

# NY-sea

**It's New York, but not as you know it, finds Meera Dattani on a tour of the Big Apple's booming waterfront**

**T**here are people surfing in New York City. And kayaking, and jetskiing. Sitting on the beach at The Rockaways, one of New York's 40-odd islands (yes, that's right) there's a slightly surreal sense that we can't possibly be this close to the skyscrapers of Manhattan. But we are.

With so much focus (deservedly so) on its architecture, nightlife and art scene, you'd be forgiven for forgetting New York City was once a port city, where ships docked in busy wharves. It's also easy to overlook that this is a city of islands, its waterfront as much part of its make-up as cool restaurants and world-

class museums. And now, finally, developers are breathing life into its neglected stretches.

Whether you're catching the waves on The Rockaways, exploring the revived Seaport neighbourhood or using the new ferry routes, seeing New York from the water adds another angle – literally – to this popular metropolis.

## ▶ MANHATTAN

Over the past few years, waterside investment has been changing the perception of New York as a city of skyscrapers. New ferry routes have made island-hopping easier, encouraging visitors and islanders to travel by boat. NYC Ferry, which began

operating in 2017, connects Manhattan, Queens and Brooklyn along the East River, while new routes are set to include the Lower East Side and the Soundview Route to The Bronx and Upper East Side.

As well as benefiting tourism, it's providing affordable transport (at the same price as a subway ticket) for previously under-served areas, increasingly important as New Yorkers move further out for housing and jobs. Classic Harbor Line, operating from Battery Park marina, also offers sunset and sightseeing cruises.

Meanwhile, the once-neglected South Street Seaport District NYC is undergoing investment. One example is the opening





**LEFT:**  
Vandal

**RIGHT:**  
South Street  
Seaport  
Museum

**BELOW:**  
Rockaway  
Beach



PICTURE: SHUTTERSTOCK, GABRIEL ELLISON-SCOWCROFT

of Pier 17, a revamped glass-fronted building with views of New York Harbor, the Statue of Liberty and Brooklyn. It's home to a pop-up bar, rooftop terrace, concept store 10 Corso Como, New York's first iPic cinema, and high-end dining options, soon to include a food market from acclaimed chef Jean-Georges Vongerichten, set to open later this year.

Another telling sign is the opening of Mr. C Seaport, a 66-room hotel in the Seaport District. It's the first boutique hotel in the city from the fourth-generation Cipriani brothers, and

given this is hardly an area packed with high-end accommodation, this glamorous newcomer hints at what's to come.

Its understated-luxury rooms include six premium suites with balcony terraces, while guests receive a complimentary bellini on check-in.

But for now, the Lower East Side has the pick of the hotels, with properties such as Hotel on Rivington, while newcomers include Marriott's AC Downtown, Moxy and CitizenM Bowery, all ticking the affordable luxury option and symbolic of the Lower East Side's ongoing revitalisation.



**It's heartening to see the port's history celebrated; even New Yorkers don't often come this way**

Mr. C Seaport's all-day Italian restaurant Bellini is another plus, boosting the selection of restaurants in the Seaport neighbourhood, which includes The Tuck Room, styled as a modern speakeasy. Restaurant-meets-lounge bar options such as Vandal, on Bowery, are increasingly popular on the Lower East Side, while old classics such as Katz's Delicatessen, an NYC stalwart and filming location for 'that' scene in *When Harry Met Sally*, remain as popular as ever.

For clients interested in the history, the South Street Seaport Museum tells the story of New York as a port city, via interactive experiences and tours of historic ships. For many, it's heartening to see this port district's 300-year-old history being celebrated; after all, even native New Yorkers don't often come this way.

Development isn't restricted to the east, either. On what's known as the Far West Side, the revamp of Hudson Yards, the largest

private development ever in the US, will include the city's highest observation deck, a huge public art centrepiece, performing arts venue The Shed, more than 100 shops, and several hotels.

## THE ISLANDS

The beaches of The Rockaways, which fall into the borough of Queens, are one of the highlights of travelling by ferry around New York. Just an hour away from Manhattan's Pier 11, you can be surfing with Locals Surf School (lessons from \$85 per person) or jetskiing, kayaking and stand-up paddleboarding at Rockaway Jet Ski School. Or you could be appreciating the nature and wildlife of Dubos Point Wildlife Sanctuary, seeing the harbour or having fun at Coney Island Amusement Park.

Rockaway Jet Ski School owner Robert Kaskel is passionate about showing off New York's waterside. "It's so easy to escape the city," he says. "All of these islands are right here on your doorstep."

As well as self-guided tours, clients can request guided tours of New York Harbor and Jamaica Bay. Kaskel has also opened waterside restaurant Thai Rock, next to the jetski school, with a deck overlooking Jamaica Bay - the food is delicious, while the cocktails and mocktails are moreish.







➔ Another new accommodation option in New York City is glamping on Governors Island. A military base for 200 years, it was closed during the mid-1990s, when then-president Bill Clinton started a campaign to return the island to the city. Only a 10-minute ferry ride from Manhattan, it's open to the public from May to October.

The 'glampsite' is run by Collective Governors Island and opened last July. There are luxury bell tents with shared bathrooms, and en suite summit tents, all with comfortable beds, power points and high-end furnishings (prices from \$150-\$800 per night).

A campfire (marshmallows included), sunset views and sunrise yoga are part of the experience, while gourmet food is made with ingredients from urban farms. Waking up to a view of the Statue of Liberty from a luxury tent is certainly a Big Apple first.

Other island attractions include The Hills, four man-made hills with views over the harbour, Statue of Liberty and Manhattan skyline; Island Oyster, a pop-up waterfront oyster bar; and ziplining. A day spa/resort is also planned to open next year.

The Trust for Governors Island is always seeking different uses for the island, such as a place for festivals and events, walking, cycling, birdwatching



and relaxation. "Our aim is to turn it into a year-round destination," says vice-president of public affairs Sarah Krautheim.

## OLD FAVOURITES

More familiar to visitors and New Yorkers is Brooklyn, where new attractions include the farm-to-table dishes at Osprey at 1 Hotel Brooklyn Bridge. A riverfront walk leads to Pilot, an oyster bar on a vintage boat that's

renowned for its sustainable approach to oyster farming and almost-zero-waste approach. It's also set inside a rare Grand Banks schooner, a racing vessel that became the longest-serving pilot ship in US maritime history.

Ellis Island, home to the Statue of Liberty, is one of New York's most famous sights, and there's plenty for new and returning visitors to get their teeth into. This year, the Statue of Liberty Museum opens, featuring interactive exhibits and immersive theatre inside an eco-certified building. Advise clients who want to go to the very top of Lady Liberty (known as 'crown access') to book in advance.

Ferry tickets from Battery Park include Ellis Island, which was the first port of call for immigrants to New York City up to 1925, where they would apply for citizenship. The Ellis Island National Museum of Immigration is engaging, with some fascinating exhibits and stories, while at the American Family Immigration History Center, visitors can research their own history.

Staten Island is also set to attract more visitors with the opening in the spring of Empire Outlets, the first and only outlet shopping experience in New York City itself, along with a vast artisanal food hall.

That New York is ever-changing has never been disputed, but the revival of its ports and islands shows the constant innovation and creativity that makes this city such a favourite. **TW**



For more information on New York City, visit [nycgo.com](http://nycgo.com)

Virgin Atlantic flies six times daily from Heathrow to New York JFK. Return Economy Light fares start at £329. [virginatlantic.com](http://virginatlantic.com)

Hotel on Rivington, in the Lower East Side, costs from about £261 per night for a Regular King room, including breakfast. [hotelonrivington.com](http://hotelonrivington.com)



**ABOVE:** Glamping on Governors Island

**LEFT:** Ellis Island National Museum of Immigration

PICTURE: JULIENNE SCHAEFER/NYC & COMPANY