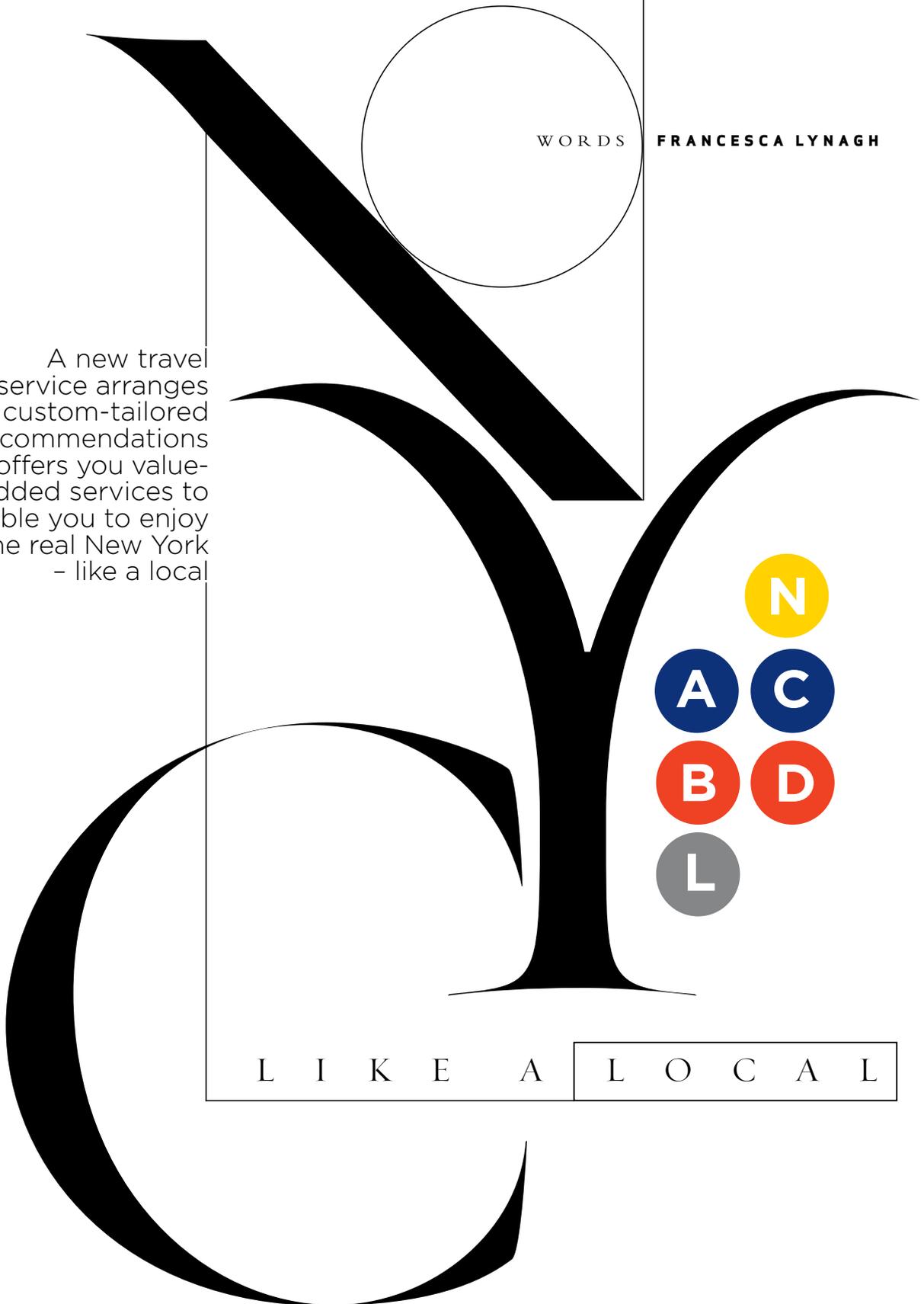


WORDS **FRANCESCA LYNAGH**

A new travel service arranges custom-tailored recommendations and offers you value-added services to enable you to enjoy the real New York - like a local



L I K E A L O C A L



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Chen Liu / EyeEm

The Manhattan Bridge over the East River connects Lower Manhattan with downtown Brooklyn. Four subway tracks are located on its lower deck, two on each side of the roadway. The tracks on the south side are used by the N and Q trains; those on the north side are used by the B and D trains.

WILLIAMSBURG

That morning, I had strolled out of the trendy Hoxton hotel in Williamsburg unsure of what was ahead of me. The area, just across the East River from Manhattan, is known for being a cool hangout for locals, with loads of hipster coffee spots and quirky independent stores. But with such a reputation, it's difficult to know where to start.

And that's exactly where Localike comes in. Ahead of my trip to New York, the company had asked me to fill in an online questionnaire in order to find out what activities I enjoy, and whether I was an early bird or a night owl. Taking this information, Localike then assembles tailor-made itineraries for visitors, filled with insider suggestions for places to eat and unusual activities to try.

That's how you end up in tucked-away areas of the city, discovering secrets that only the locals know about – just like Peter Pan Donut & Pastry Shop in Greenpoint, an unassuming little bakery that sells delicacies such as red velvet doughnuts and S'mores at between \$1 and \$2 apiece.

A sugar rush started the day, and the evening began with yet another one – this time in the form of a passion-fruit cocktail enjoyed on the roof of Night of Joy, one of Brooklyn's trendiest bars (despite sporting decor that's reminiscent of your grandparents' house).

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A further 15-minute walk into South Williamsburg, you'll find Shalom Japan – another spot you'd never accidentally stumble upon as a first-time visitor. It turned out to be a Japanese-Jewish gem serving fresh tuna tataki for starters and hearty bowls of ramen with foie gras dumplings for mains.

And so concluded day one in New York, with tourist traps and rip-offs successfully dodged.

RED HOOK

Most people who visit New York for a long weekend don't spend much time outside of Manhattan – after all, there is plenty to see on the island. But Localike responded to my desire to see “the real NYC” and sent me to Red Hook, Brooklyn. Only a 20-minute drive from Lower Manhattan, this laid-back neighbourhood is home to young families, arty types and great spots to eat. Set among slightly shabby-looking warehouses is Hometown Bar-B-Que, another suggestion on my personalised itinerary.

Sitting on benches and eating off metal trays, visitors get to enjoy a truly no-frills dining experience. When you get to the front of the queue, order a beef-brisket sandwich or the Korean BBQ wings – both are pit-smoked and melt-in-the-mouth delicious. Wash it down with a Brooklyn Brewery beer, then see if you've got space for the next stop on the tour of Red Hook.

You'll have a brief chance to air the oak-wood smoke out of your clothes before you arrive at the waterfront and Steve's Authentic Key Lime Pies, which is minutes away from Hometown Bar-B-Que.

ONCE YOU'VE TAKEN a selfie in Times Square and heaved yourself up the Empire State Building, surely the bright lights of Broadway are next? Not this time. My first bite of an impossibly fluffy doughnut smothered in chocolate icing and multi-coloured sprinkles made one thing instantly clear: trusting travel company Localike with the organisation of my New York trip was definitely the right decision.

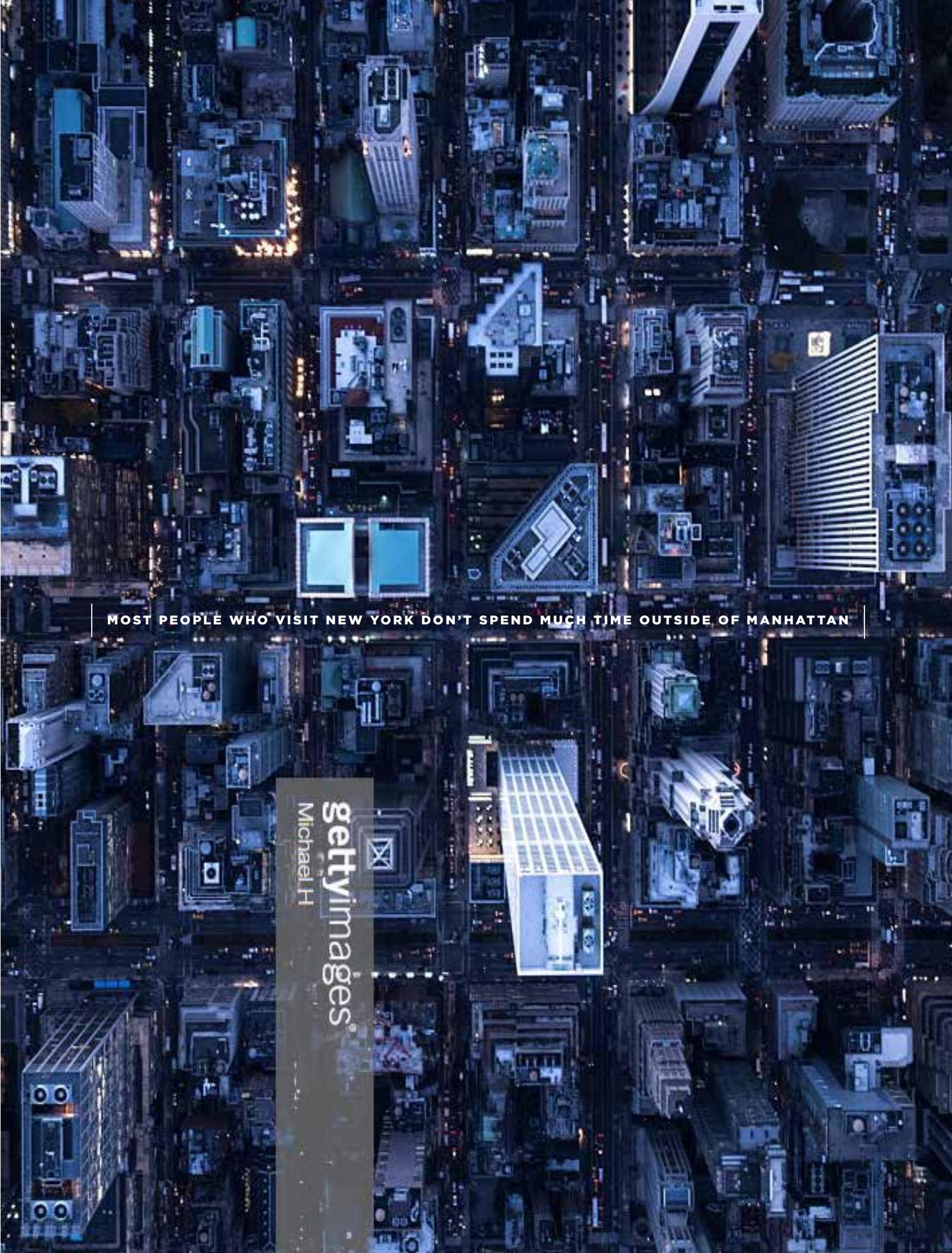
Opposite, clockwise from top left: The Williamsburg Bridge takes you from the Lower East Side into the heart of Williamsburg; dollar-per-slice takeaway pizza joints can be found all around Brooklyn; the New York City Subway runs both under- and above ground, and is the fastest way to get across the vast city; Williamsburg is home to independent stores that sell everything from artisanal cheese and jam to chocolate; George & Jack's Tap Room is frequented by Williamsburg locals; owning a key to the private, gated Gramercy Park in Manhattan is a status symbol; the East Village, where old-school bars and music venues share the streets with up-market cocktail lounges and trendy restaurants, comes alive after sunset.





Clockwise from top left: The hipsters of Williamsburg make the most of the neighbourhood's coffee shops and juice bars; the sun sets over Manhattan; with modern steelwork and restored brick buildings, the South Side neighbourhood is undergoing rapid transformation; fish and lobster are the order of the day at this quaint Red Hook restaurant; the only way to experience New York's café culture is on foot; pizza is the perfect end to a night out.

Opposite: No trip to New York is complete without experiencing the looming skyscrapers and hectic streets of Manhattan.



MOST PEOPLE WHO VISIT NEW YORK DON'T SPEND MUCH TIME OUTSIDE OF MANHATTAN

gettyimages
Michael H



Above: The trendy Hoxton hotel in boasts comfortable rooms, and a rooftop terrace and bar with city views across the East River to Manhattan.

Originally from Florida, key lime pies are one of America's best-known desserts; owner Steve Turpin is himself a Key West native, serving up what many describe as the best pies in New York. They're so good that Steve has a long waiting list of restaurants hoping to stock them. Take your pie to the water's edge and gaze out at the Statue of Liberty in the distance, saving yourself the over-priced visit to Liberty Island itself.

MANHATTAN

While the looming skyscrapers and hectic streets of Manhattan have so far been evaded, no trip to New York would be complete without seeing what it's all about. Starting the day at the brand-new Millennial-minded Moxy NYC Downtown hotel means you're just a two-minute stroll from the 9/11 Memorial.

Meander north past the fancy stores of SoHo and eclectic neighbourhood of NoHo, and you'll eventually reach Gramercy Park – the only private park in Manhattan. With only 400 keys to the gates in circulation, it's a status symbol to own one. It's completely out of bounds for the average tourist, but Localike can arrange for a long-time key holder to show you around the park. Having lived there since the '60s, she regales visitors with tales about the park's history and various antiquated rules. Then, for a Manhattan night to remember, be sure to ask the company to book tickets to a show at the Comedy Cellar in Greenwich Village – or tickets to an ice-hockey game at Madison Square Garden. Grab a slice of 99-cent pizza on the way home, or drop into the Up & Up, a speakeasy-style cocktail bar, for a nightcap to complete your "true local" night out.

Localike-newyork.com / hello@localike.com / +1 646 568 3171/ Personal itineraries from \$79.

THE ESSENTIALS

WHEN TO STAY Situated in the "locals" neighbourhood of Williamsburg, the Hoxton is the latest of the boutique brand's hotels, featuring stylish rooms with Manhattan views, a cool rooftop bar, and breakfast bags delivered to your door. thehoxton.com

To be closer to the main attractions of Manhattan, grab a room at the Moxy NYC Downtown, which boasts compact bedrooms and a buzzing communal area, with arcade games and even a basketball court.

moxy-hotels.marriott.com

GETTING AROUND Walk everywhere – it's the best way to see the city and burn off all the delicious food you'll eat.

COSTS Eating out is pretty expensive compared to South Africa, and the minimum tip in restaurants is 15%.

When ordering a drink at the bar, the barman will expect a tip of \$1-\$2.

WHEN TO GO Spring or autumn is the best time to visit. Avoid mid-winter – in January, the average temp is 2°C.

FOOD Don't leave New York without having tried blueberry pancakes!



GETTING THERE

•• **FLY** SAA flies daily to New York from Johannesburg. Visit flysaa.com