



A GUIDE TO HARLEM

The lyrics to the Duke Ellington song “Take the A Train” and memories of the Harlem Renaissance have attracted many to Harlem. If you ask 20 people to describe their Harlem it would be the most beautiful song in variations. Brilliant colors, rhythmic sounds, enticing food smells, grandiose apartment buildings and wide thoroughfares are all elements. Uptown retains its individualism even with the addition of name brand retailers along 125th Street. There’s still Amateur Night, which was launched in 1934, at the Apollo Theater; the Amsterdam News, a national newspaper based in Harlem since 1909; and restaurants like Sylvia’s, opened in 1962, which specialize in cuisines from Harlem’s many cultures.

Where is Harlem?

Harlem occupies a vast portion of Manhattan Island, river to river starting about West 155th Street, down to Central Park on the west side, and as far south as East 96th Street on the east side. It contains many distinct neighborhoods with East and Central Harlem, Hamilton Heights and Morningside Heights a few of them.

It's Easy to Get to Harlem

By subway: 1/9, 2, 3, A, B, C, D
By bus: M2, 3, 4, 5, 7, 10, 18 and 100/101

About Harlem

In 1658 the Dutch rulers of Nieuw Amsterdam named the farming village on the island’s far north Nieuw Haarlem. Even after the British occupation and the Revolutionary War, the area remained agricultural until 1837 when the Harlem Railroad provided the first rapid connection to the rest of the island, marking the beginning of Harlem’s development as a suburb. Soon moneyed gentry, mainly of European descent, built country estates on Harlem’s hilly terrain.



In 1879 elevated train lines were extended uptown, sparking the construction of many tenements

along the routes and upscale apartment houses along the spacious avenues. The #2 and #3 subway lines, opened in 1904, spurred another real estate boom. Many more apartments were built than could be rented. Philip A. Payton, Jr., an enterprising African-American realtor, convinced landlords to break the color barrier, paving the way for African-Americans from other parts of the city to move north. They were joined by those migrating from the south and the Caribbean.

By 1920 Harlem had the largest population of African-Americans in the United States. The rich amalgam of literature, art and music that soon flourished became known as the Harlem Renaissance and the movement brought Harlem to the world’s attention.

In the years that followed, Harlem pride led its people to overcome times of economic depression and social and racial upheavals. Today Harlem is experiencing another renaissance and its lively cultural scene draws both tourists and metropolitan area residents.

Things to Look for in Harlem



- Unusual, colorful, store signs made by local artists
- A vibrant street life, with sidewalk shopping and entertainment
- Subway mosaics depicting the history of Harlem in the

#2 and #3 subway stations at 110th, 116th, 125th, and 135th Streets

- Grand old buildings, often with elaborate decoration, from the late 1800s and early 1900s

- Houses with front yards, porches, even alleys, all rare

in Manhattan



Things to See and Do in Harlem

1 First Corinthian Baptist Church, 116th and Adam Clayton Powell, Jr. Boulevard, looks like a take-off on the Doges’ Palace in Venice, but was once a grand movie palace

known as the Regent Theatre, designed by Thomas W. Lamb in 1910.

2 Graham Court, 1923-37 Adam Clayton Powell, Jr. Boulevard, is the grande dame of uptown apartment houses, with two-story porticos and an inner courtyard.

3 Minton's Playhouse, 210 West 118th. Local lore says be-bop was born here, brought to life by swingers such as Fats Waller, Dizzy Gillespie, Charlie Parker and Thelonius Monk. Although the Playhouse is closed, Minton's neon sign remains as a tribute to its historic importance.

4 Riverside Church Observation Deck, Riverside Drive at 120th, is a perfect place to view not only Harlem but also much of New York City and part of New Jersey. As you head to the top, check out the world's second-largest carillon, with 74 bells that are rung on Sundays.

5 Mt. Olivet Baptist Church, on the northwest corner of West 120th and Lenox, illustrates Harlem's many transformations. The neo-Roman building began life as Temple Israel; today it is a Baptist church with a notable choir.

6 Lenox Lounge, 288 Lenox, is a 1939 art deco survivor whose Zebra Room once echoed to the likes of Billie Holiday. Lovingly restored, the bar/club again hosts live jazz.

7 Studio Museum of Harlem, 144 West 125th, focuses on artists of African descent and provides studio space for artists of promise.

8 Theresa Hotel, 125th and Adam Clayton Powell, Jr.

Boulevard. During the Jim Crow segregation period the Theresa was open to people of color. When Fidel Castro spoke to the United Nations in 1960, because of the rude treatment accorded him in midtown, he and his entourage moved to the Theresa where they were honored guests. It is now an office building, known as the Theresa Towers.

9 Apollo Theater, 253 West 125th, opened as a burlesque theater in 1914, excluded people of color from admittance. Twenty years later new ownership invited the growing African-American population to attend and began the Apollo's famous Amateur Night. Entertainers including Ella Fitzgerald, Billy Holiday, James Brown and Michael Jackson had their beginnings at this Wednesday night showcase.

10 Mohammad's Mosque #7, 106 West 127th. The original mosque was destroyed by fire in

retaliation for the 1963 assassination of Malcolm X. Rebuilt on the same site, the mosque serves as the northeast regional headquarters for the Nation of Islam.

11 Astor Row, 8-62 West 130th, is an unusual block of 28 three-story houses dating from 1880, with wooden porches and front yards. Note the handsome brownstones across the street.

12 Harlem YMCA, 181 West 135th. This landmark has been a cultural and spiritual spotlight of the neighborhood since 1935. It boasts notable past members and supporters such as George Washington Carver, Langston Hughes, Malcolm X, Paul Robeson, Eartha Kitt, Ossie Davis, Cicely Tyson and Danny Glover.

13 Schomburg Library, at 135th and Lenox, one of the city's three Public Library Research Centers, is devoted to the history of people of African descent. The building connects to the 1903 Carnegie Library on West 135th. Inside, Langston Hughes' ashes are buried beneath a mosaic floor with a design illustrating an excerpt from his poem "The Negro Speaks of Rivers."

14 Countee Cullen Branch Library, 104 West 136th. Named for a Harlem Renaissance poet, this public library occupies the site where Madame C.J. Walker lived and operated her beauty business, including a hair salon. Madame Walker's fortune was built by door-to-door saleswomen who sold her hair products to women of color.

15 Abyssinian Baptist Church, 132 West 138th, has been known for the political prowess of its preachers, including Adam Clayton Powell, Jr. and Calvin Butts, the current head. The church is a leader in addressing economic and social issues in the community. Its Sunday services draw crowds of regular parishioners and visitors.

16 Strivers' Row, West 138th and 139th between Adam Clayton Powell, Jr. and Frederick Douglass Boulevards, includes Italianate row houses by architect Stanford White on the north side and Georgian ones by Price and Luce on the south side. These serene blocks were home to such luminaries as W.C. Handy, Hubie Blake and Vertner Tandy, the first black architect to be registered in New



York State. Strivers' Row is one of the few places in the city with alleys.

17 St. Nicholas Park, West 127th to 141st between St. Nicholas Terrace and St. Nicholas Avenue, is one of Harlem's three narrow "ribbon" parks. Its terrain shows how the formerly hilly island once looked. The park may soon be the third setting for the Hamilton Grange (see #21).

18 City College of New York, West 131st to 141st between St. Nicholas Terrace and Amsterdam. Architect George W. Post used Manhattan schist from excavations for the Broadway subway line and white terra cotta for this public university meant to rival Ivy League institutions. CCNY's Aaron Davis Hall is the major performing arts center in Harlem.

19 Harlem School of the Arts, 645 St. Nicholas Avenue, founded in 1964, is a beacon in the Hamilton Heights community, offering music, dance, theater and art programs attended by more than 3,000 children and adults a year.

20 St. Luke's Church, Convent Avenue at 141st, is one of the many churches that moved north as its congregations did, this one from Greenwich Village. The old church, St. Luke's-in-the-Fields, survives in Greenwich Village.



21 Hamilton Grange, 287 Convent Avenue, Alexander Hamilton's grand country house, was built by John McComb, Jr., who also designed City Hall. It was moved from a large nearby wooded site when a new street was proposed.

22 Our Lady of Lourdes, 467 West 142nd, is a poster child for recycled architecture. The church

incorporates the façade from the 1863 Venetian-style National Academy of Design, an apse from the Madison Avenue side of St. Patrick's Cathedral removed in an expansion, and stonework retrieved from the demolition of a 1864 mansion.



23 Convent Avenue, West 142nd to 145th, is a unique Manhattan thoroughfare with richly hued and ornamented houses, many with front yards and trees.

24 Hamilton Terrace, from West 141st to 144th, is a semi-private street of house-proud residents in the Hamilton Heights Historic District.

25 Riverbank State Park, entrances on Riverside Drive at 138th and 145th, is a 28-acre, multi-level sports complex and cultural center with a promenade overlooking the Hudson River, the George Washington Bridge, the Little Red Lighthouse (from the children's story *The Little Red Lighthouse and the Great Gray Bridge*) and the New Jersey Palisades. Riverside Valley, one of the city's largest community gardens, is visible from the park's 138th Street entrance.

26 The west side of St. Nicholas Avenue between West 148th and 149th is an intact block of bowfront, turn-of-the-20th-century townhouses.



27 Bailey Mansion, 10 St. Nicholas Avenue, was built of granite for a Barnum and Bailey circus mogul, and is now a funeral parlor.

28 Jos. Loth & Co., 1828 Amsterdam at West 151st, was once a ribbon factory that employed 600 people. The 1885 building fits

comfortably into its residential setting.

29 32nd Police Precinct, 1854 Amsterdam. Opened as a local police station, this impressive mansard-roofed building is now a community self-help center.

30 Dance Theatre of Harlem, 466 West 152nd, is a thriving dance school and performance company co-founded in 1968 by former New York City Ballet dancer Arthur Mitchell.



31 Church of St. Catherine of Genoa, 504-6 West 153rd, is an unusual, Flemish-influenced building that has many other religious neighbors on its residential block.

32 Audubon Terrace, Broadway between West 155th and 156th, is a museum and educational enclave that opened in 1908. It includes The Hispanic Society and the American Academy of Arts and Letters.



Shopping

The West 125th Street corridor is the prime shopping magnet for Harlem style from clothes to music.



Look for homegrown shops like The Brownstone at 2032 Fifth Avenue near 125th, which features clothes, accessories, jewelry and beauty services by local residents.

African Market, West 116th east of Lenox, is home to colorfully garbed vendors of clothes, jewelry, hair and beauty products and many other items. On the surrounding blocks are a variety of West African run hair-braiding shops, stores and restaurants.

When It's Time to Eat

Amy Ruth's, 113 West 116th. Carl Redding, owner of this "soul-food" restaurant, named it in memory of his grandmother and her wonderful cooking. The menu features dishes named after well-known politicians and celebrities who have dined here.



Manna's, 2331 Frederick Douglass Boulevard, 51 East 125th Street, and 486 Lenox, has serve-yourself soul food and standard salad bar fare.

Famous Fish Market, 684 West 145th. The wait for made-to-order take-out fish can be long but the result is worth it.

Londels, 2620 Frederick Douglass Boulevard, spotlights live music on weekends.

Good southern cooking reigns during lunch, dinner and Sunday brunch.

Make My Cake, 103 West 110th and 2380 Adam Clayton Powell, Jr. Boulevard, is known for its one-of-a-kind creations. These shops are two of the best for desserts in Harlem.

Sugar Hill Bistro, in a renovated Victorian brownstone at 458 West 145th, offers gospel brunches and Southern, Caribbean, African and French cuisines in elegant surroundings upstairs, or casual dining and live jazz in the Renaissance Bar & Jazz Lounge.

Links

The Harlem Association for Travel & Tourism has general information on Harlem sites at <http://www.hatt.org/>

For a winter walk through Harlem that shows some of our sites and some others, go to

<http://www.forgotten-ny.com/forgothar/harlemwalk.html>

For community and tourist information, including a list of churches, go to hometoharlem.com/

<http://www.bigapplejazz.com> lists jazz venues in New York City, including Harlem

<http://www.harlemshops.com> lists businesses, artists, and institutions in Harlem, including contact information for churches



About Big Apple Greeter

Established in 1992, Big Apple Greeter is a "welcome visitor" program whose aim is to introduce foreign and domestic visitors to a "New Yorker's New York." A large network of volunteer Greeters help visitors to feel welcome and comfortable and to make the most out of their stay in the world's most exciting and diverse city. Our goal is to encourage visitors to return to New York again and again. As a non-profit voluntary organization, Big Apple Greeter receives financial support from New York City's business and philanthropic communities, and offers its services to visitors free of charge. Greeters do not accept tips.

Who is a Big Apple Greeter?

Nearly 400 adults of all ages, from all of the five boroughs of New York City have volunteered to become Greeters. Each is eager to portray his or her enthusiastic view of New York City. More than 20 foreign languages are spoken among the volunteer Greeters.

What does a Greeter actually do?

Share with a visitor what life in New York is really like by walking in their own neighborhood, or a neighborhood familiar to the Greeter—not just to see the well known sights of New York, but to highlight the little things that distinguish one New York neighborhood from another. Share with visitors the wonders of New York's mass transit system using FUN PASSES generously donated by the Metropolitan Transportation Authority.

How do visitors learn about Big Apple Greeter?

Information about Big Apple Greeter is available on our multi-lingual Web site, www.bigapplegreeter.org, as well as extensive national and international newspaper, magazine and radio coverage. "Word-of-mouth," travel agents, guidebooks and other pertinent information sources also disseminate information about Big Apple Greeter.

Please give us your feedback on this guide! E-mail comments to bsaper@bigapplegreeter.org

Big Apple Greeter has a nondiscriminatory policy on race, religion, color, national origin, age, gender, sexual orientation, marital status and disability.

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