

New York /1/ **Been There**

New York City must be the greatest place on earth. **At least that's what** a lot of people say. I've never been **to** the city **myself** but I've talked to **quite a few** people who **have**. And they were all **impressed with what** they saw and they all **wished they could** live there. I **can't help wondering what** it must be **like** to arrive **in** this amazing place and **find yourself among** thousands of people moving in every direction, while all the yellow taxis are making **an awful lot of** noise.

But the **truth** is, **you** don't really have to go over there to know **what it's like**. There are so many movies and shows that **take place** in New York City that you **sort of feel as if** you've lived there yourself. Again, a lot of people say this **who** have been to New York. They will tell you that **seeing** New York for the first time is not really **much of a** surprise. You **kind of** look around and think, hey, I know this place. **Still**, I wish I could go there and see it **for myself**.

It's often said that New York doesn't have much **in common with** the rest of America. Well, **the same goes** for a lot of capital cities. **Like**, I don't think there's a lot of similarities between Moscow and Siberia. Or even Prague and villages in southern Moravia. **Most** New Yorkers like to **think of themselves as being much** more **sophisticated** and educated than their **countrymen** in, say, Alabama. **Which** may be true but it doesn't explain why they always vote for the wrong candidate in the presidential election. Have I actually **checked** that information? No, **not really**, it was **more of a wild guess**. I was **kind of hoping** you wouldn't **call my bluff**. But you did, yes.

New York /2/ The Place To Be

Anyway, now **for** a bit of history. New York was originally called New Amsterdam. The town was founded by Dutch settlers in the seventeenth century. Before that there was nothing. Well, there were some Indians living **nearby** but they had no idea what would one day **become of** this place. **Which is why** when they **were offered** some furs for the place they **didn't think twice before accepting**.

Thirty years **later**, the British figured that New Amsterdam was a good **place to be** and they snatched it away from the Dutch. A lot of trading took place in New York, as the town began **to be called**, in the next few decades and centuries. **As a matter of fact**, the trading **has** never stopped.

New York City is famous **for** its skyscrapers, **among other things**. Some of the buildings you see are famous all over the world, **like** the Chrysler building or the Empire State building. **There may be** taller buildings in other cities, **such as** the one they have in Chicago and many others in Asia, but **the ones** you see in New York have a **reputation** that will **be hard to match**. **Obviously**, the twin towers were the most famous ones until they were **brought down on** that awful day six years ago. So now the skyline looks **pretty much** like it **did** thirty years ago, before they were built.

I like **the way** the streets in New York are laid out. When you look at the map you see a perfect grid **with** just one street **cutting** diagonally across the whole place. That street is called Broadway and it is one of only a few streets that has an **actual** name **rather than** just a number. The numbering is **supposed to make** it easier to know where exactly you are if you **get lost**. Also, distance is **measured** in blocks rather than miles or kilometers in New York, as it is in most big cities. A city block is a standard one twentieth of a mile, **that is**, about 200 meters. This may be different in other cities, **though**.

New York /3/ **Junkies and Snakes**

The city consists of several boroughs and **each** of them consists of hundreds of neighborhoods. Many of these places **stand for** something in the popular imagination or are **associated** with certain activities. Bronx and Harlem, **for instance, are supposed to** be these really dangerous places full of **junkies** and black **thugs. Which** is not only racist but in many cases **no longer** true.

Another place that you **may have heard of** is Greenwich Village. This area was **something of a** hippie heaven back in the sixties. There are still lots of small bookstores and record stores there, **which makes it different from** the rest of New York, I guess. Then there's Wall Street with its famous stock exchange. We're talking about Manhattan now, which for many people IS New York.

As far as New Yorkers **are concerned,** they **do** have a reputation **for being** sort of **hard-boiled** and not at all polite. They are also **hard to shock.** They've **seen it all.** There's a story about **this** guy who's walking **down** the street somewhere in Greenwich Village. It's Sunday afternoon and the guy's wearing overalls but he also has a large snake around his neck. He passes these two guys and when he's **out of earshot,** one of the guys turns to the other one and says, **Can you believe that? What does that guy think** he's doing, walking around in overalls?

New York /4/ Ya Lookin' At Me?

New York **has been trying hard** to **shake off** the reputation it **won** in the 70s and 80s when **most** people **thought of it as** a lawless place **run** by drug dealers and corrupt police. **In those days**, tourists were afraid to walk through Central Park **even** in daytime. Quite a few people were murdered in the park, too. If you believed the **headlines** of the **tabloid** press, you had a fifty percent chance **of surviving** a walk across the park so a lot of tourists **figured** this wasn't **a risk worth taking**.

There's a famous line from the movie Taxi Driver, where this guy says „Hey, you looking at me?“ **Apparently**, this is what people who were trying to **pick** a fight with you would say to **get you involved**. **These** were often homeless **people** who did nothing but **hang around** all day and wait **for** someone to **make** the mistake **of looking** at them. Then they would pretend to be **offended** and start **arguing** with you. **Like**, if you got on the **subway** in those days, or just walked **down** the street and **happened to pass** one of them, **the smart thing to do** was look down **the whole time so that** you wouldn't happen to look into their eyes. **Next thing you'd know**, you'd **be lying** on the ground with a black eye. **Or else** you might **end up** in a morgue.

Things changed in the 90s when a new **mayor** was elected who **cracked down on both** criminals and people he **considered too much of a nuisance** and decided to clean the place up. His name was Rudy Giuliani and his **response** to the rising **crime rate** was to launch **what he called** a zero-tolerance policy. This is **based on** the idea that crime has to be stopped **early on**. If someone breaks a window, they have to **be punished**, **otherwise** they will **break into** a house **next** and sooner or later murder someone. A lot of people **doubted** that this **was going to work** but Giuliani **proved them wrong**. Today New York City is one of the safer cities in the U.S and people aren't afraid to **hang out** in Central Park **anymore**.

New York /5/ **Winding Down**

You should **be sure to distinguish** between the state of New York and New York City. **Also**, New York, **by** which I now **mean** New York City, is sometimes called the Big Apple, **the same way** that for instance Chicago is called Windy City. The reasons **for** this are unclear. **Apparently**, someone **came up with** this nickname some time in the **early** 1930s and it just **stuck**. Sounds pretty **cool, too**.

Across one of the rivers from Manhattan, **either the** Hudson or **the** East River--I can never remember which is which--you see New Jersey, a place that New Yorkers love to joke about **as being** an awful place **to live**. However, when the Devils **play** the Rangers in the NHL, the laughter **tends to stop** temporarily.

There's **a lot more to say** about New York but we **don't** have much time **left** so **let me** tell you what I'm going to do **when** I finally **visit** this amazing place. First, I'm going to **take** the Staten Island ferry from the tip of Manhattan. **I hear** that when you're on the ferry and **it's getting dark**, you see Manhattan **the way** you know it from all the postcards and pictures. The famous skyline is **lit up** and... pardon me?

The time's **up**? Well, that's a **shame**, I've got **so much more to say**. **Oh well**. How did I **do** then? Right, not enough history. I see. No, I don't know when Central Park first appeared on the drawing board. No, I don't know its precise area, **either**. How many furs? Let's see... twelve? No, **I guess not**. Yeah, I know it's in the papers you gave us. I **did** try to read them but, you know... no, not boring exactly, just too... yeah? Right, you won't **fail** me. No, it wouldn't be fair to all the other students who have come here prepared... I understand that. Thanks, I **appreciate** it.