

Tour # 3: Bohemian Williamsburg Rhapsody

Regardless of your chronological age, if you're young at heart, open-minded and can appreciate some awesome street art, you'll love this tour. There's nothing cute, quaint, cozy or pretty about Williamsburg. It's crazy, hipster, under, groovy, trendy, cool, jazzy, and everything else down that line. It's a place to go and hang out, have a snack or a meal, definitely a few beers, enjoy some live music, browse around funky stores, grasp the bohemian feeling, ponder what it will be like in a few years, or what it was like a few years ago. In other words, it's a whole cultural experience you need to be in the mood for. So, if you're ready to have the time of your life, Williamsburg is where you want to go. If you are going to pick the best day and time of the week to do this, that would be Saturdays in the early afternoon. That's when you'll find Williamsburg at its full expression. A second best option would be Saturdays in the evening, or if Saturday is for some reason out of the question, go on a Sunday. If you go on any given weekday, you may not get the real thing.

Getting there...

There is, of course, a train which takes you there. But one of the highlights of this tour is taking the East River Ferry. It makes a world of a difference. If you are in the surroundings of downtown Manhattan, you can catch the ferry at Wall Street, Pier 11 at F.D.R. Drive, and take the northbound boat; if you're closer to midtown, go to East 34th St. at F.D.R. Drive and take the southbound ferry. If you happen to be at the end of the Brooklyn Heights or the Dumbo tours, then you will head to Pier 1, at Old Fulton and Furman St, to hop on to this ferry. If this is the case, make sure to take the northbound ferry, which goes to Midtown Manhattan. Whatever your starting point is, where you want to get off is at North Williamsburg. Do not confuse with South Williamsburg, also interesting but not what we are currently looking for. Click on our website for a link to the map, fares and hours information. If for any reason you opt out of the East River Ferry, there is always the L train, which drops you at Bedford Avenue and N 7th Street, which is where this tour ends. This train runs all along 14th St in Manhattan. Easy to catch at Union Square. There is a rumor though, that the L train between Brooklyn and Manhattan may be shut down for quite a while (a few years, in fact) since repairs are seriously needed due to damages caused by Sandy Storm back in 2012, and optional means of getting to and fro are being considered. But at press time, L trains are still covering that route.

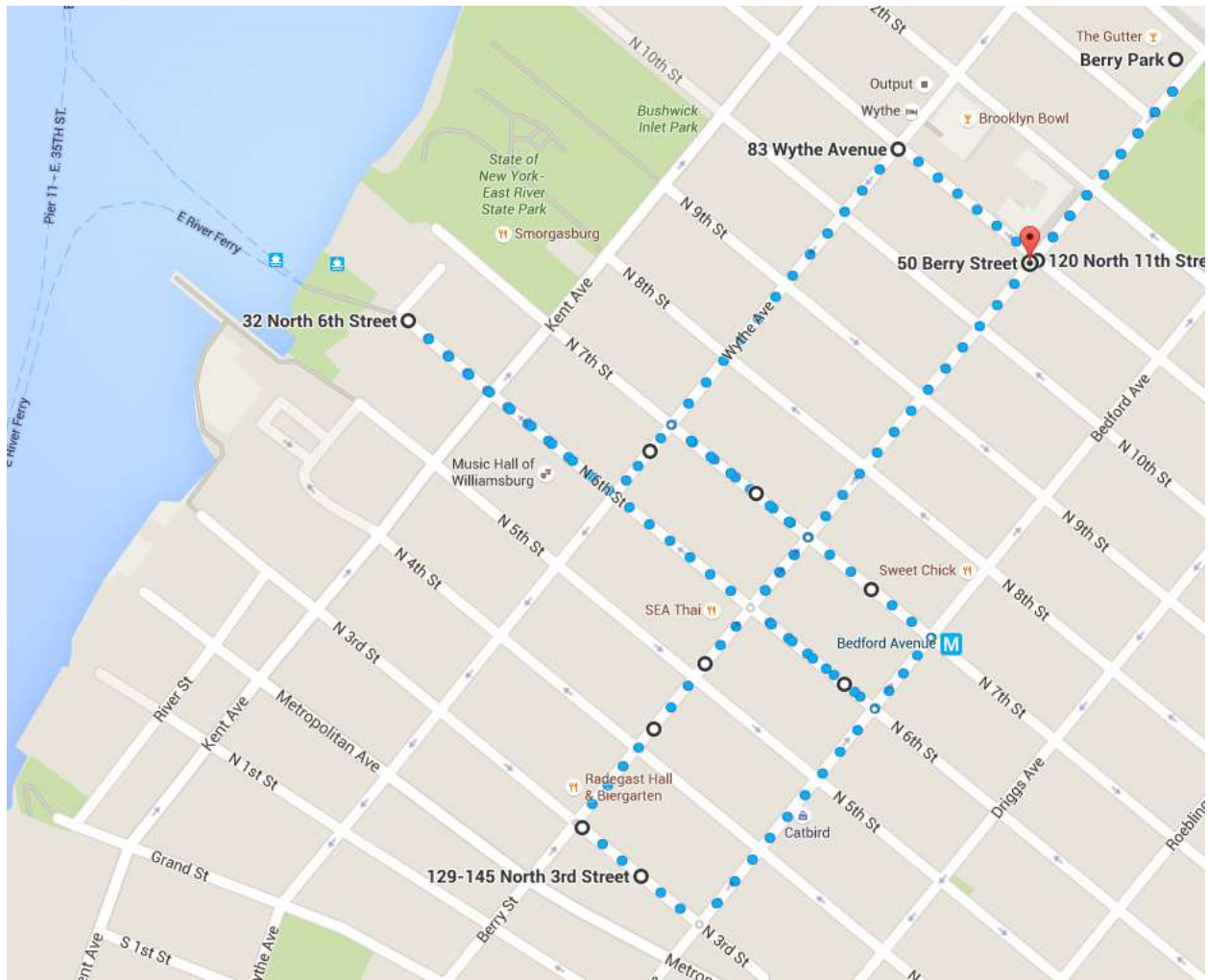
What you'll see...

As I said at the beginning, don't hope for opulent mansions or striking architecture. Williamsburg is not about that. Look for graffiti and street art all around, bars, restaurants, coffee shops, vintage stores, cool clothes, bookstores, people having a good time, that kind of thing. Bring along some appetite and photo ID.

Off we go...

Let's pretend you are on the Ferry on your way to North Williamsburg. Unless weather is absolutely miserable, you want to head to the upper deck in order to get the full view. If you are coming in from downtown Manhattan or from Pier 1, Brooklyn, you will navigate under three most iconic bridges: Brooklyn Bridge, Manhattan Bridge and Williamsburg Bridge. Quite an experience and all for a small fare. So now you have arrived, you will get off the ferry and you will be standing at North 6th St and Kent Avenue. Before you dive straight into the heart of Williamsburg, stop for a moment and walk around the pier, all the way to the water front, to catch that amazing glimpse once again. It's a very different postcard than the one you get from Brooklyn Heights Promenade, for example, since here you get to see the midtown skyline very closely.

Not a year-round event, but rather during the summer season, there is a Flea & Food Market, or Smorgasburg, which takes place on Saturdays 11 a.m. to 6 p.m. within the East River State Park premises, Kent Avenue and N. 7th Street. It's not marked on the route of this map as it's not always on, but you can easily see where it is. If it's one of those Saturdays, do stop by. You will not only find local and regional food and beverages, but many interesting handcrafts, furniture, antiques, and much more.



Enough with the Smorgasburg already; let's get going. What I'll do now is describe the route which is actually shown on the map, and maybe point out to a few things, but my strong recommendation is for you to stop and walk in to as many places as you possibly can. Some may say nothing from the exterior, but once you enter, for example to the Sea Thai Restaurant on 114 N 6th St, it's a whole new world in there. You will be very surprised with what some places have to offer, and there are so many amazing places to stop to eat or drink I couldn't possibly name them all. You can grab something here and something there, or simply pick one place, but before you make your choice, do some walking around, since there is something for every taste. Bedford St is kind of the main street but not necessarily the best. Most great places tend to be more hidden or out of the usual or conventional way, so don't get drunk in the first bar!

You will start walking down N 6th Street kind of south west towards Bedford St. On your way though, your second corner will be 6th and Wythe Avenue. This is worth a small detour towards 7th Street and back. There you will find amazing places like the Mezcal Tequila Bar, Rosarito Fish Shack for great ceviche, and at 80 N 7th you'll find the entrance to Shelter, a place which could not look shabbier from the outside but with very warm interior decoration which, among many things, serves Argentine traditional empanadas. The atmosphere in those places is absolutely incredible. You really must step in and see for yourselves. They are usually pretty crowded, but you're in no hurry, so it won't matter.

Once you've covered that, walk back to 6th Street and, as we said, continue all the way to Bedford Av. On your way you will walk by many other interesting places, not just for food but other stuff too, like the Shoe Market between Bedford and Berry. Cubana Social will draw your attention because of its attractive exterior looks, and features a great Cuban menu, if you are in for some Latino food. The Surf Bar for some seafood and/or great cocktails with its patio at the back is also quite something.

The Bedford Cheese Shop deserves a whole mention of its own, with its irresistible offering of cheeses and all sorts of preserves and delicatessen.

Once you've reached Bedford, you will make a right and walk all the way to 3rd Street. As I said, Bedford is a mostly commercial street, full of street exhibitions, interesting stores, such a nice liquor store by the name of Uva Wines, the Mini Mall, between 5th and 4th, really mini but loaded with interesting vintage stuff, designer's clothing, a bookstore, and other fascinating knick-knacks.

For a complete list of Bedford Avenue's stores, visit their website.

Once you reach 3rd St, you want to make a right and walk one block to the corner of Berry Street, where you will make another right. As soon as you turn on Berry, you will run into the Radegast Hall & Beergarten, a place you must absolutely walk in to for an outstanding selection of European beers, delicious authentic German menu (sausages, pretzels, sauerkraut), live music, and a lot more. The atmosphere is incredible. You'll feel like you are in Germany. Visit their website to see the full mouthwatering menu.

Once you manage to pull yourself out of the *beergarten*, continue on Berry Street all the way to 11th Street. (On 7th, close enough to Berry, you can find a Starbucks coffee shop, always a friendly, convenient and predictable place in case of need.) Once you've reached 11th street, you will make a left turn towards Wythe. On your right you will find the Brooklyn Brewery, which you can visit either for a tour of the facilities, to have yet another beer, or simply to visit their gift shop. They also hold private events, in case you're interested.

At the corner of 11th St and Wythe you will find the Wythe Hotel, built on what was once a factory. It features a one-of-a-kind roof top with compelling views of Manhattan, good music and drinks. You must have a photo ID to be admitted. They also have a private dining room for large parties, with vaulted ceilings and brick walls. Worth the while visiting.

This area of Williamsburg still boasts its authentic original industrial look, with remains of old factories not recycled into fancy places yet. Continue on Berry St past 13th street, to find yet another magnificent rooftop place in this area, totally worth the while: The Berry Park. Dramatic views, great atmosphere, beers, wines, cocktails, and a great snack menu and brunch menu as well. What else can you ask for?

Once you are done with this area, you will head back down Wythe Ave towards 7th Street, in order to catch the L train to go back home, unless you choose to navigate back with the ferry again, but mind the hours, as the ferry doesn't run till very late.