

## GIVE YOUR REGARDS TO BROADWAY

### NAVIGATING NEW YORK'S THEATER DISTRICT

BY LAUREN HAUPTMAN

Broadway is, arguably, New York's most famous street, making its way diagonally through the island Manhattan. As it cuts through the west side of Midtown, it becomes the star — and namesake — of one of the city's biggest attractions: the Theater District, which runs approximately from West 41 to West 54 streets (south to north), and Sixth to Eighth avenues (east to west), and is home to myriad theaters of all sizes.

Speaking of sizes: Don't be fooled into thinking a theater is a Broadway theater by virtue of its location. The term is not defined by a theater's place, but by its size. A New York "playhouse" with more than 499 seats is, officially, a Broadway theater. Case in point: The very-long-running *Perfect Crime* plays on Broadway (at 50th Street), but it is an off-Broadway show (it is also dreadful, so ease on down the road, and skip it). For your reference: A theater with 100–499 seats is called "off-Broadway," and a theater that seats fewer than 100 people is called "off-off-Broadway."

### JUST THE TICKET

The neon lights are bright, and they gave the section of Broadway careening through the Theater District the nickname "The Great White Way." More neon lights joined the party in 2008 with the revamp of the famous TKTS booth at Duffy Square (Broadway and 47<sup>th</sup> Street) and its red-lit steps. TKTS is your best friend for New York theater, offering discounted tickets for same-day shows. There are now three TKTS booths: Times Square, South Street Seaport and Downtown Brooklyn. Just in case you happen to be near one, there are two benefits to the Seaport and Brooklyn outposts: shorter lines, and you can get matinee tickets the day before the show.

In days gone by, you would see locals clutching theater listings from the back of *New York* magazine while waiting on line at TKTS. Alas, *New York* no longer publishes listings, and those in the know use the TKTS app, which lists the shows currently available — or "up" — at the booth (more on the app here [\[link: https://www.tdf.org/nyc/20/TKTS-Mobile-](https://www.tdf.org/nyc/20/TKTS-Mobile-)

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*App*). Availability changes through the day, as tickets sell, and new ones may appear closer to show time. Long-running shows, such as *Chicago*, *Jersey Boys* and *Mamma Mia!*, are often a good bet to be up on TKTS. It may be the impossible dream to count on a show being up on the day you want to see it, and even more of a gamble to wait until closer to show time for more tickets to arrive. So, if you have your heart set on seeing a particular show, pay full price, relax and enjoy.

You may want to consider signing up for the free Playbill Club at [www.playbill.com](http://www.playbill.com), which offers discounts for current and future shows. The Playbill website also provides a very handy “Weekly Schedule of Current Broadway Shows,” [\[link: http://www.playbill.com/celebritybuzz/article/weekly-schedule-of-current-broadway-shows-142774\]](http://www.playbill.com/celebritybuzz/article/weekly-schedule-of-current-broadway-shows-142774) a grid with what is playing when and where, as well as a list of upcoming shows. Other useful free websites and apps for discount tickets and show information are TodayTix [\[link: http://www.todaytix.com/\]](http://www.todaytix.com/), BroadwayBox [\[link: http://www.broadwaybox.com/\]](http://www.broadwaybox.com/) and TheaterMania [\[link: http://www.theatermania.com/\]](http://www.theatermania.com/).

## LET’S GO ON WITH THE SHOW

There are some key things you should keep in mind when choosing a show to see:

- Most theaters are dark on Mondays, as well as Sunday nights.
- Many shows offer matinees (2 pm or 3 pm) on Wednesdays, Saturdays and/or Sundays.
- While most evening performances begin at 8 pm, some theaters have begun start times of 7 pm on Tuesdays (and, more recently, Thursdays!).

On behalf of all theater-goers: Please double-check your start time, and arrive at the theater no less than 15 minutes early (more if you need to use the bathroom); most theaters begin letting you in 30 minutes before show time. If you happen to be seeing a show at the American Airlines Theatre (227 W. 42), come even earlier, show your ticket, and head up to the fifth-floor lounge: You’ve got nothing to do but relax until you go to your seat.

## IN AND AROUND TIMES SQUARE

The Theater District centers around Times Square, at the intersection of Seventh Avenue and Broadway (diagonal!), named in the early 1900s for *The New York Times*, shortly before the ball started dropping there on New Year’s Eve. It became the city’s main theater

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hub after World War I, until the Great Depression, when it began a steady decline into an “adult entertainment” hub. It was not until the 1980s and 1990s that Times Square began to undergo what some call a “Disneyfication,” with family-friendly entertainment, led by big-budget musicals, replacing seedier alternatives. That redevelopment seemed to climax with the opening of gargantuan candy stores and the closing of Broadway (the street) from 42nd to 47th streets to automobiles in 2009.

While it’s hard to argue with the safer feeling of Times Square and the whole Theater District today, making the crowded stretch around Duffy and Times squares an even-more crowded, pedestrian-only zone still raises the ire of some New Yorkers. Further, a growing cadre of giant costumed characters now makes the area their stomping grounds, bringing back some of the seedier elements of yesteryear. Please remember: Most of these characters are not “officially sanctioned.” Nor are they there for your benefit. It’s a hard-knock life, and they are there to make a buck; they’ve been known to become nasty or even violent if you don’t give them what they want. If you’re here with kids, think of the infamous molesting Elmo as a warning to keep your babes in arms.

Tickle-you Elmo notwithstanding, the pedestrian area does offer the benefit of empty chairs at empty tables, where you can recalibrate and rest for free during warmer months. If you need a bathroom, try the Marriott Marquis, just a jump to the left of the TKTS booth. Nice bathrooms are open to the public on the main-lobby (eighth) floor of the hotel, which has housed its very own theater, the Marquis, since 1986. The Marquis is one of only three Broadway theaters that is, in fact, on Broadway (the street).

## MAYBE REAL NEARBY

Once you have tickets in hand, you may want somewhere that’s green for a respite. Consider nearby Bryant Park [[link: www.bryantpark.org/](http://www.bryantpark.org/)], between Fifth and Sixth avenues and 40th and 42nd streets, behind the New York Public Library. Once known as “Needle Park,” it underwent a renaissance of its own in the 1980s and 1990s. In winter, it is taken over by an ice-skating rink, but during warmer months, it’s de-lovely, with decidedly fewer crowds, peace and quiet and open air.

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If it's beginning to snow, or if it's too darn hot to sit outside, go west to "Theater Row," a group of off-Broadway theaters on 42nd Street, between Ninth and 10th avenues. At 480 W. 42nd Street (closer to 10th, on the south side of the street), The Pershing Signature Center's upstairs lounge offers comfy couches, a bookstore and a *café/bar* [[link: http://www.signaturetheatre.org/Visit/Cafe.aspx](http://www.signaturetheatre.org/Visit/Cafe.aspx)] — all open to the public in a Frank Gehry-designed building. It is also home to the Signature Theatre Company (*Sex and the City*'s Cynthia Nixon directed a play here in early 2015), which makes a superb argument for considering an off-Broadway show. Another plus for off-Broadway: Many shows get their start in smaller venues before opening on Broadway. Case in point: Greenwich Village's Public Theater debuted the brilliant (really brilliant) musical *Hamilton*; the show's run at the Public quickly sold out, and it was set to transfer to a Broadway theater in summer 2015. There is nothing better than being able to say, "Oh yes, I saw it when it was off-Broadway," when your friends mention a big Broadway smash.

## FOOD, GLORIOUS FOOD

You will surely want a nosh before or after your show. Thinking about the Olive Garden, smack in the middle of Times Square? Tell me it's not true. There are so many real New York restaurants throughout the Theater District from which you may choose. Maybe this time you could try one of the more than 20 dining options on Restaurant Row (46<sup>th</sup> Street, between Eighth and Ninth avenues). If you are hoping for a star-sighting, Joe Allen (326 W. 46) and Sardi's (234 W. 44) are still popular (though overpriced) hangouts for Broadway babies. Sardi's reportedly offers a discounted Actor's Menu on Wednesdays, so actors can dine between their matinee and evening performances.

If you are not staying within walking distance of your theater, head east when your show lets out, as it will be much easier to catch a cab (look for one whose toplight is lit) away from the old time throng. With the lullaby of Broadway singing in your head, kiss today goodbye and start planning what to see tomorrow.

*With thanks to veteran theater-goers Andrew Marcus, Marsha Mercant, Marco Baria and Aileen Zim.*

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#### LINK RECAP:

BroadwayBox: [www.broadwaybox.com](http://www.broadwaybox.com)

Bryant Park: [www.bryantpark.org](http://www.bryantpark.org)

Joe Allen: [www.joeallenrestaurant.com](http://www.joeallenrestaurant.com)

Playbill Club: [www.playbill.com](http://www.playbill.com)

Playbill's Weekly Schedule of Current Broadway Shows:

[www.playbill.com/celebritybuzz/article/weekly-schedule-of-current-broadway-shows-142774](http://www.playbill.com/celebritybuzz/article/weekly-schedule-of-current-broadway-shows-142774)

Sardi's: [www.sardis.com](http://www.sardis.com)

Signature Center Café: [www.signaturetheatre.org/Visit/Cafe.aspx](http://www.signaturetheatre.org/Visit/Cafe.aspx)

TheaterMania: [www.theatermania.com](http://www.theatermania.com)

TKTS app: [www.tdf.org/nyc/20/TKTS-Mobile-App](http://www.tdf.org/nyc/20/TKTS-Mobile-App)

TodayTix: [www.todaytix.com](http://www.todaytix.com)