

From mouth-watering steakhouses and offbeat design stores to movie-like vistas, **Philip Watson** takes a bite out of one of the Big Apple's most vibrant districts

#### 01 BROOKLYN BRIDGE

Brooklyn is one of the most hip and happening neighbourhoods in New York City. While the borough is easily accessible from Manhattan by subway or taxi, by far the best way to approach the area is on foot, via the iconic Brooklyn Bridge. The world's first steel suspension bridge opened in 1883 and boasts a pedestrian walkway that begins just east of City Hall, rising above the car lanes and East River, to afford uninterrupted views of Manhattan's skyscrapers, Governors Island and the Statue of Liberty. Observation points under the support towers have brass plaques showing the buildings on view. This classic city walk takes 20 minutes or so – about 140 metres after the wood-plank path ends, take the left fork down to Washington Street.

#### 02 DUMBO

With a population of more than 2.6 million, Brooklyn is New York's most populous area, and more like a separate city than a single borough. It has a long history of immigration and industry, as well as deprivation and disrepair, yet in recent years it has seen a vibrant revival. One of the first districts to be rejuvenated was Dumbo (an annoying acronym for Down Under the Manhattan Bridge Overpass), an area of old warehouses and abandoned lofts that proved ideal for young creative types priced out of the increasingly gentrified Lower Manhattan.

It's now home to an energetic array of modern art galleries – 111 Front Street has a dozen or more in the same building – and offbeat design stores. Spring (spring3D.net) at number 126a is perhaps the most original in all of New York. Dumbo also features two of Brooklyn's most renowned restaurants – Grimaldi's (19 Old Fulton Street; tel +1 718 858 4300; grimaldis.com), an authentic pizzeria that many New Yorkers consider the city's best, and the River Café (1 Water Street; tel +1 718 522 5200; rivercafe.com), an eatery by the water's edge that serves up fine New American cuisine and has spectacular views of Manhattan, especially at night.

#### 03 BROOKLYN HEIGHTS

While Dumbo's riverside Empire-Fulton Ferry State Park offers a view of the city that's so famous it has

starred in countless feature films and wedding videos – framed perfectly by Brooklyn and Manhattan Bridges – the most scenic and panoramic views of Manhattan are to be savoured from the Brooklyn Heights Promenade, an elevated riverside pedestrian walkway that runs for ten blocks. Nearby are rows of stately early 19th-century brownstone houses and the Greek Revival-style Borough Hall at 209 Joralemon Street, where you'll find the small but informative Brooklyn Tourism and Visitors Centre (tel +1 718 802 3846; visitbrooklyn.org).



#### 04 CARROLL GARDENS

This is another rapidly regenerating district close by, where old-fashioned tailors, hair salons, dental offices and laundromats sit side-by-side with chichi gift shops, organic cafés and hip bars. Smith Street is a new "restaurant row", the highlight being Saul at number 140 (tel +1 718 935 9844; saulrestaurant.com), a good-value modern American eatery that's one of the few in Brooklyn to hold a Michelin star. A few blocks away is a delightfully unreconstructed bar, Brooklyn Social (335 Smith Street; tel +1 718 858 7758), a former Italian men's club with a classic pressed-tin ceiling, faded deco mirrors and a curved oak bar that looks unchanged since the 1950s.

#### 05 PARK SLOPE

This laid-back area of tree-lined streets, historic brownstones, chic clothing boutiques and hip cafés is the epicentre of the Brooklyn boom. With Manhattan often seeming over-run

and increasingly sanitised, bohemian Park Slope offers a New York that's more edgy and authentic – like a Big Apple equivalent of London's Shoreditch. It's here you'll find stores such as 3R Living (2761 Fifth Avenue; tel +1 718 832 0951; 3rliving.com), a cool boutique selling organic and eco-friendly products and gifts, and cutting-edge music venues such as Barbes (376 Ninth Street; tel +1 347 422 0248; barbesbrooklyn.com), which hosts everything from jazz and reggae to klezmer, a form of Jewish music.

Park Slope is also home to Brooklyn's first boutique hotel, Hotel Le Bleu (370 Fourth Avenue; tel +1 718 625 1500; hotellebleu.com). Opened in November 2007, the four-star property may be located inauspiciously between a busy taxi centre and a bleak

office supplies superstore, but it has 48 bright and cheery bedrooms with large beds, wifi access, 42-inch plasma TVs, and industrial cityscape vistas taking in Manhattan and the Statue of Liberty (request a room above the fifth floor for the best views). The 30 sqm bedrooms start at US\$300 – stylishly designed rooms of this size are twice the price in Manhattan.

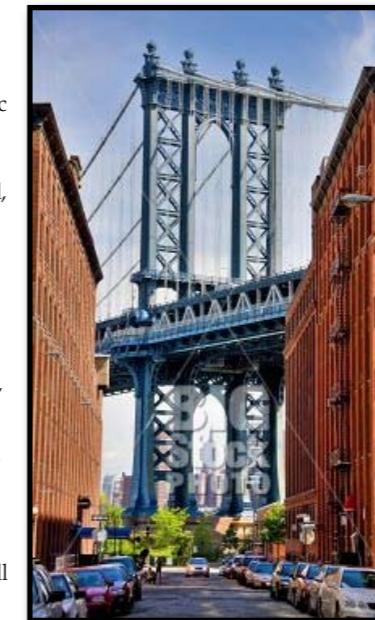
#### 06 BROOKLYN MUSEUM AND PROSPECT PARK

Brooklyn Museum is one of the largest art museums in the US, yet it couldn't be more different from its hectic Manhattan cousin, the Metropolitan Museum of Art. This is a calm, cultured and welcoming gallery housed in a five-floor Beaux Arts building, highlights of which include one of the world's finest ancient Egyptian collections, about 60 Rodin sculptures and Judy Chicago's intriguing and extraordinary installation, *The Dinner Party*. 200 Eastern Parkway; tel +1 718 638 5000; brooklynmuseum.org

The museum is on the edge of Prospect Park, a 526-acre recreational area created in 1866 by Frederick Law Olmsted and Calvert Vaux – it's a public space they considered to be a vast improvement on their other famed, though smaller and more compromised, New York project, Central Park. Prospect has jogging routes, nature trails, a boating lake and a small zoo. Next door is the Brooklyn Botanic Garden, a 52-acre garden museum featuring more than 12,000 plants, a Japanese garden, and a "celebrity path" that honours famed Brooklyn natives such as Woody Allen, Barbra Streisand, Mel Brooks and Woody Guthrie.

#### 07 WILLIAMSBURG

With its new-style eco-activists, avant-artists and literary outlaws, as well as old-time Poles, Puerto Ricans and Hasidic Jews, Williamsburg (locals prefer "Billyburg" or "Billburg") is Brooklyn with attitude. While the diverse district can appear a little down-at-heel compared with Park Slope, walk along



Bedford Avenue and North Sixth Street and you'll discover a lively array of cafés, design stores, indie record shops and vintage clothing outlets. Williamsburg is also home to the "alternative Chelsea" art scene, with galleries such as Pierogi (177 N Ninth Street; tel +1 718 599 2144; pierogi2000.com) and Klaus von Nichtssagend (438 Union Avenue; tel +1 718 383 7309; klausgallery.com), showcasing the work of some of New York's most exciting emerging artists.

For a taste of how Brooklyn used to be, locals and Manhattanites alike head to Peter Luger (178 Broadway; tel +1 718 387 7400; peterluger.com), a Brooklyn institution founded in 1887 that has been voted New York's number-one steakhouse for more than two decades. In a series of wood-panelled, vaguely Bavarian-style dining rooms, no-nonsense waiters in red bow ties and white aprons serve unbeatable porterhouse steaks cut from prime aged Iowa-farmed corn-fed beef. Bring some dollars as it's cash-only.

From Peter Luger, it's a quick cab ride over the Williamsburg Bridge back to Manhattan. Look out for the sign, erected by Brooklyn president Marty Markowitz, that perfectly encapsulates the borough's proudly independent streak. It reads: "You are now leaving Brooklyn. Oy vey!" ■

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