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New York City Walking Tours

In our desire to bring the best of the best to our readers, as well as increase our own New York knowledge, we contacted **New York City** experts, Art and Susan Zuckerman of ["Z" Travel & Leisure](#), to take one of their New York City tours.

This "passionate about New York" couple formed their company, "Z" Travel & Leisure six years ago because they love sharing their knowledge and passion with visitors. How passionate and knowledgeable are they about New York? Perhaps the fact that they have over 1,200 books on New York in their collection should provide you with a good indication. They also are the hosts of a weekly radio show, ["Z" Travel & Leisure](#).

They offer many different tours including Heritage Tours - Italian, Jewish, and Irish, African-American Culture, Ethnic New York, Eating Tours, Dog Tours, Theater, Broadway Film and Music Tours, Rich and Famous Tours, Murder and Mayhem Tours, Women's Equality (focus on the women who helped shape New York City) and New York by Water, that our only problem was trying to decide which of their many tours to take! After careful consultation with Art and Susan, we decided on a "little bit of everything" tour.

On January 30, 2006, with Susan seated behind the wheel of their plush new mini-van, and Art acting as narrator, the four of us set out for an exciting tour of New York. We parked the car and started out in Chinatown, which was the perfect starting point, as it was the Chinese New Year, called the Lunar New Year. The streets were electric with a steady stream of people coming to celebrate, there were pounding drums, and "dragons" made their way from shop to shop to bring good luck to the shop owners.

We learned about the history of Chinatown as well as many Chinese customs, at a restaurant over Dim Sum, which is truly "dining by the cart," as waiters bring carts laden with savory delicacies as well as sweet desserts to each of the tables, and diners point out what they want to eat. Every cart has something different, and the challenge is to wait for your favorite items.



New York's Chinatown has a population of around 200,000; it is twice the size of Chinatown in San Francisco, and is the largest Chinatown in North America. The Chinese have many interesting customs; they believe that the number 8 is lucky, and that white clothing symbolizes death. Their funeral customs include covering all of the mirrors in their house when a person dies, they dress their deceased in an odd number of clothing, they burn paper money, called Joss Paper, in memory of the deceased so that they will have money in the afterlife, and they also buy a small house with a figure in it for the same reason. For the Lunar New Year, it is customary to wear red, which is considered to be a lucky color, and give children small red envelopes called "Lai See" that are filled with money for good luck. We even learned the proper Chinese New Year greeting, "Gung Hey Fat Choy," which means, "wishing you prosperity and wealth."

After lunch, we followed the crowds, taking photographs of the colorful dragons, the small children dressed in red clothing clutching their "Lai See" in their little hands, enjoying the drum music, the exploding firecrackers and the colorful stream of confetti that rained down on the passersby. Soon, the confetti wasn't the only thing that was coming down, it began to drizzle and then the rain really started coming down, but not to worry, this is New York, and New Yorkers are always prepared, or at least the street vendors are, with umbrellas readily available for sale. We quickly purchased two umbrellas, and followed Art and Susan as they led the way huddled together under a brightly colored flowery umbrella, which blended in perfectly with the festivities.



We went to a Buddhist temple, where the air was redolent with incense and the fragrance of oranges and tangerines that are symbols of wealth and good fortune. We went exploring in the shops, and purchased "Lai See" envelopes for our nieces and nephews, which was a fun experience in itself, as the clerk did not speak English, but we managed to convey what we wanted and made our purchases.

We returned to the car, and Susan drove us to the Lower East Side. This neighborhood, once predominantly Jewish, now coexists with many Chinese shops and restaurants, but you can still find the best bagels, bialys and knishes. Not familiar with bialys and knishes? Art and Susan will explain what they are.



Art insisted that Susan stop the car, so he could hop out and buy us some knishes, which we promptly devoured while they were still warm. We had just finished the knishes, when Susan rounded the corner, and pointed out the "pickle man." If you have seen the movie, "Crossing Delancey" with Amy Irving, you will remember the Lower East Side and the famous pickle man. Of course, this meant another stop to purchase pickles, and we purchased a quart of half sour pickles to take home, enjoyed a half sour pickle in the car, which was so fabulous that we wished we had listened to Art and Susan, and bought a gallon instead.

Although by now, we felt like we were eating our way through the neighborhoods, we really were learning a lot about this interesting city called New York. Art and Susan know how to spin a story and blend world history with pop culture, and the end result is delightful, entertaining and informative. A few of the interesting facts that we learned is that Broadway is 150 miles long, is the longest street in the United States, and starts in New York City and ends in Albany, New York. Wondering just how far you really are walking in New York? 20 blocks in New York equals 1 mile, and the landmass in Manhattan is now larger than when it began, due to the growth and excavation. Why are some street signs brown and some are green? Brown signs indicate a historic area.

On the pop culture side, Art and Susan pointed out the building that they used for the television show, Will and Grace, as well as the building that they used for the television show, Friends. We visited Chumley's at 86 Bedford Street, the most famous pub in New York, where the term "86" originated, and learned how the term came about. We toured Gramercy Park, the West Village, Greenwich Village, Harlem and even the Bronx, and after 4½ hours, we still didn't see everything, and our heads were swimming with all of our newfound knowledge. It looks like we will just have to take another one of their trips to continue our New York education!

Whether you are a first-time visitor to New York wanting to have a "real" New York experience, or have lived in New York all of your life, Art and Susan have a special tour just for you. They personalize each of their tours to the individuals, and work with groups of all sizes and ages.

To learn more about ["Z" Travel & Leisure](#), or book one of their New York tours, please contact Art and Susan Zuckerman, for a New York experience you won't ever forget.

Z Travel & Leisure has offered [Luxury Experience](#) readers a special rate. Please mention Luxury Experience when booking your tour. We hope that you enjoy your tour with Art and Susan as much as we did ours.

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