

An Insider's Guide to Central Park



The Great Lawn in Central Park

Central Park is located in the heart of Manhattan, New York. Manhattan is an island that's commonly referred to as New York City, or just "The City" to New York residents. It's a jungle of concrete with so many varieties of different people that everyone can find their place, even a naked cowboy and a crow man. Both these guys are real people, by the way. The Naked Cowboy usually hangs out in Times Square, though he's been known to make it to Queens on occasion. He's not actually naked—he wears underwear, cowboy boots, and a cowboy hat. What's most impressive about the Naked Cowboy is that he wears this and only this, even in the middle of New York's frigid winters. The crow man is less interesting and a lot more annoying. He wears a hat with a crow feather stuck in its brim and walks the streets of The City. Every once in a while, he'll bellow out an unimaginably loud "CAW," startling anyone walking nearby.

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Unlike the crow man, just about everyone in New York loves Central Park. It's a breath of fresh air (so to speak, The City's air is still pretty polluted) in a bustling and busy city. Many New Yorkers think of Central Park as their happy place, the place where they can see some nature, relax, unwind, and also see some interesting things that are unique to New York.

Let's start with the basics. Central Park is 843 acres. It starts at 59th street and goes all the way up to 110th street. More people visit Central Park each year than any other park in America. The park was first established in 1857 and has grown a bit larger since then.

The first Central Park attraction that most people will tell you about (because you're a kid) is the Central Park Zoo. I personally find the zoo rather meh, and I am a big animal enthusiast. Having lived in Manhattan for a number of years, I've found some much more exciting points of interest.

The place I always loved most was the Great Lawn. The Great Lawn is exactly what its name implies. It's a lawn of great size and a great lawn—seriously, the grass is exquisite for running around on in bare feet in the summer months. Tall trees surround the Great Lawn on all sides, giving you the feeling of a green oasis in a concrete desert. Of course, you can see some tallish buildings over the treetops, but they won't bother you. Several baseball diamonds line the east side of the lawn and you have to sign up and pay to use them.

The Great Lawn is a fabulous location for a picnic. But there are some rules that you have to follow. 1. No dogs allowed: if you think about it, this makes sense because lots of people like to walk around on the Great Lawn barefoot. Dog poo would just ruin that experience. 2. No playing soccer: the park police are more willing to make an



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exception if you're playing barefoot. They say that playing soccer with shoes tears up the grass too much, ruining it for other people.

My next favorite place in Central Park is a smallish paved area called The Mall located at the southeastern tip of a manmade body of water called The Lake. It's always pleasant to walk around The Mall and people-watch. Closer to The Lake is the iconic Bethesda Fountain. It's a popular place to take selfies. A few yards away is the Bethesda Terrace. There's a pedestrian bridge and it's fun to walk underneath or overtop. There are often street performers playing music, singing, or doing other interesting performances right under the bridge.



The Bethesda Fountain

Skater's Circle is not far from The Mall. It's less than a five-minute walk south. Skater's Circle gets pretty exciting on weekends. That's when hundreds of people meet to roller skate. They don't just skate in boring circles, though. Lots



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of the people dance. They come dressed in colorful and interesting outfits and perform all sorts of dance-tastic tricks. In-line skaters are welcome, too, but it's really more of an old-school roller disco. And it's cool, man.

If you're a kid, you might also like the Ancient Playground. It's on the east side of Central Park, right next to the Met. It has kind of an ancient Egyptian feel to it, even though the playground is constructed of mostly concrete, brick, and metal.

The Met is short for Metropolitan Museum of Art. It's a fantastic place to visit if you like art, which I do. The Met actually has a whole section dedicated to ancient Egypt. As a kid, that'll probably be the most interesting part of the museum for you. The museum, by the way, is enormous. There's a lot to see and you can't really expect to see it all in one day. It has mostly older rather than modern art.

The Guggenheim (or the Goog, as many native New Yorkers call it) is the place to go if you like modern art and walking around in circles. The Goog is about a block north of the Met. It is a circular building and, yes, you do walk in circles when you visit. The building was designed so that visitors walk up (or down) a gentle sloping incline as they move through different exhibits in the museum.

There are still plenty more places to explore when you visit Central Park. But if you ever go, I recommend that you start with the places mentioned above. You won't be disappointed!

