

**10**  
*walking tour adventures*

**50+**  
PLACES  
TO GET YOUR  
EAT OR  
DRINK ON

**5**  
*bonafide boroughs*

**10**  
PLACES  
TO PEE

# ANKWAFINA'S NYC

**10**  
*fold-out maps*

**1**  
PRACTICAL  
GUIDE TO  
UNDERGROUND  
ETIQUETTE

*& diy lessons*  
SUCH AS  
URBAN  
CANNING!



# AWKWAFINA'S NYC

*Nora Lum*

PHOTOGRAPHS BY ELYSSA GOODMAN



POTTER STYLE  
NEW YORK

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For my great-grandfather, Jimmy Lum, who settled our family in the best city in the world

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# THE EMPIRE STATE BUILDING: A SPOKEN-WORD JOURNEY



I should have peed  
Before I left.  
But instead,  
I stand before you,  
Screaming tourist babies  
And all.  
If *phallacious* was a word,  
It would describe you best.  
Also the words  
*Tall* and *metal*.

You are  
Kind of a big deal  
Like Bonnie Raitt  
Or  
Frasier.  
Except Frasier  
Does not have  
Mass-produced foam replicas of himself.

Your guardians  
Wear maroon suits  
With little hats.  
Kind of like the one Joe Pesci wore  
In the provocative film  
*My Cousin Vinny*.

Inside, you are basically

A shitload

---

Of velvet ropes

Positioned

In a ridiculously complicated line.

It is kind of like

A Six Flags in hell.

Next is

A bag check

A body X-ray and

A tasteful pat-down.

Kind of like

The airport.

Except

There is no Cabo

Or shirtless tan

Man dancers

On the other side.

When I reach the ticket booth

I pay.

To climb you.

And for \$10 more

I can get

A map.

Next

A very

Assertive guardian

Jams like

Fifty of us of us

Into an elevator

That talks

In different languages.

The elevator

Goes ten floors at a time.

And

Other than the hot breaths

Of a person I've never met

Fluttering against

The nape of my neck,

It's a pretty cool

Ride.

On your observation deck

I elbow through.

When I finally get

---

A good view

I'm like

Damn.

I should Instagram

This shit.



---

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# FIVE BEST SPOTS FOR PEOPLE-WATCHING

In a place as congested as New York City, people-watching is an unavoidable activity. Depending on where you are in the city, it can be an incredibly fascinating and eye-opening experience, whether you see a homeless man who has just peed himself or a hipster wearing a vest made out of uncooked macaroni and things that he found in the garbage.

Here are the greatest venues for the best free shows in town.

## 1 UNION SQUARE

Union Square is Mecca for freaky, unnecessary people. Taking a seat on a bench or on the steps of the square itself, expect a ratchet parade of everything from the overdressed to the-oh-my-god-i-that-guy-really-paying-people-a-dollar-to-smell-their-farts.

## 2 SOHO OFF LAFAYETTE STREET

SoHo is home to some of the most pimped-out residential lofts in the city, as well as a large modeling and fashion crowd. While the intersection of Broadway and Prince is far too crowded and commercial, people-watching off Lafayette Street is a highly efficient way of staring enviously into the vacant eyes of contract models who work in the surrounding buildings. SoHo is also fertile ground for celebrity sightings since many high-profile stars live in the neighborhood.

If you're super desperate for some more skin, head farther west toward the NYU athletic center on Mercer Street for troops of sweaty, shirtless men who spray themselves with water bottles as they jog right out of your life.

## 3 BEDFORD AVENUE, WILLIAMSBURG SECTION

Williamsburg is kind of a big NYC joke at this point. It is arguably the most gentrified neighborhood in the city, known to most New Yorkers as a place where hipsters and artists run rampant. As a result, Bedford Avenue is basically a (sometimes unbearable) fashion show, a congested thoroughfare where similarly styled denizens who are all trying way too hard to be cool walk quickly past each other pretending not to take note of each other's shoes and outerwear.

## 4 BEDFORD AVENUE, CROWN HEIGHTS SECTION

Crown Heights' tight-knit and fascinating community of Hasidic Jews makes for amazing people-watching. Sure, some would say that this is an intrusion upon their privacy, but hey, the best part about people-watching is that it's done on public property. Taking a long stroll through the

boisterous enclave on the south end of Bedford Avenue is an out-of-body experience that includes crazy displays of fashion, hair, hats, and minivans. What's refreshing about this community on Bedford Avenue is its ability to exist peacefully and seemingly undisturbed by the society around it.

## **5** TIMES SQUARE

As a native New Yorker, I try very hard to avoid visiting this area at all costs. Sure, it was fun as a wide-eyed teen who considered TGI Fridays to be haute cuisine and PacSun to be luxury fashion (I was a terrible person back then). As a young adult, I'd say the most fulfilling aspect of visiting Times Square is being overwhelmed with the people there. Times Square people-watching shouldn't be directed at the tourists who flood the streets, but rather at the slightly deranged characters who set up "shop" for the visitors' entertainment. These would include the array of furies, men dressed as superheroes, the aging and mildly depressing Naked Cowboy, the African American naked cowboy, and the freaky betch who can stand still like the Statue of Liberty.

**1**

**THE PLACE  
WHERE  
BEN FRANKLIN  
PROBABLY  
POOPED,  
OR HOW  
STATEN  
ISLAND  
WON MY COLD,  
DEAD, JUDGMENTAL  
HEART TOUR**



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# THE ADVENTURE



**An intense and ridiculously historical walking tour of the lovely waterside town of Tottenville, caked with (mostly positive) WTF-ery, ending at a haunted house built in the seventeenth century where Ben Franklin once slept and most likely took a dump.**



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# HISTORY

Tottenville is home to the largest pre-European burial ground in New York City (Burial Ridge).

It was also a place of incredible significance during the American Revolution (and colonial times in general).

Once known for “the best oysters in the world,” it gave way to a sprawling maritime industry pioneered by John Totten in the 1800s.

Into the twentieth century, its industry shifted to smelting and oil refining, and included the (former) Atlantic Terra Cotta Company.

Based in Tottenville, the Atlantic Terra Cotta Co. provided all the materials for the Flatiron and Woolworth Buildings.



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# ADVENTURE BACKGROUND

ALL RIGHT, LET ME JUST PUT IT ALL OUT THERE. Staten Island, tied only with New Jersey, is the kind of glorious butt-end of many bad and overused native New Yorker jokes. In our irrational minds, we don't just go to Staten Island—we take a freakin' boat across a freakin' body of water, then take a bus for an indeterminate/unappealing amount of time ... or spend upwards of \$7,000 on a taxi driver who will probably roll his eyes when asked to schlep us out there from Times Square during rush hour right before he was about to grab dinner.

Glorified by VH1's *Mob Wives* and *The Godfather* as a place where people go to “sleep with the fishes,” Staten Island, compared to its borough siblings, doesn't have the best rep in town. What I've learned, however, is that all that shit-talking has successfully closed off a charming, otherworldly, and welcoming borough with a dense and jaw-dropping history—rich enough to make even the worst critic a little less ignorant.

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Staten Island's  
massive garbage  
dump can be seen  
from space.\*



\*SCIENTIFICALLY JANKY yet  
HIGHLY BELIEVABLE FACTOID



Oh who dat  
betch over there?  
THE STATUE OF  
LIBERTY.



**LEGEND**

- TOUR ROUTE
- DETOUR ROUTE
- REVERSE
- TRANSPORTATION
- FOOD
- CHECKPOINT
- ENDPOINT



## **START** 🌍

**Take the 1 train to South Ferry or the R train to Whitehall; see large, blue, over-the-top-fonted sign reading STATEN ISLAND FERRY.**

Depending on the time of day and the day of the week, the ferry should be running every thirty minutes. The true Staten Islanders will be waiting calmly four centimeters away from the large glass gates at the ferry. Try to get to the terminal at a quarter to the hour. If you're true to your descending road to alcoholism, feel free to grab an actual margarita at the most random and WTF-is-this-really-a-bar on the lower level.

On the ferry, you can be a killjoy and angrily Facebook stalk in the enclosed indoor seating areas like a true local. If you're a picture person, butt elbows with the surprisingly aggressive and ever-present French and Asian tourists on the front end or perimeters of the boat. See that thing? That Jersey City. Oh who dat betch over there? THE STATLE OF LIBERTY.

Ferry was good? Drunk from your random margarita? Good. Here, folks, is where things get weird.

➡ **Make a right** out of the gates for boarding THE STATEN ISLAND SUBWAY SYSTEM. Let me repeat: STATEN ISLAND HAS A SUBWAY SYSTEM. One more thing: STATEN ISLAND'S SUBWAY SYSTEM LOOKS LIKE THE REAL SUBWAY. Last one, I promise: THE STATEN ISLAND SUBWAY SYSTEM IS CRAY ONLY IN THE FACT THAT STATEN ISLAND HAS A SUBWAY SYSTEM.

As someone who has been living in this great city my whole life, I was sufficiently mind-blown when I boarded the Staten Island subway. This stroke-inducing awe may not be the natural reaction for most, but come on, guys. STATEN ISLAND HAS A SUBWAY SYSTEM.

On this adventure, we're riding this bad mamma jamma THE WHOLE WAY.

**Get off at Tottenville Station.**



## CHECKPOINT 1



### MAIN STREET

and the giant, decaying, and gutted-out theater with a graffitied sign that reads FOR A GOOD TIME, CALL 1-800-GLEN.

**Exit the outdoor platform at Main Street.**

**Walk one block down Main Street toward Conference Court.**

Built in 1925, this thespian establishment, called the Stadium Theatre, has been used for various period-specific entertainment since its original construction. The last film screening was in the late fifties; then it sat empty until the cocaine-and-Jackson Browne-heavy days of the seventies. The Stadium Theatre reopened as a concert hall and then a funky roller-skating rink until it shut its doors in 1980. A playground for bored middle-schoolers and urban adventurers who sneak in and blaze up in the evening hours, the theater wholeheartedly represents, in an epic way, the glory that once was the now quiet and neglected Main Street.

If you look across the street, note the freaky Masonic Temple.

**↩ Turn left onto Amboy Road.**



After being ratted out to the Revolutionists by a female house servant, Captain Billopp killed her by throwing her down the stairs.

Some people get thrills from house-peeping, and if you're one of them, this strip will definitely get the blood flowing. The houses that aren't marred with gaudy granite steps and unnecessary stone cherubs were built by various men of prominence around the time of the American Revolution. From the Tottenville Library—built by Andrew Carnegie('s money)—to John Totten's house, these prehistoric gems will either give you the creeps, make you nostalgic, or make you jealous because you live in an illegally converted two-bedroom railroad underneath a loud Afro-punk producer who wakes you up every single morning at nine a.m. with a *djembe*. Fortunately, thanks to NYC regulations around historical landmarks, these houses will continue to be protected from marble lions and those stone acornlike statues that look like ribbed butt plugs.

**NOTE:** The Tottenville Historical Society, founded by Linda Hauck (now the director of the society), offers an extremely detailed house-by-house run-through as a downloadable PDF that can be found at [www.tottenvillehistory.com/walking-tour-1940.html](http://www.tottenvillehistory.com/walking-tour-1940.html) enabling you to type in various addresses to see how old a house is and who built it.



**EGGER'S ICE CREAM PARLOR**



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