

# NEW YORK EXPRESS

With its carnival-like atmosphere, hotfooting it through New York's five boroughs in this unique marathon is both a feat and a fiesta, says Alexandria Gouveia

**W**hen faced with the prospect of exhaustion, nausea and momentarily losing control of the idea of running, however, when you throw in the opportunity to witness some of the world's greatest landmarks, celebrated sites, chicest boutiques and award-winning eateries, the November 4 New York Marathon is worth it. Dating back to 1970, it began with 127 competitors, 55 of whom completed the several laps around Central Park. Over the years a thirst for achievement swept over the US, leading to a massive increase in participants. To accommodate the army of runners, Co-founder Fred Lebow redrew the now 26.2 mile course in 1976, incorporating all of NY's five boroughs. With records continually made and smashed, and prize money now over US\$700,000, it's easy to see what entices so many onto the streets. Oryx exposes the sights to keep an eye out for as you stagger towards the finishing line.



## STATEN ISLAND

At 10.10am the race commences with a gun shot, and the sea of competitors overflow on to the Verrazano Narrows Bridge. When built in 1964, the bridge was the longest in the world spanning a total 4,260 feet. After descending the overpass the gruelling course leaves the “forgotten borough” and winds into Brooklyn.

### Detour

Experience a serene sightseeing boat trip aboard the Staten Island Ferry. As you cruise out from the island you’ll be greeted with the most enduring symbol of the city,

the Statue of Liberty. It’s only when the equally famous skyscrapers loom overhead, assuming postcard dimensions, that you’ll appreciate the Big Apples’ iconic and truly thrilling landscape.



## BROOKLYN

For 13.1 miles the runners find themselves in legendary hip-swayer John Travolta’s hometown.

### Detour

Thanks to its ethnic diversity, the fourth biggest city houses the most saliva inducing delis and restaurants across the States. Sample America’s famed ‘best pizza’ at Grimaldi’s – an authentic Italian restaurant under Brooklyn Bridge. Its fluffy dough certainly hits the spot with the locals claiming, “Brooklyn invented pizza”. If your body craves a sugar rush, cheese cake at Junior’s on Dekalb Avenue should get your adrenalin pumping for the race to the next borough.

A tour to Brooklyn museum will educate you, bizarrely, about Egypt, with its world-renowned collection of ancient Egyptian masterpieces. For more modern impressionists, the Brooklyn Museum of Art is



notorious for sparking controversy after displaying Chris Ofili’s depiction of the Madonna with dung on it. Before you leave, head to the Refinery boutique, on 254 Smith Street for the best tees, belts and shoes – most of the labels are by local designers. It sure beats ‘I heart NY’ souvenirs. ☒



## QUEENS

Crossing the Pulaski Bridge and entering Queens marks the halfway point of the marathon. After two-and-a-half miles the race then takes a bitter turn for the worse as runners try their utmost to prevent their legs from buckling as they mount the Queensboro bridge, considered to be the hardest stage of the course.

### Detour

Although it may not seem as exciting as Manhattan or Brooklyn, it still contains history, streetwise shops and renowned restaurants, although without the more favoured boroughs' price tags.

Despite its lacklustre reputation, only in Queens can you dub your voice in the *Wizard of Oz* and see exactly how short Italian stallion Robert De Niro is – you'll be amazed at the outcome. All this film-based fun can be had at the Museum of Moving Image.

For something more indulgent, the Bohemian Hall is a tantalising beer garden in Astoria. Turning off the bustling urban street it allows you to hide among its shady trees and picnic tables with refreshing pitchers of icy beer. If that doesn't make you fall in love with the borough nothing will.



## THE BRONX

Although they reach Manhattan after 16 miles, the marathon runners cross briefly back into the Bronx where they face another sweat-filled mile before re-entering NY's most famous district.

### Detour

As the birthplace of salsa and break-dancing, the borough once considered the 'postage stamp of crime', is brimming with street entertainers and local shows. The Point Community Development Centre is an ideal place to sample local performances.

Boasting over 600 species, the Bronx Zoo is cited as the largest metropolitan zoo in the States, the best exhibit being the Congo Gorilla Forest. The US\$3 million development re-creates an African rainforest with wooded pathways, lush greenery, and animals including red-river hogs, colobus monkeys, and two troops of lowland gorillas. ■

### 490 BCE

The world's first-ever recognised marathon took place when Pheidippides ran 26 miles from Marathon to Athens to inform the Athenians of the Greek's defeat of the Persians, before he fell to the ground dead.

### 1978

Norwegian Grete Waitz set a women's marathon world record, finishing in a time of 2:32:30

### 1970

127 runners paid \$1 entry each to NYRR to participate in a 26.2-mile race in Central Park.

### 1992

When international sanctions against South African athletes were lifted Willie Mtolo chose to run New York, besting the field and garnering media coverage around the world.

### 2000

NYRR added an official wheelchair division to the marathon. It's now one of the most competitive wheelchair marathons in the world.

### 2001

Less than two months after the September 11 terrorist attacks, the New York City Marathon became a race of hope and renewal for participants and spectators alike.

### 2006

Over 93,000 athletes applied to run and nearly 38,000 people crossed the finish line, making it the largest marathon of all time.



## MANHATTAN

Proceeding down Fifth Avenue and into Central Park, racers will be greeted by over two million cheering spectators as they finish the final mile of the marathon.

### Detour

*Sex and the City* further glorified the main district of New York which has left London struggling in second place year after year for the title of Capital of Cool.

Manhattan is the trendiest, slickest and most seductive of all five boroughs. Saturated in history, every street and avenue has a story to tell. Every New York guide recommends trips to the Empire State Building (avoid queues by buying tickets online), Central Station, the Chrysler building and the Rockefeller centre, but there's so much more to explore.

Check out Chelsea Hotel where every room tells a famous and often brutal tale. Welsh poet Dylan Thomas stayed in room 205 where he fell into a fatal coma after 18 whiskies, while room 100 witnessed the savage murder of

Nancy Spurgeon, the girlfriend of Sex Pistols bass player Sid Vicious.

Another site drenched in psychosis is the Dakota apartment building, where Beatles star John Lennon was shot five times by crazed fan Mark Chapman.

When it comes to shopping forget your usual Macy's and Barney's and hunt out some unique buys at the trendy vintage shops on Greenwich Avenue. Even Carrie Bradshaw wouldn't seem out of place at Star Struck or Zachary's Smile, which sell fascinating pieces from the 1940s to mid 80s. Or try China Town's hip quarter for quirky buys and designer fakes.

Be part of a TV studio audience. Most American shows offer free tickets to the public, so visit [www.tvix.com](http://www.tvix.com) to find out the schedules. For plays, go to TKTS in Times Square, where you can purchase discount theatre tickets. ■

Qatar Airways flies to New York four times a week. For details, visit [www.qatarairways.com](http://www.qatarairways.com)

## TOUR DE FORCES

### HUSH TOURS

This four-hour journey will take you through the birthplace of hip hop, featuring rap greats as personal tour guides. You'll get the low down on famous groups and see where hip hop celebrities live. Tour includes a live b-boy dance performance. [www.hushtours.com](http://www.hushtours.com)

### BIG APPLE GREETER

Big Apple Greeters are New Yorkers who volunteer to show off their favourite parts of the city. There's no fee for the service as you tour the city as native New Yorkers – on subways and buses. You're guaranteed to discover parts of the city unknown to tourists. [www.bigapplegreeter.org](http://www.bigapplegreeter.org)

### SCREEN TOURS

Follow in the Manolo Blahnik footsteps of Carrie Bradshaw and co. on this stylish tour, which visits over 40 locations from the hit TV series *Sex and the City*. From Carrie's lush apartment to her favourite thrift shop you'll experience it all. If it seems too girly the company also offers a Sopranos version. [www.screen tours.com](http://www.screen tours.com)