

A NEW YORK CITY ITINERARY

written by Emily Iris Degn October 3, 2017

This summer I took a week off and went to New York for work. I decided to do things from my bucket list, and things that maybe not everyone thinks of. So here is my itinerary for a local inspired trip to the Big Apple. Next time you are in the city, check out some or all of these things! I promise you won't regret it!

Day one: This was a day of traveling, Seattle sushi, and sunset views from the sky. I drank a lot of ginger ale, listened to literally every Ed Sheeran song four times, had a veggie wrap for dinner, and watched the sun go down over Canada. It was so beautiful- the neon orange wisps of clouds coating the wings, and the cotton dyed sunset below. For those of you who hate flying, I am pretty sure you are just doing it wrong because folks, airplanes are magic. With your favorite music in hand, good snacks and a window seat (hopefully) there is no way to go wrong.

At the airport, I met a lovely couple from Queens. Eddie told me their story of how they met in his biking days when they were teens, how they travel to Alaska a lot now, and gave me tips on which art museums to hit up. When we landed, it was 2 a.m. in new york, so they helped me get my luggage to the pick up zone and we exchanged numbers. I always meet the coolest people when I travel. Anyways... the drive to Queens was glitter and music. I love Nyc's night life. Even in the early hours, there is always something to see.

Day two: I was staying with my incredible cousin Becca, and her fiance, Neha. They are both amazing women and their house was so great. I woke up to a view of their quaint backyard between the brick apartments on both sides. That's how their whole neighborhood is. They live in Astoria, and it is just streets full of brick homes, vine covered walls, narrow roads, so many trees, and cool Brazilian markets. So I went with Neha in the morning to pick up some bagels. Oh man were they killer bagels. If you are ever in New York, check out "Brooklyn Bagels". It's a local chain. Think billions of spreads, hearty bagels, and nutty coffee. That was the best way to start any morning. It is just something everyone HAS to do at least one of the New York mornings.

That day we:

-Stopped by the Brazilian market and I used my Portuguese to buy guava juice. There are so many cultural markets, so make sure you check out at least one!

-Walked through the Union Square farmers market. Flowers galore. Bought a chocolate babka (Um go try it right now if you have not already).

-Explored Chelsea Market. Checked out their spice markets. Overall just enjoyed this historic place.

-Walked by every floral shop, saw the Walter Mitty subway stop, mural spotting, and gazed through artist stands.

-Made it to the Highline. Best place in the city. Killer views of the Statue of Liberty, Empire State Building, cute apartment buildings, the Village, and endless plants to walk through. Bought some things from a watercolor artist, and ate the best watermelon mint popsicle of my life. Actually it was the only one of my life... but damn it was good. People, try the random snacks you see, and always stop by the local artist stands. You never know what treasures you are going to find.

-West village was lovely. We saw the ring shop where Neha and Becca bought their rings (beautifully small shop- hotspot for celebs), sampled perfumes in an upscale perfumery, and met some super cute dogs. New York dogs are so stylish.

-At Washington Square Park, there was an Indian festival, and wow that was fun. There was dancing and vegetarian street food and of course that beautiful arch. If you ever find yourself passing a festival, stop, turn around, and wander through it. New York has so many different festivals always happening, and each one is so enveloped in culture and cool ethnic traditions. It is something everyone should experience.

-We walked through Alphabet City, a park with a painted and graffitied piano in it (also a cockatoo), passed Katz (where "when Harry met Sally" was filmed in the orgasm scene), and this beautiful english street owned by NYU. It was a step back in time and sooo quiet.

-We made it to East Village and wow. It is everything I had heard and more. I wish more people explored it. Actually no- I like it mellow. While there, we ate at this quaint place in East Village called "Supper". Let me just say that it kinda ruined me for all other food ever. It was out of this world. It

was this tiny little vine wrapped place made of brick and Italian sentiments. We sat under these twinkly lights right outside and sipped on white wine, as the sun went down. My kale annolini was to die for and literally everything was so insanely beautiful. If you are ever in that area, make a reservation and get down there! It was a perfect ending to a beautiful day. The key to eating in New York is to ask locals. They know where the good stuff is, and even if it is someplace small and maybe out of the way, it will always be worth the effort.

Day three: So this day was made up of a beautiful brunch, Broadway, and watching the Tonys.

Brunch was colorful and eaten at "Bonnie's" in Astoria. The food and booze was all sooo good and so pretty. Piled high avocado toast and bright mimosas? Yeah, you can't beat a brunch in the city. Broadway tickets were given to us by Becca's actress friend from NYU, so we got insanely good seats at WAITRESS. Yep. It was soooo emotional and full of the best music and definitely hit a note in me. Also let's be real, Sara Bareilles is just INSANE live- sooo good! It was two bucket list items in one! If you ever have a chance to see a Broadway musical, see it! Whether that means making actor friends or saving up the money for a ticket, you just got to do it.

After, we came home and watched the Tonys- full of Becca's friends. It's funny how in New York everyone is up to date on musicals and plays and the arts. Elsewhere it might be dying, but the show must go on in NYC. We ordered some killer sushi, drank even better rose wine, and sat outside until late in that magical backyard. If you ever have a chance to stay outside Manhattan, please do! It will be more quiet and definitely will feel more authentic.

Day four: This day I was working in Harlem. As far as Harlem goes- it is sketchy, but wow is it cool. Hair braiding places on every corner, fruit stands everywhere, street performers, and every building is different. Brick everywhere. African street jewelry and Hispanic singers. It was fun to wander. If you ever plan on exploring this area, just make sure to choose the neighborhoods accordingly.

After a long day of work, we got home to Astoria and feasted on TRUFFLE OIL PIZZA. Yes. It was as good as it sounds. "Milkflower Pizza" has the best selection of vegetarian options, and this one was beyond good. Brussel sprouts galore. Also their wines- pretty and perfect pairings. People are serious when they say that New York has the best pizza. Pick just about any dive there, and it will probably beat 75% of all pizza you have tried before that.

Day five: I got done early and was able to go exploring a bit by myself.

NOTE TO ALL NON NEW YORKERS** Do NOT try to get somewhere specific with a dead phone, no map, bad directions, and all in 100 degree heat.

Don't get me wrong though- wandering was fun in it's own way. I saw WAYYYY more than I would have. INCLUDING: art galleries, cool old hotels, Grays Papaya, and the Friends apartment building.

I mean I even high fived Hulk in Times Square. Now, I had been TRYING the whole day to get to Toms Restaurant (heyo Seinfeld fans), which is by Columbia University. Now if you know NYC geography at all, you are probably thinking, "then what the hell is she doing all the way up at Times Square?!!" Well folks, That is what happens when a non new yorker does not heed the above

warning. No phone. No map. NO one knew where it was. And yes- it was 100 degrees. I was sooo sweaty and gross and pretty lost. I mean I saw ALL of Central Park on the way, walked by every single Broadway theater, met some cool people from England, and probably got a ton of exercise. Again, always ask a local, but better yet, just know where you are going to begin with.

By the time i got to Times Square, I knew I must have just turned the wrong way a few miles back. Being way too tired to think about walking all the way back down the street, I got a cab. Long story short, my driver's name was Helene. She was so chill and kind and wiser than anyone ever.

Everything she said should be a famous quote from a philosophical book somewhere. We were in that car for an hour in traffic on the way to Toms, and we had the deepest talk. We told each other our life stories, and laughed till we cried. she charged my phone and gave me water, and gave me the courage to open up. She was from Haiti. She said some things that changed me, but one of them was really important. "You can get mad about people cutting you off in life. You can get depressed about your circumstances, but nothing will change those things. You can decide to breathe, look for beautiful pieces of your torn life, and make a new place of heart." It really took my breath away because how often do you get told that by a total stranger? Yeah. It was surreal and so necessary. Everybody, TALK TO YOUR DRIVERS. So many people just sit there on their phones in the back, and ignore their drivers. You never know what they have to say. You don't know their stories. Who knows what they have to offer? You never know who you will meet. Not to say that everyone will be profound or even want to talk, but do not be that person who ignores the driver as if they are statues. Your driver is a person too. Never forget that you are never too good for anybody. She got me to Toms and all along the way pointed out things I should take photos of. We stopped on this little road and jumped out to get a photo of it cause it was too lovely to ignore.

Eventually we DID make it to Toms. Yes it looks the same as in the show. It was well worth the chaos of the day. If you end up wandering like I did, or just have plans falling through, do not let it ruin things for you. There is so much to see and do there. Take advantage of that! See things along the way.

Day six: I got done early again and CHARGED MY PHONE before leaving to explore. First good move of the day.

I found myself walking on 5th through Harlem and towards the other end of Central Park. I walked the Museum Mile and passed the Guggenheim, the Austrian Art Museum, and lots of Smithsonian branches and little ones. I was in heaven. Make sure you check out a few of those because there is so much to see. I met some rappers around there who gave me a signed cd, danced with me, and taught me a super gangster handshake. Yes true story. Be street smart, but sometimes it is okay to talk to strangers.

So after wandering through this secret garden, I found myself on the outside of the MET. Now after living in DC where all the best museums in the world are free and RIGHT THERE, I have gotten pretty cynical about other city museums... so I was not planning on going inside, but I told my sisters (avid fans of Gossip Girl) that I would at least have lunch on the steps. So I sat down with my lunch

feeling all strong like I would not go inside. I did not have that much time, and I had so much to see. I would definitely not go inside.

Literally two minutes later...

okay I caved. I am a sucker for art, and they had Van Gogh, so what was I supposed to do? I saw his work and Monet, and Picasso, Degas, Pissarro, and even the TERRACOTTA WARRIORS. It was so incredible, so a note to anyone who even slightly likes art- DO NOT SKIP SEEING THE MET!

Then I decided I wanted to go on the roof. After finding out that was possible, I made my way up there and WOW. Think garden maze rooftop with a view of the ENTIRE 360 skyline. I met some Brazilians up there and helped them out in Portuguese. I have never used my second language more than this trip. If you are bilingual in any language, be prepared to use it there! New York City is such a melting pot of people and countries. You are never alone.

So I got down from there, and went out to buy some art to bring home. If you ever want to buy art, look no further than the front of the MET. So many artists set up shop there. After, I got a lift to Little Italy, and I just walked around under the green and red Italian tinsel and banners, while Italian opera singers sang and people offered me cannolis. I DID get a fruit tart from the oldest Italian bakery in America, so that was pretty neat.

I highly recommend "Ferraras". Such artsy little pastries. I walked Mulberry until I made it to China Town. I walked the Bloody Angle (accidentally) and tried some super cool street produce. I just really love street stands. I got some good luck charms and let myself get a little lost under the paper lanterns. It was a pretty magical place. Make sure you explore it in the daylight though.

Long story short, from there I finally made it to the Brooklyn Bridge. Being someone who is always disoriented, it was hard to find, but I DID find it:) Thank God for nice cops. If you are ever lost, just ask one for directions.

Walking the Brooklyn Bridge has always been on my bucket list, and I was determined to do it- the whole thing. SO WORTH THE HEAT. The whole way it is crowded and hot and covered in sketch artists and pineapple stands and photographers. It is exciting and full of killer views. Between the Statue of Liberty on one side, the skyline on the other, and the rooftop gardens of Brooklyn ahead... it is pretty hard to choose where to look.

There was this wonderful italian artist with beautiful drawings of the bridge, so I had to get one and chat. This dude spends every day on that bridge just drawing his surroundings. There are so many people like that.

I made it to brooklyn and explored some neighborhoods and parks. I just really appreciate all the plants on people's roofs.

Later, I made it back to Manhattan. I got a green tea at this perfect little place called "Idea Coffee". It looks like something you would see off of Pinterest- the colors, the serenity amidst the chaotic city streets, and the beautiful drinks served in lightbulbs. Do not skip this place.

Being the big Seinfeld fan that I am, I of course had to check out the Soup Nazi place. Yes it is real. Yes the soup makes you have to sit down. It was not too far away, and the place was tiny, but oh man the soup was everything I could have asked for.

I brought it to a little park across the way from the "How I Met Your Mother" bar (Mcgees in real life), and ate my soup and roll. It was legendary. Only in NYC can you be in two shows at once.

After that life changing soup, i took the subway back to Queens. Back in Astoria we cooked some awesome asian food in that beautiful little kitchen and watched "Friends". Small New York past times.

Seattle was raining when i got home. i love my city.

It was quite the week. I saw so many beautiful things, and met so many incredible people. NYC is a place of possibilities and new things- whether that be new found dreams or newly discovered places. It is everything people think it is and more. yes there are negative sides to a crowded and messy

city, but I gotta say- if you look for it, there is a certain magic in that chaotic place. I am convinced that in a way, we all have a piece of it in ourselves as Americans- constantly expanding our capabilities and full of little parks no one knows about, and art in every corner. New York has my heart.

Bottom line? Explore the outer boroughs when you go- get the heck out of the Times Square slump (as fun as that is... it's been done). Talk to other humans- you are not better than any of them. Always buy local art and always eat the pizza. Never pass up good wine. Any place with strung lights must have good italian food and all floral shops are pretty no matter the neighborhood. Always always always take the long way. Charge your phone. With those rules in mind, enjoy the city, and do something you might not have thought of. Try the places I did, or try your own place. I guarantee it will be just as magical.

By: Em Iris Degn