

new! **Travel**

A tale of three cities

Whether you want to head stateside or stay closer to home, there's a city break for you...

New York

USA

Walking round New York is a bit like walking round a film set. We recognised the steps in Grand Central Terminal from the Justin Timberlake romcom *Friends With Benefits*, the entrance to the New York Palace Hotel from TV glamfest *Gossip Girl* and Brooklyn Bridge from the Miranda and Steve scene in *Sex And The City*. We also kept our eyes peeled for the city's famous residents, but Madonna was clearly not in the mood for a jog in Central Park while we were there!

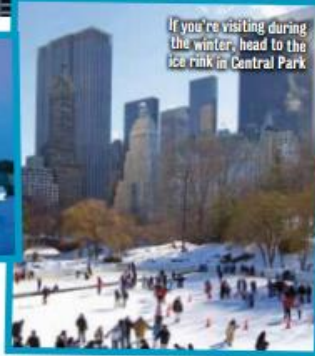
WHAT TO DO: No visit to the Big Apple would be complete without seeing a show on Broadway, and we chose *Kinky Boots*, which is a sequintastic, humour-loaded musical. We loved it! Another must is to get up high for a bird's-eye view of the famous Manhattan skyline. If you're feeling flush, splash out on an exhilarating helicopter tour, which not only takes you up above the skyscrapers but also gives you a fantastic view of the Statue Of Liberty. For a more purse-friendly option, head to observation deck Top Of The Rock, which overlooks Central Park in one direction and the Empire State Building in the other. The views are breathtaking. Back down in the park, we headed to Wolman Ice Rink,



Madonna lives in New York



An evening dinner cruise is a real treat



If you're visiting during the winter, head to the ice rink in Central Park

where Suri Cruise has been spotted skating, and were delighted to make it round without a wipeout. Then we rounded off with a culture fix at the Museum Of Modern Art and a spot of shopping on Fifth Avenue. We recommend saving some space in your suitcase for the way home!

WHERE TO EAT: For lunch on the run, we thought the burgers at Shake Shack were tasty and speedy! For a real treat, take to the water for a Bateaux Dinner Cruise. You'll be served a three-course meal as you cruise past the city lights, while the band plays a mix of laid-back jazz and modern classics.

WHERE TO STAY: We stayed at the Courtyard by Marriott Central Park

and found the location excellent, with many attractions within a few blocks. The beds are so comfy you're guaranteed a good night's sleep, and we were lucky enough to have a view of Times Square from our corner room. We also found the bar opposite - The Three Monkeys - to have a fun and friendly vibe!

HOW TO BOOK: See Virgin-atlantic.com for flights and Marriot.com for rooms from £100 per night. Visit Attraction-tickets-direct.co.uk or call free on 0808 271 4453 to pre-book all your excursions with guaranteed admission and to book private airport transfers from £19pp each way.

You get an amazing view of the city from the Top Of The Rock viewing deck

Barcelona

EUROPE

With its unique architecture, vibrant nightlife and seaside location, it's no wonder this Spanish city is a Mecca for celebs. Beyoncé Knowles, Cameron Diaz and Gwyneth Paltrow have all visited recently.

WHAT TO DO: Start with a stroll up Las Ramblas, the bustling central avenue that's lined with quirky stalls, street performers and countless opportunities for a tapas pit stop! After a trip to famous food market Mercat De La Boqueria, explore the narrow streets of Bari Gòtic, filled with cute cafés and tempting boutiques. The chilled-out Gràcia quarter is dotted with picturesque little squares and overlooked by the other-worldly Parc Güell, the creation of Barcelona's most celebrated architect, Antoni Gaudi. His mind-boggling Sagrada Família - a church started in 1882 and still unfinished - is another must-see.

Across town on Montjuïc, the hill overlooking the city, you can get your cultural fix at Barcelona's national museum of art (MNAC), then take a cable car back down to the centre. If time is limited, hop on one of Barcelona's frequent tour buses (Barcelona.city-tour.com), which take in all the key sights in around two hours. For a more personal take on the city's secret treasures, Trip4real.com offers intimate guided walks around Barcelona's hidden gems, with friendly, in-the-know hosts showing you



Gwyn was here in November



Parc Güell, designed by Antoni Gaudi, is a great place to visit

hotspots you may miss if left to your own devices!

WHERE TO EAT: El Nacional is a temple of gastronomy with four restaurants and bars under one roof, allowing you to sample a host of Spanish specialities in one go. For a night-time tippie, head to hipster hangout Garage Beer Co, which draws an easy-on-the-eye local crowd.

WHERE TO STAY: We took advantage of Lastminute.com's Top Secret Hotel deal, which

offers up to 35 per cent off usual rates. Before booking, you're given key info about your hotel, including the approximate location, but the rest is a surprise. We lucked out with the five-star Eurostars Grand Marina by the port, which has fantastic views back onto the city.

HOW TO BOOK: See Voyages-sncf.com to book rail travel from London to Barcelona, from £161 return. You'll travel to Paris on the Eurostar, then change to the superfast TGV service direct to Barcelona, which takes six and a half hours.

Edinburgh

UK

It's perhaps most famous for its annual Fringe Festival, where comedians such as Stephen Fry and Steve Coogan out their teeth. But there's plenty to see and do in the Scottish capital when it's not festival season. Just ask recent visitors David Williams and Simon Cowell, who were in town for the *Britain's Got Talent* auditions...

WHAT TO DO: Edinburgh Castle is a must-see, and offers brilliant views of the city from above. Culture vultures should also head to the Scottish Gallery Of Modern Art for fun and quirky installations, or the more traditional Scottish National Gallery for impressive portraits.

There's plenty to keep shopaholics happy, from luxury boutiques to high-street stores, and after your shopathon, you can go for a oozy afternoon tea at Brooks Hotel, and recharge in front of the open fire with a selection of delicious sandwiches, scones and cakes.

WHERE TO EAT: Head to Edinburgh Larder to enjoy a tasty meal made from locally sourced ingredients. The friendly and enthusiastic staff at this bistro on Alva Street go all out to make you feel special. For a real treat, we loved Monteiths on the Royal Mile, which offers fantastic seasonal dishes and innovative cocktails, such as the bourbon-based Peanut Butter And Jelly Shake. You'll definitely want to try more than one!



Simon has visited the city



Edinburgh Castle is a must-see



Head to Brooks Hotel for afternoon tea



Sip a cocktail at the bar at Radisson Blu

WHERE TO STAY: Based in the heart of the city centre, the newly refurbished Radisson Blu is the perfect base from which to explore. The rooms are large and stylish, and there's even a pillow menu so you can make your stay as comfy as possible! We highly recommend the cocktails in the hotel bar - and there's a hearty breakfast buffet every morning, which will sort you out if you've overdone it the night before.

HOW TO BOOK: See Ba.com for flights from £88 return, Radissonblu.com for accommodation from £99 per night and Thisisedinburgh.com for more information on the city.