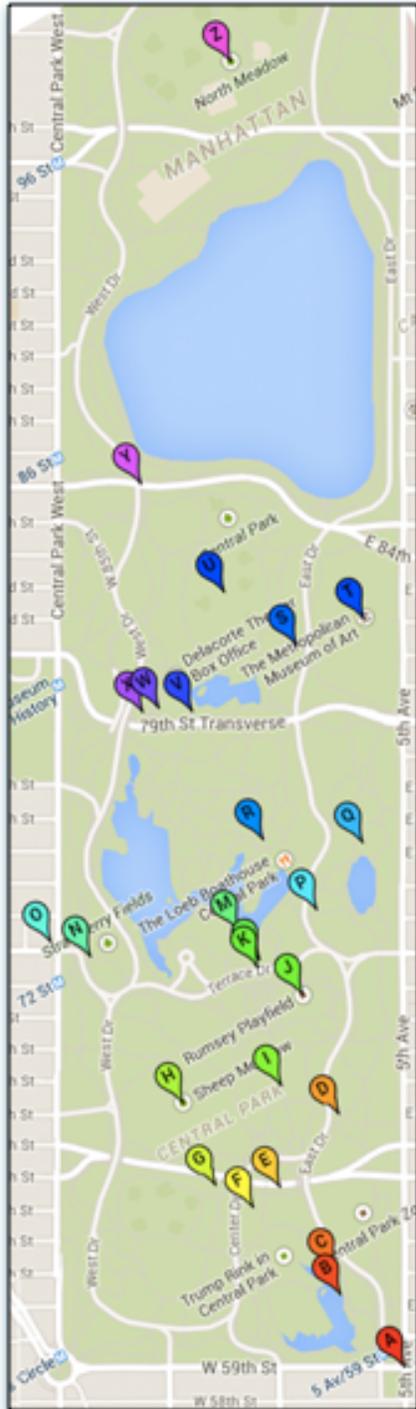




## Free Tours by Foot - Central Park Self Guided Tours

We've developed this self-guided Central Park Tour as a tool to see what Central Park has to offer and how to go about seeing it. It's also a great companion to take along on one of our guided Central Park tours.



- Start Tour at 59th Street and 5th Ave
- The Pond and Gapstow Bridge
- Central Park Zoo Route
- Balto Statue
- The Dairy Visitor Center and Gift Sh...
- Chess & Checkers House Visitor Ce...
- Carousel
- Sheep Meadow
- The Mall
- Rumsey Playfield - Summer Stage
- Bethesda Arcade
- Bethesda Terrace
- The Lake
- Strawberry Fields
- The Dakota Apartments
- Conservatory Waters
- Alice In Wonderland Statue
- The Ramble
- Cleopatra's Needle
- The Metropolitan Museum of Art
- Central Park The Great Lawn
- Belvedere Castle
- Shakespeare Garden
- Swedish Cottage Marionette Theatre
- Jacqueline Kennedy Reservoir
- North Meadow

### Quick Park Stats

Size: 843 acres

Year Started: 1857

Officially Completed: 1873

The park was a massive undertaking. Over 1500 residents had to be cleared from the area, particularly in Seneca Village. Even just preparing the land for landscaping was a feat. The Manhattan schist that makes up the island had to be blasted apart in many areas using gunpowder. There was more gunpowder used in building Central Park than was used in the Battle of Gettysburg in the American Civil War. It was also determined that the soil in the area was not suitable for all of the planting that was planned. The topsoil was removed, and new soil was

brought in from New Jersey. All in all, during the park's construction, more than 10 million cartloads of rubble were carted out.

Central Park was designed as an urban oasis to give New Yorkers an escape from the crowded city. The original design for New York, laid out by the City Commissioners in 1811 did not include a park. Between that time and the 1850's, the city of New York quadrupled in size. As the city got more and more crowded, New Yorkers started seeking a respite.

Landscaped cemeteries became a popular place to hang out because they were among the only public green

spaces in the city. It was time for a change in New York. In 1853 the city purchased the

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land that would become Central Park for \$5 million. To ensure that they were getting the best design possible, they held a design competition to determine what the future park would look like. The design team of Fredrick Law Olmstead and Calvert Vaux won the completion with a design called “The Greensward Plan.” The construction of the park began, which was a complete transformation of the land. Even though the Greensward Plan was meant to look very naturalistic, the park is entirely manmade.

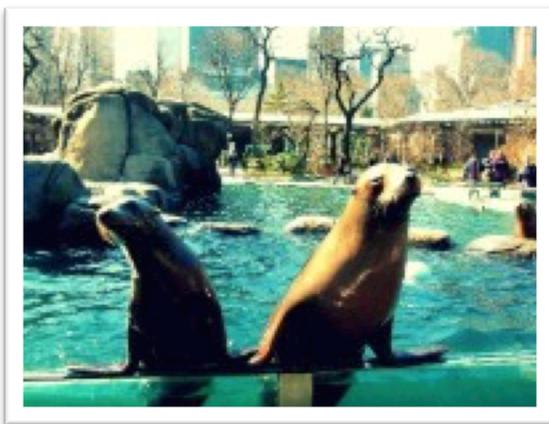
**NOTE:** the following self-guided tour covers about 5 miles, so you may want to do it in multiple parts depending on how much walking you are up for.

**(Stop A) Begin your self-guided Central Park tour at the Southeast entrance to the Park (59th and 5th Avenue)**



**(Stop B) The Pond and Gapstow Bridge** - The Pond is the southernmost body of water in the park. It is entirely manmade and is fed from the city water supply system. Gapstow Bridge arches over the Pond and offers one of the best views of Midtown from Central Park. Make sure you stop there for a great photo op!!

*Go north up the path and then head under the Inscope Arch to go towards the Central Park Zoo.*



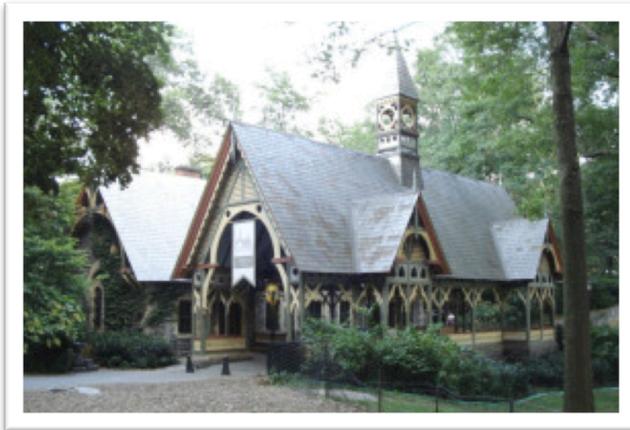
**(Stop C) Central Park Zoo** - The Central Park Zoo happened by accident. It was not included in the original plans for the park, but was started when New Yorkers started leaving “gifts” of exotic animals in the park. The park found itself with a menagerie on its hands, including swans and bears. A couple of years later, the city decided to make it official. The New York State Assembly recognized the Central Park Zoo, making it the second publicly owned zoo in the country. (Philadelphia was first). The zoo has

received two major overhauls. The first was in the 1930’s, when the zoo became the Robert Moses Zoo. During this renovation, the famous Sea Lion Pool was added. This pool was considered groundbreaking, because the designer actually studied the habits of sea lions and tried to make the pool resemble their natural habitat. The next renovation

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occurred in the 1980's, when the old-fashioned menagerie cages were taken out and replaced with natural, open habitats. Many of the larger animals were moved to the Bronx Zoo. The Sea Lion Pool was redesigned and remains the center feature of the zoo. On the way out, make sure you check out the **Delacorte Clock**. The clock was donated by George Delacorte and features animals that move in a circle to nursery rhymes every half-hour. (The clock plays 44 different songs!)

(Stop D) Head out of the zoo and then cut over towards the center of the park. Look for the **Statue of Balto** along the path! This statue is donated to all of the sled dogs that participated in the Great Race of Mercy, a dogsled run that relayed diphtheria antitoxin to the town of Nome, Alaska in 1925, effectively saving the town. Balto, the dog featured in the statue, was the lead dog of the final team. He was present for his statue's dedication later that year. The statue's shiny appearance comes from all of the children in the park "petting" him!



*Continue your self-guided Central Park tour by heading towards the center of the park.*

(Stop E) **The Dairy** - This Victorian-style cottage was a functioning dairy when the park opened. This part of the park is known as The Children's District. One of the major criticisms of the Greensward Plan when it was released was that it didn't contain

enough features for children. The Dairy and other children's attractions were then added. The Dairy was a place where children and their caretakers could go for refreshment and a break from the outdoors. The dairy, designed by Calvert Vaux, served fresh milk and ice cream in the nineteenth century. By the 1950s the building was dilapidated and was used as a maintenance shed. When the Central Park Conservancy took over in 1979 the dairy was restored to its former appearance and became the first Visitor's Center in the park.

(Stop F) **Chess and Checker House** - also considered a part of The Children's District. When the park was built, this was the site of the Kinderberg (children's mountain). The Kinderberg was the largest shelter for children and their parents. In 1952 the Chess and Checkers House was built to replace the Kinderberg. It was refurbished by The Central Park Conservancy in the 1980's, when the shaded area was added. Today, visitors are welcome to bring their own chess and checker sets or to borrow them from the Conservancy staff. Dominoes and backgammon are also available.

Look down the hill and check out the **Wollman Rink**, one of two rinks in Central Park. The rink is seen in a number of films, including the final scene of "Serendipity." Check out our post on ice skating in NYC!

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*Now head down the path and through the red and white brick archway to the Carousel.*

(Stop G) **The Carousel** - the beautiful Carousel is a favorite attraction in the park. It is the 4th carousel to stand in the park. The first one, opened in 1873, was powered by a horse or mule under the platform. It was trained to stop walking in a circle when the operator tapped his foot on the platform. This original carousel was replaced in 1924, and promptly burned down. The next one also burned down in 1950. The current carousel was discovered abandoned in a trolley terminal in Coney Island. It was constructed in 1908 and is considered one of the finest examples of American folk art in the country. It has 57 horses and plays beautiful calliope music. The carousel runs 7 days a week in the summer.

*Head north up the path to Sheep Meadow.*



(Stop H) **Sheep Meadow** - this grassy meadow got its name from the sheep that once grazed here. The famous Tavern on the Green restaurant at the edge of the meadow was constructed as the Sheepfold in 1870.

The area was used for grazing sheep until 1934, when they were removed to Prospect Park. City officials feared that out-of-work New Yorkers affected by the Great Depression would eat the sheep. The area was turned into a lawn and the Sheepfold became a restaurant.

*Head east down the path to the Mall.*

(Stop I) **The Mall** - The Mall quickly became a popular spot for wealthy New Yorkers when the park opened. It was New York's answer to Hyde Park or the Bois du Boulogne. Carriages would drop people off at the start of The Mall and then loop around to the top to pick them up. The Mall is also the only straight line made by a sidewalk in the park. The designers did that so that there could be a big buildup leading to Bethesda Terrace, north of the Mall. The American Elm trees that line both sides of the Mall, one of the largest collections of these trees in the United States. The trees create a "cathedral ceiling" over the pathway. Also along the pathway is the **Literary Walk**, a collection of statues of famous writers. **William Shakespeare** is the first statue of the walk.

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(Stop J) **Summer Stage** is a series of public entertainment events that began in 1986. Originally the events were held at the Naumberg Bandshell (the white stone structure), but by 1990 the series had outgrown the Bandshell. They moved into the new facility a few hundred feet to the east. The new facility offered more seating and an updated sound system. Summer Stage offers a very eclectic lineup. Throughout their history, performances have ranged from Patti Smith to The Metropolitan Opera Company.

*Walk straight up the Mall to Bethesda Terrace. Go down the stairs to check out the Minton tile ceiling under the archway.*



(Stop K) **Bethesda Arcade**- The underground Arcade was designed to be a contrast to the openness of Bethesda Terrace that it leads to. Look up and see the spectacular ceiling, with 15,000 tiles made by the famous Minton Tile Company of England. The Bethesda Arcade is the only place in the world where these tiles are used for a ceiling. The ceiling was designed by Jacob Wrey Mould, who also designed many of the decorative carvings seen on Bethesda Terrace. It was completed in

1869. The ceiling weighs around 50 tons, and over the years the tiles deteriorated. In the 1980s they were removed and placed in storage. After many years and many donations, the ceiling was restored in 2000. The acoustics in the Arcade are wonderful, so take a minute to enjoy whatever musician is performing there when you visit.

(Stop L) **Bethesda Terrace** - the formal terrace was considered the heart of the park by the designers. The central feature is the famous **Bethesda Fountain** with its Angel of the Waters statue. This statue is the only statue in the park that was specifically commissioned for the park. The terrace and fountain get their name from the Gospel of John, where a pool called Bethesda with healing waters is referenced. This was all dedicated in honor of the Croton Aqueduct System, the water supply system that gives New York its tap water. The creation of the aqueduct was a huge leap forward in New York's development. It greatly reduced disease in the city and also helped decrease the number of fires in New York. In the statue, the angel has her hand out, blessing the water for New York. The lily in her other hand represents the purity of the water. This area is

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seen in dozens of films and TV shows, including *Law and Order*, *Sex and the City*, *Enchanted* and *Elf*. Fans of the *Avengers* will recognize the Terrace as the scene where they all depart one another.

(Stop M) **The Lake** - The Lake was used year-round in the early days of the park. Park goers rowed boats on the water in the summer and ice skated in the winter. The Lake was used for ice skating all the way up until the 1950s, when Wollman Rink was opened. People can still enjoy rowing boats on the Lake today.

*Head west on the 72nd Street Traverse to Strawberry Fields.*



(Stop N) **Strawberry Fields** - this quiet area of the park is dedicated to John Lennon, who lived just outside of the park in the Dakota Building. The name comes from the Beatles song “Strawberry Fields Forever.” The garden was planned by the city and John Lennon’s widow Yoko Ono. Its central feature is the Imagine Circle, donated by the city of Naples, Italy. It was designed by Italian mosaic artists and displays the name of Lennon’s most famous solo work.

Strawberry Fields is recognized as a “Garden of Peace” by 121 different countries, and is one of the most popular parts of Central Park.

(Stop O) **The Dakota Building** - completed in 1884, was New York’s first luxury apartment building. It was financed by Edward Singer (of the Singer Sewing Machine Company), who decided that he could convince New Yorkers that apartments could be a viable option for the wealthy. The Dakota offered many amenities, such as porters, maids, room service, a formal dining room and electricity provided by an in-house generator. There were 65 apartments, ranging in size from 4 rooms to 20. Throughout its history The Dakota has been famous as the home of many celebrities, including John Lennon and Yoko Ono. (Yoko Ono still lives in the building).

*Head east back down the 72nd Street Traverse all the way over to the Conservatory Water.*

(Stop P) **The Conservatory Water** - Fans of the book *Stuart Little* will recognize this pond, which is usually filled with toy sailboats. This is where Stuart races a sailboat to victory in the book. This area is also home to two famous statues: Hans Christian Anderson and Alice in Wonderland. Hans Christian Anderson is on the west side of the pond. It features the famous fairy-tale author reading his story “The Ugly Duckling” to a duckling.

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(Stop Q) **Alice in Wonderland** is on the north end of the pond. It shows Alice and the Mad Hatter Tea Party. The statue was donated by George Delacorte in honor of his wife Margarita Delacorte. The design of the statue is taken from the illustration in the first edition of the novel that was ever released. These two statues are designed for children and are meant to be climbed on, so go ahead!

*Head north away from the Conservatory Water. Go to the back end of the Loeb Boathouse to enter The Ramble.*

(Stop R) **The Ramble** - The Ramble was designed alongside Bethesda Terrace and The Lake as one of the key elements of the park. The Ramble, which can be seen from Bethesda Terrace, is meant to be a juxtaposition to the formality of the terrace. The Ramble is meant to look like a natural, wild forest and is a place where you can truly escape the city. Despite its appearance, The Ramble is entirely manmade. Some of the trees in The Ramble today were original plantings in 1859. The Ramble is known as being one of the best spots for bird-watching in the United States. Over 230 different species have been spotted.

*Head north through the Ramble, staying on the east side. When you get out on the other side, head north to the Great Lawn, stopping to check out Cleopatra's Needle on the east side of the lawn.*

(Stop S) **Cleopatra's Needle** - the oldest object in the park. The obelisk was constructed in Egypt in 1400 BC. The name is misleading, because the obelisk was 1000 years old by the time Cleopatra began her legendary reign. The obelisk in Central Park is a twin with a second Cleopatra's Needle that can be found on the Thames River in London. There is also one in Paris, but it is not a matched set with the other two. The obelisk was moved from Alexandria to New York in 1880, and it was an arduous task. A hole was cut into the hull of the ship, and the obelisk was rolled into it atop cannonballs. Once it reached New York, it was moved in a wagon hitched up to 32 horses. They had to move very slowly so as not to jostle it too much. It took 112 days to move the obelisk from New York Harbor to Central Park. Cleopatra's Needle is currently being restored.

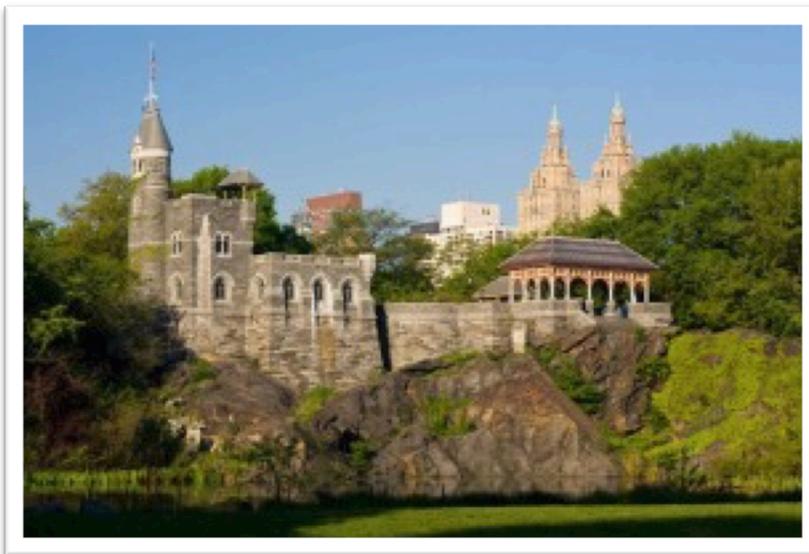
(Stop T) **The Metropolitan Museum of Art** - This is probably the most well-known museum in the city. The permanent collection has over 2 million items housed in about 2,000,000 square feet. It was designed by Calvert Vaux and Jacob Wrey Mould and was opened in 1874. There are numerous collections, including a vast Egyptian collection, Impressionist Paintings, a massive armor collection and the famous Metropolitan

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Costume Institute. Don't forget to visit this amazing museum while you are in the city! It is also budget friendly. Admission is suggested donation and you are free to pay whatever you can!

(Stop U) **The Great Lawn** - This massive lawn is one of the most famous in the United States. It was not a part of the original park design, because it was the site of a massive reservoir that was part of the Croton Aqueduct System. The reservoir was drained in 1931 and filled in with excavation from the building of Rockefeller Center and the 8th Avenue Subway. Over the years, the Great Lawn has been used for many concerts, including Simon and Garfunkel, Bon Jovi and the New York Philharmonic. Turtle Pond, the body of water at the south end of the lawn, is actually the last remaining part of the Croton Reservoir. It is named Turtle Pond for its many turtle inhabitants (up to 5 different species!).

*Take the path that goes along the east side of Turtle Pond to go up to Belvedere Castle.*



(Stop V) **Belvedere Castle** - This castle, whose name means “beautiful view” in Italian, was designed by Calvert Vaux. It is a “folly,” and architectural term for a purely decorative building, and was completed in 1869. It was meant to be a lookout over the Croton reservoir to the north and The Ramble to the south,

and it is one of the highest points in the park. For years it was also used by the National Weather Service, who took weather readings for the city up in the castle's tower. They still use the wind instruments up on top of the turret. The castle was renovated in 1983 and became a Nature Center, where visitors can get information about the flora and fauna of the park and rent bird watching kits.

*Go down the stairs on the west side of the castle. Turn left and go to Shakespeare Garden.*

(Stop W) **Shakespeare Garden** - This beautiful garden was originally a flower garden called “Heart Garden.” It was redesigned and designated Shakespeare Garden in 1915, in honor of the famous poet and playwright William Shakespeare. All of the plants and

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flowers in the garden are mentioned in the works of Shakespeare, and there are small plaques with quotations scattered throughout. The designer also released 60 starlings (mentioned frequently in Shakespeare) into Central Park when the garden opened. These birds were not native to North America, and those original became over 150 million on this continent.

*Walk though the garden and exit by the Swedish Cottage*

(Stop X) **The Swedish Cottage** - this cottage was built in Sweden in 1875 and was brought to the United States as a part of the 1876 World's fair. It was displayed in the Swedish Pavilion as an example of a traditional Swedish schoolhouse, where Fredrick Law Olmstead spotted it and decided that it would be a great addition to Central Park. It was brought to New York in 1877. Today it is the home of a marionette theater company known for their productions of fairy tales such as Cinderella and Peter Pan. It is the oldest continuously operating marionette theatre in the country.

*Walk north on the path until you come up to The Reservoir on your right.*

(Stop Y) **The Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis Reservoir**- the Reservoir is one of the most popular spots in the park. The one billion gallon reservoir was built in the 1860's as a backup water supply for the city while the Croton Reservoir System was shut down for two weeks for repairs. The Reservoir was decommissioned in 1993. It was no longer needed because of a new underground water tunnel. (Probably a good thing that we don't need it anymore- some experts say that the one billion gallons would only last the city about 4 hours today). There is a dirt jogging track that goes around the water (approximately 1.6 miles). It was a favorite spot of Jackie Onassis's to run while she lived in New York, so the Reservoir was re-named in her honor in 1994.

*Walk along the Reservoir to the north end. Make sure you check out the amazing skyline views from the path. Exit to go to the North Meadow.*

(Stop Z) **The North Meadow** - this 23 acre meadow has 7 baseball fields and 5 softball fields. It is the largest meadow in Central Park. The competition winners, Fredrick Law Olmstead and Calvert Vaux, were asked to include three areas for playing ball in their design, because the sport was rapidly gaining popularity in the 19th century when the park was being built. Today the North Meadow is used by baseball teams in the spring and then is turned into football and soccer fields in the fall. The North Meadow also has the North Recreation Center, which is a great place to find water fountains and restrooms while you are in the park.