



Big Apple Greeter
New York City

A GUIDE TO CHINATOWN

Because New York City's Chinese population has grown so rapidly the last few decades, the city has three Chinatowns: the one in Lower Manhattan which is still the one meant by "Chinatown"; one in Flushing, Queens; and the newest in Sunset Park, Brooklyn. To visitors, Manhattan's Chinatown promises exotica. To the city's Chinese and other Asian residents, it's the heartland of their culture and the place for the freshest and cheapest fish, fruits and vegetables and the best Chinese meals.

Where Is Chinatown?

As its population has expanded and off-shore investment increased, Chinatown has pushed the envelope into areas north to Houston Street, east to the River, south to the Brooklyn Bridge and west to Broadway.

It's Easy to Get to:

By Subway: 6, N, R, Q,W, J,M, and Z to Canal Street; B, D to Grand Street.
By Bus: M1, M6 (going downtown,) M9, M15, M103

History

By at least the 1890s the area around Pell and Doyers Streets was already known as Chinatown. The 1900 Census found 6,321 Chinese in the New York City. The surrounding neighbors were largely remnants of earlier European descendants and African Americans. The Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, aimed against working class Chinese, was in effect until 1943. The 1882 law also kept Chinese women from entering the U.S., thus perpetuating Chinatown's "bachelor" society. After 1943 immigration of both sexes increased but not until 1965, when the basis for immigration was changed from ethnicity to country of origin, did a dramatic expansion of the ethnic Chinese population begin. By 2000 some 56,000 Asians were living in Manhattan's Chinatown, probably 95% of them ethnic Chinese.

Today Manhattan's Chinatown is still the first staging point in America for many Chinese immigrants. Family may be here as well as jobs (garment factories, restaurants and food distribution) and, of course, the language(s) and foods are familiar.



Photos:

A stylized version of the two-part Chinese ideogram for "Chinatown" appears in the Canal Street subway stop.

Bilingual street signs

Chinese newspapers

Manhattan Bridge



Historic and Other Notable Sites

1 Columbus Park (west of Mulberry and south of Bayard) is the community's outdoor rec room. For tots, there's a playground; for teens, baseball and basketball courts; for adults (mainly seniors) there are Chinese checkers and dominos, card games and friends to gossip and exercise with. In sunny weather elderly men air their songbirds in handsome bamboo cages. Dating to the 1890s, Columbus Park replaced the notorious Mulberry Bend, a festering slum that was publicized by reformer Jacob Riis' photographs and writings.



2 PS 23 (70 Mulberry) is a century-old public school building now used as a community center. Inside it houses everything from the Museum of the Chinese in the Americas and a senior center to the Refugee Vocational Training Program. Check PS 23's dark recesses along Mulberry and Bayard and you'll discover a shopping mall with a shoemaker, clothes vendor, fortune teller, jewelers and a woman selling homemade sticky rice dumplings wrapped in bamboo leaves.



3 Museum of the Chinese in America houses a fascinating collection of documents and artifacts covering the history and culture of the Chinese community. MoCA opens at noon every day and is free on Fridays.

The Chinese are devoted savers as the great number of banks here attests. One is landmarked (both interior and exterior): **4** the 1895 Bowery Savings Bank (130 Bowery at Grand). Its classical design by McKim, Mead and White set the style for grand banks across the U.S. The magnificent, but long unoccupied, building has been transformed into a restaurant.

銀行

The Chinese word for "bank" is formed by the characters for "silver" and "store."



5 On the SW corner of Canal and Bowery the 1924 bank with its gigantic bronzed dome occupies a historic spot. A plaque notes it was built on the site where George Washington began his march into the city when the British evacuated, November 25, 1783. The Bull Head Tavern then occupied the corner.

6 Noteworthy, but erected much later (1977), is the pseudo-Chinese temple at 17 Chatham Square, now home to an HSBC bank branch.



7 First Diamond District. The city's earliest diamond sellers once lined Canal west of Bowery. A few shops remain there and around the block, up Bowery. But the main business is now done uptown on West 47th Street between Fifth and Sixth Avenues.

8 Church of the Transfiguration (29 Mott) is home to the largest Chinese Roman Catholic community in the U.S. The 1801 building of stone rubble began life as a protestant church with congregants from Germany, Scandinavia and England. In 1853 it became a Catholic church, with mainly Irish and then Italian parishioners. One sign of the ethnic change is the Mulberry Street funeral home associated with Transfiguration.

Originally known as Chas. Baciagalupo Resting Parlour, it now is called Ng Nook Funeral Services. However, an Italian brass band still plays during some of the funeral services. Other historic churches include: **9** the Greek Revival St.

James Catholic (32 James), 1837, where Governor Alfred E. Smith was a parishioner as a boy, and **10** the ionic-columned Mariner's Temple Baptist Church (12 Oliver) where seamen once worshipped. The stone building was erected in 1842 and rebuilt twice after devastating fires.

11 First Shearith Israel Cemetery (on St. James Place near Oliver, 1656-1833) is a reminder of the Sephardic Jews who lived and worked within the walled city of New Amsterdam but who were not allowed burial within those city walls.

12 65 Mott Street (ca.1824) is said to be the first building still standing which was built as a tenement, rental properties which barely met the minimum residential building standards.

13 20 Mott Street (1820) is a federal style townhouse now occupied by Sweet-n-Tart Restaurant. With its swooshy signage and fusion menu, it is one of many new, trendy Hong Kong-style eating places.

14 18 Bowery (1785), the Edward Mooney House, lays claim to being the city's oldest row house.

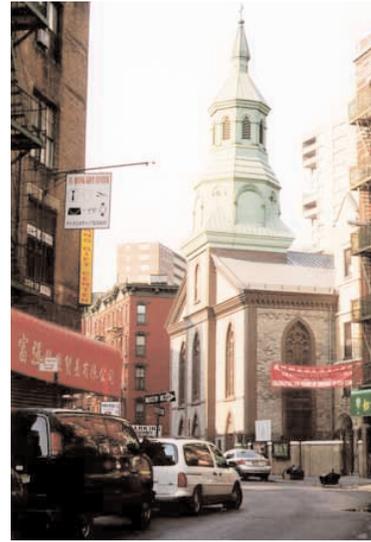
Two statues command different parts of the Bowery: First came **15** Confucius, in 1984, at Bowery and Division. He appeared along with the much needed, giant-sized housing complex to his north, Confucius Plaza. Thirteen years later a statue of **16** Lin Za Xu was placed in Chatham Square. He was a 19th century officer from Fukien (Fujian) province, source of the latest surge of Chinese immigrants. Lin Za Xu burned British ships carrying opium, thus starting the Opium War.

Events

The Lunar New Year is heralded with a colorful and noisy celebration spread over at least two weekends and full of dancing lions, bands and general merriment. Its date can fall anywhere from January 1 through mid-February. Coordinator for Lunar New Year events is the Chinese American Arts Council (212 431-9740). The Asian American Federation of New York maintains a good calendar of many Chinatown-related events at <http://aafny.org> (click on calendar).

Shopping

Canal Street is awash with mini-malls and sidewalk sellers hawking knock-offs of luxury watches, 'designer' handbags, T-shirts and hats. For non-tourist merchandise (clothes, decorative goods and packaged foods) try Pearl River 477 Broadway near Broome, or its branch at 200 Grand, near Mott); for teas, other packaged foods and housewares, Kam Kuo (7-9 Mott); for uptown taste and quality in decorative items, both antique and new, Sinotique (19A Mott).



The Chinese character for "pearl" appears on the Pearl River store and also in signs at the diamond district end of Canal Street.



The Chinese characters for “rice” and “shop” appear on many small restaurants in Chinatown.

Culinary Attractions

Cafes, restaurants, tea and coffee shops abound, perhaps close to 200. It’s hard to go wrong, but check where the lines are since repeat customers know best.

- 17** Nom Wah Tea House (13-15 Doyers) is the oldest dim sum (dumpling) house, dating to 1920 and typical of the chop suey restaurant décor of that time.
- 18** Green Tea Café (45 Mott) are among the newcomer teahouses whose flavorful, often tapioca filled, liquid concoctions are favorites with teenagers.
- 19** Wo Hop, an old-time Cantonese restaurant (15 Mott Street), is one of the few that still keeps late hours, staying open until 5 am.

Carrying on the pushcart tradition of the Lower East Side, vendors sell Chinese fast foods from sheet metal pushcarts stationed on streets close to Canal. Most offer two or three specialties. Buns with pork, egg or other tasty fillings are another inexpensive lunch snack which you’ll find at most Chinatown bakeries.

20 To see a Chinese style supermarket, stroll the Mott Street block between Hester and Grand. Here’s where local and area-wide Asians do their food shopping. In storefronts and on the sidewalks the block brims with fresh fish, fruits and vegetables, and with all manner of dried foods, from sea and land alike.

Web Links

For a photo tour of Chinatown, go to <http://nyctourist.com/chinatown1.htm>

A guide to dim sum food is at <http://chinatownnyc.com/ds.html>

The Museum of Chinese in the Americas, with a calendar of events at the museum and in the neighborhood, is at <http://www.MoCA-nyc.org> or at <http://www.chinatownweb.com/MoCA>

About Big Apple Greeter

Founded in 1992, Big Apple Greeter’s mission is to enhance New York City’s worldwide image while enriching the City experience for its visitors. Connecting with business and leisure travelers from all over the United States and the world, Greeters bring visitors to neighborhoods in all five boroughs, promote tourism throughout the city, and help visitors discover the ease of using public transportation. More than 350 volunteer Greeters, speaking over 30 languages, enjoy giving their time and energy back to their hometown. Big Apple Greeter volunteers research, write and distribute the *Neighborhood Information Profiles*, a series of five page feature stories describing a New York City neighborhood in text and photographs. Since its founding, Big Apple Greeter — a free public service — has welcomed over 50,000 visitors and been featured in hundreds of newspapers, magazines, television and radio programs all over the world, reaching an audience exceeding one billion potential visitors to New York City.

Big Apple Greeter is proud of its affiliation with NYC & Company and the Metropolitan Transportation Authority. United Airlines is the Official Airline of Big Apple Greeter.

You may learn more about Big Apple Greeter and its many services on our website: www.bigapplegreeter.org or by emailing us at information@bigapplegreeter.org.

Big Apple Greeter welcomes you to New York.

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THE HEART OF CHINATOWN

