

... to guided walks round Manhattan big screen locations and the eerie, unfinished subway tunnels

Hollywood on the Hudson

One o'clock on a hot New York Saturday, and a group of 20 people gathers on the steps of the Washington Square Hotel in the heart of Greenwich Village. Arthur Marks ("your favourite tour guide, raconteur and overall fun person") breaks into an a cappella version of *Hokey for Hollywood*. One might have expected a snatch of *Wonderful Town* but Hollywood is a metaphor for all things cinematic and anyway Manhattan, Marks tells us, is known as "Hollywood on the Hudson". He segues into *You Ought to be in Pictures*.

Marks has been guiding tourists round Manhattan for more than two decades and is a walking, talking encyclopaedia. As he would be the first to tell you. So it is nice, as he is waiting for his party to assemble, to be able to give him something to add in: that, back in the early 1960s, Bob Dylan and Joan Baez pursued their brief affair in the Washington Square Hotel. Then called *The Earl*, it was immortalised in *Diamonds and Rust*, Baez's bittersweet musical recollection of the romance, as "that crummy hotel over Washington Square". "Is that so?" exclaims Marks, who goes on to recount that Hemingway, Dylan Thomas and Streisand have all in their time signed its guest register.

Now that rare thing, a family-run "boutique" hotel, it is this week home to Bo Diddley and Patti Smith, both of whom are playing gigs in the Village. "We are in the heart of the creative area of New York," Marks explains, once everyone in the group has introduced themselves — including the lady from Long Island who has never before been to Manhattan.

Naturally, our guide is an actor manqué and not in the least bit shy, not these days. "I auditioned wonderfully but froze on stage," he recalls. Dressed in shades of mauve and pink, with cranberry-coloured socks peeking out between slightly too-short chinos and sturdy walking shoes, and his trademark fedora, he puts on a three-hour show that is as informative as it is entertaining and which goes well beyond its cinematic brief.

He leads us across Waverley Place, past one of Eleanor Roosevelt's numerous apartments to Washington Square Park (cue *Rose of Washington Square*), the heart of the New York University campus. Named after George Washington and dominated by the famous arch which marks the start of Fifth Avenue, it was originally laid out as a potter's field, becom-



RONALD GRANT

The Manhattan skyline has been a backdrop to countless films. Now you can tour the more famous sites, such as where Michael Douglas threw up or where Harry met Sally

ing a parade ground in 1827. "Horses occasionally plunged into the mausoleums and it's said there are a lot of ghosts here. But that's another tour," plugs Marks, pausing by the hanging tree to exclaim in horror at the sight of one of the numerous squirrels.

"They're rats with tails, and pigeons are rats with wings! Now over here," he continues without pause, "are the chess tables where parts of *Searching for Bobby Fischer* were filmed."

Marks gestures to the fire-eaters and buskers and jugglers jostling for attention in the park and heads over to George's Dog Run. Our guide appears no more fond of pooches than he is of rats. "In New York, there are one million people and two million dogs!" he yelps. On the third Saturday of October, the park hosts the Grand March of the

Dachshunds. "Thousands of them come out — long-haired, short-haired, black, tan." Other breeds are not similarly honoured: every dog does not have its day.

We pause on the corner of Fifth Avenue, where Marks points out the location shots for *Reds*, *When Harry Met Sally*, *Dressed to Kill* and *Kids*, as well as the real-life home of Henry James, whose *Washington Square* was filmed on these streets as *The Heiress*. At Fifth and Tenth, several Spanish-style façades have come in handy down the years and, round the corner, a teak-carved frontage has stood in for India and Indonesia. The nearby Church of the Ascension has frequently been passed off as an English country church.

On Tenth (*Six Degrees of Separation* and *The Verdict*), a street which has understudied Boston

shot here, not far from his apartment at 161) but also the backdrop for *Cruising* and *Bullets on Broadway*. On Bleeker Street, in the heart of Little Italy, Marks whispers the M-word. An ageing godfather lives on the street, allegedly resisting arrest by feigning insanity: he can occasionally be spotted wandering the streets in his dressing gown.

Viewers of *The Cosby Show* recognise St Luke's Place, where a house can be yours for \$3m to \$6m. Theodore Dreiser and e.e. cummings lived here in less expensive times and Audrey Hepburn walked its pavements in *Wait Until Dark*. Gue for another song, and Marks positions himself high on someone's doorstep. St Luke's-in-the-Fields, the local church, featured in *Longtime Companion* and from there both Brendan Behan and Dylan Thomas, who drank them-

self to death in the White Horse Tavern at Eleventh and Hudson, were buried.

We start back towards the hotel. Now here, by the flagpole on Stonewall Place and Christopher Street, Michael Douglas threw up in *Bright Lights, Big City*. Well, he didn't actually throw up, of course ... and this is Gus's Place, which was a leitmotiv in *The Paper*. "We cross back to Waverley Place, where scenes from *Barefoot in the Park* were shot. Once more Marks breaks into song: "Every street a boulevard, every street a highway full of dreams." It is his finale and draws a round of applause as he ushers us into CIII, the Washington Square Hotel's restaurant, for a real American tea, strawberry shortcake, cranberry butter and all.

LIZ THOMSON

FACT FILE

Continental Airlines (0800 776464) has return fares London/New York from £249 plus tax. Virgin Atlantic (01293 747747) offers Apex returns from £398 plus tax. Virgin Holidays (01293 61718) has packages to New York. British Airways (0345 22211) has a World Offer during April from £219 return.

Rooms at the Four Seasons New York (001 212 758 5700) cost from \$440 (£260) for a single to \$625 (£370) for a luxury double; at the Hotel Pierre (001 212 940 8185) \$375 (£220) for a single to \$580 (£345) for a "superior" room with Central Park view. Cheapest double room is \$415 (£245). Both can be booked by on 0800 526648.

Big Apple Greeters (001 212 669 2896) tours include Harlem Spirituals, Radio City or a Central Park group skate. Virginia Dillon (001 212 229 7880) charges \$50 (£30) an hour for groups of up to six people, whatever you want — shopping, theatre or cycling, for example.

Arthur Marks and CIII Restaurant (001 212 254 1200) run themed Greenwich Village walking tours throughout the year. Afternoon tours cost \$20 (£12) and include tea; twilight tours in July cost \$30 (£18) and include dinner. Marks also has a regular tour programme featuring other areas of Manhattan and is available for private hire from \$350 (£200) (001 212 673 0477).

The New York Transit Museum, corner of Boerum Place and Schermerhorn Street, Brooklyn. For information on tours call 001 718 243 3060.

Reading: *722 Miles* by Clifton Hood (Johns Hopkins University Press, £13). *Maximum City* by Michael Pys (Pleasant, £6.99). *New York Walks* ed by Baita Plotch (Henry Holt & Co, £11.50). *Time Out Guide New York* (Penguin, £9.99).



Pagoda-shaped phone box in Chinatown