

## New York City, USA



### Report made by

- **Name:** Joan & Guillem
- **Social media handles:** @joan\_pahisa (Twitter, Instagram), @joanp (TabiFolk) & @guillemch (Twitter, Instagram)
- **Date:** September, 2022.

### General information of the city

- **Name of the city and country:** New York City, USA
- **Description:** The largest city in the United States, New York is famous around the world for its unmistakable skyline, the rectangle of green in the heart of Manhattan known as Central Park, its Broadway shows and its yellow cabs.

### Transportation accessibility

- Only 25% of subway stations are wheelchair accessible. You can find an up-to-date [list of accessible stations at the Metropolitan Transit Authority \(MTA\) website](#).
- Subway elevators' maintenance is poor, so they are often out of order. It is quite common to not be able to enter or, worse, to get out stations. The most common solution then is for you to go to the next accessible station, which may be a few stops

away. The issue is so common that even the [accessible subway map](#) marks stations with a long-term elevator outage.

- The above link of accessible stations, also lists the location of elevators and has a link to check the status of elevators, though it's not 100% trustworthy.
  - Accessible stations have a specific area with a small elevation of the platform, which may be difficult to locate due to barely visible signs. Otherwise, besides the gap, there's a 10cm step to board the subway.
  - On many stations, turnstiles are not accessible either and you have to ask staff to open a specific door for wheelchairs to pass.
  - Aside from the subway, there are other MTA trains that service outer areas of the city. There is the Long Island Rail Road (LIRR), beginning at Penn Station, which is accessible though in most stations you need to ask for [boarding assistance 2 hours in advance](#), the Metro North Railroad, which is mostly accessible with a [15 minutes heads-up call](#), and the [AirTrain JFK](#) that goes to JFK airport, which is fully wheelchair accessible and transfers to accessible subway stations (at your own risk).
  - City buses are **ALL** wheelchair accessible by means of either low floors and ramps or mechanical lifts, though you may have trouble boarding at rush hour.
  - Bus tickets are not sold on the bus, so you should already have a Metrocard before boarding.
  - If not for adventure or out of necessity, buses are highly recommended over the train and the subway. You can check [bus routes here](#). For schedules, I would rely on Google Maps.
  - There are also wheelchair accessible taxis available throughout the city. You can book for yellow or green accessible city taxis through [Accessible Dispatch](#) at the same fare than regular taxis (if not nearby, it may take 30 minutes for a taxi to arrive). You can also book accessible city taxis or airport shuttles from [NYC Wheelchair Accessible Transportation](#).
  - Finally, all Ferry Services are wheelchair accessible. They are a nice way for slower sightseeing and provide great views of the city.
  - Here is a summary [link with accessibility information of the aforementioned means of transport in the city](#).
- **Score: 2/5.** The bus saves the day, but, as it's not the fastest means of transport, it does not make up for the poor subway accessibility. Train accessibility is not bad, although it does not cover most of the touristic areas. Ferries are a bonus and accessible taxis are not the fastest nor the cheapest option either.

## Streets accessibility

- Streets in Manhattan, where most of the tourists attractions are, are mainly flat.
  - Sidewalks on vertical avenues are pretty wide, although they get easily crowded with people, and are sometimes blocked by works on the street.
  - Sidewalks on horizontal streets are narrower, but less crowded.
  - Sidewalk maintenance is a bit better than street maintenance. Street pavement is in a pretty bad shape in many crossings, so you should watch your step, specially if there are manholes and the likes. If you're a manual wheelchair user, it's quite easy for your front casters to get stuck.
  - You should also watch your step in curb cuts, specially on older ones, as many are not zero level. Nevertheless, newer ones are better and there are curb cuts in nearly every crossing.
  - As for tactile pavement, all new curb cuts and some old ones (a rough estimate would be around 75%) have tactile pavement. However, there are some full corner curb cuts that have the tactile pavement placed in the middle, effectively pointing diagonally, thus if you go straight you'd cross diagonally and risk getting run over.
  - Most traffic lights on wide crossings have buttons with Braille. These traffic lights beep faintly when red and, if you press the button, they activate a buzzing sound when the light turns green. When pressed, they also tell "Wait" if the light is still red.
  - Here's a link with a downloadable spreadsheet of the location of all [Accessible Pedestrian Signals](#) (the aforementioned accessible traffic lights).
  - Building doors tend to be quite heavy, but many of them have buttons usually marked with a wheelchair sign that open them automatically when pushed.
  - Streets in Manhattan tend to be really noisy.
  - Street accessibility doesn't differ much from central Manhattan to other areas.
  - There aren't many pedestrian only streets around the city.
  - There are barely any public restrooms.
- **Score: 3/5.** Even though streets are mostly manageable, you have to constantly keep an eye on the ground, while also keeping an eye on other pedestrians. Also, there's no consistency with good curb cuts and tactile pavement. It seems to be getting better, though.

## Restaurants & shops

- In downtown Manhattan and on most wider streets, around 70% of restaurants and shops have step-free entrances. Many of the inaccessible ones have a single step.

- In residential areas in Manhattan, this number goes down to around 50%. Here it's more common for the inaccessible ones to have more than one step.
  - Shopping malls and both international chain restaurants & shops or newer ones are a safe bet for accessible entrances.
  - There are also some restaurants that serve food on terraces, as well as street food stalls where you can buy mostly fast food.
  - Here is a link with a [map to locate "accessible" restaurants in New York City](#). The PDF guidelines to obtain the badge and be part of the list are [here](#). Having an accessible restroom is not part of the requirements.
  - Few restaurants have accessible restrooms. If needed, you should call in advance to check. Here is a short list of [restaurants with accessible restrooms](#).
- **Score: 3/5.** Not good, but not bad either. The sheer amount of options compensates a little bit. Accessible restrooms are a real problem, though.

## **Hotels & accommodation**

- New York has many old buildings, so many hotels and apartments are not accessible.
  - Nevertheless, most high-end or newer hotels are wheelchair accessible and also have accessible rooms, as per America for Disabilities Act (ADA) compliance.
  - There are many 3 to 4 star hotels that are listed as accessible at online platforms, such as Booking.com.
  - These hotels may indeed have accessible entrances and elevators, but may not have rooms with accessible bathrooms. The search filter for accessible hotels in such platforms can be very useful for some users, but you should still check directly with the hotel depending on your needs.
  - Here's a [list of hotels that do have accessible rooms](#) in different price ranges.
  - However, in peak season, if your budget is tight (as "tight" as it can be visiting New York, as it will be expensive anyway), you'll probably need to search quite a bit for an accessible lower budget hotel or an accessible and affordable AirBnB apartment. Specially, if you don't want it to be far away from downtown or midtown Manhattan, taking into account the issues with transportation (see [Transportation section](#)). In these cases, calling to make sure that your accessibility needs are met will be a must.
  - If sharing a room is an option for you, newer hostel type accommodation that is wheelchair accessible is also available.
- **Score: 4/5.** Despite many hotels not being wheelchair accessible, there are also many that are. Lower budget options in peak season, combined with poor subway accessibility that could otherwise get you fast to centric locations, may be an issue.

## **Tourist attractions accessibility**

- In New York, all main tourist attractions are wheelchair accessible, including skyscrapers, museums and parks.
  - Many museums also have touch tours for people with visual impairments, although most of them need to be booked in advance or are held a specific day of the week or the month.
  - Broadway shows have many accessibility features. Most of them are wheelchair accessible, but there are many that also have some of the following: hearing loop or compatibility with other assistive listening devices technology, closed captioning, audio description or, in fewer occasions, American Sign Language interpretation.
  - Here is a site with [accessibility information on currently running Broadway shows](#).
  - As for Central Park, you can do most of it rolling on wheels, but there are areas where slopes are either quite long or steep and other paths that may be a bit rough depending on the weather. Nevertheless, accessibility is quite good and the park can be enjoyed.
  - Regarding the Statue of Liberty, ferries are wheelchair accessible (see [Transportation section](#)), but wheelchair users can only get up to the 6th floor of the statue's pedestal. The rest of the climb consists of a steep spiral staircase. More details can be found [here](#).
  - If you're on a tight budget, you can see the New York skyline, plus the Statue of Liberty, from the Staten Island Ferry, which is free of charge and runs 24/7. There's even an elevator on the boat to access the upper decks (though maneuvering space on some aisles is a bit tight).
- **Score: 5/5.** Accessibility is still not perfect, but overall one of the best in the world.

## **Getting there**

- New York has three airports, JFK, Newark (EWR) and La Guardia (LGA), although most international flights coming from outside North America get to JFK International Airport.
- You may get to La Guardia Airport, if you're coming from Canada or from another city in the US.
- Assistance at all airports should be booked in advance through your airline.
- JFK has an accessible train, the AirTrain, that stops at each terminal and that also has connections with the subway A line at Howard Beach station and the E line at Jamaica station. Both are accessible stations (see the [NYC subway accessible map](#), although remind the issue with the elevators and the small number of accessible stops).
- The AirTrain also connects with the LIRR at Jamaica Station, which is one of the three LIRR stations that only needs a heads-up of 15 minutes to book for assistance (though



it requires knowing the schedule of the train, which you may not know until you're actually at the station).

- More or less, all of these options would take between 70 to 90 minutes (depending on the connections) to get from the airport to central Manhattan, or vice versa, if all goes smoothly.
  - There used to be a service named Airporter that had accessible buses with lifts, but since the service changed to Golden Touch transportation reviews are quite bad and they do not mention accessibility on their website either.
  - Finally, the most reliable way in terms of accessibility to go to or from any of the airports, although also the most expensive, is to call an accessible shuttle or taxi from Accessible Dispatch or NYC Wheelchair Accessible Transportation. LGA airport may be an exception as there are accessible city buses that go there (see LGA section).
  - Accessible taxis can also be requested at the cab stands outside airport terminals at JFK and EWR, although waiting times can go up to 30 minutes.
  - Depending on the traffic, a taxi or private shuttle trip takes from 1 to 2 hours from JFK to Central Manhattan and around 1 hour for LGA and EWR. Nevertheless, trips from and to airports have flat rates, so trip duration will not affect the price.
  - You can also get to New York from other nearby major cities (e.g. Boston, Washington, Philadelphia, etc.) by Amtrak trains getting to either Grand Central or Penn Station.
  - Here is Amtrak's website to make reservations for passengers with disabilities. Accessibility at main stations and Amtrak's service is usually good, although Amtrak trains can accumulate large delays on their schedules.
  - You can also get to New York from other major cities by MegaBus highway buses, which are quite affordable and also wheelchair accessible. Here is their website with accessibility information.
- **Score: 3/5.** The fact that trains and buses that get to New York from other cities are accessible is a plus, although most people will still be getting to the city by plane. Getting from the airport to central Manhattan, or vice versa, by public transit can be tricky due to poor subway accessibility. Taxis and shuttles are your best option.

## Overall accessibility score

- **Score:** 20/30. Overall **3.3/5 stars**.
- **Summary:** The accessibility of New York City really takes a hit due to poor subway accessibility. Despite that, New York tourist attractions are still top of the class worldwide and accommodation should not be a problem either. Street accessibility also has room to improve, but with care it should be manageable.