



## Adapted Travel by Mike Cohen



**NEW YORK CITY:** My family and I recently returned from a busy four day stop in New York City, where we saw two spectacular Broadway musicals (Pippin and Kinky Boots), stayed at a sensational luxury hotel (The Sofitel) and enjoyed a restaurant experience (TAO) we won't soon forget.

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](http://www.nycgo.com) you can begin planning your activities.

**BROADWAY:** 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 Telecharge, 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.

Kinky Boots and Pippin represent two "can't miss" choices. These Tony Award winning musicals were so good you can count me in to see them again if the opportunity presents itself.

In Kinky Boots ([www.kinkybootsthemusical.com](http://www.kinkybootsthemusical.com)), Charlie Price has reluctantly in-

herited his father's shoe factory, which is on the verge of bankruptcy. Trying to live up to his father's legacy and save his family business, Charlie finds inspiration in the form of drag queen Lola. A fabulous entertainer some sturdy stilettos, Lola turns out to be the one person who can help Charlie become the man he's meant to be. As they work to turn the factory around, this unlikely pair finds that they have more in common than they ever dreamed possible and discover that when you change your mind about someone, you can change your whole world. Inspired by a true story and based on the Miramax motion picture written by Geoff Deane and Tim Firth, Kinky Boots features a warm and witty book by Harvey Fierstein and a richly diverse musical score from pop icon Cyndi Lauper, in her stunning theatrical debut. Tickets for Kinky Boots (\$87 - \$157) are available for purchase in person at the Al Hirschfeld Theatre box office, online at [www.telecharge.com](http://www.telecharge.com), or by calling Telecharge at 800-432-7250 or 212-239-6200.

Pippin ([www.pippinthe musical.com](http://www.pippinthe musical.com)), meanwhile, is back on Broadway for the first time since it thrilled audiences 40 years ago, having won the 2013 Tony Award for Best Musical Revival. With a score by Tony nominee Stephen Schwartz (Godspell, Wicked), Pippin tells the story of a young prince on a death-defying journey to find meaning in his existence. Will he choose a happy, but simple life? Or will he risk everything for a singular flash of glory? It arrived on Broadway direct from an acclaimed run at Boston's American Repertory Theater. This captivating new production is directed

by Tony winner Diane Paulus (Hair and The Gershwin's Porgy and Bess). It features sizzling choreography in the style of Bob Fosse and breathtaking acrobatics by Les 7 doigts de la main of Montreal. Pippin is playing at the Music Box Theatre (239 W 45th Street). Tickets are available via Telecharge: 212-239-6200, 800-432-7250 or online at [www.pippinthe musical.com](http://www.pippinthe musical.com).

The Al Hirschfeld Theatre is located at 302 West 45th Street, between 8th and 9th Avenues. There is a wheelchair accessible restroom (unisex) available on the lobby level. There are no steps into the theatre from the sidewalk. Wheelchair seating and assisted listening systems are available. The Music Box Theatre is not completely wheelchair accessible. There are no steps into the theatre from the sidewalk. Where there are steps either into or within the theatre, there is no assistance available. Seating is accessible to all parts of the Orchestra without steps. Wheelchair seating is available in the Orchestra only. Handrails are available at the end of every stepped seat row in the Mezzanine. A wheelchair accessible restroom is available on the main floor.

**WHERE TO STAY:** My family and I have indeed experienced heaven. That is because we spent four nights in a gorgeous luxury suite at the Sofitel New York ([www.sofitel.com](http://www.sofitel.com)), located at 45 West 44th Street, a very short walk from Times Square and Broadway theatres. For us, the location could not have been better.

This elegant 30-storey midtown Manhattan hotel is just a stone's throw from Fifth Avenue. There are 398 spacious rooms on 30 floors, including 52 suites and one presidential suite all featuring Sofitel's luxurious feathertop and duvet sleep system - SoBed. The executive suites encompass a bedroom with a separate seating/work area, which can be closed off from each other for in-suite meetings. Most suites have southern exposure, offering a downtown view. Five terrace suites have outdoor terraces with commanding views of Manhattan. While the bed in our main bedroom was as comfortable as can be, the sofa bed also got very high marks. Seldom have I seen a hide a bed mattress as perfect as this one. There is excellent cupboard space, bathrobes and slippers to use during your stay and an in-room safe with plenty of room to place your valuables.

Elegantly decorated with Paris-meets-New York motifs, all guestrooms have a spacious marble bathroom, three telephone lines, broadband Internet access and fully stocked mini-bars. Room service is available 24 hours along with international newspapers; nightly turn-down service with Evian water; and imported French bath products. There is a fully equipped fitness centre on the basement floor.

The Sofitel New York first opened on July 14, 2000. It caters to upscale business and leisure travelers seeking a classic, yet contemporary, "home away from home" while travelling. From the moment you check in, via a series of "Bonjour," you are treated like royalty. The lobby is large, warm and

welcoming, with the concierge ready to guide you. Staff here speaks 52 different languages and there is a French-speaking ambassador in each hotel department. Upon check-in, the hotel will valet park your car at the Hippodrome facility across the street and have it ready for you when checking out.

The hotel boasts seven meeting rooms perfect for small to mid-sized meetings, with rooms ranging from 365 to 760 square feet. Rooms are designed to meet specific meeting needs, from video-conferencing to breakout work sessions and computer access for company training sessions. The Grand Ballroom offers 2,500 square feet of space to seat up to 180 people. There are handicapped rooms available while all rooms can accommodate wheelchairs as well as the visually and hearing impaired.

For reservations, call 1-800-Sofitel (763-4835).

**HOTEL DINING:** On the evening we arrived we decided to dine at Gaby, a traditional French brasserie and bar named for a Parisian model who made a name and career for herself in New York in the 1920s. Just off the lobby of the hotel, the restaurant seats 128 people. There is easy interior access for hotel guests and an entrance on 45th Street. There is a special lift at the Gaby entrance for those in wheelchairs.

Executive Chef Sylvain Harribey has been in New York for five years, having previously worked for the Sofitel in Philadelphia and Bordeaux, France. His culinary achievements include winning first place on the hit Food Network show called Chopped. This is a classy restaurant, popular not only with hotel guests but those going to a Broadway show. Pre-theatre menus do exist here. The restaurant is open all day, beginning at breakfast and for lunch as well. Among its special menus is 30-minute business lunches served in bento boxes for executives on the go.

We enjoyed an absolutely outstanding dinner at Gaby, having the great advantage of meeting Harribey in person. He first prepared a marvellous and tasty butternut squash cappuccino, with truffle oil and fleur de sel. This was followed by a unique spring lobster salad, featuring some sumptuous lobster, fruits, avocados and greens. There were two main courses: oven roasted lamb loin, crusted with Dijon mustard, white bean puree with pumpkin seed oil, vegetable tian gratine and Harribey's own creation called the Franburger. This was served on a crispy baguette with melted brie cheese, caramelized onion and piment d'Espelette pepper aioli and French Fries on the side. We shared



*The Sofitel New York is ideally situated.*



some extraordinary desserts: a crème brulee, a chocolate lava cake with vanilla ice cream and a chocolate chip and raisin pudding with cinnamon ice cream.

**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 is no shortage of kosher restaurants here either.

The one restaurant we had heard a lot about was TAO ([www.taogroup.com](http://www.taogroup.com)), the pioneers of the Pan-Asian trend that swept New York City over a decade ago. We dined at TAO Uptown; the chain recently unveiled TAO Downtown and they are in Las Vegas as well.

Since its inception in 2000, TAO Uptown at 42 East 58th Street, has become well-known for spurring the trend of “vibe-dining,” has been a national and international hotspot. TAO Downtown is located beneath the Maritime Hotel.

Upon entering the restaurant, one is immediately struck by a 16-foot Buddha floating above a reflecting pool filled with Japanese carp. The Pan Asian restaurant specializes in authentic Hong Kong Chinese, Japanese and Thai cuisines. There are three levels of dining, including the prized “Skybox” which offers views of what once was a movie theatre. Tao has 300 seats, a sushi bar, lounge and two bars at which to enjoy the food and the show. Be sure to make reservations. As GM Keith Dorrow told us, “we are always busy.”

There is a wonderful ambiance here, with trendy music and a charismatic serving staff. The menu here is truly designed for sharing. Our waiter, Hutch, made life so much easier for our group by recommending a series of courses. It is as if he read our minds. We started off with some appetizers: hot edamame and roasted shishito peppers. That was followed by spicy tuna tartar on crispy rice,

six pieces we split among us happily. The Peking duck spring rolls, with hoisin sauce, were deliciously crispy but the outstanding item of the night which I strongly recommend was the satay of Chilean sea bass with wok-roasted asparagus. I cannot remember tasting any kind of fish this good. The lobster and shrimp spring roll with shiitake mushrooms and spicy pineapple sauce was a treat, a bit spicy but nothing too difficult to handle.

TAO has a magnificent sushi menu. You can study the options via their menu. Hutch selected some fantastic pieces for us. There was still more to come. The wok-seared New York sirloin with shiitake mushrooms cut like butter and was served with some crispy roasted potato wedges. An order of crispy orange chicken, beautifully prepared scallops and some white rice rounded out the main course. Did we have room for dessert? First came the sugar dusted doughnuts with a trio of dipping sauces – caramel, chocolate and vanilla. This was delicious beyond description. The banana pudding with fortune cookie crust and the lemongrass crème brulee were dandy as well.

There is easy street-level access by wheelchair. When making your reservation, ask for a table at the main level where there are no stairs.

**BREAKING UP THE DRIVE:** If you are travelling with passengers who have special needs, it is always a good idea to break up the trip. Consider staying over in Saratoga and the Hampton Inn and Suites ([www.saratogaspringssuites.hamptoninn.com](http://www.saratogaspringssuites.hamptoninn.com)). This one is located at 25 Lake Avenue.

The Hampton Inn & Suites Saratoga Springs Downtown is probably one of the nicest properties from this brand that I have come across, having opened just over five years ago. It is part of the Turf Hotels group. The first thing you will notice is the majestic entrance. Upon checking in your room key grants you entrance to free covered parking on a multi-level garage.

There are 123 guest rooms and suites featuring king-or queen-sized beds. Some suites have spacious balconies and separate living rooms with sofa beds. We booked the latter and were pleasantly surprised by how extraordinarily large the unit was. I particularly liked the ultra-comfortable chairs in front of the two TVs. It is fully wheelchair accessible, via its walkway from the garage to

the large size elevators.

**BUFFALO, NEW YORK:** My family and I recently spent some time in Buffalo, New York to visit friends. Buffalo ([www.visitbuffaloniagara.com](http://www.visitbuffaloniagara.com)) is the commercial, political and entertainment hub of an eight-county region of western New York State consisting of nearly 1.6 million people. Located at the easternmost end of Lake Erie, overlooking the Niagara River, Buffalo is just across the Peace Bridge from Ontario.

Buffalo is only a 20-minute drive to and from Niagara Falls and its array of world class tourist attractions, including the Maid of the Mist sightseeing boat and the Cave of the Winds, a web of wooden catwalks and staircases accessed through a tunnel in the rock behind the American Falls that provide spectacular up-close views of the cataract.

Here is something I did not know. Buffalo is home to the only “bricks and mortar” museum in the U.S. dedicated to the history of people with disabilities called The Museum of disABILITY History. It is located at 3826 Main Street. Visitors and those who see its travelling exhibits, enjoy wide-ranging topics like disability and pop culture, the wide world of disability and sports, and the evolution of adaptive equipment, among many others, illustrated by photos, rare books and historic artifacts - truly a unique experience. Group tours are available. To schedule a tour, call 716-629-3626, 716-629-3626 or log on to <http://museumofdisability.org>.

**WHAT TO DO:** There is wonderful shopping, museums, a great zoo, an amusement park, a Dave and Busters restaurant/amusement centre and a fabulous Regal Transit Center Stadium 18 & IMAX at 6707 Transit Road in Williamsville. I always enjoy seeing a movie at the Regal chain ([www.regalmovies.com](http://www.regalmovies.com)). As the name of the complex says, this is stadium seating. There is a large parking lot and very friendly staff.

For special needs patrons, most of the movies shown offer closed captioned equipment upon request. There are listening devices for the hearing impaired and wheelchair access. Go to their website and at the bottom of the homepage under Theatres, click on the Captioning and Descriptive Video link. This page will provide you with a list of theatres, sorted by state. Click on the state in which your theatre is located. This page will provide a list of what movies are being shown that offer the captioning and descriptive audio, as well as their show times. If you go online to Fandango.com and locate the theatre, movie and showtime the website will list if closed captioning is available for that performance. Upon arriving at the theatre location, printed materials are available that explain how to use the closed caption-

ing system. Staff members and managers are knowledgeable on the closed captioning system and can assist with any specific questions you may have.

**WHERE TO STAY:** In terms of accommodations, we were very fortunate to come across the brand new Staybridge Suites Buffalo Amherst, at 1290 Sweet Home Road, adjacent to the University at Buffalo –SUNY North Campus. Resting on the eastern shore of Lake Erie, the suburb of Amherst provides great access to entertainment, restaurants and attractions. Buffalo Niagara International Airport (BUF) is eight miles away. It turned out to be an excellent location. Having only opened on November 11, 2013, general manager Shannon Ruth, assistant GM Sarah Esposito and their team really provide a welcoming atmosphere.

This is an extended stay pet friendly hotel, which offers studios, one bedroom and two bedroom/two bathroom suites, as well as an indoor saltwater pool, a fitness room, an in-season BBQ Pavillion with grills and complimentary guest laundry. You also get a full hot breakfast each morning, along with evening social receptions Tuesday through Thursdays. We chose the two bedroom option and for three of us it offered the kind of personal space one is not normally accustomed to during a family stay in a hotel. With a king size bed (and one amazingly comfortable reading chair) in the master bedroom, two double beds in the other and a pullout couch in the living room two families could happily share the premises. We also appreciated the 24 hour free coffee, tea, hot chocolate, milk, juices and soft drinks, the “Great Room” where you can hang out with business associates and the “Den,” filled with books, games and lots of comfy little nooks.

Each hotel room is furnished with a 42 inch flat screen HD TV, DVD players, iPod docking stations, alarm clocks and fully equipped kitchens, complete with pots, pans and utensils. There is good workspace and wireless internet. This property even has additional storage units available on each floor.

This is the eighth property opened by the folks at Ellicott Development and over the next couple of years they plan many more. You can see the others at <http://www.ellicottdevelopment.com/portfolio/hotels>. They range from luxury boutique to other extended stay locales. You can call 1-877-660-8550 for reservations or do so online at [www.staybridgesuites.com/amherstny](http://www.staybridgesuites.com/amherstny).

The Staybridge Suites is well equipped for guests with special needs. This includes the public entrance, guest rooms, the registra-



Tao Uptown is one of New York City's finest restaurants.

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tion desk, the dining area, the exercise facility, the pool and the business center. In fact, both the pool and whirlpool are furnished with lifts for the handicapped. The hotel provides accessible self parking, van accessible self parking, communications kits with visual alarms and notification devices, TTY for guest use and closed caption televisions.

**TORONTO'S HOCKEY HALL OF FAME:** On my most recent trip to Toronto I visited the Hockey Hall of Fame, a first for me.

Wheelchairs can reach every area in the Hockey Hall of Fame. For guests with wheelchairs there is an elevator located beside the steps to the Great Hall. The Hall also has one wheelchair for guests that might need it. There is no charge, although they require an imprint of a major credit card. If you intend to use this service, it is recommended you call ahead to reserve at 416-360-7735 ext. 231.

For more than two decades I have been visiting Toronto ([www.seetorontonow.com](http://www.seetorontonow.com)) at least once a year. There were times that for work purposes I'd be there as often as once a month, yet for some reason I never made it a priority to visit the Hockey Hall of Fame ([www.hhof.com](http://www.hhof.com)). During my most recent stop, I made it a priority to place this on my agenda. It is located downtown in Brookfield Place at the corner of Yonge and Front Streets.

Visitors are told to pretty much allocate several hours to explore Toronto's premier hockey attraction and I did just that. Montreal fans will enjoy experiencing a replica of the Canadiens dressing room at the old Forum, complete with sweaters of such greats as Ken Dryden and Guy Lafleur. There are small and large TV monitors in various sections and in the Habs room you can hear the golden voice of our very own



The Staybridge Suites Buffalo Amherst opened last fall.

Dick Irvin narrating a film about Stanley Cup dynasties.

**WHERE TO STAY:** I like to stay downtown when visiting Toronto and for my family nothing beats a two bedroom suite at The Grand Hotel and Suites ([www.grandhotelto.com](http://www.grandhotelto.com)), located at the corner of Jarvis and Dundas. This is a great area to select as a base for it is in such a dynamic location. First and foremost, the amazing Eaton Centre ([www.toronto Eaton Centre.com](http://www.toronto Eaton Centre.com)) is just a few blocks away. Besides its endless array of stores and kiosks, there is an Indigo bookstore, a number of restaurants and the busy urban eatery food court, which can serve your dinner needs at good prices on a daily basis. Dundas Square, across the street, is Toronto's answer to Times Square and always full of action. The Theatre District is nearby. We took advantage of the hotel's daytime shuttle service, which took us door to door wherever we wanted to go.

The Grand Hotel and Suites is only 14 years old and still looks spanking new. It features 177 extraordinary guest suites. For families, the junior two bedroom suites feature spacious living room/work areas separated from the two bedroom areas by sets of double French glass doors with vertical blinds. The bedrooms areas contain king and queen size beds, LCD TVs and dual-line telephones with data port. A separate living area contains a double sofa bed, TV, DVD Player, CD Player and a work desk with a dual-line telephone. There is a fully equipped kitchenette with a microwave, fridge, coffeemaker and cutlery. We got one of the recently refurbished second floor rooms.

You can slip into a plush bathrobe, use the iron and ironing board and enjoy the convenience of the laptop size in-room safe. There is complimentary wireless Internet access in each room. Indeed this place has all of the comforts of home and more, which is why many guests capitalize on the options of extended stay packages for 21 consecutive days or more. The kitchenette is a definite bonus and something kosher guests in particular will find useful as they can prepare some of their own meals. A very large Metro supermarket is just a block and a half away. The suite has ample cupboard space to pack away the groceries.

All guests get to enjoy a splendid breakfast buffet, free of charge, with an extensive array of items to choose from. There is also a fitness

centre, the two-storey neo-classical pool indoor pool (surrounded by exquisite hand painted murals) and two whirlpools on the rooftop garden, which provides a panoramic view of Toronto. The latter is a real plus and an area guests take advantage of year-round, even with below zero temperatures. When darkness falls, movies and television shows are piped on to a large white screen.

There is 24 hour room service, twice-daily maid service, valet and underground parking, a friendly concierge, a restaurant, 10,000 square feet of meeting space and a fully equipped business centre. Shuttle services are available to anywhere in the financial core. Make sure to bring your Aeroplan card in order to earn 500 miles per night.

Having the two distinct bedrooms and the middle area was a bonus I would recommend for a family spending multiple days together in a hotel room, providing just the necessary privacy.

**DINNER:** The Shore Club ([www.theshoreclub.ca](http://www.theshoreclub.ca)) on Wellington Street turned out to be a real treat. It is fully wheelchair accessible, with all of the tables at the same main level.

A vibrant restaurant and cocktail bar offering up lively ambiance, The Shore Club (which also has an Ottawa locale) is memorable for its atmosphere, professional service and outstanding cuisine. Located in the new RBC Dexia Centre, the restaurant is situated in Toronto's bustling Entertainment District and is just steps away from prominent cultural venues such as Roy Thomson Hall, David Pecaut Square and TIFF Bell Lightbox, making it an ideal pre-performance dinner destination. It's also within walking distance of the financial district, Rogers Centre and the Metro Toronto Convention Centre. Valet parking is available next door at the Ritz Carlton.

We started off by sharing an amazing Single Tier Seafood Tower featuring a king crab dip, won ton, oysters, clams, mussels and jumbo shrimp while also opting for the grilled marinated wild mushrooms. The menu includes numerous other sumptuous choices such as fried calamari, steamed clams, dungeness crab cake, apple cider smoked salmon and vanilla-battered prawns. There are a number of soups and



The Museum of disABILITY History is a unique Buffalo attraction.

salads. As for the main courses, you have a choice between seafood specialties such as salmon wellington, maple-glazed king salmon, smoked Alaskan black cod, herb-dusted sea bass and stuffed rainbow trout and steakhouse favorites like the New York strip, filet mignon, braised short ribs and double-cut lamb chops. As for sides and add-ons, there are no less than 21 selections from mashed potatoes and steakhouse fries to tempura-battered onion rings, fresh asparagus and braised fennel. We all went the steak and lobster route, enjoying every morsel of each. Yes, we saved just enough room for some home made desserts : a spectacular Black Forest cake and some keylime pie.

With its luxurious, contemporary décor, The Shore Club elevates dining to a true feast for the senses. The interior, curated by renowned designer Elaine Thorsell, pays homage to art deco ocean liners, boasting soaring ceilings, a palette of cool blue and green hues and stunning original artwork.

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The Hockey Hall of Fame is wheelchair accessible.