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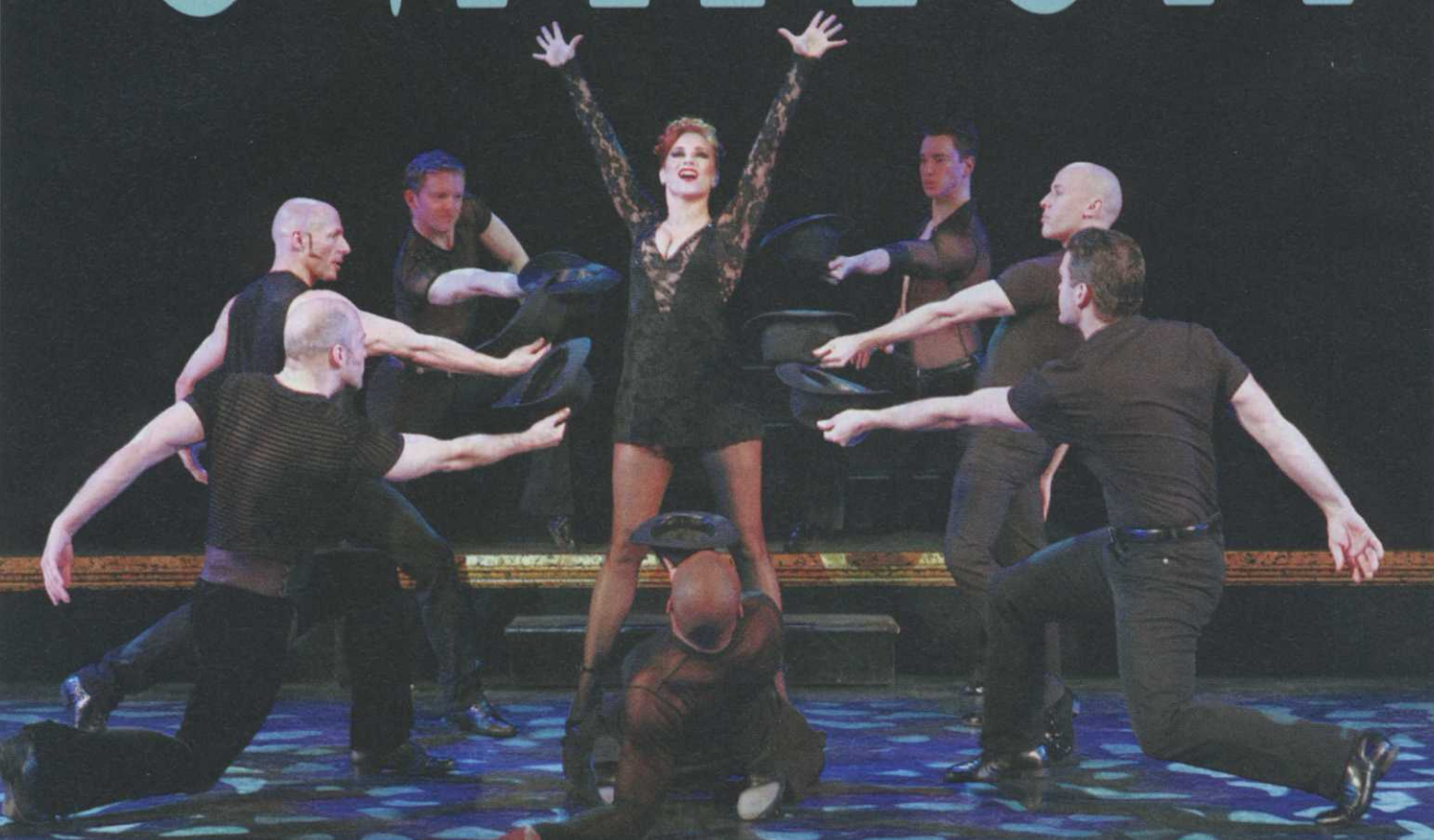
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# STANDING OVATION



The Big Apple makes for a delicious Broadway getaway.

## It's the longest street in all of Manhattan: Broadway, home sweet home for American theater. Dubbed the Great White Way because

it was among the first cities in the U.S. to be lit with electric lights, Broadway is home to performances that are major attractions for residents and visitors alike. The 2007–2008 season grossed nearly a billion dollars, selling more tickets than the eight professional New York sports teams combined. According to the Broadway League, the average theatergoer attends at least four shows a season.

What's the appeal?

"This is where you see the best actors, the best singers, the best choreography and the best shows," said Kent Davidson, director of sales and marketing for Keith Prowse, an entertainment ticket specialty company. "And because it's New York, there's a certain vibrancy around the city that comes with it because people are excited to be there and to be seeing something new."

In fact, the lure of a star-studded play or musical is often tourists' primary draw.

**BY BARBARA WAYMAN** "There's nothing quite like it anywhere else," Davidson said.

"Fall is a great time to visit because things are a little quieter than the summer and over the winter holidays, so tickets can be more affordable."

He recommends purchasing tickets 90 days ahead of time for the best selection.

"If you have your heart set on a certain show, or seats in a particular part of the house, you'll want to give yourself some time," he said. "But with nearly 40 theaters on Broadway, there's so much to choose from."

### ON WITH THE SHOW

With a slower economy, plays have taken a stronger role on Broadway as they have lower up-front costs and can recoup their initial investments faster than a rock opera or splashy musical. But musicals do remain popular. *Chicago* has been running on Broadway for 13 years and *Mamma Mia!* for nine, and both are sold out 90 percent of the time, Davidson said.

Broadway-watchers are predicting success for three new musicals set to open this winter: *The Addams Family* is based on the antics of America's favorite Goth family; *Spider-Man*, *Turn Off the Dark* has music by Bono and the Edge, directed by Julie Taymor of *The Lion King*; and *Catch Me If You Can* is based on the Leonardo DiCaprio/Tom Hanks movie of the same name.

*The Phantom of the Opera* is the longest-running mu-

sical in Broadway history, and fans are eagerly awaiting a sequel scheduled to open in New York and London next spring.

There are also lots of new plays. I had a blast at *Boeing-Boeing*, which was billed as a nonstop comedy and delivered on the promise. While that show has now closed, *39 Steps*, the Tony award-winning comedy based on the Alfred Hitchcock film of the same name, is said to be very funny. Tickets for *Desire Under the Elms* are also selling briskly.

### LANDMARK GLAMOUR

To make the most of a Broadway-themed visit, stop in at legendary restaurants before or after the show. A hot spot for cocktails is the King Cole Bar at the St. Regis New York Hotel, which has been featured on the TV show *Gossip Girl* and in the movie *The Devil Wears Prada*. Over a Kir Royale, I learned the mural behind the bar was commissioned for St. Regis hotel owner John Jacob Astor by some of his friends and underwent a \$200,000 restoration three years ago. It's said the Bloody Mary was invented here in 1934, at the very bar where Andy Warhol would regularly meet Salvador Dalí.



Michelle DeJean, center, as Roxie Hart in *Chicago* the musical (left). Manhattan's posh St. Regis New York Hotel (right) boasts a lot of lavish decor, including silk wall coverings, antiques and custom-made furnishings, and marble baths.



MADAME TUSSAUD'S WAX MUSEUM

## "I want to be a part of it, New York, New York . . ."

The hotel itself is exquisite, so plan on some extra time to explore the lobby and public spaces. Built in 1904, it was the tallest building in town. Astor wanted to be able to house and entertain his high-society friends in European style, and he certainly achieved his goal. Technologically ahead of its time, the hotel featured the city's first central heating and air-cooling systems, elevator, and central vacuum system, which helped protect the marble floors. If a stay at the St. Regis is out of budget range, you can still dine at the glamorous Adour restaurant, designed by celebrity chef Alain Ducasse. Or there's formal tea service in the serene Astor Court lobby each afternoon between 3 p.m. and 5 p.m.

Stars including New York Giants quarterback Eli Manning are easy to see at Madame Tussaud's Wax Museum in Times Square.

Admiring the elegant decor of one of New York's most famous restaurants, Tavern on the Green, I couldn't believe the space began as a home for sheep that grazed in Central Park back in 1870. It's pretty incredible what a \$10 million renovation can do. Now the Upper West Side attraction is the second-highest-grossing independently owned restaurant in the U.S., with annual revenues in excess of \$38 million.

A must-see for many tourists to the Big Apple, Tavern serves nearly 700,000 diners a year with an eclectic

menu of seasonal fare. Its 27,000 square feet can seat 850 people in six dining rooms. You'll want to walk through the outdoor gardens, which feature topiaries created by the Hollywood artists who fashioned greenery for the movie *Edward Scissorhands*. From there, stroll into adjacent Central Park, or, if you prefer, hire one of the horse-drawn carriages parked out front.

### EMPIRE STATE

When you are not at an evening show or matinee, your day can be packed with sightseeing. New York's signature museums, cruises, shopping and one-of-a-kind views are on the verge of drawing 50 million visitors a year.

A great place to start is at the very top.

"Cary Grant didn't have this kind of trouble," grumbled a tourist riding one of many elevators with me to get to the top of the Empire State Building. It's 1,050 feet up to the 86th floor observatory or 1,224 feet to the 102nd floor tower, so expect elevator rides supplemented by stair climbs and winding ways through many velvet corridors. In addition to the good exercise, you gain a sense of achievement once you're looking out upon the sweeping views. The well-done optional audio guide helps identify all the major landmarks and shares entertaining tidbits of history.

Completed in 1931, the Empire State Building attracts people from around the world. On the rooftop deck I overheard Swedish, French, Spanish, Italian and German, and those were just the languages I recognized.

### MUSEUM CRAWLING

A Vincent Van Gogh exhibit was the star display during my visit to the Museum of Modern Art, but the museum's inventory and ever-changing exhibi-

tions are sure to have pleasing offerings no matter when you go. Back in Midtown after a portion of its permanent collection spent two years in Queens, the MoMA received a \$425 million overhaul that doubled its size. Stopping in the cafe on the second floor for sandwiches, desserts and beverages makes for a welcome break from the crowds of fellow art appreciators in the museum.

For something completely different, Madame Tussaud's Wax Museum in the heart of Times Square has lifelike wax replicas of everyone from Miley Cyrus to Daniel Craig. Sports legends such as Hank Aaron and movie stars such as Julia Roberts are on display. Touching the statues is encouraged. Visitors are welcome to take their own photos with celebrity figures, so bring your camera and a friend and give yourself plenty of time for mugging. I noticed George Clooney was an especially popular model, but with scores of political, historical, sports and entertainment stars, there's bound to be personal heroes on display. The museum is open all year.

It would take many more trips to New York City to experience all it has to offer. I packed my days with activity and felt like I only scratched the surface. Striding down 49th Street one night, breathing in the scents of roasting nuts and popcorn mixed with car exhaust, I felt a palpable energy. I couldn't get Frank Sinatra's voice out of my head: "I want to be a part of it, New York, New York..."

The Big Apple feels like a place where anything can happen and dreams can come true. A rising curtain is as good a reason as any to be a part of it.

### PLANNING YOUR TRIP

For show and event tickets, visit [www.keithprowse.com](http://www.keithprowse.com) and [www.citypass.com](http://www.citypass.com). For trip-planning assistance, visit your AAA Travel agent or [AAA.com/travel](http://AAA.com/travel).

H&A

■ Barbara Wayman is a regular contributor from Dublin, Ohio.



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