

Your First NYC Weekend: 3 Nights, Fully Pre-Sorted (October 8–11, 2026)

Welcome to the plan that means the only thing you'll google on a street corner is "where's the nearest bathroom." Everything else, tickets, timing, subway payment, exact addresses, is right here. Two adults, three nights, first time in the greatest show on earth. Let's go.

o) Your Details at a Glance

Item	Detail
Dates	Thursday, October 8 to Sunday, October 11, 2026 (3 nights)
Group	2 adults, first visit to NYC
Budget	Up to \$2,500 total
Lodging preference	Midtown or Lower Manhattan, mid-range
Pace / interests	The icons plus one neighborhood morning; no more than two big things a day
Arrival	Flying into JFK
Food must-haves	Bagels, pizza, one splurge dinner
Special request	Everything usually googled on the spot, pre-sorted: which tickets to pre-book, Broadway lottery vs. TKTS, OMNY explained, which neighborhood for what, exact addresses

1) At a Glance

Category	Pick	Key facts (as of June 2026)
Hotel	Pod 51 (Midtown East)	230 East 51st St, NY 10022. Compact modern rooms, rooftop terrace. Rates are set through the live booking widget; guide value for fall runs roughly \$170–\$230/night.
Sky-high view	Top of the Rock	30 Rockefeller Plaza; entrance on 50th St between 5th & 6th Ave. Timed Admission from \$46/person, tiered by date and time.
Backup / alt view	Empire State Building 86th Floor	20 West 34th St. From \$44 + \$5 booking charge per transaction. Open ~9 AM–12 AM.

Cate gory	Pick	Key facts (as of June 2026)
Harbor icon	Statue of Liberty & Ellis Island ferry (Statue City Cruises)	Departs Castle Clinton, Battery Park. Base reserve ticket approx. \$25–\$26/adult.
Splurge dinner	Gramercy Tavern	42 East 20th St. Michelin one-star. Dining Room 5-course prix-fixe; Tavern à la carte.
Bagels	Ess-a-Bagel	831 Third Ave (at 50th/51st). Open early daily for fresh-from-the-oven bagels.
Pizza	Kesté Pizza & Vino	271 Bleecker St, Greenwich Village. Neapolitan wood-fired.
Getting around	OMNY tap-to-pay, \$3.00/ride	AirTrain + subway from JFK = approx. \$11.75/person.

1b) Recommendation and why

Stay at Pod 51 in Midtown East. For two first-timers who want to be walking distance from the marquee icons, Midtown East is the sweet spot: you're a short stroll from Rockefeller Center, Grand Central, and the Fifth Avenue spine, with easy subway access downtown. Ess-a-Bagel's flagship at 831 3rd Ave is right in the neighborhood, so your bagel morning is basically built into the block. Pod's compact-but-smart rooms and rooftop keep it firmly mid-range, which protects your budget for the splurge dinner and tickets.

Best alternative: the Pod Times Square (400 West 42nd St) if you'd rather be steps from the Broadway theaters and the TKTS booth, at a similar price band. It trades the quieter Midtown East feel for full Times Square buzz (great for a theater-heavy trip, less great if you want to sleep with the window cracked). A second solid alternative is **Arlo NoMad (11 East 31st St)**, a stylish mid-range property halfway between Midtown and the Flatiron/Gramercy dining scene. All three meet your hard criteria: Midtown/Lower Manhattan, mid-range, and a short subway or walk to everything on this plan.

Hotel rates are set through the property's live booking widget, so treat the figures above as **guide values (as of June 2026)**. See the "Book now" table for exactly where the binding price appears.

1c) Book Now (do these before you fly)

What	By when	Where / link
Hotel (Pod 51 or an alternative)	ASAP; fall is busy	thepodhotel.com/... , You will see the binding price for your exact dates and occupancy at the provider's booking step, it changes daily.
Top of the Rock timed ticket	1–3 weeks ahead (pick a sunset or clear-morning slot)	rockefellercenter.com/...

What	By when	Where / link
Statue of Liberty / Ellis Island ferry (Reserve ticket)	2–4 weeks ahead; early time slot	statuecitycruises.com/...
Gramercy Tavern dinner reservation	The day the date opens (28 days ahead, at noon) via OpenTable	gramercytavern.com/...
Empire State Building (only if you want a second deck)	A few days ahead	esbnyc.com/...
Broadway: enter the digital lottery daily, or plan a TKTS visit	Lottery opens days before; TKTS is same-day	lottery.broadwaydirect.com and tdf.org/...

💡 **Booking-critical honesty:** the observation-deck and ferry prices above are per-person before any date-specific surcharge. Confirm the exact amount at the official checkout before you pay; the observation decks in particular tier their prices by date and time.

2) Day-by-Day Plan

Day 1, Thursday, October 8: Arrival + Midtown icons at night

Land at JFK, get into Manhattan the cheap, reliable way. Take the **AirTrain** from your terminal to Jamaica or Howard Beach station, then transfer to the subway. In 2026 the base Statue ferry is one thing, but for transit: the subway ride is \$3.00 via OMNY tap, and the AirTrain is a separate \$8.75, so JFK-to-Manhattan runs about **\$11.75 per person**. From Jamaica, the **E train** runs straight into Midtown (about 50–60 minutes door to door depending on terminal). A taxi or rideshare is faster (~\$70+ plus tolls, tip 15–20%) if you land tired and loaded with bags.

- Check in at **Pod 51, 230 East 51st St.** [Map](#)
- Evening icon: **Top of the Rock**, 30 Rockefeller Plaza. The main entrance is on 50th Street between Fifth and Sixth Avenues; look for the big red carpet marking the entrance on the south side of the street. Choose a Timed Admission slot; an evening slot means dinner-hour skyline sparkle without the sunset scrum. Confirm your slot and the current operating hours at checkout when you book. [Map](#)

💡 **Tip:** Early mornings and evenings are the least crowded at Top of the Rock. If you'd rather do it as a daytime activity, its west-facing terraces give you the one view the Empire State Building can't: the Empire State Building itself in your photos.

Plan B (rain/low cloud): Observation decks reissue tickets in bad weather, so swap the deck to Day 2 or 3 and instead wander the indoor concourses and shops of Rockefeller Center, then a low-key dinner nearby.

Day 2, Friday, October 9: Neighborhood morning (Greenwich Village) + Statue of Liberty

Your requested "one neighborhood morning" and one big icon, nicely balanced.

- **Bagel breakfast first: Ess-a-Bagel**, 831 Third Ave (between 50th & 51st St). They open early daily, so start your morning here. The quintessential New York bagel, hand-rolled, kettle boiled and baked, crispy outside and chewy inside. **Map** 💡 **Tip:** the Express line is specialized in giving out bagels (not cut or toasted), so go straight there for a fresh bagel right out of the oven.
- **Neighborhood morning: Greenwich Village.** Take the subway down to West 4th St and wander the tree-lined blocks, Washington Square Park, and Bleecker Street. This is the classic "which neighborhood for what" answer: the Village is for strolling, brownstones, cafés, and record/bookshops, no big-ticket attraction needed, just atmosphere.
- **Lunch, and your pizza box ticked: Kesté Pizza & Vino**, 271 Bleecker St. Located in Lower Manhattan, Kesté specializes in authentic Neapolitan wood-fired pizzas, including white, red, stuffed and specialty pies and calzones, with gluten-free options available. It has previously been named the number 1 pizza in New York by New York magazine and praised for the "best pizza" in the state by Food Network Magazine. **Map** 💡 **Pizza alternative** two blocks away: **Joe's Pizza**, 7 Carmine St, for the quintessential fold-and-walk NYC slice.
- **Afternoon icon: Statue of Liberty & Ellis Island.** Take the subway down to South Ferry / Bowling Green. Statue City Cruises is the ONLY vendor authorized to provide tickets and transportation to Liberty and Ellis Islands; no other ferry company can give you access to the islands, monuments, and museums. Your ticket includes round trip ferry service, access to the grounds of Liberty Island and Ellis Island, and audio tours of both islands. The departure point is Castle Clinton at Battery Park. **Map**

💡 **Tip:** book an **early time slot** and beeline for the ferry. Allow at least three hours to explore both islands; reservation times at 2 PM or later will not give you enough time to visit Ellis Island. Complimentary audio tour headsets can be picked up and dropped off at Liberty and Ellis Islands. Note the time on your ticket is when you enter the security screening line, so arrive a few minutes early. Crown and Pedestal access is separate and sells out months ahead, so if that matters, book it the day you book everything else.

Plan B (rain/wind): Harbor ferries still run in light rain, but if it's genuinely nasty, skip the exposed islands and do the (free!) **Staten Island Ferry** for a covered Statue-from-the-water photo, or duck into a downtown museum instead.

Day 3, Saturday, October 10: A Manhattan classic + Broadway night

Keep it to two big things: a signature daytime walk/sight and a Broadway show at night.

- **Bagel or coffee to start**, then head to **Central Park + the Midtown museum mile**, your choice of one anchor: the **American Museum of Natural History** (Central Park West at 79th St) or a Central Park walk from the south end up to Bethesda Terrace. This is your low-stress "big thing #1."

- **💡 Tip:** Saturday is a peak crowd day everywhere; do the park early and save indoor spaces for the afternoon.
- **Broadway night (big thing #2).** Here's the pre-sorted tickets answer you asked for:

Option A, Digital lottery (cheapest, luck-based). You will never have to pay to enter a Broadway Direct Lottery; payment for tickets is only required if you are selected as a winner. If you win, you'll be notified via email minutes after the lottery closes and have 60 minutes to submit payment and claim your tickets. Every individual is limited to one entry per lottery, attempts to submit more than one entry will result in removal, but there is no limit to how many lotteries you can enter. Enter at lottery.broadwaydirect.com (and note some shows use Lucky Seat or Telecharge instead). **💡 Tip:** the one thing that separates people who win regularly is consistent daily entries; each entry is independent, so enter every day for a show you want to see. Start entering as soon as your dates open.

Option B, TKTS booth (reliable, same-day discount). The famous red-steps booth is in **Father Duffy Square, Times Square (47th St & Broadway/Seventh Ave)**. It sells same-day (and next-day matinee) tickets at up to 50% off, with a small per-ticket service fee. [Map](#)

The honest verdict for two adults: enter the lottery every morning for a show you love (it's free and it's a \$10–\$49 thrill if you win), but don't build your evening around it. Plan to swing by **TKTS in the afternoon** as your reliable backup, or simply buy a specific show in advance if there's one you can't miss. That way you're never stranded ticketless at 7 PM.

Plan B (sold out / lost the lottery): TKTS almost always has good same-day options; if nothing appeals, a comedy show or a jazz set (Village Vanguard, 178 Seventh Ave South) is a great NYC night.

Day 4, Sunday, October 11: Splurge brunch/lunch or a last look, then JFK

Checkout at Pod 51 is typically noon; store bags with the front desk if your flight is later.

- **Your splurge, done right: Gramercy Tavern**, 42 East 20th St. One of America's most beloved restaurants, it has welcomed guests to enjoy seasonal American cuisine, warm hospitality and unparalleled service for close to two decades. For dinner service, the Dining Room showcases a five-course seasonal menu with optional wine pairings. At lunch, guests choose between an à la carte menu or an optional four-course menu. [Map](#) **💡 Tip:** if the multi-course Dining Room is booked or too pricey for the budget, the Tavern side serves an à la carte menu of soulful fare from the open, wood-burning grill in a lively, casual setting, and the bar is available for walk-ins at all times. Reservations for both rooms are made online through OpenTable, or by phone from 12 PM to 9 PM daily at 212-477-0777; they accept reservations 28 days in advance, with new dates opening at noon. Remember US tipping of 18–20% and that menu prices do not include gratuity.

Splurge alternatives if you prefer: since you said "one splurge dinner," you can also flip it to a **Friday or Saturday night** and use Sunday for a relaxed brunch. Two well-loved alternatives: **Gramercy Tavern's Tavern room** (same address, walk-in at the bar, lower spend) or a steakhouse classic like **Keens Steakhouse, 72 West 36th St**, near your hotel and Penn Station.

- **Head to JFK:** reverse the AirTrain + subway combo (E train back toward Jamaica, then AirTrain), about **\$11.75 per person**, or a taxi/rideshare (~\$70+ plus tolls and tip) if you're cutting it close. Give yourself 2.5–3 hours before an international flight, 2 hours for domestic.

3) Practical Notes & Checklist

OMNY, explained once so you never think about it again

- **What it is:** OMNY is the MTA's tap-to-pay system. Just tap your **contactless credit/debit card or phone (Apple/Google Pay)** on the reader at the turnstile. Same card = same rider; tap the same card each time.
- **Fare:** subway and local bus are **\$3.00 per ride** via OMNY tap, with free transfers between subway and bus within about two hours.
- **Weekly cap:** if you tap the *same* card all week, OMNY automatically caps you after a set number of rides, so heavy riders effectively ride free once the cap is hit. For a 3-night trip you likely won't hit it, but it's automatic if you do.
- **AirTrain at JFK is separate** (\$8.75) and is not covered by the subway fare or cap.
-  **Tip:** you don't need to buy anything in advance, no MetroCard, no app required. Two adults = tap two different cards. Keep one card per person and use it consistently so any cap tracks correctly.

Which neighborhood for what (quick reference)

- **Midtown (your base):** icons, Rockefeller Center, Fifth Avenue, Broadway theaters, big department stores.
- **Greenwich Village / West Village:** strolling, brownstones, cafés, pizza, jazz, Washington Square.
- **Lower Manhattan / Battery Park:** Statue of Liberty ferry, Wall Street, the 9/11 Memorial, harbor views.
- **Times Square:** Broadway shows and the TKTS booth (visit, don't linger for meals).
- **Flatiron / Gramercy:** your splurge-dinner turf (Gramercy Tavern).

Estimated Cost Overview (2 adults, 3 nights) vs. your \$2,500 budget

Item	Estimate (USD)	Notes
Hotel, 3 nights	\$510–\$690	Guide value; the binding rate is set at the live booking widget (\$170–\$230/night).
Airport transit, round trip, 2 people	~\$47	AirTrain + subway (\$11.75 x 4 legs). Taxi would add ~\$140+ each way.
Subway within the city, 3+ days, 2 people	~\$50–\$70	\$3.00/ride via OMNY tap.

Item	Estimate (USD)	Notes
Top of the Rock, 2 adults	~\$92+	Timed Admission from \$46/person; tiered by date and time, confirm at checkout.
Statue of Liberty ferry, 2 adults	~\$50–\$52	Base reserve ticket approx. \$25–\$26/person; confirm at checkout.
Empire State Building (optional 2nd deck)	~\$98	From \$44/person + \$5 booking charge per transaction; skip to save.
Broadway, 2 tickets	\$20–\$300	Lottery \$10–\$49/person if you win; TKTS ~\$60–\$110/person; full price higher.
Bagels + pizza + casual meals	~\$150–\$220	Ess-a-Bagel, Kesté/Joe's, plus coffee and one or two lunches.
Splurge dinner for 2 (Gramercy Tavern)	~\$250–\$450	Dining Room prix-fixe higher; Tavern à la carte lower. Add 18–20% tip.
Buffer / incidentals	remainder	Souvenirs, cabs, a second observation deck, etc.
Rough total	~\$1,320–\$2,170	Comfortably inside \$2,500 if you skip the second deck and keep the splurge to one meal.

💡 **Budget reality check:** \$2,500 is very workable here. The two swing factors are the **splurge dinner** (Gramercy's Dining Room prix-fixe can eat \$400+ for two once wine and tip are in) and **Broadway** (lottery win = cheap thrill; premium seats = \$300+). Choose one to go big on. Skipping the optional Empire State Building deck and doing the free Staten Island Ferry instead of paid harbor add-ons keeps you well under.

Pre-trip checklist

- ☐ Book hotel (Pod 51 or alternative) for Oct 8–11.
- ☐ Reserve Top of the Rock timed slot (sunset or early morning).
- ☐ Reserve Statue City Cruises ferry, early time slot; add Crown/Pedestal now if wanted.
- ☐ Set a Gramercy Tavern reservation on OpenTable the day the date opens (28 days out, at noon).
- ☐ Start entering Broadway lotteries daily once your dates are eligible; note TKTS as backup.
- ☐ Make sure each person has a contactless card or phone wallet set up for OMNY.
- ☐ Pack layers, October evenings are cool and observation decks are windy.
- ☐ Screenshot this plan (offline access beats street-corner googling).

4) Sources (checked June 2026)

Observation decks

- Top of the Rock, tickets & entrance: [rockefellercenter.com/...](https://www.rockefellercenter.com/...) and [rockefellercenter.com/...](https://www.rockefellercenter.com/...)
- Top of the Rock, Skyline add-on & hours: [rockefellercenter.com/...](https://www.rockefellercenter.com/...)

- Empire State Building, 86th Floor tickets & hours: [esbnyc.com/...](https://esbnyc.com/) and [esbnyc.com/...](https://esbnyc.com/)

Statue of Liberty & Ellis Island

- Statue City Cruises (official operator): [statuecitycruises.com/...](https://statuecitycruises.com/) and [cityexperiences.com/...](https://cityexperiences.com/)
- Statue of Liberty Foundation (authorized-ticket guidance): [statueofliberty.org/...](https://statueofliberty.org/)

Broadway tickets

- Broadway Direct digital lottery: lottery.broadwaydirect.com and [broadwaydirect.com/...](https://broadwaydirect.com/)
- TKTS discount booth (TDF): [tdf.org/...](https://tdf.org/)

Food

- Ess-a-Bagel (hours & locations): [ess-a-bagel.com/...](https://ess-a-bagel.com/) and [ess-a-bagel.com/...](https://ess-a-bagel.com/)
- Kesté Pizza & Vino: kestepizzeria.com
- Gramercy Tavern: [gramercytavern.com/...](https://gramercytavern.com/) and [gramercytavern.com/...](https://gramercytavern.com/)

Hotel

- Pod 51: [thepodhotel.com/...](https://thepodhotel.com/)

Transit

- MTA OMNY fares: [mta.info/...](https://mta.info/)
- JFK AirTrain: [jfkairport.com/...](https://jfkairport.com/)

Enjoy every minute, you've earned a trip where the only surprise is how good that first bagel tastes.

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