

## *Tour # 2: Lofty Dumbo and the Brooklyn Bridge Park*

So what is Dumbo, exactly? New York developers and real estate agents have gotten into the habit of making up names for the areas they are intending to develop or market, such as the now popular Soho, Noho, Tribeca, Nolita, and many other quite silly ones. Some of them just stick and become globally accepted, as has been the case with Dumbo, the acronym for Down Under Manhattan Bridge Overpass —and then there's Rambo, Right After Manhattan Bridge Overpass. And so forth. According to comedian Jerry Seinfeld, the area was to be called Down Under Manhattan Bridge, but "who wants to live in a neighborhood called Dumb?", and so the O came along to rescue those residents out of an embarrassing name.

Less than two decades ago no one would have dreamed of setting foot into this very neglected area, except for a few visionary artists —same old story all over again. This rather small neighborhood was designated historic district in 2007, and nowadays, the old warehouses and abandoned factory facilities are under a transformation process; many have already become trendy loft apartments, exceptionally located and boasting dramatic views. The ones which are close enough to the Manhattan Bridge have had to learn how to live with the very noisy and very frequent B-D-N-Q trains.

### ***Getting there...***

Three if by land, two if by sea. Among the land transportation alternatives, one option is the F train, which stops at York Street station, where you can start the tour right away. A second option is to come across the Brooklyn Bridge, on foot or by bike —separate lanes clearly indicated, in which case you want to take the first exit of the bridge, which bears to your left. Once you walk down those steps, you'll find yourself on York and Washington streets, where you'll want to leave the bridge behind you and walk north up Washington St towards Front St, great place to start the tour. Be careful not to miss this exit or you'll end up in Adams St and Tillary; not the apocalypse, but that's like half a mile away from where you need to be. And then there is always the A-C train to High Street station, if the F is out of your way and you're not in the mood to cross that bridge just yet. If this is your choice, once you exit the train station you will walk into Cadman Plaza, look for the path that would lead you to the entrance of the Brooklyn Bridge, and once you're there, look for Washington Street and continue to Front St, where you can start your tour.

Among the seafaring options, very recommendable especially if weather allows outdoor sitting, one is New York Water Taxi which you can take at Pier 79 on West 39th St, Pier 45 on Christopher Street, Battery Park Slip 6, or Pier 11 Slip A. And then there's the more inexpensive option of the East River Ferry which brings you from Pier 11, Wall Street, in to Pier 1, then goes all the way to Williamsburg, makes two more stops and ends at East 34th Street, in midtown Manhattan again, or vice versa, if you are coming from a location close to East 34th Street and feel like sailing all the way.

If you chose to come by water, since you're in Pier 1 now, it would be wise to do the Brooklyn Bridge Park part of the tour first, and then return to Pier 1, and head towards Dumbo, by crossing right under the Brooklyn Bridge into the St. Ann's warehouse area, Jane's Carousel, and follow the circuit to the end.

### ***What we'll see...***

Old warehouses, art galleries, fancy shops, deli shops, specialty coffee shops, restaurants, unparalleled waterfront views, Manhattan skyline and the three bridges, and even a magnificent historical merry-go-round from 1920, Jane's Carousel, brought all the way from Youngstown, Ohio, piece by piece, and beautifully reassembled in its new location, and more, much more...

### **Off we go...**

There's more than one way to face the Dumbo and Brooklyn Bridge Park circuit designed here; it doesn't necessarily have a starting and an ending point per se: you can hop on and off it at different stages, since there are a couple of ways for you to get to Dumbo, so that will define when and where you will join the tour. Take a look at the map where the circuit is outlined so you'll visualize where you are now and what your wisest option is.

If you've sailed in with either the ferry or the water taxi, or if you've just finished our Tour #1, you are now at Pier 1, so the smart thing would be to stroll along the Brooklyn Bridge Park first, round trip, and once you're back at the Pier, you'll walk around the River Café grounds, cross under the bridge in to St. Ann's warehouse and Jane's carousel area and then follow the circuit as shown on the map.

If you walked across the bridge or took the A-C train, you will join the circuit at the corner of Washington and Front streets and start walking to your right/east. Follow the loop drawn in the circuit until you're back on Front Street, where you will now head west up to Main St and continue as shown. Once you're done with Dumbo, continue on to the Brooklyn Bridge Park.

If you just got out the F train at the corner of York and Jay streets, no further explanations needed. Simply follow the circuit shown in the map and you'll be as safe as houses. Once you've covered Dumbo and reached Pier 1, continue on to the Brooklyn Bridge Park for a lovely stroll.



For the sole purpose of describing this 1.6-mile circuit, I chose to start at the corner of Jay and Front streets, as if you'd just gotten off the F train, but as I said, you can start elsewhere.

You will begin to walk up Jay St in direction to the waterfront, where you will stroll among some old red brick buildings and some stores, and you'll come across Front, Water, Plymouth and John streets. At the corner of Jay and John, find the first interesting highlight of the tour, the specialty coffee store and headquarters of the Brooklyn Roasting Company. Do step in, if only to capture the aroma of their incredible specialty coffees, from many remote origins, such as Indonesia, East Africa and of course the Americas. Take a deep breath, or a nice cup of coffee, or pick any blend you'd fancy and they'll grind it right there for you to take home, as an exquisite souvenir of your expedition, to share with friends while you tell them all about your Dumbo experience. Also a good place for a quick snack, since they offer sandwiches and scrumptious pastries as well.

Once you're done and ready, go all the way to the water front and into the John Street Park from where you'll get the first striking glimpse of New York skyline and all three bridges —Brooklyn, Manhattan and Williamsburg, one more impressive than the other, Manhattan and Brooklyn bridge equally beautiful, each one in their own very characteristic style.

You can sit on those benches for a while and admire the view from this privileged spot, which is really hard to beat.

Now exit that little hidden treasure, south down Adams St and merge on to Anchorage Place. Walk south until you reach the Pearl Street Triangle, another colorful and lively spot in Dumbo.

Once you've taken the photo of the dog photographers, or they've taken yours, at the tip of the triangle look for Front St and make a right/west turn towards the massive iron structure of the Manhattan bridge, through which not only tens of thousands of cars make their way every day, but also entire trains come in and out of Brooklyn almost every other minute. Walk a few steps and you will now officially be Down Under Manhattan Bridge Overpass which gives name to the area. Way ahead, you can see a section of the Brooklyn Bridge as well. Actually, at many corners in Dumbo you can get fractions of both bridges all in one.

As you keep walking down Front St towards Main St, at the corner of Washington and Front, look right and enjoy a classical Dumbo postcard, the Empire State Building framed by two of the pillars of the Manhattan Bridge. Pretty amazing. You'll be at the door of Peas and Pickles, a great place to pick something to eat on the go. Keep going one more block and walk past very trendy stores such as Bo Concept, West Elm, P.S. Bookshop, Gus Studio, until you reach the corner of Front and Main —Starbucks right there in case of need. Turn right/north on to Main Street and walk towards the waterfront again.

Walk past Water St and before you reach Plymouth St you will see to your right the 12-story Walentas Building, with the clock tower at the top, overlooking the East River, considered as the most successful condominium project ever. David Walentas is the man who transformed Dumbo into what it is today, and his wife, Jane, an artist, is responsible for the restoration and relocation of the carousel now named after her.

Now enter Main Street Park to your right. Follow the pathway and get yet another astonishing view of Manhattan and the bridges. Pebble Beach is a good place as any to sit for a while, especially if you've purchased a snack at Peas and Pickles or elsewhere. Catch your breath and then exit this area as you walk west towards the Brooklyn Bridge, right by the waterfront.

You are now facing Jane's Carousel, and you'll see a lovely sitting area where many of the locals go to take a lunch break and maybe munch on a coal brick-oven pizza from Grimaldi's. Contrary to what you may think, the carousel is not just a kiddie's thing. Many grown-ups, me included, have taken a ride on this vintage merry-go-round which is likely to take you back to happy childhood memories.

If not to actually take a ride, at least step into this crystal box and see how it distorts the view of the skyline behind it. It looks as one of those artistic photos with special effects. Kind of bizarre. Walk all the way to the waterfront for some more stunning views and walk your way around the carousel. Exit the area where St. Ann's warehouse now stands. You may enter what is now an art center and see what a great job they've done with the old building, or simply walk leaving it to your left until you reach Water St. You will now cross under the Brooklyn Bridge, towards what would be the end of the Dumbo circuit. Walk into a small semi-private place at the entrance of the legendary River Café, where you could enter and have the drink of your dreams at that bar facing the skyline, or even have a meal there, although they do have a dress code. In the evenings there is live piano music and the atmosphere is magical.

Other than the River Café, there are many places where to get a snack, ice-cream, coffee, etc. and many places where to sit and admire the sweeping views.

Now that you've covered Dumbo's best, there is still the entire Brooklyn Bridge Park ahead of you. All along the East River shoreline, many of these old piers (six in all) have already been transformed into recreational areas, to include playgrounds, basketball courts, soccer fields, kayaking, skating and more. Plenty of space to walk, run, bike, stroll, sit, take photos or simply wander around. Bask in the glorious sunshine or relax under a cool and breezy shade; you will find plenty of places to sit and take a rest, or even to barbecue. All this mingled with innovative public art. Under the motto of "Please touch the art", admire works such as the multicolor watertower, a solar-powered sculpture located at the top of 334 Furman, around Pier 5, and the very popular jetting water rooms, for everyone to refresh during hot summer days. There is also a pop-up swimming pool open during the summer season.

Many events and activities take place in this 85-acre sustainable park, especially during summer. Biking is a great way to tour the park, and there are plenty of bike rental stations close by.

The park opens at 6 a.m. and most of it remains open until 1 a.m. Piers and courts close at 11 p.m. Restrooms can be found in Piers 1, 2 and 6. A new boathouse is under construction and will soon provide more restrooms at Pier 5, and will add a new recreational hub to the area.

Once you are done and over with this Tour # 2 of Dumbo and the Brooklyn Bridge Park, if your stamina is still with you, you should definitely continue on to our Tour # 3, the Bohemian Williamsburg Rhapsody, in which case you will now head back to Pier 1 to catch the ferry which will take you there. This tour is best done in the evening, since Williamsburg is mainly about having fun, hanging out in bars and rooftops with striking views of Manhattan, and the ferry trip is already a treat. To sail under the three bridges, at that surreal time of the day when the city lights start to turn on, is an absolute bonus which enhances this "magical mystery tour" that will stay in your memories for years to come.

So this is the end of this lovely tour, which I hope you've enjoyed as much as I have. If you are dead tired by now, and are considering to call it a day, you should exit the Promenade at its north end, if you wish to catch the A-C train; you'll find yourself at Columbia Heights and between Orange and Cranberry streets, so walk up to the East on pretty Cranberry Street, which we haven't really covered, and you'll soon find yourself at Cadman Plaza, where the High Street station is. If the 2-3 train works better for you, exit the Promenade a little earlier, when you reach the corner of Clark Street. Walk up Clark and before you reach the corner of Henry Street, you'll see the entrance to the station. Last, but not least, if your need to take the 4-5 train, you need to get yourself all the way back to Borough Hall station, at the corner of Montague and Court streets. You know your way around now, but in case of doubt, look at the map at the beginning of this tour description and pick whatever route floats your boat.