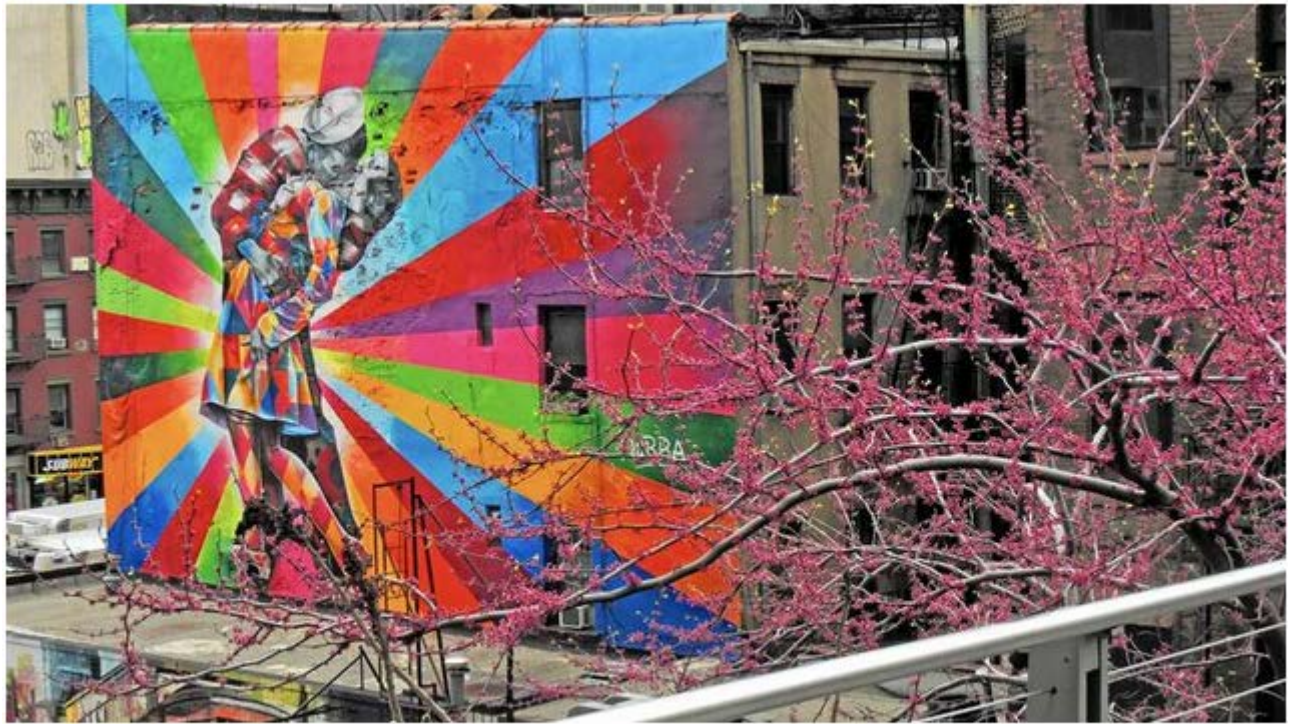


How New York City's High Line has inspired murals, sculptures and other works of street art



The High Line makes a fine perch from which to see Brazilian street artist Eduardo Kobra's mural, based on the iconic 1945 photograph "V-J Day in Times Square" by Alfred Eisenstaedt. (Rosemary McClure)

By **Rosemary McClure**

Billowing rain clouds were closing in as I hurried along West 30th Street in the Chelsea neighborhood of Manhattan. Ahead, I could see the outline of the High Line, an elevated park that has become the darling of New York City residents and visitors alike.

Just as I reached the steps leading to the park, thunder boomed and rain began to fall.

The good news, I thought, was that I would have the place to myself and could explore the last section of the park, a recent addition. The bad news, of course, was that I would have to see it from under an umbrella.

But I hadn't counted on how wildly popular the park has become. Even in bad weather, with a chilly spring rain falling, the 6-year-old High Line had drawn a crowd — joggers and walkers, families, seniors and moms pushing strollers that bore bundled-up kids.

Five million people visited the High Line last year, making this oddly shaped green belt along the Hudson River on Manhattan's Lower West Side one of the city's most popular parks. "People like it so much they come even when the weather isn't great," said Ashley Tickle of Friends of the High Line, a park support group. The recent opening of the new Whitney Museum of American Art at the edge of the park has only heightened interest.

Suspended 30 feet above the city, the High Line originally was a New York Central Railroad spur called the West Side Line that delivered freight to area businesses. Wildflowers and grasses turned it into a secret garden in the sky after the spur was abandoned.



When demolition loomed, public outcry saved it, and in 2009 the first segment opened.

The 1.45-mile park stretches from Gansevoort Street, in the meatpacking district, through Chelsea to 34th Street at its northern end. Eleven entrances allow visitors to hop on and off the raised promenade along

the way. The third and northernmost section of the park, the High Line at the Rail Yards, opened last September.

Among the benefits of visiting this pretty walkway: stunning views of the Hudson River and cityscape, an intimate above-it-all look at neighborhoods, numerous cultural events staged on the parkway and an ever-changing gallery of public art.

The day I visited, a giant mural by California Pop artist Ed Ruscha was drawing crowds. The 30-by-50-foot project, commissioned for the High Line and painted on the side of an apartment building, overlooked the park and recited the line, "Honey, I twisted through more damn traffic today."

In another area, I saw pedestrians pausing in the morning drizzle to photograph a colorful mural by Brazilian street artist Eduardo Kobra. Based on the iconic 1945 photograph "V-J Day in Times Square" by Alfred Eisenstaedt, the huge kaleidoscopic mural was a day brightener. At 14th Street, I

saw a couple kissing in front of a wall mural that featured Albert Einstein holding a sign that read "Love is the answer."

Although art projects such as Ruscha's are regularly commissioned by High Line Art, a group associated with Friends of the High Line, not all art that strollers see has been commissioned.

"The High Line has inspired many in the West Chelsea community to install murals, sculptures and other works of art," Tickle said. "Although they are not part of our curated program, they are popular attractions for visitors and add to the vibrant art community that surrounds the park."

The art scene isn't the only community element that has been affected by the park. The New York Post recently called it "the rail line that resurrected a neighborhood." Both Chelsea and the meatpacking district have gained cachet since the park opened.

Open-air meat markets and tenements once lined these cobblestone streets; now the neighborhoods have taken on new lives as gourmet eateries, artisanal shops and designer stores have appeared. With them have come crowds of locals, travelers, foodies and fashionistas, and higher real estate prices.

New businesses are capitalizing on the area's popularity by tacking the words "High Line" onto their names.

Others, such as the luxury Gansevoort Hotel, have created packages to take advantage of the park. The hotel's "Hit the High Line" package includes a picnic lunch and a copy of the book "Designing the High Line"; a "Get Laced" package has a running map of the High Line and meatpacking district.

It's a new way to get high on the Big Apple.

WHERE TO STAY

High Line Hotel, 180 10th Ave.; (212) 929-3888, www.thehighlinehotel.com. Gardens, a gated Parisian-style courtyard and converted 1865 red-brick seminary buildings set off this out-of-the-ordinary hotel that's about a block from the High Line. All rooms are individual, with pine floors, antique furniture and sunny courtyard views. Doubles from \$499 a night.

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