

Travel



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Big Apple enjoyed in small, delicious bites

SATURDAY in New York City. The business that brought me here is over, and I have a full day to explore The City with my friend and fellow writer Julie Candler of Birmingham, and my son and daughter-in-law, Eric and Pui Jones, New York artists and filmmakers. Julie and I have been here for two days, taking small bites of the Big Apple. Between interviews and appointments she discovered a small restaurant called Audre's on 46th St.

I had lunch among the rich and famous at the Russian Tea Room. Now we are on our way to an afternoon at South Street Seaport and an evening at the theater.

Iris Jones contributing travel writer. When I travel to New York on business, I often come home with brief, disconnected images of the tourist life of the city, vignettes experienced between and after the business events of the day.

THE CITY, as New Yorkers call it, is too big to explore on any one trip, so I take it one bite at a time, usually nibbling away at the few blocks around my hotel.

I have written about enjoying small tastes of the city from different hotels where I have stayed: the Lexington Ave. area where the Hiltop House and the Waldorf, stroller stand among several other business hotels; the 42nd St. Grand Central Station; the Berkshire Place on West 52nd near Rockefeller Center; the American Stanhope, among the rack of hotels across the street from the Metropolitan Museum of Art on 81 St.

This time I am based at the Essex House, one of five ritzy hotels along the southern side of Central Park. The Essex House was one of the first grand years as the Empire State Building. It was purchased in 1985 by Nikko International, a hotel chain owned by Japan Air Lines.

WEST FIFTY-NINTH ST. It is a sunny winter Saturday so New Yorkers and tourists are all over the streets, shopping in the elegant stores south and west of Central Park. The well-known shops stretch from 34th to 59th along Fifth Avenue: Lord and Taylor, Bonwit Teller, Saks Fifth Avenue, FAO Schwarz, Tiffany's.

Places like Tiffany's are as much a sightseeing attraction as a fine place to shop; don't be afraid to go in and explore the bargain counter on the third floor. Walk around in Gue's — even Gue's has sales.

We were on our way down Central Park South, which is on 59th St. to Bloomingdale's, at 59th and Lexington. It took us a long time, because it was so much fun to loiter along the way.

The hotel canopies were all in a row: the Essex House, Ritz-Carlton, St. Moritz-on-the-Park, the Park Lane, the Plaza. The Barbizon was closed and desolate, its furniture being carried out by gleeful auction shoppers, but the rest were all wearing smartly uniformed doormen.

The horse-drawn cabs that we have seen in so many movies were parked around the southwest corner of Central Park at 59th and Fifth. We had time to photograph the drivers in their top hats and to enjoy the children gathered around the horses.

From there it was the bargain counters at Bloomingdale's and a subway ride to South Street Seaport. My son's instructions were specific. Get off at the Fulton St. exit and walk down Fulton to the sea.



Writer Julie Candler in front of the Fulton Market, a wonderland of food market stalls and eating places.

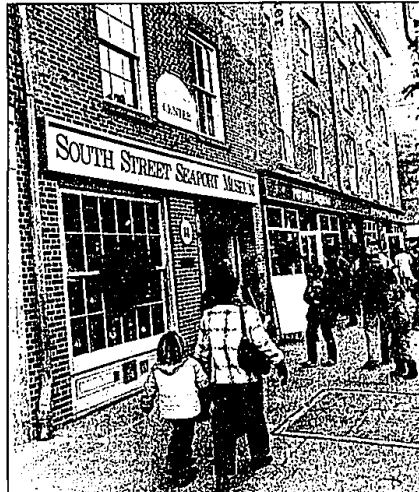
enclave of low-rise historic buildings on the East River, just south of the Brooklyn Bridge; it is the last vestige of the 19th century port that made New York a world center of commerce. The Seaport District is on the National Register of Historic Places.

We sauntered down Fulton St. on our way to the sea, looking at tiny cafes, fudge shops, stores that will someday be boutiques, interesting passageways angling away on either side, and old cobbled streets that disappear around corners.

The Seaport itself includes a Museum Block with 14 structures being restored for both museum and office space; the Schermerhorn Row Block, rehabilitated 19th century warehouses being restored for shops and commercial space; Fulton Market, a wonderland of food market stalls and eating places; the new pier 17 Pavilion, a three-story glass and steel shopping mall sitting on the pier; and the tall-masted sailing ship that draws big crowds every day to the pier itself.

The brick sidewalk outside Fulton Market is the centerpiece of everyday street life: jugglers, actors, food sellers, musicians and other crowd-pleasers. A one-hour multi-media show called the Seaport Experience is available for a fee; it's an interesting if overlong media view of the area's history.

Most people throng the Fulton Market building, buying fresh bread,



seafood, cheese and other delicacies in the main floor market or choosing from several dozen ethnic eating stalls on the upper floors. The Fulton fish market goes full swing in the building space next door.

THE FULTON Market was a good place to buy a little cheese and some pate to go with the late afternoon drink and rest back at the Essex House.

Problems we never dream of in the Detroit suburbs are major problems in The City: It costs about \$25 to park a car for the evening in a hotel like this. The \$16 sign across the street started looking like a bargain after ten runs around the block and no parking meters.

We took a taxi to the theater — "I'm Not Rappaport" was a thrilling theater performance in the Booth Theater on



Horse-drawn cabs are a feature of Central Park at 59th and Fifth. At left, the South Street Seaport area — an enclave of low-rise historic buildings being transformed into shops and offices on the East River, just south of the Brooklyn Bridge.

West 45th St. — and walked to dinner afterwards.

Judd Hirsch and Cleavon Little starred in the heart-warming comedy written by Herb Gardner, author of A Thousand Clowns. Two old men on a bench in Central Park may not sound like much, but it brought the whole audience screaming and clapping to a standing ovation.

THE BOOTH is on Schubert Alley, but we had other things in mind when we came out into the busy Saturday night streets. We were headed for dinner at Audre's, the restaurant Julie had discovered the day before. It was several blocks down 46th St.; we would definitely take a taxi home.

The chef, Chen Kai Chan, pleased us with Salmon poached in dill, and other delicacies. The wine menu was broad and reasonable; a bottle of Loire wine cost \$11. The bill for four was about \$100 plus tip, a reasonable price in the Big Apple.

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