

CIVIC CENTER / BROOKLYN BRIDGE / DUMBO / MANHATTAN BRIDGE / CHINATOWN

TWO BRIDGES: BROOKLYN AND MANHATTAN

A MUSEENYC WALKING TOUR · FREE, AND NOT SPONSORED BY ANYONE

DISTANCE 4.6 miles	TIME 3.5 to 4 hours
STOPS 17	START City Hall Park (4/5/6 to Brooklyn Bridge-City Hall, R/W to City Hall)
END Columbus Park, Chinatown	MAP museenyc.com/tours/09-two-bridges/map

A loop. Out over the Brooklyn Bridge, down into DUMBO, back over the Manhattan Bridge into Chinatown, ending where you can sit down and eat. You cross the East River twice on foot and never repeat a view. The Brooklyn Bridge is the famous one and it is crowded; the Manhattan Bridge is loud, rattly, half-empty and arguably the better walk. Do both and you understand why. Start at 8am if you want the Brooklyn Bridge to yourself.

ROUTE CARD

Screenshot or tear off this page. Full detail for each stop follows.

1 City Hall Park	10 Jane's Carousel
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3 Brooklyn Bridge pedestrian entrance	12 Manhattan Bridge anchorage and Brooklyn approach
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6 Brooklyn Bridge, Brooklyn tower	15 Mahayana Buddhist Temple
7 Brooklyn Bridge exit, Washington Street	16 Doyers Street
8 Washington Street at Water Street	17 Columbus Park
9 Empire Stores	

GETTING THERE AND BACK

START	4/5/6 or J/Z to Brooklyn Bridge-City Hall. Also R/W to City Hall, 2/3 to Park Pl.
FINISH	N/Q/R/W/J/Z/6 at Canal St, or B/D at Grand St, both minutes from Columbus Park.
ALONG THE ROUTE	Under the Manhattan side: 4/5/6 and R/W at City Hall, N/Q/R/6 at Canal. Brooklyn side: A/C at High St, F at York St, NYC Ferry at DUMBO. Buses: M103 on the Bowery, M22 on Chambers, B25 on Fulton St.

Cutting it short

Every walk here has exits. Good ones on this route:

- Before the first bridge: skip to stop 8 by taking the A/C to High St. Ten minutes instead of forty.
- After stop 7 (bridge exit): A/C at High St, or F at York St, three blocks.
- After stop 11 (Fulton Ferry): NYC Ferry back to Wall St or Midtown. A good ending if one bridge was enough.
- Instead of the second bridge: F at York St to East Broadway, or A/C at High St to Fulton St. Either puts you back in Lower Manhattan in fifteen minutes.

THE WALK

1 CITY HALL PARK

OPEN TO THE PUBLIC

This was the common: a colonial pasture, then an execution ground, then an almshouse and a jail, then the seat of city government. City Hall itself dates to 1812 and was faced in cheap brownstone on the north side because the builders assumed the city would never grow past it. The fountain is an 1871 Jacob Wrey Mould design, lost for a century and rebuilt in 1999. Sit here for five minutes and look at the Woolworth Building on the west side, which was the tallest building in the world from 1913 to 1930.

[Open in maps](#) · 40.71280, -74.00600

2 AFRICAN BURIAL GROUND NATIONAL MONUMENT

OPEN TO THE PUBLIC

Walk: North across the park to Duane St, west two blocks to Elk St. The visitor center entrance is inside 290 Broadway.

Heads up: Stop here before the bridge, not after. Give it twenty minutes. Closed Mondays and Tuesdays.

Rediscovered in 1991 during excavation for a federal building. Colonial New York's Black population, free and enslaved, was buried here from the 1690s to 1794, outside the city limits, then built over and forgotten. Stop here before the bridge, not after. The bridge is a monument to what the city built; this is a monument to who built it. The outdoor memorial and the free visitor center inside 290 Broadway are open Wednesday to Sunday and closed Mondays and Tuesdays.

[Open in maps](#) · 40.71450, -74.00450

3 BROOKLYN BRIDGE PEDESTRIAN ENTRANCE

OPEN TO THE PUBLIC

Walk: Back east to Centre St and Park Row. The ramp starts from the traffic island opposite City Hall. Follow the pedestrian signs.

Heads up: Cyclists have their own lane on the roadway now, so the walkway is pedestrians only. Still stay right and stop at the towers, not in the middle of the path.

The promenade starts here, on a ramp from the traffic island. Since 2021 cyclists have been moved down to a protected lane on the roadway, so the walkway is pedestrians only, which made the crossing dramatically more pleasant. From the ramp you are already looking down at the Manhattan approach arches, built of granite laid without steel.

[Open in maps](#) · 40.71180, -74.00420

4 BROOKLYN BRIDGE, MANHATTAN TOWER

OPEN TO THE PUBLIC

Walk: Straight out along the promenade, about 10 minutes. The first tower is where the cables fan down to the deck.

Heads up: Look for the Emily Warren Roebling plaque at the tower base.

276 feet of granite and limestone, built between 1870 and 1876, and among the tallest structures in New York when finished. The Gothic pointed arches were John Roebling's decision: he wanted the towers to read as cathedral, not machinery. Roebling died of tetanus from a ferry accident before construction started. His son Washington took over, got decompression sickness in the caisson, and directed the rest of the build from a window in Brooklyn Heights while his wife Emily Warren Roebling ran the site and learned the engineering herself. Her name is on the plaque at the tower.

[Open in maps](#) · 40.70850, -73.99970

5 BROOKLYN BRIDGE, MID-SPAN

OPEN TO THE PUBLIC

Walk: Continue about 5 minutes to the low point between the towers.

Heads up: This is the stop. Turn a full circle before you move on.

You are 135 feet over the river on the main span. Downriver: the harbor, Governors Island, the Statue of Liberty. Upriver: the Manhattan Bridge, which you will be walking back across, and the Williamsburg behind it. The four main cables carry over 5,000 galvanized steel wires each, spun in place. Roebling over-engineered the bridge to six times its required strength, which is the only reason it still carries traffic after 140 years.

[Open in maps](#) · 40.70610, -73.99665

6 BROOKLYN BRIDGE, BROOKLYN TOWER

OPEN TO THE PUBLIC

Walk: About 5 more minutes east.

Sinking the Manhattan tower's caisson meant digging through riverbed under compressed air at pressures no one understood. Over a hundred workers got the bends; at least twenty died on the project. Washington Roebling ordered the Manhattan caisson stopped at 78 feet, short of bedrock, having calculated the sand was firm enough. It was. The tower is still sitting on it.

[Open in maps](#) · 40.70425, -73.99360

7 BROOKLYN BRIDGE EXIT, WASHINGTON STREET

OPEN TO THE PUBLIC

Walk: Keep going and take the stairway down at Washington St and Prospect St. Do not ride the walkway to its end.

Heads up: Staying on to Cadman Plaza costs you a ten-minute backtrack. Take the stairs.

The promenade continues into downtown Brooklyn, but the stairway down at Washington Street and Prospect Street puts you exactly where you want to be. Take the stairs, walk two blocks north, and you are in DUMBO. If you stay on the walkway you end up at Cadman Plaza and have to backtrack ten minutes.

[Open in maps](#) · 40.70020, -73.98840

8 WASHINGTON STREET AT WATER STREET

OPEN TO THE PUBLIC

Walk: North on Washington St two blocks to Water St. Stand in the middle of Washington and look uphill.

Heads up: Live street with cars. Get the shot from the sidewalk.

Cobblestones running uphill, brick walls on both sides, the bridge tower filling the gap, and the Empire State Building lined up dead center behind it. It is the most photographed spot in Brooklyn and it is genuinely good. It is also a live street with cars, so watch your back. By 10am there is a queue.

[Open in maps](#) · 40.70365, -73.98950

9 EMPIRE STORES

OPEN TO THE PUBLIC

Walk: West on Water St one block. The courtyard cuts through the block.

Heads up: Lunch stop. You are exactly halfway. The roof terrace is free and the stairs are inside the courtyard.

Brick Civil War-era warehouses that stored coffee, sugar and molasses, with a public courtyard punched straight through the block and a free roof terrace on top. Take the stairs up. The roof gives you the Manhattan Bridge from above and a place to sit. This is the right lunch stop on this walk: the ground floor has food, and you are exactly halfway.

[Open in maps](#) · 40.70328, -73.99045

10 JANE'S CAROUSEL

OPEN TO THE PUBLIC

Walk: West on Water St to the park lawn. The glass pavilion is ahead.

A restored 1922 Philadelphia Toboggan Company carousel, rebuilt over decades by Jane Walentas and housed in a glass pavilion. Stand behind it and you get the carousel, the Brooklyn Bridge and Lower Manhattan in one frame. Riding it is optional.

[Open in maps](#) · 40.70349, -73.99320

11 FULTON FERRY LANDING

OPEN TO THE PUBLIC

Walk: West past the lawn and under the Brooklyn Bridge to the wooden pier.

Heads up: The Whitman lines are cut into the railing. Read them with the bridge overhead.

For two centuries this was the only link between Brooklyn and Manhattan, and it is the reason the bridge was built here. Walt Whitman rode this ferry daily and wrote Crossing Brooklyn Ferry about it; lines from the poem are cut into the railing. Read them with the bridge directly overhead. The bridge opening in 1883 killed the ferry within a generation.

[Open in maps](#) · 40.70328, -73.99506

12 MANHATTAN BRIDGE ANCHORAGE AND BROOKLYN APPROACH

OPEN TO THE PUBLIC

Walk: Back east on Water St, under the Manhattan Bridge, then south on Jay St to Sands St. About 12 minutes.

Or ride: F train York St to High St if you want to cut the walk, though it does not help you reach the entrance.

Heads up: The walkway entrance is badly signed. Look for the blue pedestrian sign and the stairs on the east side of Jay St. South side is pedestrians, north side is bikes.

The Manhattan Bridge was finished in 1909, 26 years after the Brooklyn, and it is a completely different animal: steel towers instead of stone, built cheap and fast, and engineered by Leon Moisseiff using deflection theory, which let it be far lighter. The four subway tracks on the outer edges make it flex visibly under trains. The south walkway is the pedestrian side; the north side is bikes. Entrance is a set of stairs and a ramp off Jay Street, poorly signed. Look for the blue pedestrian sign.

[Open in maps](#) · 40.70020, -73.98630

13 MANHATTAN BRIDGE, MID-SPAN

OPEN TO THE PUBLIC

Walk: Straight out along the caged walkway, about 12 minutes to the middle.

Heads up: It shakes when trains pass. That is normal and by design. It is also loud, so do not plan on conversation.

You are walking a caged path bolted to the side of a working rail bridge. When an N, Q, R or W train passes a few feet away the whole structure moves, which is by design. Almost nobody walks this. The payoff: a broadside view of the Brooklyn Bridge in full, with Lower Manhattan behind it, which you cannot get from the Brooklyn Bridge itself. If you only have time for one bridge and you already know the postcard, walk this one.

[Open in maps](#) · 40.70730, -73.99030

14 MANHATTAN BRIDGE ARCH AND COLONNADE

OPEN TO THE PUBLIC

Walk: Continue west off the bridge, about 12 minutes, and you land at Canal St and the Bowery. Turn back to see the arch and colonnade whole.

You come off the walkway into Chinatown and the bridge greets you with a monumental arch and a curving colonnade modeled on Bernini's at St. Peter's, by the architects of the New York Public Library. The frieze, Buffalo Hunt, is by Charles Rumsey. It was built to dignify the approach, then spent most of a century choked by traffic and neglect. Walk out into the plaza and turn back to see the whole composition.

[Open in maps](#) · 40.71480, -73.99730

15 MAHAYANA BUDDHIST TEMPLE

OPEN TO THE PUBLIC

Walk: Half a block southwest on the Bowery. The temple is at the corner of Canal.

Heads up: Free, open daily. Hat off, voices down.

Directly under the bridge at Canal and the Bowery. The building was the Rosemary Theater until a Buddhist association bought it in 1996. Inside is a 16-foot gilded Buddha and a wall of donated offerings. Free, open daily, and a hard tonal shift from the bridge you just walked, which is the point. Hat off, voices down.

[Open in maps](#) · 40.71370, -73.99650

16 DOYERS STREET

OPEN TO THE PUBLIC

Walk: West on Bowery to Pell St, right, and Doyers is the crooked lane on your right.

A one-block lane with a hard 90-degree bend that made it useful for ambushes during the tong wars of the early 1900s. It is said more people were killed on this block than any other in America. Now: barbershops, a 1920s tea parlor, a painted street mural, and no traffic.

[Open in maps](#) · 40.71430, -73.99820

17 COLUMBUS PARK

OPEN TO THE PUBLIC

Walk: Follow Doyers to Mott St, right, then west on Bayard St into the park.

Heads up: Benches, shade, and food in three directions. You earned it.

The site of the Five Points, the most notorious slum in 19th-century America, cleared in 1897 for the city's first park built explicitly as slum clearance. Today it is Chinatown's backyard and the most genuinely used public space downtown. Your legs are done and there are benches. Food is three directions from here.

[Open in maps](#) · 40.71480, -73.99980

COMBINING THIS WITH OTHER TOURS

- [Tour 2 \(Brooklyn Heights, DUMBO and Vinegar Hill\)](#) shares five stops with this one. After stop 11 here, instead of crossing back, walk up to the Squibb Park Bridge and run Tour 2 from stop 8. That gives you one bridge crossing and a full Brooklyn Heights afternoon.
- [Tour 7 \(Chinatown, Little Italy and Tribeca\)](#) starts at Columbus Park, where this tour ends, and shares four stops with it. Do this walk in the morning, eat in Chinatown, then start Tour 7 at stop 2 (Doyers St) and skip the duplicates.
- [Tour 3 \(East Village to LES\)](#) passes Seward Park on East Broadway, about 12 minutes from Columbus Park, so you can also run this tour and then pick up the back half of Tour 3 from there.
- [Tour 10 \(Williamsburg Bridge\)](#) completes the set. All three East River bridges in one day is about 9 miles: this loop in the morning, lunch in Chinatown, then walk up to Delancey and cross the Williamsburg in the afternoon.
- **Short version:** City Hall Park, the burial ground, across the Brooklyn Bridge, down to Empire Stores, ferry or A/C home. About 2 hours and one bridge.
- **Bridges-only version:** skip stops 1, 2, 15, 16, 17. Start at the ramp, end at the arch. About 2 hours and 3 miles of pure bridge.

WALKING NAVIGATION LINKS

Google caps a directions link at ten points, so the route is split. Open a segment on your phone and it starts walking navigation.

- [Stops 1–10](#)
- [Stops 10–17](#)

THE MAP

Open the MUSEENYC map for this walk at museenyc.com/tours/09-two-bridges/map. Every pin carries its own walking directions, transit alternative and notes.

- **Green pin** = open to the public.
- **Orange pin** = private, look from the sidewalk. Several are people's homes: no gates, no doorways, no photographing into windows.

The orange line is a straight-line guide between stops, not the walking route. Use the navigation links for turn-by-turn.

MUSEENYC

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Questions about a stop, a closure, or anything else on this walk? Reach MUSEENYC at museenyc.tours@gmail.com or [@museenyc](https://www.instagram.com/museenyc) on Instagram. More walks at museenyc.com/tours.