

Samar's Declassified NYC Survival Guide

Updated September 2025

I moved to this city in 2021 and immediately felt something akin to culture shock, which is strange to experience in your own country. I was ill-equipped to handle my new lifestyle in the East Village, and now, Brooklyn, but my practice of recording every experience in this guide has become a means of catharsis. It's truly a survival guide.

What I've learned is that NYC is not for the spontaneous. It's a Type A paradise requiring meticulous planning, and there's a never ending list of things to do precisely because it cannot be done in one fell swoop. However, I urge you to look for the hidden gems of NYC, to move beyond the listicles and hotspots, and to find your local 'Sal.' Good luck and godspeed.

Americana

Worth It Winner: ♥ Little Rebel

I don't want to blow up my favorite spot, but the world needs to know what the perfect go-to bar is. The ambience is chic, with a few TVs that sometimes play sports, but sometimes Harry Potter marathons. The walls are adorned with celebrity mugshots and the food is GF-friendly, with some of the best wings and fried chicken you can have at a bar. Drinks are \$11-14.

Honorable Mention: ♥ Jacob's Pickles

After seeing Hasan Minhaj at Beacon Theater, we needed food on the Upper West Side and this was the only place I knew of. We were BLOWN away by the buffalo chicken mac & cheese, the pickles, and the insanely enormous portions. The patty melt made me feel sick, but I'd eat it again if I could.

Honorable Mention: ♥ Crown Shy

I went here with some true connoisseurs of fine dining. They scrutinized the service, the silverware changes, and the open kitchen. Seasonal favorites included the pork katsu, tuna toast, paneer grits, and the free pistachio bread.

Honorable Mention: ♥ Sweetwater

As a last minute reservation for six in their garden, Sweetwater surprised us by how cute and delicious it ended up being. I got two gimlets, calamari, a half chicken, and their famous french onion soup – all hits, no misses. If you can't hack Bernie's, go to Sweetwater.

Honorable Mention: ♥ Ferns

Ferns' bacon hits, the espresso martini foam ratio is phenomenal, and the lush ambience is true to name. It's perfect for a lowkey brunch that still feels Instagram-worthy.

Honorable Mention: ♥ Walter's

After Daisy was laid off, we needed some comfort food in our bodies. We ventured out into the rain and sat on Walter's patio, treating ourselves to steak frites and a roasted half chicken. The portions are immense, and every bite was absolutely succulent – I wanted to lick the plate.

Honorable Mention: ♥ Amber Steak House

I had sworn off overpriced steak in NYC until I found this joint two blocks away from my new Greenpoint apartment. We got a fatty ribeye, mashed potatoes, and white sauce mussels for a cool hundo. If someone handed me a benjamin right now, I know where I'd go.

Honorable Mention: ♥ Dinner Party

A four-course meal for \$70 with a weekly rotating menu and communal seating for those feeling chatty. Unfortunately, we were seated with a couple that kept making out. The flavors were complex and fresh, but every dish was a little sweet. The wine pairing was excellent.

Honorable Mention: ♥ Evelina

A small, cozy, but still upscale cafe in Fort Greene. We went for brunch, and I swear the braised short ribs with heirloom polenta could throw me against a WALL. The staff is also so gorgeous.

Honorable Mention: ♥ Freemans

Tucked in a graffitied alleyway in the Lower East Side is Freemans. It definitely makes an impression – the interior is gorgeous, the food is decent, and I cannot wait to drink wine on the patio in the back. Highly recommend the seared spanish octopus and brussel sprouts.

Honorable Mention: 📍 The Butcher's Daughter

Unexpected delights here. The mushroom and squash carbonara, paired with a cheeky slice of artichoke heart quesadilla, fills your tummy but leaves you feeling refreshed and comfortable for the walk home. The brussies are a lil' sweet, if that's your thing.

Honorable Mention: 📍 abc kitchen

The hype surrounding Jean-Georges' abc kitchen was a bit too high for the tasteless Chilean sea bass in spinach broth. But the dining room, made from 'salvaged, reclaimed, and recycled' materials is still worth a trip for any budding interior designer, ne pas West Elm Caleb.

Honorable Mention: 📍 Bernie's

Bernie's is cool. Our hot waitress was a famous TikToker with 500K followers and a penchant for flirtation (got us to tip 25%). For being Kaitlyn Lavery's favorite restaurant, I found the menu and food deeply underwhelming (vinegar chicken, chicken parm). But the vibes saved it.

Rare Miss: 📍 Gage & Tollner

A real disappointment – I was SO excited for this famous NYC steakhouse. The crust on the NY Strip was borderline charcoal and the kimchi-butter clams were gritty. But the Parker House Rolls slapped, and I will be back to try the speakeasy upstairs.

Other Favorites: 📍 Ruby's Cafe 📍 Essex 📍 Treadwell Park - Uptown 📍 Superfine

📍 Odd Sister 📍 Peaches Prime 📍 MUD SPOT aka MUD 📍 Malibu Farm New York

📍 Cafe Mado 📍 Friend Of A Farmer - Gramercy Park 📍 Three Decker Diner

📍 Rosemary's East 📍 Alfie's Kitchen & Craft Beer Bar

Pizza

Worth It Winner: 📍 John's of Bleecker Street

On Saturday, I went to John's on Bleecker Street. On Sunday, Alina saw a guy wearing a John's t-shirt in Texas. When you do pizza right for 100 years, no one has any right to judge you. Their pizzas are pricey compared to the dollar slice, but everything about their coal-fired crusts just feels right.

Honorable Mention: 📍 Mama's TOO! Pizzeria West Village

I was definitely skeptical of these ridiculously thick slices of vodka and cacio e pepe pizza, but they were actually crispy and incredible. The real star of the show, however, is the chicken cutlet alla vodka sandwich. Skip the house slice.

Honorable Mention: 📍 Rubirosa

While the Rubirosa supreme pizza was delicious, the TIE DYE™ pizza (vodka + pesto) is entirely overhyped. I mean, they even trademarked the thing. But the fact that they have gluten-free as an elite Italian establishment means that it's worth it to deal with the sassy employees.

Honorable Mention: 📍 Emmett's on Grove

You may consider it a crime to get Chicago tavern-style pizza in NYC. I'm not talking deep dish – common mistake. Tavern-style is that square pizza with small, versatile slices that you inevitably eat 20 of because they don't feel real. The Hot Poppy is macadocious.

Honorable Mention: 📍 L'Industrie Pizzeria

Waited at 9pm on a Friday for 30 minutes (not bad) to try this famous slice. The staff is kind, the ordering system is chaotic, and the pizza is good, but left me wanting for a better cheese pull.

Honorable Mention: 📍 Upside Pizza

Sure, Upside isn't the best pizza, nor the best prices, but it's half pizza shop (Upside), half soft-serve joint (Softside), and half speakeasy in the back (Ask for Janice). Personally, I love it here, and it's fine if you don't!

Honorable Mention: 📍 Joe's Pizza

Had to include a \$3 slice for a drunk end of the night cravings situation. The crust is so crunch. The flavors are so balanced. That's the best analysis I can do considering I have never had it sober.

Rare Miss: 📍 Artichoke Basille's Pizza

Literally offensive. Some descriptions: greasy-in-the-wrong-ways, one-bite-makes-you-feel-sick, not-even-heated-properly, forget-about-it. Don't fall for their marketing.

Other Favorites: 📍 Emmy Squared: East Village, New York 📍 Fini Pizza 📍 Appas Pizza

📍 Paulie Gee's 📍 Rome to Brooklyn, pizza & panzerotti

Burgers, Hot Dogs, Delis

Worth It Winner: 📍 Minetta Tavern

Holy shitballs. My body was not prepared for the grilled oysters, lobster roll, and life-changing bone marrow. The ambience makes me want to become a full-time mob boss. The Black Label Burger is slightly overhyped – order it MEDIUM or you'll be eating raw cow.

Honorable Mention: 📍 Smør

For \$13, I enjoyed a delicious iced latte and the best hotdog I have ever had. When I say hot dog, I don't mean those Coney Island monstrosities. I mean elevated, hand-crafted weenies dressed with remoulade and crisped onion. I'm a weenie lover, and this one shined.

Honorable Mention: 📍 7th Street Burger

A sweaty Niagara night is not complete without chowing down on the city's best smashburger. Only acceptable seating is on the sidewalk stoop. You're guaranteed to make an equally drunk friend.

Honorable Mention: 📍 Corner Bistro

'The Last of the Bohemian Bars.' Apparently Anthony Bourdain ate here once, and you know I'm a slut for that man. Very old school vibes, the kind that inspired Piano Man by Billy Joel, and the juicy Bistro Burger is cooked to perfection.

Honorable Mention: 📍 Frankel's Delicatessen & Appetizing

My first time having pastrami! It was like if a brisket and a hot dog had a baby. I became an instant fan – though I would definitely get more creative with it than house it between dense white bread, mustard, and cheese. Frankel's delivered – Katz is next.

Honorable Mention: 📍 Gotham Burger Social Club

We went to the Greenpoint outpost inside of Threes Brewing. \$9 for a single patty smashburger with the works, including jalapeños and pickles (not bad). The frickles are also excellent.

Other Favorites: 📍 Cozy Royale 📍 Emily: West Village

French, Italian, Spanish

Worth It Winner: 📍 Marylou

Stumbled on this marvel near Astor Place and I swear, it was like a scene out of a Parisian film. We order wine, mussels, mashed potatoes (but swear on the ribeye for next time). There's little space, so we get sandwiched next to an actor named Jimmy who knows the jazz singer crooning in the corner. Soon we're all chatting it up – a real New York moment.

Honorable Mention: 📍 Forma Pasta Factory

An absolute gem in Greenpoint, go during golden hour after skateboarding around McCarren Park. Try the handmade, insanely fresh mafaldine scampi for only \$12 (now \$13, now \$14!), which is simply the best deal known to man. They even do gluten-free!

Honorable Mention: 📍 C. Di Palo

After my friends said they were running an hour late to our hotpot date, Daisy and I stumbled into this absolutely delightful wine bar. We were given tastings of fine Italian wines, free cheese and focaccia, and the best goddamn service I have had in this city.

Honorable Mention: 📍 LaRina Pastificio & Vino

Adorable pasta spot in Brooklyn with the best lasagna in NYC, according to the foodie couple we dined with (better than i Sodi and Don Angie). But to me, the best dish of the night was the agnolotti, filled with braised beef and a black lime sage sauce.

Honorable Mention: 📍 Mama Mia

This family-owned joint in Midtown is a testament to Italians everywhere. We came in for a cappuccino and dessert, but left wishing we had spent our whole evening here. The Spumoni Bomba, filled with layers of gelato and chocolate, was inhaled in one minute flat.

Honorable Mention: 📍 Epistrophy

Although I did have to look up where Sardinia was on a map (it's in Italy), I was quite excited to find this laid-back gem in Nolita that serves up delicious drinks and clean, vibrant flavors. Get the seared calamari and the eponymous house cocktail.

Honorable Mention: 📍 St. Mazie Bar & Supper Club

Had dinner here for Valentine's Day because their ambiance is unmatched. Good jazz, great chicken pot pie, and slightly underwhelming short rib. The new waiter we had erroneously delivered a cake to our neighboring table that said, "I slept with the bride." Intriguing!

Honorable Mention: 📍 Bea

Perfect place to go right before a Broadway show. The menu is diverse, but I recommend the spinach tagliatelle. Sit in the backroom, which is romantic but still eclectic.

Honorable Mention: 📍 LELABAR

A wine bar in the West Village with unmatched quality but absolutely painful prices. Get the orange wine, gambas al ajillo, and the meatball pita.

Rare Miss: 📍 Senza Gluten

Daisy is obviously upset as I type this right next to her, but I have to tell the truth. While the ambience is great, the prices do not justify the mediocre pasta and the cardboard bread. There are so many ways to make gluten-free food delicious, and this ain't it.

Other Favorites: 📍 Cecconi's Dumbo 📍 Vic's 📍 Boucherie Union Square

Bagels & Bakeries

Worth It Winner: 📍 Tompkins Square Bagels

While the line curls around the entire store, you'll never be bored deciding your order, watching the bagel lords call out to each other, or staring absentmindedly at the gelato-like mounds of cream cheese. Be adventurous, and prepare for a tummy ache.

Honorable Mention: 📍 Nick + Sons Bakery

Best croissant I've ever had. You can just tell these guys know what they're doing. I brought a few pastries in for my watchmakers, and they texted me to ask the address so they could go back. Now that's a testament to good pastry.

Honorable Mention: 📍 The Blue Light Speak Cheesy

Unbelievable find – they have a rotating daily menu known for their breakfast tacos, burritos, and buns. We got the Fling, gluten-free, and it was love at first bite. Unbelievable quality, such cute vibes, and we will be back to try every single item.

Honorable Mention: 📍 Peter Pan Donut & Pastry Shop

The iconic donut shop with pink-and-blue uniforms that are featured in Spiderman: No Way Home. It's still dirt cheap, cash-only, and very yummy, but I must have terrible donut taste because I don't love their honey glaze. Criminal of me. Shame.

Honorable Mention: 📍 Konditori

Konditori, a Swedish espresso bar, was the first bagel place I ever visited in NYC, and my rediscovery of it three years later was emotional. Their gluten-free BEC with peppery cream cheese and avocado was banging, but jeez, \$19 for a bagel sandwich?

Honorable Mention: 📍 Black Seed Bagels

This is the ritziest bagel place ever – what other bagelry can claim seasonal ramp cream cheese, a mobile app, and a partnership with Raaka to make 'Everything Bagel Crunch' chocolate bars? But the cheese pull on the gluten-free BEC was very epic, so the \$9 was worth it.

Honorable Mention: 📍 Radio Bakery

A very hyped bakery that apparently crushes in the savory department. They were all out of their french onion soup croissants, so I picked up a citrusy tuna salad sandwich that was fine.

Rare Miss: 📍 Bagel Boss

As a premiere bagel caterer, I thought that it would be perfect for the 40-person Pride party I was throwing at 10am. But when they charged \$18 for a tub of cream cheese, it was highway robbery. And the gluten-free option was a frozen bagel from the grocery store.

Other Favorites: 📍 Baker's Dozen 📍 Bagel Pub 📍 Bagel World 📍 Bagelsmith
📍 Bergen Bagels 📍 Pan Pan

Cafes

Worth It Winner: 📍 Postmark Cafe

The coziest cafe in New York. It's located right under my girlfriend's place in Park Slope, so nothing makes me happier than waking up and walking outside to get the best latte/cold brew I have had in this city. They have a community fridge right outside (which I helped paint).

Honorable Mention: 📍 Hide & Seek and 📍 Red Rover

I love this cafe-slash-cocktail-bar so much, I decided to throw my brand's launch party here. The interior decor and artistic style of this place is off the walls (or on the walls), and the staff are very approachable. Red Rover, its sister, is a little more laidback, but equally as gorgeous.

Honorable Mention: 📍 Campbell & Co.

Lil' coffee shop and snax grocery outlet. Secretly enjoyed the vanilla latte slushie they have. Great vibes near McGolrick for your pre- or post- farmers market outing.

Honorable Mention: 📍 787 Coffee

A cute, colorful Puerto Rican coffee shop with a few locations, one very close to me (thank god) and one on 7th street that features indoor swings. Great cold brew, optionally infused with rum or mint, and the empanadas should not be slouched on.

Honorable Mention: 📍 La Cabra

The definition of third-wave coffee. An Aarhus-based coffee company with big dreams to move to NYC. Their cold brew is a light roast, which makes it incredibly floral, but their latte is perfectly balanced. You can watch the baristas work from behind their beautifully-architected counter.

Honorable Mention: 📍 PlantShed Cafe

I love how delightful this coffee & plant shop is – perfect for working, filled with plants, and never overwhelmingly busy. The cold brew is elite, especially in the spring when they offer up a cherry vanilla variety.

Honorable Mention: 📍 Prima Brooklyn

My favorite spot in Clinton Hill to bring a book, grab a coffee, and perhaps write about my feelings. It turns into a wine bar around 4pm, and is also a great meeting spot for long-lost relatives.

Honorable Mention: 📍 Café Lyria

It was raining cats and dogs during our day out in Nolita, so we stumbled into this beautiful cafe, which was understandably packed but still provided a homey refuge. It's Greek-inspired, so be sure to get the freddo.

Honorable Mention: 📍 Crossroads Cafe

A Knickerbocker classic. Like many things in Bushwick, the outside is not indicative of the inside. They have chocolatey cold brew, a good selection of bites, and very kind staff, as well as a decently sized working and chatting area.

Rare Miss: 📍 The Alchemists Kitchen

\$12 for an iced latte with oat milk with a shot of 'joy' which made it virtually undrinkable. Honestly traumatic.

Other Favorites: 📍 Coffee Project New York | East Village 📍 The Roost 📍 Café-Flor

📍 Principles GI Coffee House 📍 All The Kings Horses Cafe

📍 Brooklyn Roasting Company 📍 ad hoc collective coffee + shoppe 📍 Vineapple Café

📍 Commune 📍 Nostrand Coffee Roaster 📍 Café Grumpy - Greenpoint 📍 Homecoming

Mediterranean & Middle Eastern

Worth It Winner: 📍 Mamoun's Falafel - Greenwich Village, Manhattan, NY

The chicken kebob and shawarma are top tier, and the creamy rice brings it all together. However, add their 'hot sauce,' which is really just acrid molten lava, and the bowl quickly becomes unpalatable. The location in Greenwich Village is 2x better.

Honorable Mention: 📍 Pita Palace

No frills hole-in-the-wall in Williamsburg that is cash only and features a father and his sons working diligently to get you the best kofta sandwich of all time.

Honorable Mention: 📍 Miss Ada

Been here twice now – once for dinner, once for brunch, and I think the brunch is more worth it at the price point. My favorite dishes include the malawach pancake and the merguez hummus bowl, and you can't forget the round lil' pitas.

Honorable Mention: 📍 Shuka

Shuka is an approachable upscale dining experience that will please the toughest critic. The best dish is the fried halloumi, and you have to order the dips to go with the perfectly puffy bread. Split the spit roasted chicken shawarma and the sirloin kebab with a friend – trust me.

Honorable Mention: 📍 Au Za'atar

Let's be real here, Au Za'atar is really delicious. The dips, the pita, the kebabs, all amazing. But the prices were what I struggled with. And the lack of a standout dish – their tableside shawarma is very one note, and most of the volume comes from the mound of fries.

Honorable Mention: 📍 Pomp and Circumstance

P&C attempts to be upscale without much of a thought of what that truly entails. While the food was actually really good (labneh, risotto, braised chicken), the space was cramped and the service was less than courteous.

Honorable Mention: 📍 Ayat East Village

Sister of al Badawi, this Palestinian spot in the East Village is really solid. The portions are huge, the bread is outstanding, and the Mansaf + Chicken Ouzi were the perfect combo.

Honorable Mention: 📍 Sahara East

Good vibes, good hookah and seriously delicious shawarma. Bring a big group that is ready to wine and dine – our bill for six clocked out at over \$500. Don't be put off by the entrance' aesthetic, just go to the back patio. NO LONGER GOOD.

Other Favorites: 📍 Pera Soho 📍 Olea 📍 al Badawi 📍 Medusa The Greek 📍 Döner Haus
📍 Holy Pita 📍 PITA GRILL BK

Latin American

Worth It Winner: 📍 Taqueria Ramirez

This is it, folks. The closest you can get to a Mexico City taco is right here (albeit at 4x the price). Perfect suadero, al pastor, campechano, and nopales. Served from a cute indoor-outdoor Greenpoint shop where you can pile the salsas and toppings high.

Honorable Mention: 📍 Colonia Verde

Heard of a no-skip album? Well, this might be a no-skip menu. We ordered four things, but gravitated toward about 20. Everything was insane, from the duck confit tacos to the bone marrow with pão de queijo, with the heavy hitter being the cast iron blackened pork chop.

Honorable Mention: 📍 Alta Calidad

Alta's generosity knows no bounds. After an unfortunate 30-minute wait for our table, they apologetically brought out \$50 worth of apps and spritzers to make up for it. The short rib was unbelievable, the charred cauliflower fucks, and the halloumi queso fundido... you get it.

Honorable Mention: 📍 Oxomoco

A new MICHELIN-starred Mexican place, reminiscent of those sexy CDMX locales that only the insiders know about. Order the popcorn, the lamb barbacoa tacos, and the mezcal-infused cocktails. Surprisingly, skip the pollo, it's a little dry for \$44.

Honorable Mention: 📍 Sobre Masa

Like the name suggests, it's all about the tortillas here. Meaning they give you a hunk of pull-apart meat with some toppings and let you build your own tacos. AKA my favorite way to eat tacos. Their chips and guac are also excellent, unsurprisingly, and the ambience is fantastic.

Honorable Mention: 📍 Ursula Brooklyn

I was expecting this to be the best breakfast burrito in existence, and it... was. The chorizo, egg, and hash all complimented each other fabulously, and every bite was magical. However, if I could add a smidge more texture (read: crunch) I would.

Honorable Mention: 📍 Guacuco Bushwick

I'm not the biggest fan of Venezuelan, as I find it to be too sweet and cheesy for my liking, but the arepas here are nothing to slouch on, especially the arepa parrillada with a side of their rice and beans. Divine.

Honorable Mention: 📍 GRAN ELÉCTRICA

Finally, I got to check out this infamous Mexican backyard locale in DUMBO, and it lived up to the hype. The guacamole was epic and the adobo chicken quesadilla was very flavorful, but the quesobirria tacos were a letdown.

Honorable Mention: ♥ Empellon Al Pastor

Solely for the insanely cool aesthetic, I give you Al Pastor, an offshoot of the Empellón taco kingdom of New York that serves food in a hyper-casual environment (read: shroomy, dark, amazing Reggaeton remixes). I got the Jamaica Fizz, and will go back to try \$3 late night tacos.

Rare Miss: ♥ Poco NYC

It seems like a great opportunity at first. \$5 margs, \$1 tacos, and a dance party on Thursdays until close. We roll up with the crew – it's too loud for human eardrums. I have two innocent drinks, but then black out an hour later. I'm positive they're dosed with Everclear. Stay safe, kiddos.

Rare Miss: ♥ Malecon

Ate this while walking the entire length of Manhattan! Apparently we went to the wrong location (UWS instead of the Heights) and ordered the wrong thing (fried rice instead of the gorgeous roasted 'tissi), so I take the blame for this miss. But damn, it was awful.

Other Favorites: ♥ Los Tacos Al Pastor ♥ Taqueria Diana ♥ La Palapa ♥ Birria LES

♥ Birria-Landia NYC ♥ Habana Outpost ♥ Empanada Mama LES

♥ Fogo de Chão Brazilian Steakhouse ♥ Taqueria El Chato ♥ Tacocina

Southeast Asian

Worth It Winner: ♥ Soothr

My love for Soothr began on day one. After a harrowing move-in, I brought my parents to this quaint joint for their renowned Koong Karee, a MICHELIN plate. We were entirely wowed by the beef Pad Krapow and the freshness of the ingredients. Since, I've come to recognize the hit-or-miss nature of Soothr, but it's owned by lesbians and tastes fucking good so who cares.

Honorable Mention: ♥ Madame Vo

My new comfort food. I had the Madame Pho, the broth of which could get me pregnant. I literally drank it from the carton the morning after. Add grilled pork chops, and you've got a happy meal.

Honorable Mention: ♥ Thai Diner

We headed to Wayla for a Tuesday date night, only to find that everything was hella expensive and not gluten-free. So we quickly Uber Eats'd the braised duck leg with rice noodles and the massaman curry at Thai Diner, which has a really unique Y2K internet presence and a popping location. And the food surpassed every expectation (and continues to every time I go back).

Honorable Mention: ♥ Bayon

Went with Alyssa, a Cambodian expat who steered our order and actually hugged the waitress. Everything was delicious, but my favorite dishes were the fried vegetable dumplings (not what you think) and the Baked Amok. Wish I could buy all of their dishware, 'twas gorg.

Honorable Mention: 📍 Di An Di

This cute Vietnamese spot is perfect for a date, with warm bowls of pho and a really solid selection of small plates. I went with my two bosses, so decidedly NOT a date, but we still bonded over the yummy food.

Honorable Mention: 📍 Monsieur Vo

Monsieur, just like Madame, does NOT play around. The market price beef shank was a showstopper (\$125), the caviar was fresh, and the rice paper x meat platter was so fun to construct ourselves. Go with a group that's ready to ball out.

Honorable Mention: 📍 SUKH

A great pick-me-up after a truly awful day. SUKH, modeled after a Thai railway car, had exquisite bites and the best Khao Soi I've ever tried. Get the Hor Mok and their non-alcoholic cocktails too.

Honorable Mention: 📍 Hanoi House

We showed up at 10pm, haggard and wanting for a bowl of soup. We were welcomed into the dark, intense yet welcoming interior, where I was treated to bone marrow pho and a jungle drink. It's all a lovely blur.

Honorable Mention: 📍 Chinta Thai

Deeply cute Thai spot in Greenpoint that's become our go-to delivery. But on a nice day, we ventured to the actual restaurant and got cute menus, spectacular service, and a yummy drink, Chinta Wild Garden, that we will try to reverse engineer because it was cracked.

Honorable Mention: 📍 KRAAM

Kraam surprised me – I had low expectations for this lowkey work dinner in Midtown, but my goodness did it deliver. It went three-for-three with the Curry Tart, Okra, and Confit Chicken Khao Soi.

Honorable Mention: 📍 Sappe

Sappe is cramped, loud, and maybe not the best place to take your family on Mother's Day. But what saves this place (and sister restaurant of Soothr) is the food – the Crying Tiger beef, Zaab wings, and flash fried cuttlefish were unforgettable.

Honorable Mention: 📍 Bricolage

While I would not get the Pho Ga at this quaint Vietnamese-French spot in Brooklyn, I would absolutely go for the Coconut Green Curry Lamb Shank or Spicy Garlic Noodles. Those slap, no cap. Very worth a date night.

Rare Miss: 📍 Thaimee Love

A rough Wednesday night is finding out that the hip new Thai place you wanted to try does not yet have a liquor license. Although the flavors are incredible, the service was trash, our order was wrong, and the fish head was straight out of Bikini Bottom.

Rare Miss: 📍 Forever Thai

A bad introduction to East Williamsburg. When you go 0 for 3 on dishes for the night, you're on my shitlist. Given the fact that it was packed on a Tuesday night, I had extremely high hopes, but the Duck Bun, Guay Tiew Pad Thai, and Larb Gai were smelly, dry, and awful.

Other Favorites: 📍 Luck Thai 📍 Thai Holic 📍 Laut 📍 Lula Mae

📍 Lemongrass Brooklyn 📍 Little Mo 📍 Sea Thai Brooklyn

Chinese & Taiwanese

Worth It Winner: 📍 Spicy Village

This was a spiritual experience for me. I had never sampled authentic Chinese food, only the greasy fare that had almost ended my life during a sophomore year food poisoning episode. Get the spicy dry hand-pulled noodles with chicken, and wonder how different your life could have been if you had only known.

Honorable Mention: 📍 Málà Project

Amazing Sichuan Dry Pot (Bib Gourmand). I went with a friend and snotted up a storm eating the incredibly fiery, delicious combination of meat, seafood, and vegetables in the secret Málà sauce. That shit was embarrassing, but I couldn't care less.

Honorable Mention: 📍 LaoJie Hotpot Manhattan | 老街火锅 | 曼哈顿火锅

If you've never done hotpot, this is an approachable spot in Chinatown that uncovered the magic of communal soup pots that cook noodles and meats in seconds. I undercooked everything due to impatience, but the sauce bar covered up my mistakes. Reminder: don't wear white.

Honorable Mention: 📍 Birds of a Feather

Five friends and I did a walk-in at this upscale Sichuan spot, which was incredibly lucky as it filled up 10 minutes later. Every dish was to die for, from the cold noodles and wood ear mushrooms to the mapo tofu and poached wontons. The interior is cozy and gorgeous.

Honorable Mention: 📍 The Dolar Shop Manhattan

I took my parents here to give them an upscale hotpot experience and it almost killed them. Granted, I only ordered the spicy szechuan broth, as the other more obvious pork-based ones were out of the question. We coughed and cried, but were saved by the free ice cream and boba.

Honorable Mention: 📍 Buddakan

If I could have a casual celebrity run-in anywhere, I would expect it to be here. The interior is a surreal interpretation of a Buddhist temple infused with speakeasy vibes. It's huge. And if you split the pork buns and the dim sum tasting with a friend, you'll inspire immense envy.

Honorable Mention: 📍 TAO Downtown Restaurant

Right across the street from Buddakan – it's basically the same exact vibe except Tao also has a nightclub in the back. My work decided to book a dinner there, so I tried basically the entire menu and can say that every dish is delish, but beware of the super sexual fortune cookies.

Rare Miss: 📍 Joe's Ginger

It was the Year of the Tiger, and I just had to celebrate the Lunar New Year by trying my first soup dumpling. We stumbled on world-famous Joe's Ginger before the line erupted out the door

– score. But the dumplings, while at first delicious, became super heavy in my tummy. And the service, perhaps due to the overwhelm, could not get us our goddamn check.

Rare Miss: 📍 Spicy Moon

Call me a hater, but this vegan szechuan spot was not it. Sorry, but if you can't even get scallion pancakes right, there's no excuse.

Other Favorites: 📍 Hometown Hotpot & BBQ 📍 Super Taste 📍 Han Dynasty Brooklyn
📍 Da Long Yi Hot Pot 📍 Mama Lee 📍 Breeze 📍 Momofuku Noodle Bar

Korean

Worth It Winner: 📍 Osamil

I've seen a lot of Korean food on TikTok, and before Osamil, I could only dream of its flavor. Johnson Tang? Seafood Tokbokki? Kimchi Fried Rice? Everything was so unique and scrumptious – it reminds you how big the world is when you try something so new.

Honorable Mention: 📍 Haenyeo

Not everyone agrees that Haenyeo is elite Korean food, but they probably didn't have a sugar mama pay for the entire bill. We went in on the dukboki fundido, bulgogi, and had to splurge on the daily fish selection, since the restaurant is known for seafood. The banchan slapped, and we polished off every dish.

Honorable Mention: 📍 Mokyo

A brother of Thursday Kitchen, the fluorescent juice pouch-style drinks carried the experience. While I don't quite remember the food selections (there were quite a few), I do remember the corn fritters being top-tier.

Honorable Mention: 📍 Let's Meat BBQ

Forgive the tacky name – Let's Meat is an elite AYCE experience for only about \$48. We went only two rounds before getting extremely full between the New York strips, bulgogi, and endless banchan. Tip: stick with the beef and avoid the seafood.

Honorable Mention: 📍 MONO+MONO

A beautiful, cavernous enclave of brooding lighting, jungle trimmings, nooks for hidden tables, and records that rotate around the ceiling. The drinks were absolutely bomb, but the food was average.

Other Favorites: 📍 Barn Joo Union Square

Japanese

Worth It Winner: 📍 Ume

The most thoughtful meal I have ever experienced. I arrived in the dead heat of July and was immediately allowed to wash up and take off my shoes before entering the establishment. I sat atop a floor cushion and was fed a delightful, 12-course deconstructed omakase. Please tell me how the 'global salts' were my favorite inclusion. For \$78pp, you cannot do better.

Honorable Mention: 📍 Rule of Thirds

If I never get invited to a wedding at Rule of Thirds, I'm doing life wrong. This restaurant is visually stunning – one of the most beautiful I have ever seen. The brussel sprouts with smoked trout roe carried, as did the maitake skewer and tuna crudo. Skip the hamachi collar.

Honorable Mention: 📍 Karasu

As a Japanese speakeasy at the back of Walter's, Karasu did not disappoint as our Valentine's day restaurant of choice, especially at happy hour. The scallops in chili oil were a favorite, as were the happy hour umeshu shochu tonic and tonkatsu sando, both \$9. Worth it!

Honorable Mention: 📍 U Omakase

U is a pretty unique dining experience – the counter is U-shaped, with all the patrons facing each other. Definitely a better omakase than my previous experience, with outstanding bites of toro, wagyu, and uni. But the bites were spaced out over two hours, and I got sleepy off the sake.

Honorable Mention: 📍 Marufuku Ramen

Not only do they have incredible, enormous ramen bowls that are flavored to perfection, but the interior is very industrial modern and brings the vibes. Very reasonably priced, and good for a first date.

Honorable Mention: 📍 Decibel

For the first time, I felt like an NYC insider heading inside this basement sake bar that screams cool. News flash: those carafes get you absolutely smashed. If you ever want to impress someone and get them drunk, take them here.

Honorable Mention: 📍 Ichiran

Ichiran has perfected the art of solo dining. There I was, a haggard post-work businesswoman, not wanting to be judged for slurping up warm soup by myself. Ichiran sat me in my own private booth, lifted a flap, slid me my perfectly balanced ramen, and left me alone. Delightful.

Rare Miss: 📍 matsunori

This restaurant had just opened with a great deal: \$68 omakase, BYOB. My girlfriend and I dolled up for an experience sure to delight. Twelve pieces of nigiri, a hand roll, and if we played our cards right, free mochi. However, the place smelled very fishy, the service looked like they were trying to leave, and the uni was a shade of brown.

African & Caribbean

Worth It Winner: 📍 Haile Village Bistro

Another Avenue B gem. Feels like you're eating in someone's home. Cozy, perfect for a little meetup with friends where you want to plunge your hands into some Ethiopian comfort food and drink Ethiopian wine that tastes like apple juice.

Honorable Mention: 📍 Cafe Mogador

If you want to feel like you belong in the East Village, bring a friend to Cafe Mogador. The cool ambience makes you want to swill wine and I'm chow down on a tagine while spilling your monthly tea to your bestie. The lamb pulled apart amazingly, but the portions were a lil' small.

Honorable Mention: 📍 Fat Fowl

Got the signature organic lavender rotisserie half chicken here (slightly overpriced) and was prepared to be disappointed – it ended up being the juiciest chicken on the planet. Would return.

Honorable Mention: 📍 Frangos Peri Peri

Little hole-in-the wall Portuguese joint that emulates Nandos. While the ambience lacks South African charm, the sauce is good for healing your soul after a shitty work day. Get takeout, order the fries, NOT the mashed potatoes, and enjoy the Peri for 2.

Honorable Mention: 📍 JAMROCK JERK

I had jamrock out of a truck in DUMBO and let me say, it put me on what real jerk chicken is supposed to taste like. No one could have prepared me.

Rare Miss: 📍 Negril BK

Granted, this place is an absolute vibe at happy hour. However, our drinks did not match that energy and the wings were pretty garbaggio as well. But I would give it another chance.

South Asian & Persian

Honorable Mention: 📍 Eyval

A top ten NYC meal, Eyval showed up and showed out with amazing, unique Persian flavors and presentation. The barbari bread, eggplant & cured yogurt, octopus bandari, and ghormeh sabzi were all cooked to perfection and rounded out the meal stunningly.

Worth It Winner: 📍 Masalawala & Sons

*I appreciate the *unapologetic* nature of this Park Slope spot, which is currently impossible to get a reservation for. When you walk through the door, you're hit with a wave of fried onion and spice, and you get steered into ordering sabudana vada, morog, fish fry, and other delectably unique foods from Kolkata. The khichuri is a vegetable stew, which was unexpected.*

Honorable Mention: 📍 NURA

Checks all the boxes – retrofitted warehouse, MICHELIN guide, deeply creative menu. This is one for the parents, if you want to impress them with Indian-accented New American fusion while also impressing on them your deep pretension. The daal tadka is unbelievable.

Honorable Mention: 📍 Dhamaka

Four years after this place absolutely blew up on socials, I finally decided to eat here. It sits right at the entrance of Essex Market, so not exactly full of ambience, but the butter pepper garlic crab and the rara gosht smacked me in the face with flavor. And the biryani is a show!

Honorable Mention: 📍 Desi Galli

Just some Desi soul food. Lamb biryani and the creamy bihari chicken curry, paired with crunchy chickpea flour paratha was epic. And it's always on the table in 30 minutes or less, per Rachel Ray's orders. The cute outdoor seating area was playing bangers all night.

Honorable Mention: 📍 Namkeen

Namkeen had my heart before I even went – Pakistani flavors and fried chicken could take me anywhere. I went to their Williamsburg outpost and got the Dhamaka fries, topped with fried chicken, cole slaw, and tikka sauce. But what stole the show was the tangy, spicy mint chutney.

Honorable Mention: 📍 BK JANI

I don't understand why every notable Pakistani restaurant has to be fusion – why can't I just enjoy nihari instead of having it be a 'nihari crunch wrap supreme burger.' Anyways, the nihari sando is delicious, and the burgers are rated top 15 in NYC.

Honorable Mention: 📍 JACKSON DINER - INDIAN CUISINE

My first sit-in spot in Jackson Heights. I can safely say it's probably impossible to have a bad meal in Jackson Heights, and this place is no exception. But perhaps save your time and money for Angel, or do Nepalese instead.

Honorable Mention: 📍 Semma

If they gave Semma a MICHELIN star, they should give me one too because my biryani is less dry. All of the meat (oxtail, lamb, goat) is on the bone, meaning you can only take 1-2 bites. But we South Asians deserve nice things, and this is one of them.

Other Favorites: 📍 Bijan's 📍 Mint Heights 📍 Sigiri

Seafood

Worth it Winner: 📍 Ama Raw Bar

The sensual enchantment of this Avenue B gem never fails to garner looks from streetwalkers – me included. Came for the \$1 oysters, stayed for the insane lemongrass mussels and nori shoestring fries that were complemented perfectly by our many drinks. Supreme date spot.

Honorable Mention: 📍 Maison Premiere

Unparalleled ambience. I can't imagine a sexier date spot. Avoid the overpriced oysters at this oyster bar, but spring for the scallop crudo, which was probably a top ten lifetime dish for me, as well as the beef cheeks.

Honorable Mention: 📍 Bar Crudo

This spot in Park Slope, once a small ceviche pop-up, prides itself on its sustainable, local seafood, which is always appreciated. Yet the most stunning dish on the menu was certainly not ceviche – far from it. It was the duck fried rice!

Rare Miss: 📍 Brooklyn Crab

I don't want to shit on Brooklyn Crab, as it is an absolutely fine, legitimately interesting locale in Red Hook that makes you feel like you're at a Caribbean resort. However, the soft shell crab was so ass. As is probably every seafood item there. Just not fresh. Stick with the drinks.

Other Favorites: 📍 upstate craft beer & oyster bar

Açaí Bowls

Honorable Mention: 📍 Juice Vitality

I am a snob when it comes to açaí bowls – as a veteran of South Block and Soulberri, I know how things are done. And here, things are done right. Absolutely delicious bowls with perfect ratios and very fresh fruit.

Barbecue

Worth It Winner: 📍 Hometown Bar-B-Que

As someone who has tried the best barbecue that Austin has to offer, I was skeptical of NYC barbecue – until I had Hometown in Red Hook. Absolutely unbelievable sausage, ribs, and beans, but the brisket queso seals the deal. I need to experience the whole menu.

Honorable Mention: 📍 Fette Sau

Daisy ran into Chloe Grace-Moretz here on a date, which goes to show that even small barbecue joints can have upscale clientele. This unassuming barbecue stop in Willyburg is delicious – get a half pound of fatty brisket, glazed burnt ends, and make sure to share.

Honorable Mention: 📍 Dinosaur Bar-B-Que

This is the first barbz I had in NYC, and it wasn't as disappointing as I thought it would be! My standards for barbecue are simple – don't be sweet. The two meat, two side combo for \$25 was a steal and it definitely satisfies your cravings.

Honorable Mention: 📍 Mighty Quinn's Barbeque

Another surprising homerun! We Uber Eats'd some barbecue, expecting the worst but Mighty Q delivered with solid beef ribs, brisket, sausage, mac & cheese, and the best-of-the-night brussel sprouts. Update: hit or miss.

Eastern European

Worth It Winner: 📍 Veselka Williamsburg

If this is the bastard Veselka location, my bad. I tried four different pierogies for \$10, and my final verdict is that you can skip the sauerkraut & mushroom one but definitely get multiple braised beef ones. The BEC and potato fillings are also fire. I need to try the stroganoff.

Honorable Mention: 📍 Pierozek

Shamefully, my first time having pierogies after living blocks away from the Ukranian Village for two years. However, these pierogies were a Polish rendition that were, in my humble opinion, simply okay – except for the raspberry and & sweet cheese one, which was the same texture as vomit.

Honorable Mention: 📍 Polka Dot

We moved in across the street from this storied Polish homestyle place that opened in the 90s. Unfortunately, it smelled pretty sour inside and the food was openly microwaved in front of us. Will I continue supporting them? Absolutely – they got damn good pierogies.

Bars & Drinks

Worth It Winner: 📍 Art Bar

Perfect for a first date on a snowy day. There's a fireplace, the greatest chocolate peppermints martinis, and couches that are perfect for cuddling and inevitable negging. And you're surrounded by strange pieces of art, so the conversation will never run dry.

Honorable Mention: ♥ Verlaine

The perfect place to get liquored up for a night out. I could put away infinite lychee martinis for \$8 a pop, while munching on the most delicious fries and wings. The ambience is cozy but cacophonous, so try to grab the couches in the front with a bigger group.

Honorable Mention: ♥ McSorley's Old Ale House

This one is for da bois – endless amounts of \$3 beers. The waiter impressively carried 10 glasses of beer in his tentacle-like fingers. Women were only allowed to enter in 1970, so beware the slightly offensive art and cramped bathroom. Only two beers on the menu – tan and dark.

Honorable Mention: ♥ Black Mountain Wine House

Unbelievably cozy and gorgeous, tucked away in Carroll Gardens. Enjoy the “fireplace & farmhouse bric-a-brac,” and just trust the waiters to get you the best wine.

Honorable Mention: ♥ Twins Lounge

The sceniest scene you've ever seen. Also now right across from me in Greenpoint. Everyone is hot, the espresso martini is \$13, and there are two floors to weave between. Cash only.

Honorable Mention: ♥ Skin Contact

When we got here, the bartender was frantically waving hot wine glasses in the cold air. She realized we were eager to enter, and made us walk around the block before we could get in and drink an absolutely delicious \$56 bottle of natural Riesling in the candlelight. Shmood.

Honorable Mention: ♥ The Craic

The Craic is my little secret basement bar that is PERFECT to hang out with friends and watch a game on their large projectors while still sitting on a comfy velvet couch. I need it to stay relatively unknown, so... maybe I should take it off this list.

Honorable Mention: ♥ Tomi Jazz

My first jazz bar experience. While the super sensual ambience is great for dates, I went with a group of strangers and ended up having a hilarious night squished into a back room. The jazz is top tier.

Honorable Mention: ♥ Joyface

Joy Face has an unrivaled ambience – I've never seen a water bed parked in the corner of a bar. The lighting is reminiscent of Veronica's speakeasy in Riverdale, complete with a disco ball.

Rare Miss: ♥ Cubbyhole

To each their own. But Cubbyhole, instead of feeling like an inviting lesbian space, was instead cramped and grim. The bathrooms open up directly into the bar space, the waiters take cash only, and it felt more like an intense hookup spot than just a place to hang out.

Other Favorites: ♥ Blind Barber ♥ Jupiter Disco ♥ The Flower Shop ♥ Mood Ring

♥ Evil Twin Brewing NYC ♥ Hidden Lane Bar ♥ Pineapple Club ♥ Barcade

♥ Ginger's Bar ♥ Sugar Monk ♥ Sweet & Vicious ♥ Yard Bar ♥ The Belfry

♥ Threes Brewing Co. ♥ Ray's Hometown Bar ♥ The Bush ♥ The Commodore

♥ Little Rascal Bar ♥ Vig Bar

Hotels & Rooftops

Worth it Winner: 📍 The Williamsburg Hotel

The view from this rooftop is the best in the world, and I do not say that lightly. Especially during sunset, you can't help but disengage in any conversation you're having and just gaze lovingly at the skyline. It is expensive, but when your company throws an all-inclusive pizza party, it's a move. But for the love of god, don't stay here. Now called Arlo.

Honorable Mention: 📍 Panorama Room

Definitely worth a trip to Roosevelt Island. When you get off the F train, you feel like you've unlocked a new territory in a game map. The view from their balcony is so unique – it feels like you've conquered New York. Weird that it's on Cornell Tech's campus.

Honorable Mention: 📍 Randolph Beer DUMBO

DUMBO is goated for this one. The views are incredible, the drinks are great, and the rooftop is so spacious yet hidden away. Beware however, anyone at your table can put drinks on your tab. Guard yourself.

Honorable Mention: 📍 Mr. Purple

Been here twice, yet to be disappointed. Highlights include being fast-tracked into the hot girl line and partying with NYU grads while the Empire State Building glowed purple. The views, of course, are spectacular given you're smack-dab in Manhattan.

Honorable Mention: 📍 The Ludlow Hotel

*A very lovely place to work and feel like you're on the set of *Inventing Anna*. I got a latte and fries, and accidentally walked out having paid nothing to no one. So in reality, I swindled a hotel, just like Anna. Sue me.*

Honorable Mention: 📍 citizenM New York Bowery Hotel

Hipster central. Chilled at the Bowery CitizenM and enjoyed the interesting design touches and the people who reminded me of myself.

Honorable Mention: 📍 The Hotel Chelsea

Very bustling and upscale, but my god, don't look at the menu prices – cocktails are \$25-32, and the McDonald's style french fries were \$16. Sit at the bar, as it's a free show with hot bartenders.

Honorable Mention: 📍 Broken Shaker at Freehand New York

Beachy vibes in the sky. Went there during Ramzan and got a Kin Euphorics beverage, which not only brightened my spirits (ha) but also saved me hella money since rooftops break your budget unceremoniously. Views are not top-tier.

Other Favorites: 📍 The Ready Rooftop Bar 📍 The Standard, East Village

📍 Ace Hotel Brooklyn 📍 The DL | Best Rooftop Lounge NYC 📍 Bar Blondeau

Clubs & Venues

Worth It Winner: 📍 Under the 'K' Bridge Park

The best venue I have ever been to, hands down. We went to a Sammy Virji x FourTet rave here and were greeted by a gorgeous, clean bridge wonderscape that featured all-night food vendors, water trucks, and an amazing soundstage. If you have a chance to party here, do it.

Honorable Mention: 📍 public records

This 'sound room' is magical. It's gorgeous, quirky, leafy, and the perfect place to spend a night partying and stealing cigarettes from nice men. The music is very oontz oontz, but with three floors, it's quite easy to lose yourself in the vibes.

Honorable Mention: 📍 Brooklyn Bowl

Huge bowling alley in Williamsburg that Diplo played a surprise set at while I was there. So it's half a bowling alley, half a concert venue. Which is something I feel can only exist in Brooklyn.

Honorable Mention: 📍 Avant Gardner

Deep in East Williamsburg, there is a haven of rave chaos called the Avant Gardner (which includes the Brooklyn Mirage). I've seen MEDUZA, Zedd, and Tiesto there, and those experiences had me absolutely rolling in delight.

Honorable Mention: 📍 Nowadays

A strange forest club in the middle of Brooklyn, replete with nymphs, mavens, and weird Brooklyn children. Everyone is on drugs, or looks like they are on drugs. Go to Mister Sunday, and buy your tix in advance.

Honorable Mention: 📍 Dead Letter No. 9

What was once a defunct postal facility is now the coolest dance bar in Brooklyn – every room is designed as a cozy outdoor conversation-scape (think porch, camper trailer, bunk beds) but in the back is a hazy red room house club. Hard to explain, but you'll get it when you go.

Honorable Mention: 📍 The Bowery Ballroom

I love this cute concert venue. I saw Isaac Dunbar here, and the crowd was so chill. They also have themed dance parties with balloons and confetti – avoid the alternative music nights.

Honorable Mention: 📍 Pier 17

Surprisingly, this pier features a rooftop concert venue that ROCKED. I didn't know the band at all, but the venue was so stellar that we had an amazing time anyway.

Honorable Mention: 📍 3 Dollar Bill

Went to see a Chappell Roan drag show here and have never witnessed a hotter, cooler crowd. The dance floor is massive, the drinks are expensive and strong, and the outdoor area features an all-night kitchen that makes yummy fries and dumplings.

Honorable Mention: 📍 Phoenix Bar

My little gay bar on Avenue B. There are intense lasers, hilarious music choices (mostly queer icon discography) and lots of gay boys getting it. Some consider it a safe space, so I will rethink bringing str8s next time.

Honorable Mention: 📍 Elsewhere

A hype club with three levels – was clutch after a Brooklyn Mirage show was cut short. My phone was promptly taken out of my bag, one of four stolen in the same moment. Didn't ruin my night, but passing on the caution!

Honorable Mention: 📍 Music Hall of Williamsburg

Similar to the Warsaw venue also in Williamsburg. We saw The Beaches here and it was, of course, the best day of my life. I might become a groupie. Anyways, \$11 drinks and good vibes at this venue.

Honorable Mention: 📍 Playhouse

I heavily fuk with dis place. Witnessed a very memorable drag performance from two cool, self-assured, incredibly athletic queens that weren't taking themselves too seriously. Good music and clientele.

Honorable Mention: 📍 Le Bain

Le Bain is infamous for giving people diseases from its intensely populated pool, but if you don't take a dip you're bound to enjoy the stunning views and bob your head to the techno music happily, only to move on to another club in the next hour.

Honorable Mention: 📍 House of Yes

I pictured Moulin Rouge, I got Barcelona club wannabe. I went for Pride weekend, and thought this gay rave house would show up, but it was pretty tame. Could have just been a bad DJ, so I'll give it a second chance.

Honorable Mention: 📍 sweetie

Consider this an upscale version on Downtown Social, considering it's 23+ and also in the East Village. But that is about all it has going for it – expect the same pop music that caters to young white professionals.

Rare Miss: 📍 La Caverna

For the youths, I mention La Caverna, a cavern-themed club in the LES that housed basically all of Georgetown at the onset of our careers. It's a very interesting place, but if you like breathing, maybe steer clear.

Other Favorites: 📍 Heaven Can Wait 📍 The Penny Farthing 📍 The Jane Hotel

📍 Hotel Chantelle 📍 SILO 📍 Warsaw Concerts 📍 Gabriela

Comedy

Worth It Winner: 📍 The Stand NYC

I have never been treated so well at a comedy club, you'd think we were VIPs. Got \$20 tickets to a 6pm show, and were personally escorted to our seats. No drink minimum, delicious Italian food, and pretty decent comedians. And the vibes are unmatched.

Honorable Mention: 📍 Sesh Comedy

The smallest joint on this list with the coolest crowd and the tightest lineup I have seen so far. Very much a 'if you know you know' place. However, do not use the bathroom here. BYOB.

Honorable Mention: 📍 Comedy Cellar

When you see Sarah Silverman having a casual chat with friends outside a comedy club, you know the laughs are going to be good. \$25, two drink minimum to get you tipsy, and Class A talent from New York who have all done heavy drugs before their set.

Honorable Mention: ♡ Union Hall

Combine bocce ball with an insane basement comedy scene, and you've got Union Hall. Get blasted off the cold brew martinis and laugh your ass off to their pretty impressive lineups.

Honorable Mention: ♡ ReVision Lounge and Gallery

I went to a 'heckle show' at this quaint lounge two blocks away from me. While not peak humor, it was a fun, vicious shitshow that offended and delighted equally.

Honorable Mention: ♡ New York Comedy Club - East Village

Only went here because of Daisy's first invite-only comedy set. Classic 'Manhattan' comics (white men who are mean and make the women uncomfortable) but Daisy crushed.

Rare Miss: ♡ St. Marks Comedy Club

Never go to St. Marks at 10pm on a Thursday. The comedians will yell at you for not laughing hard enough. This club is where every comedian must bomb at least once – it's canon.

Other Favorites: ♡ Brooklyn Comedy Collective (BCC) @ Eris

Bookstores

Worth It Winner: ♡ The Center for Fiction

As a proud member of CoF (\$180 for the year), it has to be my winner. It is curated, spacious, with an amazing members-only floor filled with writers' rooms and comfy chairs. In a world lacking third spaces, CoF fills the void nicely.

Honorable Mention: ♡ Book Club

This would be my runaway favorite coffee shop if not for the... terrible coffee. What keeps me coming back is the incredible atmosphere (curated bookstore + wine bar + neighborhood coffee shop) that is always brimming with interesting people – I go to read for filth!

Honorable Mention: ♡ P&T Knitwear Books & Podcasts

I stumbled upon this new bookstore during one of their book talks with a hilarious Asian author. I loitered, listening and reading in the bookshelves. This place also is a podcasting studio.

Honorable Mention: ♡ Strand Book Store

I love a bookstore that FEELS like a bookstore. I hope you all understand that Harry Styles reference. This bookstore is massive, iconic, and a community staple. People line up for blocks to sell their books, and you can roam around for hours through their three floors.

Other Favorites: ♡ Sweet Pickle Books ♡ Bibliotheque

♡ McNally Jackson Coffee & Wine Bar

Movie Theaters

Worth It Winner: 📍 Village East by Angelika

Angelika is my beloved local independent movie theater that has the best popcorn. I've seen films here such as Spencer, Licorice Pizza, The Worst Person in the World, Bros, and The Batman (2022). It was the first thing that made me feel at home in this city.

Honorable Mention: 📍 BAM Fisher

In a world of cookie-cutter, big box chains, BAM stands out. Its theaters are simply gorgeous – it maintains the wood-carved proscenium from its playhouse days. The movies always start exactly on time and the popcorn is affordable.

Honorable Mention: 📍 Rooftop Cinema Club Midtown

The CUTEST little rooftop cinema for all the movie-lovers out there. Felt like a drive-in without the cars. The vibes are immaculate, the popcorn is all-you-can-eat, and if you get there early you can play a lil' cornhole. So worth it.

Honorable Mention: 📍 Skyline Drive In NYC

I may never watch a movie indoors again! This parking lot turned drive-in has the best views of Manhattan that I've seen yet. They show new movies. We usually sit in the lawn chairs they have up front. Bring a blanket, drinks, and candy, because concessions are pricey.

Honorable Mention: 📍 Metrograph

If you're a pretentious cinephile, look no further than the Metrograph for all of your needs. It features past hits while also being an amazing bar and restaurant, inspired by the studio eateries from Hollywood's golden age. The steak frites and chicken go hard.

Honorable Mention: 📍 Alice Tully Hall

From my first Letterboxd review: "I would love to tell you that going to the 59th New York Film Festival was a treat, a pleasure, a divine experience powered by luck and \$25. However, I am sorry to say that I walked out of Alice Tully Theater with an empty, distraught, and flustered soul." Read the full thing [here](#).

Other Favorites: 📍 Nitehawk Prospect Park 📍 Alamo Drafthouse Cinema Lower Manhattan

📍 IFC Center 📍 Cobble Hill Cinemas 📍 Williamsburg Cinemas

Parks

Worth It Winner: 📍 High Line

There's a reason I take friends and family visiting from out of town here at sunset. It's a poetic embodiment of NYC – formerly an abandoned railroad, repurposed for public use. The design and architecture on display while walking the High Line is unparalleled.

Honorable Mention: 📍 Sheep Meadow

The best part of Central Park is this little meadow where young people eat, drink, play frisbee, and laugh like there's no tomorrow. It is so picturesque, I always feel like I am dreaming. Bring games, sit in the shade, and people watch your heart out.

Honorable Mention: 📍 Brooklyn Bridge Park

I ran five miles through this gorgeous park that borders DUMBO, and I will say it's Brooklyn's (not-so) hidden gem. The highlight is Movies with a View on Pier 1, but don't slouch on the premiere recreation hub on Pier 5 or the playgrounds on Pier 6.

Honorable Mention: 📍 Gramercy Park

The park of the Elite™. Yes, I made it inside this famed private park in Manhattan that only has 300 keys. Blame it on my Vanderbilt friend whose parents own half the block. Anyways, it was pretty underwhelming until we saw an engagement happen at the front gates.

Honorable Mention: 📍 Little Island

Little Island was the mockery of New York's public parks. However, it's beautiful, especially at night. There used to be a fee, but I have run through it several times with no attendants in sight.

Honorable Mention: 📍 Fort Greene Park

My local park and greenmarket where I can pick up gluten-free loaves, donate my clothes, and lock eyes with Emrata all in one go. There is something seriously special about the energy there. Everyone is beautiful and out to enjoy fresh produce and community.

Honorable Mention: 📍 Domino Park

I'm not a Domino Park hater, but it feels overly sculpted compared to the insane construction blooming around it. Genuinely ruins the air quality and the vibes, and you can't help but think it might be a private park in a few years.

Honorable Mention: 📍 Jacob Riis Park

I've heard wondrous things about Jacob Riis's beaches, mainly that it's a gay and topless haven that is slightly underwhelming compared to the Jersey Shore. And that was more or less what I got. Make sure to stop by Spectro and get a burger and a huge pickle.

Activities

📍 Karaoke DUET 53

Duet 53 provides a seamless karaoke experience for a decent price. I would definitely suggest it over Sing Sing in St. Marks Place. Just make sure everyone pays you back, and try not to throw up in the bathroom.

📍 Paint 'N Pour

A great beginner activity in the LES to make you feel at home in NYC. \$50 for an open bar with huge drinks, painting lessons, and hopefully a canvas you can hang up in your apartment at the end.

📍 Craftsman Ave

In my quest to be interesting™, I went to this crafting space in Gowanus, Brooklyn to build a skateboard from scratch. I built a beautiful wooden longboard and got to chat with the owner. They also have crowbar knives and copper lamp-making.

📍 Queens Night Market

Such an amazing, diverse atmosphere filled with happiness and food. It's in Flushing, Queens, and starts on Saturdays at 5pm – get there early because the lines get long. We indulged in Brazilian steak sandwiches, Persian rice bowls, lamb sticks, arepa cones, and más for \$6 or less.

📍 Smorgasburg

If I missed Georgetown's farmers market, now I have the perfect replacement. It has every food imaginable, so of course I got Mexican-Japanese fusion nachos. Pricier than Queen's Night Market, but located at the Bushwick Inlet Park which is just gorgeous. Saturdays only.

📍 United Nations Headquarters

For \$25, walk the beautiful grounds of the United Nations and be told how humanity is a plague unto itself. Our tour guide was a whack Pakistani woman with a robotic presence. Go with your geeky Model UN friends, as that adds some laughs.

📍 Pier 25 Mini Golf & Volleyball

I joined a Zog volleyball league here after the cheaper Riverside Park one was unceremoniously canceled. The courts are filled with amateurs just trying to make friends, but the views are insane and the sunsets unmatched. And you can play \$10 mini golf here too!

📍 Philip Williams Posters

Honestly, this giant vintage poster shop was a huge letdown. While it is enormous and cinematic, the posters are so Eurocentric, expensive, and literally ugly. I bought my sister two vintage posters online for \$60, and they're so much cooler. Maybe go, but don't spend.

📍 Monk Vintage

A huge, overwhelming vintage shop in Williamsburg that has real steals. I got two pairs of jeans for \$10. You must have a strategy, or you'll quickly become enveloped in what I like to call 'shopping shock.'

📍 Staten Island Ferry

Why pay for a booze cruise when you can just drink on the Staten Island Ferry. Same views for free, and it feels goddamn patriotic. Especially when you float by the Statue of Liberty.

📍 Area53 - Adventure Park

Played some laser tag in this DUMBO basement. While not an apt date spot, it is a very fun way to shoot your friends and run around like a maniac. Don't get overly competitive.

📍 Grand Central Station

Go to Grand Central, buy a roundtrip ticket to Beacon in Upstate NYC, and have a great weekend trip surrounded by nature, cute stores, museums, and just perfect vibes.

📍 30 Rockefeller Plaza

If you happen to miss the SNL lottery that happens in August, you can put yourself through a 6-hour urban camping experience as you wait in the standby line from 6pm-midnight, not even guaranteeing you a spot at the show the next night. Worth it? Absolutely.

📍 Vaux Vintage

A vintage clothing store with an unbelievable speakeasy and event space; entryway is through a mirror. Remake held a sustainable fashion show there.

📍 Whitney Museum of American Art

What I thought would be a cute, flirty hangout with friends turned into a horror show of tragedy and guilt. The art here is HEAVY. But still worth the visit – come during the day and be sober about it.

📍 Brooklyn Flea

Some good deals, but most are steals – as in, they're stealing from you. Very cool vintage shit like magazines, watches, cameras, and sunglasses, but better to save than spend.

📍 Ocean's 8 Billiards

Forget gay bars, this is where the actual lesbians congregate. I went with Daisy's parents and got slaughtered at pool, but they also have great cider, pop-a-shot, and air hockey.

📍 WORLD SPA

A globally-inspired spa in deep Brooklyn that is worth EVERY penny. Russian banya, Japanese onsen, Turkish hammam, everything you can think of. I fell asleep for an hour in the Himalayan salt room. Do the cold plunge, and get the traditional potato vareniki.

📍 Brooklyn Botanic Garden

We went to see the 'Lightscape' attraction at the Brooklyn Botanic Gardens for \$30, meaning we spent \$30 to see something that should have been free. Silly to go to a garden in the middle of winter, but we made the best of it.

📍 Tin Building by Jean-Georges

Finally, one thing Jean-Georges has done right. Really cool marketplace next to Seaport in Fidi, worth a trip to buy a fun beverage and lounge outside.

📍 St. Ann's Warehouse

A lovely venue in DUMBO to watch musicals and shows. We saw Monsoon Wedding here, which was an absolute spectacle while still remaining intimate. And yes, it rained indoors.

📍 Museum of Sex

One of the best museums I have ever patroned. It was incredibly educational but still deeply entertaining. We went on Valentine's Day, which was a choice, and the 'Superfunland' exhibit left us speechless. While I won't go into specifics, I highly recommend a visit.

📍 Happy Medium

Walking into this serene, dimly-lit art studio feels like a scene out of a Parisian film. Happy Medium is an art cafe, where the menu includes everything from oil pastels to terracotta clay. For \$28, you get to craft for two hours. The motto is "be brave enough to be terrible."

📍 Last Place On Earth

Cutie pie place to play board games with your squad for \$10 a person. Sometimes, they throw events like 'Apocalypse Prom,' which our neighbors gleefully attended as they had never been to their own. Played Games of Thrones-themed Risk for four hours – it's also BYO!

📍 Coney Island

As expected, Coney Island is just a toned-down Atlantic City, but worth it. The rides are pretty thrilling, albeit a bit expensive (\$8-\$12 a ride) but you can get a \$75 pass for the day. The Nathan's Famous hot dog line is typically an hour, and the gelato is well worth the \$8.

📍 Barclays Center

Barclays is like a second home at this point. I've seen countless basketball games and a Doja Cat concert here. Pro tip: Liberty games are 10x more fun than Nets games.

📍 QC NY SPA

The most elite spa experience to be had in the city – the views at night are simply jaw-dropping. We went on a windy November day, which made the experience quite frigid but also immensely relaxing. The food selection, however, is entirely underwhelming, so eat beforehand.

📍 Green-Wood Cemetery

I don't love including cemeteries on my itineraries (scarred by my dad's love for them), but this one was gorgeous and a great respite from city life. The koi pond is the best I have ever seen!