

New York City: shopping, Broadway and fine dining

Travel Spotlight

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NEW YORK CITY – There is no question that 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. Before you go log on to www.nygo.com to begin planning your activities.

When in New York, shopping is always an extraordinary experience with so much to choose from. Unquestionably, though, the attraction here remains the 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.

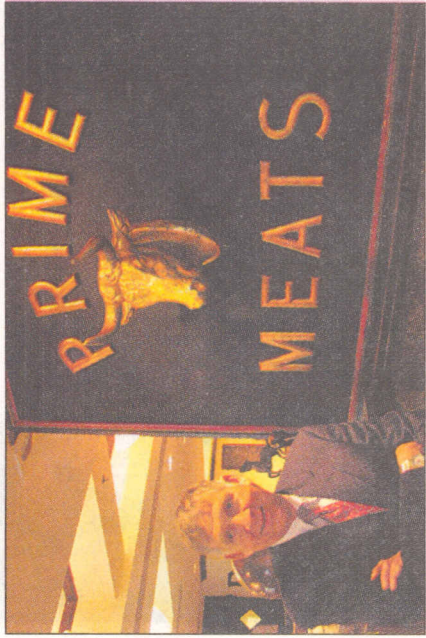
We stayed at The Benjamin (www.thebenjamin.com), a boutique luxury hotel centrally located in midtown Manhattan at the corner of Lexington Avenue and 50th Street, with quick, direct access to Fifth Avenue restaurants and shops, Grand Central Station, MoMA, Rockefeller Center, St. Patrick's Cathedral and Bloomingdale, 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.

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 workstation, 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. Their guest lounge offers 24 access to the internet and a printer.

This was my fourth trip to New York City over the 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 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).



Ben Benson is the hands-on owner of one of New York's finest steakhouses

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.

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.

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