

Times Square

Nothing defines excitement quite like New York Times Square, because it offers a vast array of dining, shopping, entertainment and nightlife. Times Square also a busy intersection of art and commerce, where the chaos of hundreds of advertisements (signs and "newscrawlers") vie for viewers' attention.

Formerly named Longacre Square, Times Square was renamed after the Times Building (now One Times Square) in April 1904. Times Square, sometimes known as the "Crossroads of the World," has achieved the status of an iconic world landmark and has become a symbol of New York City. Times Square is principally defined by its spectaculars, animated, digital advertisements.

Times Square is the site of the annual New Year's Eve ball drop. On December 31, 1907, a ball signifying New Year's Day was first dropped at Times Square, and the Square has held the main New Year's celebration in New York City ever since. On that night, hundreds of thousands of people congregate to watch the Waterford crystal ball being lowered on a pole atop the building (though not to the street, as is a common misconception), marking the new year. It replaced a lavish fireworks display from the top of the building that was held from 1904 to 1906, only to be outlawed by city officials. Beginning in 1908, and for more than eighty years thereafter, Times Square sign maker Artkraft Strauss was responsible for the ball-lowering. During World War II, a minute of silence, followed by a recording of church bells pealing, replaced the ball drop because of wartime blackout restrictions. Today, Countdown Entertainment and One Times Square handle the New Year's Eve event in conjunction with the Times Square Alliance.

The theaters of Broadway and the huge number of animated neon and LED signs have long made them one of New York's iconic images, and a symbol of the intensely urban aspects of Manhattan. Times Square is the only neighborhood with zoning ordinances requiring building owners to display illuminated signs. The density of illuminated signs in Times Square now rivals that of Las Vegas. Officially, signs in Times Square are called "spectaculars", and the largest of them are called "jumbotrons." In 1992, the Times Square Alliance (formerly the Times Square Business Improvement District, or "BID" for short), a coalition of city government and local businesses dedicated to improving the quality of commerce and cleanliness in the district, started operations in the area. Times Square now boasts attractions such as ABC's Times Square Studios, where Good Morning America is broadcast live, an elaborate Toys "R" Us store, and competing Hershey's and M&M's stores across the street from each other, as well as restaurants such as Ruby Foo's (Chinese food), the Bubba Gump Shrimp Company (seafood), Planet Hollywood Restaurant and Bar (Theme Restaurant) and Carmine's (Italian) along with a number of multiplex movie theaters. It has also attracted a number of large financial, publishing, and media firms to set up headquarters in the area. A larger presence of police has improved the safety of the area.