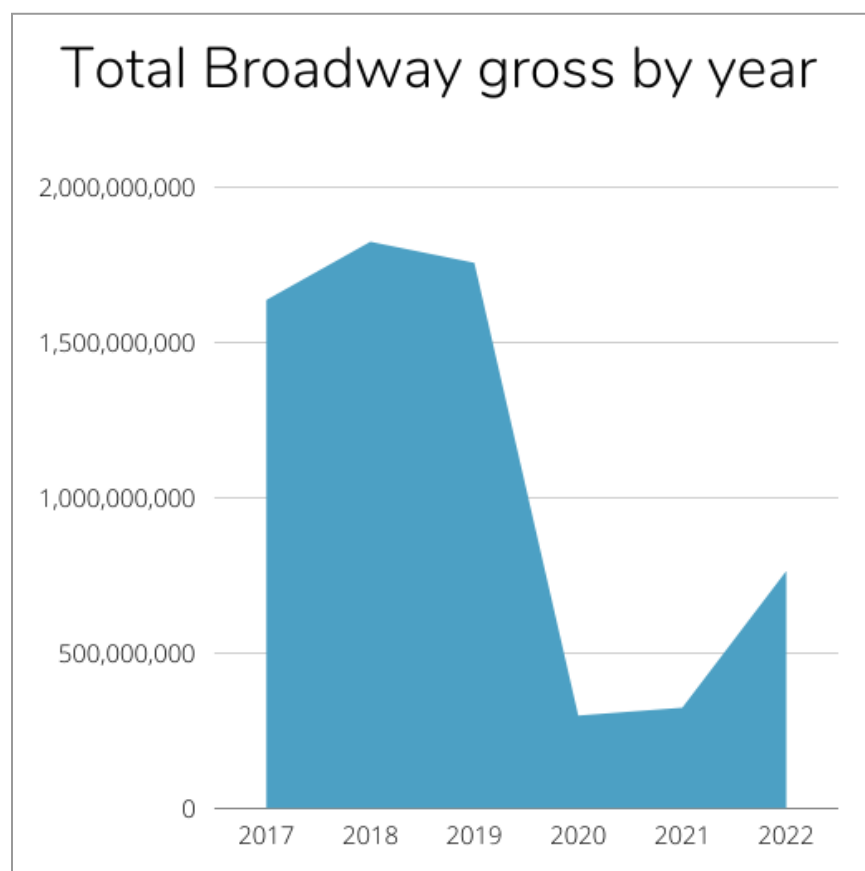
Matthew Hurlburt, a Director of Hotel Operations at the Muse Hotel on 46th Street said business has been slower since there have been fewer international leisure and business travelers.

“We used to have a lot of corporate business travelers who would come here for work, and especially this time of year, summer, there would be a lot more international travelers than there are now,” Hurlburt said.

While countries were shutting down and travel bans were enacted, employment opportunities began to decrease and people began to face financial hardships. Hotels opened their doors and created shelters for the homeless, leading to an increase in narcotics usage and harassment throughout Times Square. This seems to have affected businesses in the district now that the area is bouncing back.

“During the pandemic, it seemed like there was [were] homeless [people] everywhere, but there were less tourists, less other people, so you noticed them more,” said Hurlburt.

Yet, some avenues of business have found themselves to be relatively successful in their recovery – namely Broadway, which is currently augmenting capital.



After a plunge in sales, Broadway has recently been on an upswing. Data per [Broadway World](#)

Native New Yorker Rew Starr, a woman handing out flyers on West 52nd Street for the musical “Funny Girl,” hosts a rockstar talk show entitled [“Rew & Who”](#) and is a third-generation artist herself. Starr said that although cases are on the upswing due to the B5 Omicron subvariant, tickets are still being sold and theaters are operating at full capacity.

Theaters have recently been successful at maintaining larger audiences because when a COVID-19 outbreak occurs within a cast, there are more working understudies to fill in that were not available six months ago, Starr continued.



Civilians wait in line to purchase Broadway tickets from a TKTS ticket booth. Eden Leavey for The School of The New York Times

Although COVID-19 is becoming less threatening to theater operations, some theatergoers remain uncomfortable returning to their seats. Kelly said she has spoken to people who expressed reluctance to attend a Broadway show or wander Times Square as a whole.

As such, Tiffany, a manager of the Times Square Intercontinental Hotel with eight years in the hospitality industry, said Broadway Street has become a “walking alley” since the start of the pandemic.

The Algonquin Hotel is another business in the district that shut down during the pandemic peak, closing for over two years. When asked how they were recovering, the front office supervisor of the hotel said visitor numbers have decreased, although they are now beginning to return to their prior state.

This is the start of a larger recovery for Times Square, including efforts to combat the rising crime and homeless rates that occurred throughout the pandemic. Mayor Eric Adams is [actively working to make subway stations in the area safer](#) by moving the homeless into shelters or permanent housing, a promising initiative that may help Times Square recuperate from the aftermath of the pandemic.

TJ Witham, Vice President of Communications at the Times Square Alliance, has an optimistic outlook on the district's return. He said Times Square had an average of 420,000 people walking through Times Square from July 15th to July 17th, exceeding the same window of time in 2019 by 9.8%.

Witham, who has eagerly watched Times Square blossom since its rougher days, said with foot traffic on the rise, the once vacant area is now revived.

"I was here during the days when it was really empty and sad, so it's really nice to see it lively," said Witham. "We are definitely back and hitting our numbers on a regular basis."

Though the Times Square Alliance reassures Times Square has recovered, Tiffany, one of the business owners who see this tourist epicenter daily said Times Square isn't quite "back" just yet, but on its way.

"I think we're getting back to what we used to be," she said. "We have vaccines, we have COVID-19 testing on every corner, we help ourselves here in America."



The New York Times 
@nytimes



Times Square Pandemic Recovery:
After two years of city-wide COVID-19 restrictions and hardships, the iconic district undergoes changes as its businesses tackle pandemic recovery.

<https://www.nytimes.com/>

1:37 PM · Jul 25, 2022

16 Retweets 77 Quote Tweets 115 Likes



All Eyes On Times Square: Business Owners Open Up

As the ebb and flow of the pandemic begins to settle, one common theme among businesses is the endeavor to get New York, specifically Times Square, back to what it once was.

[NYTIMES.COM](https://www.nytimes.com)



The City Looks Forward Post-Pandemic. Is Times Square Keeping Up?

"If the world restricts their country to where people can't travel, then Times Square gets no business," Wright said. "Not just me as a vendor, but other businesses in the area."

[NYTIMES.COM](https://www.nytimes.com)

The City Looks Forward Post-Pandemic. Is Times Square Keeping Up?

After two years of city-wide COVID-19 restrictions and hardships, the iconic district undergoes changes as its businesses tackle pandemic recovery.



Employee attempts handing out pamphlets to pedestrians as they enter Father Duffy Square. Charli Reda for the School of the New York Times