



Adapted Travel by Mike Cohen



There is nothing like New York City

New York City remains one of the most exciting destinations in the world. When my family and I travelled there recently, it marked our first trip to the Big Apple in six years.

New York appreciates its Canadian tourists. This has been underlined in recent years by the establishment of an NYC & Company office right at 99 Blue Jays Way in Toronto. By logging on to www.nycgo.com you can begin planning your activities. Unquestionably, New York remains to be one of the most exciting cities in the world. I recommend you start things off at the official NYC information center (<http://www.nycgo.com/venues/official-nyc-information-center>) where you can be pointed in the right direction.

ACCESSIBILITY: New York City is committed to ensuring accessibility for visitors with special needs, and has equipped all buses with lifts for those in wheelchairs and those who have difficulty climbing stairs. In addition, many subway stations contain elevators, ramps, visual display signs, accessible public telephones and tactile and audio features on vending machines. Passengers with disabilities are eligible for reduced fares on most trips by using their Medicare card as proof of eligibility.

GREETERS: Big Apple Greeter is a welcome program that connects visitors with volunteers who enjoy sharing a walk through one or more of New York City's unique neighbourhoods. There are more than 300 volunteer greeters with special-interest expertise, including accessibility issues and foreign language skills.

TRANSPORTATION: To assist those with special needs, Scootaround, a wheelchair and scooter rental business, makes sure travelers are totally mobile no matter where they go. Whether the destination is a cruise, a convention, a swanky vacation or a trip to the Big Apple, Scootaround features a toll-free line with friendly operators available 24/7 and delivery to and pick up from wherever you are.

Vega Transportation offers luxury wheelchair service that is safe and reliable. For more than 20 years, they have helped redefine wheelchair transportation through their customized vehicles. Along with a multilingual and rigorously trained staff, the vehicles are customized with wheelchair lifts, high top roofs and doors, special suspen-

sion, front and rear air conditioning, wheelchair locks and TVs with DVD players.

BROADWAY: The Broadway Accessibility Initiative, the result of a partnership between organizations Alliance for Inclusion in the Arts and G-PASS, offers theatergoers with disabilities the opportunity to enjoy more Broadway shows. Currently featured on Broadway in *Catch Me If You Can*, the program's services include I-Caption for hearing impaired patrons, D-Scriptive for blind and low-vision theatre-goers and ShowTrans for non-English-speaking audience members. All are available free of charge at every performance. For more information, visit inclusioninthearts.org.



New York City is committed to ensuring accessibility for visitors with special needs.

For more information on transportation and cultural venues and their accessibility, download our Official Accessibility Guide. The Mayor's Office for People with Disabilities will send the Official Accessibility Guide free of charge to people who inquire via telephone at 212-788-2830. (The guide is also available to download from nyc.gov.) The 100-page, large-type book provides resources and specific accessibility reviews for cultural institutions, theatres, nightlife and sports venues and tours.

To find out more about accessible opportunities for athletes around New York City, please see the NYC Sports Commission's *Exercise Your Ability* guidebook. Inside, you can discover how New York City makes sports and athletic activities available to ev-

eryone, from adaptive sports leagues and competitions to accessible recreational facilities. The guide also provides current information on world-famous—and accessible—sports venues and tips on how to purchase tickets for individuals with disabilities. And for activities outside of the City, be sure to check out the section on national and international adaptive organizations.

Unquestionably “the draw” in New York City remains its extraordinary Broadway productions. Be prepared to pay big dollars, even for a seat that is the second to last spot in the house at the top. Here is a tip though. Go online via Ticketmaster or Telcharge, check out the precise availability and call the toll free number so that you can get a more accurate route of what is available. While they offer to mail the tickets at least 48 hours before the show, we recommend that you either print them out online or ask to pick them up at will call. In some cases you can even buy cancellation insurance. Most of the theatres are wheelchair accessible and have devices for the hearing impaired.

min Bed. The Benjamin brand is operated by Denihan, a nationally recognized, independent owner and operator of boutique hotels with more than 100 years in the hospitality and service. It is named after company founder Benjamin Denihan, better known as “Bud.”

For many, the experience of walking into The Benjamin's suites and guestrooms is like coming home to your private apartment in Midtown. Each of the 209 suites and guest rooms is elegantly appointed with a signature Benjamin bed, luxurious Anichini bedding, an executive work station, 42" HD Flat Screen TV, a galley kitchen, mini bar, and sleep menu. The one-bedroom deluxe and VIP suites afford terraces with grand, inspiring views of Manhattan and often a closer peek at the craftsmanship of the famed Emery Roth's architectural design. The one-bedroom suites include double-paned soundproof windows, the custom-designed Benjamin Bed (king) including 500-thread count Egyptian cotton sheets, a down duvet, luxury Anichini bedding and sleep menu with a 12-Choice Pillow Menu. There is also a separate living room, complete with a sleeper sofa, kitchen area with full-sized refrigerator, iPod alarm clock/radio, 42" HD flat-screen TV, and an executive work desk including a multi-outlet station and high-speed Internet access.

What I really liked about this place was the fact we could walk to Times Square in about a half hour while stopping to enjoy such sites as Rockefeller Center on the way. Here is a tip. If you want to eat early before going to a show, the Oxford Café (www.oxford-cafetogo.com), is two blocks from the hotel at 591 Lexington Avenue. The menu is endless, the food great and service exceptional.

Check out the Benjamin Guest Lounge, located on the second floor. It is an intimate 24-hour spot, providing a quiet living room-inspired space to meet with friends or clients. Two steamer trunks in the rear of the Guest Lounge were reinterpreted into individual workstations with computers and printers, allowing you to check email or simply print a boarding pass at anytime that is convenient.

The Benjamin has easy wheelchair access and elevators right off of the lobby.

SHOPPING: If it is shopping you like, the boutiques of Madison Avenue, the iconic department stores on Fifth Avenue and the fashion-forward shops in SoHo and the Village, are the favorites. Sporting 100 upscale retailers, Madison Avenue is a slice of heaven, New York's most luxurious shopping experience. From 57th Street to 72nd, this haute strip where the wealthy shop, boasts 15 blocks of designer boutiques and specialty retailers. The Century 21 Department store at 22 Cortlandt Street has bargains galore. But here is a tip. If you are driving in you will pass through the New Jersey town of Paramus, where a Century 21 is right on

ACCOMODATIONS: We stayed at The Benjamin (www.thebenjamin.com), a boutique luxury hotel centrally located in midtown Manhattan at the corner of Lexington Avenue and 50th Street, with quick, direct access to Fifth Avenue restaurants and shops, Grand Central Station, MoMA, Rockefeller Center, St. Patrick's Cathedral and Bloomingdales, among a myriad of other premiere city attractions. Customers of Travelocity, one of the largest travel companies in the world, have ranked it as the top hotel in New York City. The Benjamin provides an experience of true luxury and supreme comfort in an intimate, boutique-style setting. Known for its comprehensive sleep program, The Benjamin features the industry's first and only Sleep Concierge, a 12-choice pillow menu and custom Benja-



Restaurant owner Ben Benson has never let his visual impairment stand in the way.

the main drag.

DINING OUT: New York City is indeed the place to dine, with an endless array of choices to please your palate. Needless to say, there are no shortage of kosher restaurants here either.

This was my fourth trip to New York City over the past 16 years and each time I have made it a point to dine at the Jewish-owned Ben Benson's Steak House (www.benbensons.com). Opened in 1982, it is one of the top 100 independent restaurants in America. Manhattanites and visitors rub elbows with celebrities, politicians, sports stars and business executives, over huge juicy steaks, three-to-seven pound lobsters and fantastic Benson crispy hashed browns. Conveniently located in the theatre district, at 123 W 52nd St., Ben Benson's is considered to be one of New York's top steak houses. Its eclectic collection of authentic Americana fills the two roomy floors with casual elegance and charm. This handsome, clubby restaurant is home to many regulars (many with brass name plaques mounted on the wainscoted walls such as Schwartz and Grossman). Benson is a hands on owner. He created the menu himself, offering only USDA Prime steaks and chops and premium-quality poultry and seafood. He tastes and approves every food, including the bread. I enjoyed the filet mignon. But there were other tempting choices such as broiled veal chop, scallopine of veal: milanese, francese or piccata, veal parmigiana, triple lamb chops, Maryland crab cakes, broiled filet of sole, shrimp, fried chicken, chicken parmigiana, grilled chicken breast with herbed wild mushrooms and chopped steak. Children will love the appetizers and a piece of tilapia represents a perfect choice for them as the main entrée.

Ben Benson's serves huge portions, including a gigantic baked potato. In terms of salads, there are a variety of choices: baby spring mixed greens, hearts of lettuce, endive and arugula, Rancher's salad, tomato and onion, hearts of romaine, a special tomato salad and cucumber, sweet onion and tomato. The Ben Benson chopped salad went over best with our party. As for side orders, try the lightly battered fried zucchini and onion rings or the creamed spinach and the Brooklyn Blackout cake or key lime pie for dessert. The restaurant is also noted for its exclusively seasoned steak sauce.

This is a street-level restaurant and therefore very accessible to patrons in wheelchairs. Ben Benson himself graduated with a B.A. in biology from Bucknell University, a private liberal arts school located in Central Pennsylvania. He had every intention of following in the footsteps of his father and become a doctor. But when his eyesight waned, he fell back on his stellar palate to forge a highly successful career in the hospitality business. Benson never let the visual impairment stand in his way. Now legally blind, Benson remains a hands-on owner. He needed no assistance to come to our table, which included a few steps. Benson is now forced to use a white cane and can no longer walk from his apartment to the restaurant on his own. He has a voice adapted computer and utilizes a special machine to enlarge print for reading.

Lake Placid

Over the course of many years, my family and I passed the exit for Lake Placid, New York on Highway 87 and wondered when we would actually visit the former Olympic Village. Well, over the recent holidays that day finally arrived – several days in fact.

On our way back from New York City, Lake Placid was added to our itinerary and I can now strongly recommend others do the same. This is a four season destination. We got a taste of the winter experience and now we are tempted to go back in the heat of the summer. I cannot say enough about the personnel at the Lake Placid Convention and Visitor's Bureau/Regional Office of Sustainable Tourism (www.lakeplacid.com), who really helped point me in the right direction.

Some winter holiday tips include the toboggan chute on frozen Mirror Lake, ice skating, an invigorating dog sled ride, snowmobiling, cross-country skiing or ice climbing. There is also the option of exploring the endless Adirondack snowshoeing trails to see the forest from a whole new perspective.

ACCOMMODATIONS: We stayed at the 92 room Northwoods Inn (www.northwood-sinn.com), situated right on Main Street, a short walk to the Olympic Arena and Oval, a public beach, numerous restaurants, a movie theatre and quaint shops of Lake Placid. The hotel offers a sidewalk café, two restaurants and "The Cabin," a warm and cozy fireplace bar overlooking Main Street. Their rooftop bar presents a majestic view of the entire town plus the High Peaks and Whiteface Mountain.

The Northwoods Inn was purchased by the Smith family five years ago. Gary Smith has handed the day-to-day operations to his son Garrett, who as innkeeper spends a lot of time mixing with guests and getting their feedback. He is working hard at building the property. Free WiFi was recently added to all guestrooms and public areas.

The hotel is well suited for guests in wheelchairs. The parking lot leads to the back entrance of the hotel, where there is a ramp bringing you to either the lobby or the elevator to your room. Door entrances are large and the suites themselves have a nice passageway when you first enter. The elevator will also take you to the street level, where both sides of the street offer some lovely shops and restaurants to explore.

DINING OUT: For dinner one night we discovered Milano North (www.milanonorth.com). Modeled on its Albany cousin, this 110 seat, Northern Italian bistro features a dynamic open kitchen design, wood-fired oven pizzas, freshly-prepared homemade pastas and entrées using only the finest of ingredients. Located one block from the Northwoods Inn, Milano North offers a warm and contemporary Adirondack ambience. We absolutely loved our meals: a piping hot and delicious tomato soup, delicious salads and beautifully prepared entrées of grilled scallops, the best veal parmesan I can remember having (with some linguini on the side) and a grilled shrimp dish with fettuccini.

The restaurant offers a nice second floor

view of the charming downtown. You can also catch your favorite game at the bar in its relaxed and inviting atmosphere. Head Chef Ryan Preston oversees a very impressive menu and general manager David McKenty greets everyone with a smile and some Lake Placid trivia.

Milano North is fully handicapped accessible from the upper tier of the municipal parking lot. There are a number of handicapped parking spaces located just outside the front entrance to the restaurant and everything inside is all on one level.

Visit Lake Placid and invent your own perfect day. Sheltered among the Adirondack Park's six million acres, the alpine village offers endless opportunities for outdoor recreation, unique attractions, shopping, dining and a variety of fun. There are mountains to climb, rivers to fish, serene lakes to kayak and vast evergreen forests to explore. Bring your bike and cruise through the region's dramatic landscape, from quiet country roads to scenic mountain passes. Or pack your clubs and play a round on some of the beautiful Lake Placid golf courses—the region boasts 13 including five signature championship layouts. You can also attend one of the many enriching events at the Lake Placid Center for the Arts or catch a movie at the old-fashioned theater on Main Street.

ADAPTIVE SNOWSPORTS: Lake Placid was the proud host of the 1932 and 1980 winter Olympic Games. In all of the four seasons, this celebrated history can be experienced with a full range of activities from ORDA – the Olympic Regional Development Authority (<http://www.orda.org/corporate>). Make sure to purchase the Olympic Sites Passport, which gives you access to every one of the Olympic venues—from Whiteface to the Olympic Sports Complex and everything in between. Sold for \$29 at the ORDA Store and all of their ticket offices, the passport saves you time, money, and gets you into the venues at a good value.

Whiteface's Adaptive Snowsports Program is for adults and children with disabilities who want to learn how to ski and snowboard. First-timers needn't worry, lessons range from "Never-Ever" to the advanced skier/snowboarder. Lift ticket, lesson and rental adaptive equipment are included. The duration of the lesson is usually two hours, depending on the student. Payment is required at the time of reservation.

Fun in the Adirondacks takes on a whole new meaning when shared with the family. With Lake Placid's storybook setting, it's no surprise that this quaint alpine village offers unrivaled thrills, unforgettable adventures and historical exploration for all who visit. From museums and theatre performances to classic family amusements such as bowling and miniature golf, the Adirondacks have an array of activities and attractions for moms,

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Visually impaired brothers honour a special teacher

Inaugurating the C. Elizabeth Tate Low Vision Clinic of the MAB-Mackay Rehabilitation Centre

By Wendy Singer

Peter and Paul Ash recently paid tribute to their high school teacher Ms. C. Elizabeth Tate by funding the modernization and expansion of the Montreal Association for the Blind-Mackay Rehabilitation Centre's Low Vision Clinic, and dedicating it in her name.

The C. Elizabeth Tate Low Vision Clinic serves a wide variety of clients, from children to adults and seniors coping with vision impairments for the first time in their lives. The new state-of-the-art clinic is designed to accommodate mobility-limited clients and is more suitable for involvement of the client's family members or caregivers. It offers a thorough and comprehensive assessment, intervention and follow-up between MAB-Mackay professionals and their clients.

Younger brother Peter shares his school day memories: "Back in the '70s in Montreal, services for visually impaired students in public school were almost non-existent. I struggled to learn as teachers and schools were unwilling to accommodate my low vision needs." This changed in Grade 8 when he met Miss Tate.

Paul Ash adds: "What previously seemed like a confusing, intimidating mish-mash of numbers and symbols suddenly began



Peter and Paul Ash take part in the formal inauguration of the Low Vision Clinic. Tate.

to make sense! As Miss Tate laid out math equations in large print with a black felt pen, patiently explaining the problem-solving methodology, my understanding began to flow. I remember feeling very empowered. A seed was planted, which grew into a belief that regardless of my visual impairment, I would be able to succeed in the world!"

The Ash brothers are legally blind due to albinism; a genetic condition inherited from both parents, regardless of gender or ethnicity. People with albinism have little or no pigment in their eyes, skin, or hair, causing vulnerability to sun exposure and bright

light. Almost all persons with albinism are visually impaired, with the majority being classified as 'legally blind.'

Now semi-retired, these two successful businessmen maintain they would not have achieved the level of success they enjoy today in their personal and professional lives without Ms.

Also philanthropists, the Ash brothers created 'Under the Same Sun (UTTS) Fund' in 2008 after discovering that people with albinism in Tanzania were experiencing a severe crisis rooted in misunderstandings and discrimination.

"There was and still are attacks and killings of people with albinism in East Africa because there is a belief that their body parts possess magical powers that can be used in potions to make people rich," explains Peter.

1 <http://www.underthesamesun.com>

UTSS implements educational and advocacy programs that foster equal rights for people with albinism, and sponsors 300 children in private boarding schools to ensure a good quality, safe and fully integrated education. They employ 15 staff, the majority with albinism.

The brothers kept in touch with Ms. Tate long after high school. Peter shares: "She was a huge inspiration to us in terms of her humility and passion for teaching. We wanted to recognize what a difference her contribution made."

Sadly, Ms. Tate passed away five days before the inauguration ceremony of the new low vision centre. This dedication will ensure that her contribution is remembered for years to come.

The MAB-Mackay Rehabilitation Centre offers services that promote personal autonomy and optimize social participation to the extent of the individual's capacities. Last year, the Centre provided service to more than 5,000 people, including children with motor impairments or communication disorders, as well as people of all ages who are blind or visually impaired and/or deaf or hard of hearing.

For information, visit: www.mabmackay.ca and www.underthesamesun.com.

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their goals. "The whole team at ACCESS has just been wonderful," she says. "They have supported us in everything from supplying unused spaces (for the one-on-one tutoring), the chance to sell our baked goods with our Steppin' Up Café, to supplying materials and computers. This course of miracles has been a miracle and I am so thankful."

In the words of one of her students Kenza, a young adult with Asperger's Syndrome: "Ruth's students don't like ped days and finishing class at 1 p.m. Ruth is like our mother, our psychologist, our big sister, our teacher and especially our friend."

The Step-Up students recently presented a Variety Show called Giggling Ghosts. To see a video of the show, visit www.youtube.com/user/HRTVweb. Step-Up is currently offered at ACCESS Adult Education and Career Training Centre in Saint-Lambert. For information, please call 450-676-1843.

Nathalie Brault is the Communications Officer at Riverside School Board.

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dads and kids of any age.

For sports fans, be sure to check out the Olympic facilities including the Lake Placid Olympic Museum and the various sports venues such as the hockey arena, home to the 1980 "Miracle on Ice." If you're seeking an adrenaline rush, take a ride on the bobsled run or ski or ride down the highest vertical drop in the East at Whiteface Mountain.

You will love seeing firsthand the ramp that ski jumpers launch from before flying over the length of a football field. Take the chairlift alongside the jumping hills to the glass enclosed elevator to the observation deck of the 120K jump. At the top you will find a panoramic view of the Adirondack High Peaks as you stroll through the ski jumpers

preparation room.

Saunter down Lake Placid's Main Street and prepare yourself for a singular shopping experience. At first glance, it may seem like Main Street, USA - from the local bakery to the old fashioned movie theatre to the public library. But if you look closer there is a discernible cosmopolitan flair as Lake Placid's Main Street fuses the special character of the region with the goods, sundries and cuisines of the rest of the world. As you wander in and out of this retail menagerie you may notice that many of the shops' owners can be found behind the counters. Strike up a conversation - and be sure to take a piece of the Adirondacks and your perfect day in Lake Placid home with you. Whether you're looking for a fun souvenir, rustic Adirondack furniture, handmade keepsakes, high-tech gear or designer clothes, shopping in Lake Placid offers the full spectrum of unique gifts, necessities and must-have

mementos. There are a number of excellent outlet stores; Gap and Van Heusen to name a couple.

Annually, Lake Placid hosts the The Empire State Games and a parallel event for the Physically Challenged. It is open to athletes between the ages of five and 21 in the following divisions: visually impaired, blind, hearing impaired, deaf, spinal cord injury, amputees, cerebral palsy, and "Les Autres" (which includes conditions such as muscular dystrophy, dwarfism, and arthritis, among others). This event rotated between different regions of New York. It was cancelled a year ago, only to be rescued by Lake Placid, which served as the host this past February and will continue to do so each winter.

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