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# TRAVELLER

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## ONLY IN **NEW YORK** 4.9 **UNIQUE EXPERIENCES IN THE BIG APPLE**

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Driven by a unique creative energy, New York is a city that delivers endless one-of-a-kind- experiences — whether you want to tour the art studios of Harlem, drink savoury cocktails in a Chinatown bar, stargaze from the High Line or camp on an island overlooking Manhattan

PHOTOGRAPHS: MATT DUTILE









# Stay in a storied hotel

Follow in the slipper-wearing footsteps of notable guests from presidents to beatniks by checking into one of New York's historic hotels. Words: Amanda Canning & Zoey Goto

## Wythe Hotel, North Williamsburg

This is the new epicentre of New York cool, in what was once the city's industrial heartland. The building that houses the Wythe started life as a barrel-makers in 1897, became a munitions factory in the Second World War and then a company that made fabric for NASA. The hotel celebrates that heritage with heavy wooden beams, exposed brickwork and concrete floors in the 70 guest rooms, while ceiling tracks that were used to lift heavy objects are still visible in the double-height lobby. There are elements that a barrel-maker returning from the 19th century would be harder pressed to recognise. Chief among them are the in-room bars showcasing the best local spirits, and the refined brasserie dishes produced at the handsome ground-floor restaurant Le Crocodile.

**Not staying?** Order small plates and cocktails at rooftop Bar Blondeau. From \$354 (£279), room only. [wythehotel.com](http://wythehotel.com)

## The Lowell, Upper East Side

If one-time guests F Scott Fitzgerald and Dorothy Parker were to take rooms at the Lowell today, they'd undoubtedly find everything to their liking. For close to 100 years, this cocoon of discrete luxury is where the Upper East Side has come to exhale. Elderly gentlemen with pomaded hair nurse bourbons in the panelled bar while ladies in Chanel make for the guest lounge, chihuahuas in tow. And so it ever was. The 78 elegant suites and French restaurant Majorelle are, however, newly remodelled thanks to designer Michael S Smith, who decorated the White House when Barack Obama was in residence. Despite the flawless attention to detail — not a petal out of place in the floral displays, not a wrinkle in the upholstery — there's no formality here. Staff treat guests like treasured friends, whether you're J Lo checking in with an entourage or you've just flown economy from Heathrow.

**Not staying?** Have a white negroni in Jacques Bar. From \$1,337 (£1,053), B&B. [lowellhotel.com](http://lowellhotel.com)

## Hotel Edison, Midtown

Just steps from the neon symphony of Times Square, this grand dame has been welcoming guests since 1931 — when the lights were switched on by legendary inventor Thomas Edison, no less. Much of the art deco charm has been preserved, including a gilded lobby where scenes from *The Godfather* were shot. The guest rooms, stretching over 22 floors and including Jazz Age flourishes, offer ringside views of the street drama below. As night falls, take a nightcap at the ground-floor Rum House, a louche piano bar that retains all the atmosphere of 1930s New York.

**Not staying?** Drop in for live jazz and daiquiris at The Rum House. From \$248 (£192), room only. [edisonhotelnyc.com](http://edisonhotelnyc.com)

## Hotel Chelsea, Chelsea

The spirit of bohemia hangs heavy at Hotel Chelsea. The former commune/hotel has long attracted poets, punks and painters, with everyone from beatnik writer Jack Kerouac to Bob Dylan calling the Victorian gothic landmark home over the years. Following a decade-long refurbishment, it's now a chic 158-room hotel complete with a Parisian-style bistro. Ghosts of its previous life remain in the handful of original tenants who reside on the first floor. They starred in Martin Scorsese's *Dreaming Walls*, a documentary about their determination to stay put despite the renovation. Loiter in the lobby and you might catch them sharing tales of the time they met Andy Warhol or of avant-garde dance shows held in the marble stairwell.

**Not staying?** Have a Spanish meal in El Quijote. From \$325 (£253), room only. [hotelchelsea.com](http://hotelchelsea.com)

## The Maritime, Chelsea

If the producers of *Mad Men* ever decide to reboot the series on a cruise liner, they'd have a ready made set in the suave, retro Maritime. Designed by modernist architect Albert Ledner in the 1960s as the headquarters of the National Maritime Union, the building is in the former port district, with cargo ships and ocean liners once docking a short stroll away. The hotel stays true to his original vision, with a frieze that runs the length of the lobby, each panel showing a scene from a global port, such as Hong Kong to Istanbul. Occupying the original offices and sailors' dorms, the 126 rooms have a mid-century ship's cabin vibe, with built-in beds with teal surrounds, a nautical colour and enormous porthole windows — with views of the Hudson, the river that once brought the world to New York.

**Not staying?** Admire the frieze before dining at Catch Steak restaurant. From \$265 (£209), B&B. [themaritimehotel.com](http://themaritimehotel.com)

## The Carlyle, a Rosewood Hotel, Upper East Side

At one point, this beaux-arts beauty became known as the 'New York White House' after John F Kennedy unpacked his monogrammed suitcases in one of its rooms, apparently sneaking Marilyn Monroe through the kitchens for clandestine meetings. He was in good company: the classy Upper East Side institution has been attracting presidents, royalty and movie stars since its revolving doors started to spin in 1930. Many of the 190 graceful, stylish rooms, some featuring baby grand pianos, offer views of Central Park and Manhattan's skyline. Meanwhile, a new generation has discovered the old-school charm of mural-lined, softly lit Bemelmans Bar, enjoying dirty martinis shaken by mixologists in crisp red jackets

**Not staying?** Take afternoon tea in the Gallery restaurant. From \$895 (£698), room only. [rosewoodhotels.com](http://rosewoodhotels.com)

Clockwise from top left: A suite at the nautical Maritime Hotel; one of the bathrooms at bohemian Hotel Chelsea; the reception at Wythe Hotel, a former factory; a recently remodelled bedroom at The Lowell

# Get sober in the city

In an ironic twist, 90 years after the restrictions of prohibition lifted in New York, temperance has never been cooler in The Big Apple. Here's how to zero-proof your stay. Words: Zoey Goto

Behind every great American dive bar, there's a rock-steady formula. It goes something like this: walk through the door and a bartender stands poised to lend an ear, sliding drinks across the gnarly bar with easy intimacy. Overhead, a grunge playlist crackles through the speakers. And towards the back of the room, scratched tables and worn velvet seats provide shadowy nooks for getting up to no good.

**Hekate Cafe & Elixir Lounge** appears to tick all of these boxes, but there's something decidedly off-beat about this buzzy East Village hangout. Perhaps it's the cosmic tarot card reading happening in the window, or the greeting as I step in. "Have you been here before?" the long-haired mixologist enquires, handing me a menu. "We're a 100% alcohol-free establishment," he adds, in a tone that suggests the throw down of a challenge.

Hekate is part of a growing sobriety scene in New York. No longer the exclusive realm of committed tea-totallers, a surge of interest from the sober-curious and drinkers keen to dip their toes into the hangover-free waters of moderation has pushed abstinence into the mainstream here, and a multiverse of sober socialising exists to serve them. It's possible to greet the sunrise at a **Daybreaker** sober morning rave, attend a dry drag brunch courtesy of **Third Place Bar**, pick up a Phony Negroni at booze-free bottle shop **Boisson**, and join the zero-proof party at a pop-up event organised by **Absence of Proof**.

Social media has helped connect a new generation of temperance crusaders, I learn the next morning when I meet Rachel Hechtman in Central Park. Having called time on her own drinking, Rachel organises mocktail events across New York State, using her online platform to glamorise sobriety "in the way I once glamorised my drinking", she tells me. "Once upon a time, every photo of me had a martini glass in it."

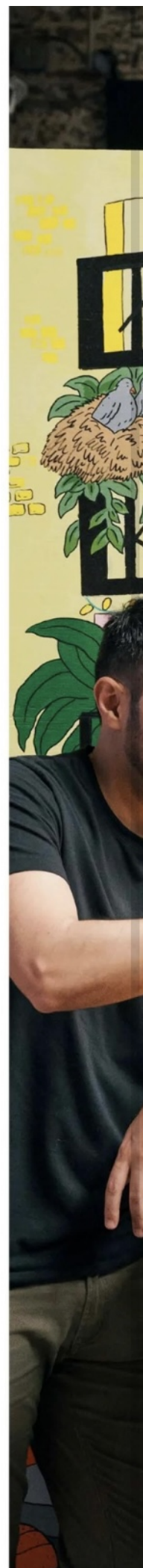
She launched her new career in Central Park, organising sober walks during lockdowns, she says, as we walk past a carousel of dog walkers and joggers. Pausing on an ornate iron bridge, we gaze back at the city's skinny skyscrapers through a curtain of foliage. Forget *Sex and the City's* Carrie

Bradshaw sipping a cosmopolitan, once as synonymous with New York as the Statue of Liberty. Nowadays, it's all about being sober in the city, Rachel explains. "Trends start here and ripple outwards," she says.

I leave the park and make my way over to Brooklyn. When I finally locate **Brooklyn Brewery**, a warehouse reimagined as a microbrewery and tap room, I feel like I've arrived at hipster central. A disco ball swirls and pop art murals line the walls of the bar, with young clientele squeezing thigh-to-thigh on communal benches to take thirsty gulps of craft beer. Since 2019, the brewery has introduced three sans-alcohol beers, wrapped in punchy graphic labels. They've gone down a storm, making up 10% of the company's US sales. I take a sip of their hoppy lager, an aromatic brew with subtle hints of grapefruit and pine. It tastes... well, just like a regular beer. Which is perhaps unsurprising, given it's created in the same way as other brews, with the addition of a fermentation method in which the alcohol is extracted.

For my final stop I hop on a train to New York State's Long Island, past wooden fish shacks and *Great Gatsby*-style mansions. Set in the heart of the Hamptons, family-run **Wölffer Estate Vineyard** has been elevating the world of de-alcoholised wines since 1996, when they launched the first of three lines of sophisticated grape juice. I join co-owner Joey Wölffer on the shaded deck. We clink a flute of sparkling blush as she tells me that inclusivity was the driving force behind the decision to introduce on-the-wagon wine. "Come and visit on a Friday night and it's like a mini festival here," she says. "Everyone is having a good time with a delicious drink in their hand, regardless of if they drink alcohol or not."

Perhaps it's the views of rolling vineyards that stretch towards the Atlantic horizon, or the placebo effect of quaffing something bubbly, but my booze-free wine-tasting has a giddy effect. I catch the train back to the city, ready to toast New York with an artisan mocktail in some dimly lit speakeasy. For no-and-low drinkers, New York sure makes for an intoxicating playground.







Customers enjoying one of the three alcohol-free beers made by Brooklyn Brewery in Williamsburg

IMAGE: JEN DAVIS



## Q&A **RONDEL HOLDER**

**Emmy-award-winning filmmaker Rondel shares his favourite city haunts**

### **WHERE DO YOU FIND INSPIRATION?**

Everything in New York is an inspiration, but one of my favourite places is the Brooklyn Museum. They have the best art exhibits and they're beautifully curated.

### **WHICH PLACE MAKES YOU FEEL AT HOME?**

I was born and raised in Flatbush, Brooklyn, which is known as Little Caribbean. It's like being on the islands, smelling jerk chicken cooking on the side of the street and hearing reggae and soca. New York has so many of these cultural pockets — you can really dive into a different culture within the city.

### **WHERE'S YOUR FAVOURITE VIEWPOINT?**

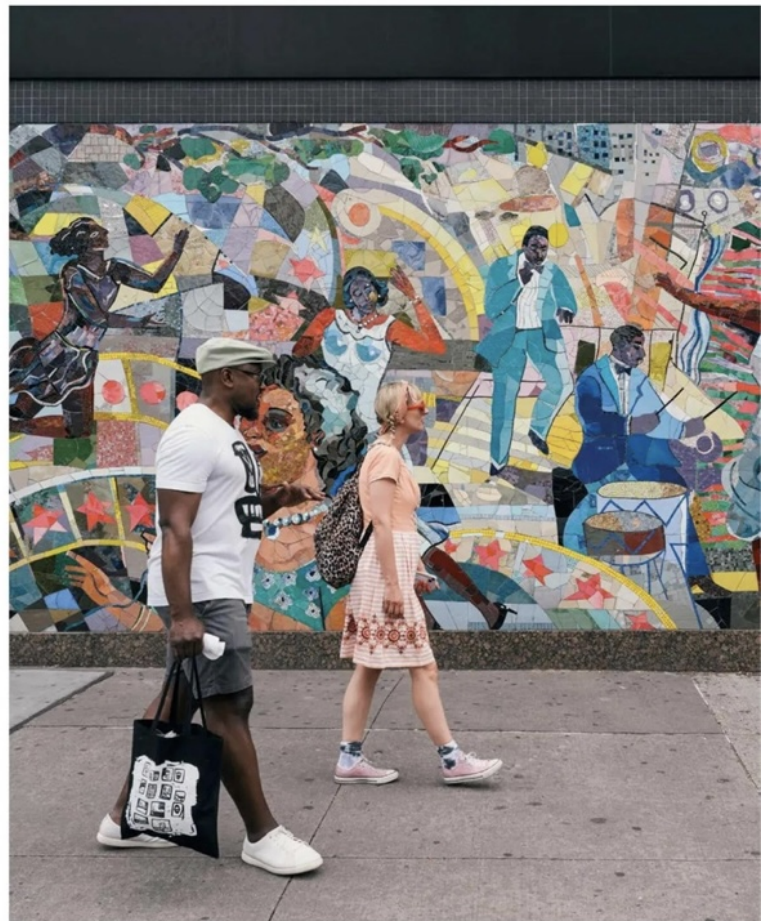
One of my favourite views is from the waterfront in Long Island City in Queens. It really gives you a remarkable take on the Manhattan skyline, including the UN Building and Empire State Building.

### **WHAT PLACE SHOULD EVERY VISITOR GO TO?**

Central Park! There are so many different nooks and crannies that you can get lost in. There's a lot of free programming, too, such as the Summer Stage concert series. It's where the whole city comes together — you can really see the full scope of New Yorkers there. I love it. [rondelholder.com](http://rondelholder.com)









Clockwise from top left: Leon Johnson in his studio; some of the creations at Hats by Bunn; a walk through Harlem with Leon; family-owned restaurant The Edge Harlem

## Discover a new renaissance in Harlem

A new generation of creatives has joined the old guard in keeping the artistic spirit of Harlem alive. One local painter and illustrator takes us on a tour. Words: Zoey Goto

"I come here when I need creative inspiration," artist Leon Johnson tells me as we emerge from the subway into the beating heart of Harlem. Around us, market stalls sell dangly earrings, incense and African print paper fans. A mosaic depicting the jazz greats who left their legacy on Harlem, including Cab Calloway and Count Basie, covers the length of a wall. Out of sight, old-school beats pump out of a boombox.

Stretching 45 blocks from Central Park to 155th Street, Harlem is one of the most culturally rich neighbourhoods in the world, its character shaped by waves of migration, particularly from the Caribbean and the American South. During the 1920s and 1930s, in a movement known as the Harlem Renaissance, an artistic explosion from Black writers, artists and musicians pinned this Upper Manhattan district to the map. The Great Depression, followed by decades of decline, signalled the end of an era, although Harlem's legacy as a hotbed of artistic experimentation lived on. Nearly 100 years later, the historic neighbourhood is once again in the throes of a revival, thanks to a new generation of makers.

Leon, a mixed-media artist who weaves his passion for 1990s hip-hop culture into his freestyle illustrations, is taking me on a walking tour of his favourite haunts. He's swapped his work uniform of paint-splattered apron for a T-shirt emblazoned with one of his own graphic prints. Having moved here from the Midwest 16 years ago, Leon set up his studio near the Harlem River, drawn by the area's energy and sense of community. "Being in Harlem has always felt like being part of a creative family," he enthuses, as we approach **Hats by Bunn**, a boutique where he buys his dapper headwear.

Mr Bunn himself emerges from the workshop at the back of the store, surrounded by racks and shelves crammed with a rainbow of pork pie and fedora hats. The Jamaican-born milliner started making and selling hats in Harlem in the 1980s. Despite growing concerns of gentrification, the neighbourhood he fell in love with then remains. "I don't think too much has changed," he muses. "Sure, a bunch of younger people moved here looking for cheap rent, but this area is still where it all happens. It will always be the core of the city."

From the old guard to the new, we duck into the studio of **Milton Washington**, a photographer documenting local street life with his iPhone. "Harlem has a super-high concentration of artists," Milton says as he walks me through his space. Writ large across the walls are shots of his neighbourhood: flamboyant hats worn for Sunday church services, a woman adorned in African beads, and a gentleman in a natty suit shooting the breeze. "There's artistic inspiration here and a honing of your craft that's difficult to find elsewhere," he adds.

Back on the street, Leon and I head a couple of blocks northeast, passing a mixture of shiny condos, red-brick tenements and handsome brownstone townhouses. A pitstop at **The Edge Harlem**, where the menu reflects the owners' British-Jamaican-American heritage, rewards with jerk chicken tacos and homemade sorrel, a traditional Caribbean drink infused with hibiscus.

Trace a finger back from modern-day Harlem to the birth of its second revival and you'll arrive at **Red Rooster Harlem**, Leon says as we head back into central Harlem. Ethiopian-Swedish chef Marcus Samuelsson opened his restaurant in 2011, and it's a boisterous dining room where the walls are lined with local artwork, including Leon's own expressive pen and ink illustrations. Plates of crispy fried chicken and waffles, devoured during Sunday gospel brunches, have become the stuff of legend. It's become an all-encompassing celebration of the creative spirit that gives Harlem its unique flavour.

I bid Leon farewell and take the scenic route back to the subway station, popping my head in at **The Long Gallery**, a contemporary arts space showcasing under-represented artists, many from the local area. Owner Lewis Long shows me around while jazz plays in the background. He grabs his jacket and offers to walk a few blocks with me.

We pause outside **The Studio Museum**, an esteemed gallery that's showcased the work of artists of African descent since 1968. It's currently closed, with work ongoing to expand what's considered one of the most important incubators for the visual arts in the US. "Just take a look around you," Leon says, pointing towards a horizon busy with the construction of new buildings, many rooted in the creative arts. "Harlem's being brought back to life." ▶

