

Summer Travel Reports

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Greece

Henry Lewis

Greece is not worth your time or money unless you are British and poor.

This summer, I had the displeasure of spending a month in Athens with visits to two Greek islands. Athens is a tease of a city. Grand views of the acropolis draw you in until you get close enough to be swept into the crowds of foreigners while your pockets get picked. The beaches look pristine from afar but greet you with cheaply made drinks and filthy water upon a visit.

The local coffee culture goes a long way toward redeeming the poorer qualities of the tourist districts. It's not uncommon for locals to spend hours of their morning sipping espresso on the sidewalk seating while chatting with friends and acquaintances. Furthermore, between the hours of 3 pm and 5 pm, small businesses shut down for 'siesta hours.' I cannot fault a people for relaxing and taking life slowly. However, one can hardly be surprised that such a place has taken so long to recover from an economic collapse.

A blurry, low-angle shot of a nightclub interior. The scene is dominated by vibrant, out-of-focus stage lights in shades of purple, blue, and yellow. The background shows the dark silhouettes of people and the structure of the club, creating a sense of a busy, dimly lit environment.

Kos is a unique combination of trash and nothing. The main city is packed with British tourists who don't have the money or taste to visit the popular Greek islands. The clubs are packed with sweaty 16-year-olds singing along to the worst that dance music from 2016 has to offer. The food is displayed on menus in large, oversaturated pictures that manage to look even more fake than what is served. The rest of the island boasts barren hills and boring beaches. The history behind the Asklepieion, where Hippocrates perfected his craft, is worth a read-through. However, the site itself is barely worth a second glance.





Santorini has a similar effect to Athens. The iconic views live up to the expectations. However, the stunning white cities perched on rugged cliffs and packed full of mediocre restaurants, copy and pasted tourist shops, and recently built hotels doing their best to fit in with the ancient vibe (while utterly failing). I would be shocked if a single Greek person still lives in any of Santorini's major cities. It's reminiscent of the ship of Theseus if, rather than being replaced by the proper functioning part, the boat was gradually replaced with tourists trying to get a good selfie. Eventually, every part is a tourist, and then what the hell are they all there for?

In conclusion, everything that costs money in Greece feels vapid, and everything that is cheap feels outright fake. If you can delude yourself into bypassing the phoniness, then by all means, aim for the cheap and save your money.



New York

Raphael Gutteridge





Visiting the Metropolitan Museum of Art's iconic building on Fifth Avenue during the setup for its prestigious gala evokes a feeling of excitement, almost as if you were a celebrity walking up the red carpet. The feeling by no means diminishes when you enter the Great Hall, a cavernous space with three luminous domes, flooding the space with natural light. Helpful kiosks sell tickets near the entrance to the Egyptian Wing (USD \$30 full admission/\$17 students), streamlining entrance into arguably the most iconic part of the museum. While at the time of my visit, the legendary Temple

of Dendur was closed for a private event, the remaining collection of Ancient Egyptian art was in no way diminished. For some, the intricate sarcophagi will be the highlight of this collection, but I was intrigued most by the shelves of tiny figures of scarabs and other motifs, only the size of thumbnails.

My last visit to the museum had been nine years prior, and I was surprised to see how much of the museum had been refreshed, and how much work The Met was still doing to update their exhibits. Their gallery of European oil paintings (1300-1800) had been undergoing refurbishment at the time, but should be completed in Fall, 2023. Like with the Temple of Dendur being inaccessible, this in no way diminished the experience, which is a testament to the size and richness of The Met. Its Impressionist paintings, Arms and Armor collection, and wings of Asian art are fully intact. To cover as much ground as possible, I required a break at the American Wing Café, which offered a limited selection of light lunches and drinks. Rushing through the museum is impossible, owing to the incredible quality of its curation, and every new room is a delightful surprise.

Meandering across Central Park could almost be a prescription for the troubles

of life. Only steps away from the bustling Fifth Avenue, the city seems to fall away, becoming only the distant and architecturally magnificent spires of the skyscrapers that Manhattan is known for. The city is sculptural when viewed from the park, a tantalizing contrast of the treetops that surround the pastoral paths of The Ramble. In this midsection of the park, labyrinthine paths make a direct crossing difficult, but even more pleasant.



Finally emerging from the Midsummer's Dream-like park, the famed American Museum of Natural History lies opposite from The Met. A farmer's market rings the museum on Sundays with a diverse selection of vendors, selling everything from local shellfish to candles. Lines stretch down the block from the museum, and tickets



must be pre-purchased in advance. The museum has had to confront its disturbingly colonial legacy, and has a highly prominent section addressing its past mistakes in its depiction of Indigenous People which was dehumanizing and exoticizing. Some sections of the anthropology collections are undergoing renovation, while the Hall of the

North West Coast is already complete. If this hall is a guide for the future of the AMNH's anthropological collections, it's a very good sign. The museum worked very closely with the thriving Indigenous communities in the Pacific Northwest, taking great care to remind visitors that these are living cultures with active pasts, presents, and futures. However, while this path forward is bright, halls that have sat untouched since the 1960s are stark contrasts. Not only are they lit poorly, they fetishize and lump together Indigenous cultures, often treating them as dead societies.

Work has also been completed on an updated Hall of Rocks and Minerals, which went from a confusing and carpeted space to an open display of shimmering rock samples. Rocks that fluoresce under ultraviolet light are given a full alcove to display their changes under different wavelengths of light, where they previously had been given little space to shine. Other updated displays show off local New York City and State geology, accompanied by helpful information plaques which are marked improvements over the old labels.

No trip to the AMNH would ever be complete without visiting the life-size model of a blue whale that's been enthralling visitors

since 1969. This centrepiece to the Hall of Ocean Life watches peacefully over the massive chamber, making eye contact with the second floor balcony. Ringing the hall, updated marine exhibits boast new information about marine ecosystems, as well as cleaned and better-lit dioramas. The spooky model of a Sperm Whale battling a Giant Squid has been enhanced, now more visible while somehow even more mysterious. When exiting the marine hall, however, you're deposited into a hallway lined with what appears to be 1950s American agricultural propaganda, an unfortunate reminder of the lengths the museum still has to go.

At first a twenty-five block walk seems excessive, but this is Manhattan after all. The journey from the Upper West Side to Midtown can be enjoyed by a park side walk down Eighth Avenue, Broadway to see Lincoln Centre and Juilliard, or, to soak in Manhattan ambiance, try Columbus (Ninth) Ave. and



Amsterdam (Tenth) Ave. Because walking is the primary mode of transportation for New Yorkers, you'll get to try out all of the above routes, taking in the vibrancy of the city. By the time you end up among the midtown skyscrapers, you'll understand exactly why walking twenty blocks is no big deal.

Of course, the best way to cool down after a long walk to Midtown is at the Museum of Modern Art. The iconic repository for modern and contemporary art (USD \$25 adult/\$14 students) occupies five floors of expansive galleries and includes an oasis-like sculpture courtyard. Van Gogh's, Picasso's, Dali's, and Monet's round out an incredible base of the who's who of Modern Art, ensuring near constant moments of "oh my god, am I really seeing it in real life?". With more art than wall space, the museum often rotates its collection on display, meaning that every visit opens up a new world of artists and works. Pieces by revolutionary artists of the Postwar world and beyond evoke deep thoughts and brilliant contemplation. Featured exhibits at the time of my visit included post-colonial projects by contemporary Latin American artists which played with both themes of Latin-futurism and re-establishing a connection to an Indigenous past. At the top of the museum, a collection of video art pieces were captivatingly politically charged. Hard hitting video pieces covered systems of clean state surveillance and control as well messier documentations of democratic expression. MoMA, and its dynamic displays,

are best followed up by a classic slice of New York pizza, which there is no shortage of sources for, or, if you haven't already had a bagel with lox for breakfast, now is also a good time.





Inevitably, when exploring New York City, you will be compelled to enter the iconic subway. Like walking everywhere, this method for getting around might take some getting used to if you aren't familiar already. Similarly, once you've completed your first trip, you immediately understand why it's as ubiquitous an option as it is. Fares are now USD \$2.90 for a single trip, which may seem



steep, until you realize how far you can get. Nearly all transfer points are within the fare-paid zone, and in Manhattan, most routes are interlined or connect frequently with other routes. Stations like 42 St. – Times Square connect many of these routes together, enabling an incredible amount of mobility. Express trains are fantastic for getting up and down the city in a hurry, and as a general rule, are on the central tracks of the station.

Payment options include the Metrocard or OMNY Card. The Metrocard is the yellow paper card that's become



synonymous with New York life and the OMNY Card is its tech-savvy solution, a smartcard that can be loaded online. The system also accepts credit card payments. Make sure to take off backpacks when entering a train, especially when busy; allow riders to get off before you try to get on; and never block the doors. Good transit etiquette is absolutely essential when the subway is so heavily relied on to get around.

For those visitors inclined to take in a little high-end shopping with their cultural enrichment, the Meatpacking District satisfies both demands. This neighborhood is home to the new location of the Whitney Museum of American Art (USD \$30 adults/\$24 seniors and students). Formerly located in what is temporarily the Frick Collection, the Whitney. The terraces, which offer incredible views of a skyline that envelops the museum, feature modern sculptures and the outdoor seating area for an overpriced café. At the time of my visit, the museum featured two notable exhibits. Their retrospective on Jaune Quick-to-see Smith, an Indigenous artist from the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Nation, featured her works as they trace the



history of Indigenous Americans' struggle for freedom under colonial rule. Her pop art style adds both familiarity and humour to the viewer's experience, and speaks directly to the act of reclaiming Indigenous heritage, practices, and, most importantly, autonomy.

On the other hand, Josh Kline's Project for a New American Century tries to speak to similar issues but falls as tone-deaf. Ultimately about the intersections of environmental crisis and late capitalism, the work is disillusioned and beleaguered, with all the rigor of Twitter political commentary. In some ways, it is interesting to see pre-pandemic takes on the gig economy as extrapolated into a future it couldn't have predicted. Somewhat unnerving are the dismembered latex body parts, which were 3-D scanned from the bodies of real workers in the gig economy whom the artist encountered. While the goal appears to have been to make the passive viewer feel complicit in the physical degradation of these workers, it instead achieves being the effect of making the artist seem as if he has a more personal interest in these body parts – to put it delicately. Beyond that, the works fall flat as lukewarm political takes that carry the same weight as a pastel Instagram infographic.



To cap off the evening, take the 1, C, or B up to anywhere between Seventy-Second and Eighty-Sixth. The Upper West Side of Manhattan is full of good dining options. Sala Thai on Amsterdam and Seventy-Fourth is a refined option for Thai, El Mitote on Columbus and Sixty-Ninth for hip Mexican, Fred's at Amsterdam and Eighty-Third satisfies classic American comfort food, Bella Luna on Columbus and Eighty-Eighth for classic American-Italian, and for a quick bite 7th Street Burger's outpost at Amsterdam and Eightieth. After dinner, walk up Amsterdam to Eighty-Second and grab a drink at The Dead Poet, an incredibly narrow Irish pub abounding with literary references. The cozy, energetic atmosphere perfectly encapsulates the personality of New York City, where friendly people exist in close proximity while going about their lives.

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