

Time Out

New York

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UNDERGROUND EVENTS • HIDDEN ATTRACTIONS

SECRETS OF NYC

OFF-MENU MEALS • BRILLIANT LIFEHACKS



you can actually visit

inches of loamy topsoil (ring a bell on the ground floor to enter). It's a signifier of what Soho really is, under all of the wealth and mythos of the neighborhood: a space on an island made of dirt and rocks. 141 Wooster St between W Houston and Prince Sts (212-473-8072, diaart.org)

Birreria Roma

The cozy Italian spot Pizza Roma has an even more intimate annex: a semisecret, reservations-only beer garden. Call at your reserved time for access to a secluded Cornelia Street alleyway, which leads to the 20-seat patio. The beer menu features mostly Italian brews like Moretti and AMA Bionda. If you're feeling peckish, dine on items from the restaurant, like slices of Roman-style pizza. 259 Bleecker St between Sixth and Seventh Aves (212-924-1970, pizzaromany.com)

Elevated Acre

This little tract of heavenly green is an unexpected retreat within the gray bustle of the Financial District. And you'd never know it was there, situated as it is behind 55 Water Street, one of the largest office buildings in the city. To access the oasis, take the stairway or one of the escalators adjacent to the building's Chase bank. There's a plank walkway and benches, à la the High Line, plus trees and bushes to give you a breath of fresh air. 55 Water St off Old Slip (55water.com)—Jenna Scherer



institutions

The Slipper Room

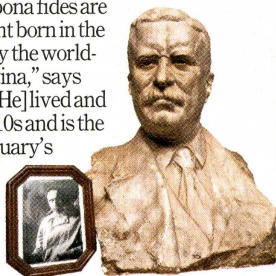
When this downtown staple reopened last fall, most of its amenities were brand-new; but a few items from the old club remain. "Our mascot, Howdy Buddha—a statue with the head of Howdy Doody and the body of Buddha—was with us at the old Slipper Room, and it felt like the new theater wasn't finished until he was brought in and installed on a shelf over the bar," says club owner and creative director James Habacker. "Along with his wingman, Bruce Lee, he has been a talisman of good luck for the place." 167 Orchard St at Stanton St (212-253-7246, slipperroom.com)

The Bell House

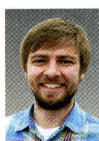
Given its location—on a slightly desolate block not too far from the Gowanus Canal—it's fitting that one of this venue's secrets concerns a ghost sighting. "Our cleaning crew sometimes reports sounds coming from the catwalk," notes Andrew Templar, one of the co-owners, referring to the main room's mezzanine. "I heard it through someone who heard it through someone else that people have on occasion seen a little girl watching shows from the upper catwalk, sitting just past the railing." 149 7th St between Second and Third Aves, Gowanus, Brooklyn (718-643-6510, thebellhouse.ny.com)

City Reliquary Museum

One of the Brooklyn institution's prized possessions is a bust of Theodore Roosevelt, whose NYC bona fides are solid: He was the only U.S. President born in the city. "[It's] a plaster cast sculpted by the world-renowned Czech artist Joseph Kratina," says museum founder Dave Herman. "[He] lived and worked in Brooklyn during the 1910s and is the great-grandfather of the City Reliquary's first resident geologist, Nik Sokol." 370 Metropolitan Ave at Havemeyer St, Williamsburg, Brooklyn (718-782-4842, cityreliquary.org)—Amy Plitt



What's your favorite NYC secret?



Nick Carr, founder of Scouting NY (scoutingny.com)

"There's a 150-foot hole in the sidewalk on Park Avenue between 36th and 37th Streets. It's fun to watch New Yorkers walk over it, completely unaware they're a sewer grate away from plunging 15 stories into Manhattan's depths."



Esther Crain, founder of Ephemeral New York (ephemeralnewyork.wordpress.com)

"The next time you're lounging around Washington Square Park, Madison Square Park or Bryant Park, remember that these wonderful green spaces started out in the late 18th and early 19th centuries as burial grounds for indigent New Yorkers. Eventually they filled up with bodies, and after burials were banned in Manhattan for health reasons, [the bodies] were either transferred to Hart Island or left in the ground. The remains of some poor yellow-fever victim popped up in Washington Square Park during construction."



Moses Gates (mosesgates.com), author of *Hidden Cities: Travels to the Secret Corners of the World's Great Metropolises; A Memoir of Urban Exploration*

"There's about a dozen abandoned observation decks, mostly in prewar office towers. Some are office spaces or apartment terraces now, but many are just sitting there unused, like on the Paramount Theatre building in Times Square, 22 William Street and the Williamsburgh Savings Bank building in Brooklyn. There are all these lost views, just sitting up above the city, that used to be there for anyone. Hopefully we can open some back up to the public."



Laura Itzkowitz, editor for Untapped Cities (untappedcities.com/newyork)

"I think New York's best secrets are the ones hidden in plain sight, like remnants of the Metropolitan Museum's original facade or a portrait of Vladimir Nabokov's uncle in a mural in the American Museum of Natural History. These landmarks are essential to the fabric of New York City, and their secrets are accessible to anyone who looks hard enough."



Nathan Kensinger (kensinger.blogspot.com), photographer and urban explorer

"I like the fact that New York City is so large, it once contained its own vacation getaways."

Some of them are no longer used, but some still exist, like Camp Pouch, the Boy Scouts' 143-acre summer camp in Staten Island, which is so large it has its own private lake and island. The city's oceanfront used to be lined with thousands of summer bungalows, some of which were served by private airports. A few pieces of these century-old communities still exist in neighborhoods like Edgemere, Far Rockaway, New Dorp Beach and Brighton Beach."



Jen Messier, cofounder of Brooklyn Brainer (brooklynbrainer.com)

"I've always had a thing for the islands scattered around the city, and my favorite is probably U Thant Island. It sits in the East River right across from the United Nations in midtown, and it's named after a former U.N. secretary-general. And even though the land is entirely artificial and small, it's become a bird sanctuary. I love that this tiny little island can sit practically unnoticed in the middle of the city, all the while having a really interesting past and present."



Jeremiah Moss, founder of Vanishing New York (vanishingnewyork.blogspot.com)

"The Explorers Club is an amazing place. [Usually] for members only, the club's headquarters opens to the public for various book readings and lectures. Take those opportunities to explore the gorgeous building, which is filled with artifacts from various historic expeditions—a taxidermied polar bear, a flag carried to the moon, the globe used by Thor Heyerdahl when he planned the Kon-Tiki trip. But maybe the weirdest artifact at the Explorers Club is the penis of a sperm whale. It resembles a large stalagmite, gazing somewhat forlornly out the window onto East 70th Street."



Gregory Wessner, executive director of Open House New York (ohny.org)

"In 1811, when Manhattan's street grid was first proposed, most of the island was fields and farms. When the surveyors were laying out the grid, they would bury heavy markers inscribed with the street numbers to identify where future intersections would be. Very few of these markers even exist anymore, but one of them is still in its rightful place in Manhattan. [The location is] kept a secret for fear that someone will try to take it. I first learned about it through the exhibition on Manhattan's grid at the Museum of the City of New York."

—Compiled by Nadia Chaudhury



For secrets from Benjamin Kabak of Second Avenue Sagas and others, visit timeout.com/newyork.