

Traveling with Jewish Taste[®] New York: World Within a World

By Carol Goodman Kaufman



New York City, with over 8 million living in its five boroughs, is “a world within a world.”

Unless you have unlimited time and equally unlimited resources, you will not be able to take in all of “The Big Apple” – even in one large chomp. So, I suggest that you take in this wonderful city in smaller, more digestible bites.

We have been quite successful with our strategy of concentrating on one neighborhood at a time, staying in a centrally located hotel, and going out from there.

Since New York is the ultimate walking city, make sure to tie on an excellent pair of walking shoes in order to enjoy it to the fullest extent possible.

So, where to start? I recommend Lower Manhattan.

For many readers of this column, this is where their ancestors began their new American lives after leaving Europe. And, if they arrived after 1886, our grandparents’ ships would have passed the iconic Statue of Liberty Enlightening the World.

Sculpted by Frederic-Auguste Bartholdi, it is a must-see on your tour of New York. Operated by the National Park Service on twelve acre Liberty Island, the Statue was a gift from the people of France as a symbol of freedom and democracy. It would have been a very welcome sight after a long and arduous sea journey. Please note that the elevator to the pedestal is currently out of service, so you must be in very good shape to climb the hundreds of stairs to the top.



Lady Liberty

After sailing past the Statue of Liberty, immigrants landed on terra firma at Ellis Island, now a national museum of immigration and another must-see. When you enter its vast hall, crowded with visitors speaking dozens of languages, you will get a hint of the overwhelming experience your immigrant ancestors must have encountered. This is atmosphere you just can’t get by doing your genealogical research at ellisland.com, or even at our National Archives, located right here in Pittsfield.

What did my Bubbie Fannie see, hear, smell, and taste that day she arrived?

Immigration records indicate that she arrived with two dollars in her pocket, was literate, and that her sister, Annie, neglected to meet her at the dock. Fannie had to stay overnight, eating three meals while waiting to be retrieved. Luckily, Annie did manage to show up the next day and bring Fannie to her new home on Manhattan’s Lower East Side.

“Home” for them, and for millions of other immigrants, was a tenement on East 2nd

Street. It was probably similar to the restored apartments on view at the Tenement Museum on Orchard Street. This wonderful institution offers specialized tours featuring guided tours through the homes of the different ethnic groups that passed through the Lower East Side on their way to Americanization and prosperity.

As Fannie supported herself as a seamstress, we chose to visit the garment worker family’s home *cum* factory. In fact, family lore has it that Fannie was supposed to start work at the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory – the day after the fire!

The Triangle fire was a major factor in garnering public sympathy for the labor movement cause, and Jewish garment workers were instrumental in forming the International Ladies’ Garment Workers’ Union.

The Triangle factory was located in what is now NYU’s Brown Building of Science, and is a National Historic Landmark. You can see it at 23-29 Washington Place, just east of Washington Square Park in Greenwich Village.

The Center for Jewish History is one last place to visit and round out your Lower Manhattan Jewish experience. Located at 15 West 16th Street in the Flatiron District, the “Center’s mission is: “To foster the creation and dissemination of Jewish knowledge and to make the historical and cultural record of the Jewish people readily accessible to scholars, students, and the broad public.”

Five major institutions call the Center home: the American Jewish Historical Society, the American Sephardi Federation, the Leo Baeck Institute, the Yeshiva University Museum, and the YIVO Institute for Jewish Research. Periodic exhibitions draw visitors to see everything from an historic hagaddah to modern Judaic art.



The Lower East Side, incubator of immigrants



ARTHUR SZYK, 1948

‘Purim,’ in the collection of The Center for Jewish History

Having walked many miles by now, you will be ready to sample the many culinary delights the city offers.

New York boasts thirteen thousand restaurants, many of them reflecting the cuisines of the various peoples that call the city home, including Italians (the largest ethnic group), African (the largest community in the country), West Indians, Dominican, Chinese, Irish, Russian, and German.

The Puerto Rican population of New York City is the largest outside Puerto Rico.

New York, with more Jews within its city limits than Jerusalem itself, is also a fabulous place to dine if you want to keep kosher. Its 172 kosher restaurants feature many different ethnic foods, according to the website menupages.com.

The quintessential early 20th century New York Jewish experience, of course, would be the “delicatessen.” Don’t miss sampling the best in the world, whether it’s hot pastrami, corned beef, or turkey.

One last thing: even if you have an itinerary, make sure to leave time for serendipity.

One of the best things about New York is the sudden appearance of fascinating things to do and places to see.

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Cinnamon Babka

Babka is a sinfully rich yeast cake that has its origins in Eastern Europe, but has taken on its own Jewish flavor over the centuries. The dessert has become so popular that it even played a major role in an episode of the television show, “Seinfeld,” in which the gang had to overcome many obstacles in attempting to purchase a chocolate babka.

While the character “Elaine” claimed that cinnamon babka is a “lesser babka,” I have to disagree. A real babka, in my mind, doesn’t need chocolate to shine. (Of course, I will not turn away a piece of chocolate if offered.)

The bad news with babka is that yeast is notoriously temperamental, balking at temperatures too hot or too cold. The good news is that this recipe uses a bread machine for the initial mixing and rising of the dough, making life simpler. The only danger is that you may end up eating this decadent dessert more often than recommended by your diet!

For Dough

3/4 cup of milk
4 large eggs
1 cup of sour cream
1 teaspoon pure vanilla extract
1 stick unsalted butter – softened at room temperature and cut into pieces
7 cups of flour
1 teaspoon salt
1 cup of sugar
2 tablespoons of active dry yeast

For Filling

1 stick unsalted butter – well softened
1 tablespoon of cinnamon
1/4 cup of sugar
1/2 cup of raisins

For Topping

2 tablespoons of sugar
1/4 teaspoon of cinnamon
1/2 cup of chopped pecans

To Prepare Dough:

- Add all liquids, including eggs, to the bowl first, followed by dry ingredients, and ending with sugar and yeast. Choose the “dough” cycle and come back in about 90 minutes when the dough has risen.

Assemble Babka With Filling:

- On a lightly floured surface, punch down dough and cut in half. Roll out one piece of dough on a well-floured surface with a lightly floured rolling pin into an 18 by 10 inch rectangle and place with long side facing you.
- Spread half of softened butter on dough and sprinkle half of dry filling ingredients evenly over the buttered dough. Roll dough into a log, pinching firmly along seam to seal. Bring ends of log together to form a ring, pinching to seal.
- Repeat with second half of dough and filling.
- Butter two tube pans and sprinkle topping on bottom evenly. Place log seam side down in pan and cover loosely with wax paper. Let babkas rise in a draft-free place at warm room temperature until dough reaches top of pans, 1 to 2 hours.
- Bake 50 minutes in 350 degree oven.
- Makes two loaves. You can freeze one babka to enjoy at a later date.