

The Ride: New York City's most innovative tour experience

New York City's newest tour bus, The Ride, is an ideal plan for frequent visitors and first-timer's alike to count on. The Ride packs a show and a tour into one 75-minute experience combining comedy, entertainment, performing and informing. The trip concludes with the anecdote, "All 8 million of us are trying to live in the whole world at the same time," the meaning of which you learn along the way.

Although this tour is limited to midtown Manhattan, the bus has easily accessible, sideways, stadium seating and rolls right through rain or snow. Riders face the entirely transparent left side of the bus transforming the city's streets into a mobile, boundless stage. Plus, midtown has enough attractions of its own including Times Square, the Chrysler building, Grand Central Station, the public library's main branch, Columbus Circle, Hearst Tower, Bryant Park, and the new Bank of America tower to name a few.

The bus itself features giant windows in front of and above riders, 36 video screens, professional audio engineering and a comedy guide duo. The two ride operatives entertain with humor, inform with statistics and fun facts, and interact with quizzes and a final prize. The music, sound effects and audio are all encompassing and the video editing is enthralling.

Performers unexpectedly appear along the route dancing, singing, acting and joking with the operatives. Locals unintentionally participate by effectively and realistically demonstrating New York City's culture. Unsuspecting passersby completely ignore a deliveryman turned break-dancer popping and locking on his route, an opera singer tuning her vocals outside Carnegie Hall, an actor nonchalantly ripping his pants off mid-walk and what looks like a thief stealing an entire fire hydrant.

Riders have the opportunity to see the real New York aided by planted performers regardless of weather conditions. I was in awe of a ballet routine performed around Columbus Circle in the pouring rain. The duo worked around a random pedestrian who wandered right through their act. Entertainment is found in figuring out who is acting and who is not, and the operatives make light of the inevitably unexpected situations caused by traffic or interaction with locals.

The performers themselves bring humor to the experience and the historic stories and stats are satisfyingly informative. The bus itself plays a character, The Ride, who conducts scans of buildings or people and shares notable facts. I was enlightened by the number of hot dog stands, cabs, residents, visitors and languages spoken in the city this year. We also heard the real scoop behind Grand Central's ceiling renovation, the famous photo of the sailor and nurse kissing in Times Square, the Chrysler building's surprise height when constructed, and how Sam Ash became a major music store.

One ride operative, Scott, studied New York City at Columbia and used that depth of knowledge to throw fun facts in throughout The Ride. I truly stepped off the bus with a deeper understanding and appreciation for my home. As a local I noted restaurants and unusual tourist destinations to try on my own time. The other operative, Jackie, even gave riders lunch recommendations, particularly any dig on 9th Ave.

The Ride's ticket clerks and line hosts strategically discuss the rider's visits with them and insert customized information along the way. A rapper may give a shout out to "Pat from Ireland who came to see Frank Sinatra perform" and throw some Sinatra lyrics into his rhyme. The experience is personal, laugh aloud funny, and refreshingly unique amongst carbon copy double-decker tours. It's well worth the \$59 tickets and ideal for a rainy, cold or relaxing day. For tickets or more information visit experiencetheride.com or their box office at The Marriott Marquis in Times Square.