

# The Sunday Telegraph

## STARTER FOR 10: NEW YORK

Douglas Rogers on why the city that never sleeps is at its best during the winter months

### SET OFF...

1 Some cities suit a season. For me, New York comes into its own in winter. Sure it gets cold (colder than, say, London) but the sky is an electric blue, the sun shines, and when it snows it buckets down, no half-measures, covering the streets and parks in a blanket of serene white. The city seems suspended in time after a snowfall; sounds are muffled, faces flushed, and the Christmas lights in the department store windows twinkle even brighter.

The fun starts before the snow, in November, with the **Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade** (Thursday November 27 this year). Televised nationally, much of the country wakes up on Thanksgiving Day to watch 50ft (15m) balloons of superheroes and cartoon characters tethered to mobile floats make their way from Central Park down Broadway, through the canyons of Manhattan. The streets get very crowded, so try to base yourself in a hotel on the route. Just don't be surprised to find a giant inflatable Power Ranger staring at you through your window.

The Christmas season, or "The Holidays" as it's called, begins the day after Thanksgiving, with the lighting at the Rockefeller Center in Midtown of "The Tree" – the 70ft (21m) conifer strung with five miles of Christmas lights and topped with a Swarovski crystal star. Of a piece with this is the **Holiday Walk**, where the classic Fifth Avenue department stores Saks, Henri Bendel, Bergdorf Goodman and others decorate their windows with ornate mobiles of the nativity, fairy tales, or snowbound domestic American scenes. This is window shopping at its best.

Of course, no winter visit would be without a show, and the **Radio City Christmas Spectacular** (until December 31) featuring the legendary Rockettes at **Radio City Music Hall** is an iconic song-and-dance extravaganza, now in its 83rd year. Book tickets at radiocitychristmas.com.

### SETTLE IN...

2 **Mandarin Oriental**, 80 Columbus Circus (001 212 895 8809; mandarinoriental.com/newyork) is right on the Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade route and ideally located between Midtown and the Upper West Side, steps from Central Park. The 35th-floor Sky Lobby is a sight to behold, floor-to-ceiling windows looking out on the city and the park. Décor-wise, Asian accents merge with retro elements such as Art Deco chairs and tiled walls in the lobby lounge. Aside from world-class concierge service, don't miss a treatment in the spa set over two floors on the Hudson River side. The lobby lounge is ideal for light snacks, while the modish MBar does inventive cocktails, but the place to be is sleek neo-Asian restaurant Asiate. Doubles from £497.

3 **At The NoMad**, 1170 Broadway (212 796 1500; thenomadhotel.com), French designer Jacques Garcia gave a bohemian-chic makeover to a 12-



storey turn-of-the-century Beaux Arts building in the Flatiron District. The 168 sumptuous rooms, two swanky bars and a restaurant overseen by superstar chef Daniel Humm make it the hottest hotel in town. Inspired by the Paris apartment he lived in as a child, Garcia's interiors combine European elegance – white walls, soaring ceilings, tiled floors – with funky, decadent touches such as tapestry-covered antique furniture, worn and faded Persian rugs, a 200-year-old fireplace, an antique staircase, and a glass atrium-like structure on the ground floor that houses the restaurant. Doubles from £231.

4 **The Ludlow**, 180 Ludlow Street (212 432 1818; ludlowhotel.com) is a Lower East side gem run by master hoteliers Sean MacPherson, Ira Drukier and Richard Born, who have reclaimed an abandoned red-brick building around the corner from Katz's Deli and channelled the area's gritty history in its design. Décor hand-picked by MacPherson (as at The Jane) includes chandeliers and mosaic-

tiled floors in the lobby, sheepskin throws in guestrooms and ornate lamps and rugs sourced from Morocco, India and Indonesia. William Burroughs would feel at home. Cocktails are inspired by classic haunts of Paris and New Orleans; enjoy them in the Lobby Bar & Garden as well as at ground-floor bistro Dirty French. Doubles from £173.

### STEP OUT...

5 **The New York Botanical Garden**, 2900 Southern Boulevard (718 817 8700; nybg.org; grounds-only pass: \$13/£8) in 250 acres of Bronx Park is inspired by London's Royal Botanic Gardens. New York's largest public garden is a living museum of the natural world; with lawns, lakes, conservatories, greenhouses, 50 garden and plant collections and even a forest preserved since pre-settler times, it's hard to believe you're in the heart of The Bronx. It's more than just scenery, though. There are year-round talks, exhibitions and classes on everything from wood crafting to herb maintenance. Don't miss the **Holiday Train**



**Big Apple buzz** (clockwise from above): the **New York Botanical Garden**; the **Ludlow Hotel**; a floating **Buzz Lightyear** balloon during last year's **Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade**; ice skating beside the **Christmas tree at the Rockefeller Center**; **PJ Clarke's**, a legendary Midtown East tavern

**Show** (Nov-Jan) in the tropical warmth of the Enid A. Haupt Conservatory, where hundreds of model trains zip around New York landmarks made of plant parts such as nuts, bark, and leaves. Booking is essential for events such as the **Holiday Train Show**, and recommended during summer weekends, when the gardens are at their busiest.

6 Part of the imperious Rockefeller Center in the heart of Midtown, **Radio City Music Hall** (1260 Sixth Avenue, 212 247 4777; radiocity.com) has been a city landmark for more than 80 years. Opened in 1932, its opulent Art Deco interior is as much part of the attraction as the performers. From the rococo ornamentation to the aluminium and chrome fittings, and plush red curtains and carpeting, it recalls the great movie palaces of Twenties Paris and Berlin.

Regular events include hosting the **Tony Awards**, but the highlight is the **Christmas Spectacular** (until December 31) featuring the all-women dance group The Rockettes. A behind-the-scenes

tour involves going backstage and a close-up look at the Mighty Wurlitzer pipe organ, the largest in any theatre in the United States.

7 Take in the scale of the city from **Top of the Rock**, 30 Rockefeller Plaza (212 698 2000; toptorocknyc.com; \$27/£17), the 70th-floor rooftop observation deck of the imperious GE Building, the centrepiece of Midtown's Art Deco-era Rockefeller Center and home of NBC studios. Built to resemble an ocean liner, the deck has unobstructed panoramas of Central Park to the north, and the Empire State Building to the south – something you obviously don't get from the Empire State Building itself.

Opened in 2005 after a \$70 million overhaul, it has glass safety walls and several vintage coin-slot telescopes through which you can see as far north as The Bronx. Come at night in winter, when the city lights are shrouded in mist. Alongside the Empire State Building, this is probably the most popular ticketed attraction in the city, so

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### SIT DOWN...

8 *La dolce vita* is transplanted to Manhattan at **Casa Lever**, 300 Park Avenue (212 888 2700; casalever.com; lunch around \$52/£33, dinner around \$85/£54). This Milanese eatery is in the modernist 1951 Lever House building that once housed the power-lunch hotspot of that name. The sumptuous interior – red carpets, curved wood counters, Warhol originals – is the theatrical prelude to a menu of Italian classics and Japanese-inspired fish and sushi. Look out for the octopus cavatelli, a seared European sea bass, and the Long Island duck with peas soaked in red wine. If you're feeling really decadent, ask for the truffle menu.

9 Tibeca has plenty of family-friendly spots: the venerable Walker's and the funky Bubby's have long been popular with the Prada pushchair brigade. Joining that list is the affordable and welcoming **Locanda Verde**, 377 Greenwich Street (212 925 3797; locandaverdenyc.com; brunch around \$25/£16, lunch around \$40/£25, dinner around \$55/£35). The latest restaurant of area resident Robert De Niro, within his ultra-trendy Greenwich Hotel. While brunches are an exquisite selection of pastries, lemon ricotta pancakes and variations on eggs Benedict, lunches and dinners are chef's and co-owner Andrew Carmellini's soulful, modern riffs on Italian country cooking. Specialties include squid-ink linguine with Manila clams, pomegranate-glazed duck with Tuscan kale and pancetta, and a fire-roasted garlic chicken (which is enough for two).

10 **PJ Clarke's**, 915 Third Avenue (212 317 1616; pjclarkes.com), a classic Midtown East tavern, has been going strong since 1884. It has a small dining room at the back, but the action is on the street-facing front room with its wood floors, tall windows and raw bar. Here, preppy types flirt over oysters and martinis, the latter immaculately poured by friendly bar staff. Get a seat at the counter among the regulars and order a dozen oysters followed by the cheeseburger. Several scenes from *Mad Men* have been shot here. Ask the bartender where Peggy likes to sit

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