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Page 92

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[4TH ANNUAL STAY LIST] Page 62

A VERY PERSONAL NEW YORK

INSIDERS OFFER
THE KEYS TO THEIR
NEIGHBORHOODS

Page 73

VOLCANIC ICELAND

INTO THE HEART
OF A WILD LAND

Page 62

48 HOURS IN AMSTERDAM

Page 34

BEYOND MESA VERDE

Page 84

ROAD TRIP CONNECTICUT'S RICH RAMBLE

Page 40



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and the Gophers gangs stalked the streets and nearby docks. But while the neighborhood between 34th and 57th Streets, bordered by Eighth Avenue on the east and the Hudson River on the west, has a dangerous past, today you're more likely to knock elbows with a Broadway star than a rabble-rouser.

Hell's Kitchen runs right up to the Theater District, which makes for a nice commute for Chad Kimball, the Tony-nominated star of the musical *Memphis*. He has lived in Hell's Kitchen for over a year. "I knew the closer I was to the theater, the odds of being late to work would decrease," he says. "I've been half right."

When he's not on stage, Kimball likes to unwind at neighborhood spots like the whiskey bar On the Rocks (1) and art-filled restaurant Druids (2). The latter used to be called the Sunbrite Bar, where the Westies, a predominantly Irish group of thugs, hung out in the 1970s and '80s. Now you can graze on Long Island duck and peruse the local artwork for sale without fear of Eddie "The Butcher" Cummiskey showing up.

Rudy's Bar & Grill (3) serves up free hot dogs when you stop by for a drink. Just look for the giant pig out front, then head in and take a seat at a booth covered in red duct tape. Or enjoy the tropical vibe and fruit-infused rum at the area's surf hangout, Réunion (4).

On a bright spring day, it's challenging to secure space around one of the best free with-or-without-kids entertainments New York City has to offer: the small-dog run at Carl Schurz Park (13). A standout little sibling to Central Park and named for the first German-American senator, Carl Schurz starts at the butter yellow Gracie Mansion and curves down along the East River. "The Esplanade on the East River is one of the most beautiful places on Earth, especially at night," says Cheever. "The river is just alive with activity."

You don't mind if we keep it our little secret, do you? —*Jenna Schmuert*

HELL'S KITCHEN

Old-school attractions mix with hot newcomers where gangs once roamed.

IF THE NAME Hell's Kitchen sounds uninviting, be glad that at least "Battle Row," "House of Blazes," and "Death Avenue" didn't stick. The monikers evoke a time in the early 1900s when the Parlor Mob, the Gorillas,



The neighborhood's reputation for great food has outlasted even the gangsters. Stroll down Restaurant Row—46th Street between 8th and 9th Avenues—and you'll come across Barbetta (5), an Italian restaurant that's been around since 1906. Don Draper romanced Bethany at Barbetta (much to Betty's dismay) in Season Four of *Mad Men*, an honor that's not lost on current owner (and daughter of the original owner), Laura Maioglio. "Andy Warhol and Woody Allen filmed movies here," she says. "Scenes for *The Departed* were shot here. But nothing has had an impact like having our menu on *Mad Men*."

Save room for dessert because Hell's Kitchen bakes some devilish sweets. Amy's Bread (6) makes calories-be-damned almond brioche toast and coconut dream bars. If you swing by Cupcake Café (7), you may bump into WNYC/WQXR radio host David Garland,



AROUND THE CORNER Le Parker Meridien hotel (119 W. 56th Street) is too far east to be within Hell's Kitchen, but the lobby's hidden Burger Joint has all the allure of underground hangouts from the neighborhood's colorful history. Peel back a

curtain near the front desk to reveal a backroom grill and indulge in one of the juiciest burgers in town. Or satisfy your craving out in the open at Knave, the lobby's Gothic café and bar, where you can get an artful latte (*left*). The cocktails won't disappoint, either, and the addictive deep-fried olives are free. —*A.M.*