

The New York Feeling

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New York City (NYC) was chosen as the first feature for several reasons, but the big one was familiarity. As a New York City rider, I've had the pleasure of blazing through what is arguably the heaviest and most random traffic in the world — a ride through Manhattan is like snowboarding through a forest with moving trees.

For the photo feature, we went with Francois Portmann's shot of Michael "Little" Klingenstein riding through Times Square. The photo is both beautiful and technical. Francois caught the shot from a custom board mount to capture a rarely seen perspective of longboarding in urban areas. The blurred, city lights surrounding Michael provide a small glimpse of the energy that New York cranks out in steady overabundance. Besides, we couldn't resist a shot of the skull and cross-bone Vans — New York is no stranger to style.

Most people don't know that the name "Manhattan" is derived from a Native American word meaning, "hilly island". Hell, even most longboarders will tell you about Central Park when you ask about good hills in the city. Well, Manhattan is, in fact, a very hilly island. The good stuff is waiting on the northern half of the island throughout Harlem and Washington Heights. The bottom line on Manhattan: uptown is great for hills, and downtown is great for partying and eating based on the sheer volume of options.

No worries though — the uptown-downtown geographic concern is addressed beautifully by a top-shelf public transportation system. In fact, all five boroughs of New York City; Brooklyn, Staten Island, Manhattan, Queens, and the Bronx, are remarkably accessible by subway, train, ferry, and/or bus. Thankfully, there are hills in every borough with less congestion the further you move away from the center of Manhattan (Times Square). Staten Island is the hilliest borough, but a comparably long commute via ferry. Sidenote: New Yorkers are notoriously bitchy about commuting anywhere outside of their general "ten-block-radius-world", going on at length about so-and-so's birthday party in the Upper West Side and all the hell and misery associated with getting there. Needless to say, Staten Island is a little far.

Brooklyn is potentially the best longboarding to be had in the five boroughs factoring in hills, traffic, accessibility, and general "coolness". Part of New York's coolness comes from its strong faction of artists, writers, entrepreneurs, and other rowdies. On top of that, real estate prices play a major role in the migration of New Yorkers throughout the five boroughs. As of late, the rents have pulled the rowdies and other associated coolness to Brooklyn. And the hills? Well, Brooklyn has a wide variety of locations to ride. From Prospect Park through neighborhoods with names like Park Slope, Cobble Hill, and Clinton Hill - you will find no shortage of incline in Brooklyn.

And let's not forget the original wave. New York City serves up world-class, urban lifestyle with full access to surf breaks along the south facing coast of Rockaway and Long Island, and the east facing coast of New Jersey. Most locations can be reached via subway, or train. Outside of hearing all of the obvious, moronic remarks like, "Hey, Surf's up!", the commute is quite manageable. Some express trains get you from Penn Station in Manhattan to Long Beach, Long Island in about 50 minutes. Ideally, it's best to hook up with a place to store your board at the beach to avoid the transport hassles. Several surf shops offer reasonable storage fees, but it's always cheaper to mooch a spot in somebody's closet. Literally, you can grab a cup of coffee, jump on the train, surf all day, and make it back to the city for dinner. If you're planning a trip, the biggest waves hit in the spring and fall during storm seasons, with fall being preferred for warmer water temperatures (approximately 65 degrees Fahrenheit).

In all fairness, I cannot recommend a trip to New York solely for the riding. There are too many other destinations with better waves, bigger hills, and less traffic. Simply put, if you are alive, you must come to New York, and the city is reason enough. Come to New York for the energy. Short of coming here, and you'll never know. New York is something you must feel for yourself. There is a truly unique and noticeably intense level of energy that evolved from years of diversity and hard-core tolerance for all comers. When the Dutch set up the ground rules for New York, progress was the objective. With progress in mind, the city would accept everyone regardless of race, religion, or language. New Yorkers were faced with the worthwhile challenge of finding harmony and balance in the most diverse stew of humanity, and not a lot of space to do it in. Like no other place in the world, like no other time, New York City is the example for acceptance and understanding.

Imagine me writing this article, trying to describe the "New York feeling". Okay, I'm sitting in Union Square Park (14th Street and Broadway-ish) with a very pretty girl in my lap. Looking around, I've got a Buddhist Monk in full-on, gold and maroon robes exchanging photos and email addresses with two hippy-chicks at twelve o'clock. At three and five o'clock, I've got two homeless dudes fully crashed out with newspaper pillows. At six o'clock, I've got a gay couple talking yoga with their girlfriend. At nine o'clock, two artists are sketching the Dead cover band that's jamming at the south end of the park. So there's a literal description for you. How does it feel? Well — you know when you think of something funny and you just start giggling to yourself. It feels a lot like that.

