

A Walk in New York

Crai S. Bower shares what NYC can offer in 48 hours

THE FRENCH POET Charles Baudelaire redefined the term *flâneur* (“observant urban stroller”) in the 19th century, so staging my finale at L’Express, a 24-hour French brasserie in Manhattan, after 48 hours of walking all over New York City, couldn’t be more appropriate. The time is 4:15 in the morning, and the room, filled with gentle light and marble café tables and bar, is packed. I’ve spent two days meandering the neighborhoods of New York, watching the Grand Central Station rush-hour bustle, getting wrapped in West Village cherry blossom blizzards, grabbing a Brooklyn bagel breakfast. At this early hour, sipping hot chocolate like a Bourbon king, I reflect upon two days of strolls and pauses, a give and take between the soles of my boots and my wanderer’s soul.

STEVE KELLEVAKA - IMDRIVE/FLOKRRGETTY IMAGES

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...I embark upon one of the most spectacular bridge span strolls in the world.

I travel by subway to Williamsburg, a gritty and eclectic neighborhood filled with artists and the cafes that host and employ them. The neighborhood revolves around Bedford Avenue, where I breathe in the ambience at the Bedford Cheese Shop and pause for a rooftop lunch at Juliette. Seated over my tea at Fabianes Caffè & Pastry, I'm surrounded by conversations of unfinished novels and artwork in search of a gallery.

I return on the L train (via Union Square) to the 4 train and Brooklyn Heights, located across the East River from lower Manhattan, where I gaze at the legendary brownstones, before coursing along the promenade to the Brooklyn Bridge. I join several hundred pedestrian commuters as I embark upon one of most spectacular bridge span strolls in the world.

5:30 p.m. *Seasonal, Hair and Cain*

New York tempts the visitor to forgo the familiar and explore the boundaries. I would never have selected midtowns Seasonal, an Austrian restaurant and wine

bar, for dinner but I follow a friend's suggestion and am not disappointed. I'll admit I don't know my *barsch* (bass) from my *tafelspitz* (roast iron steak) but the contemporary culinary waltz through the Viennese menu intrigues me.

Midtown dinner makes for a convenient trip to Broadway's Al Hirschfeld theater, where we drop in on *Hair*. I refrain from mouthing every word but leap from my seat when the actors invite the audience to the stage for a little *Let the Sunshine In* dance party.

We continue to spin all the way to Chelsea, where we step through the velvet ropes into Cain Luxe, one of several clubs that line Northwest 27th Street. The DJ blends house, soul and pop, and we twirl and sway for hours, as it had been for all those years of my East Coast youth. The 24-hour-diners beacon lures me mothlike to LExpress where, buoyed by this magnificent city, I do my imaginary beret to another exceptional 48 hours of keen-eyed exploration that would surely transmogrify Baudelaire's bouquet into flowers of pure joy. ■

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