

When In NEW YORK CITY

» The ultimate guide to the unusual in your favourite destination

PHOTOS: CARISSA VILLACORTA & MOSS



Central Park Zoo; clockwise from top right: Café Habana's grilled corn, Moss museum and De La Vega Gallery



The Big Apple is always ripe with delicious secrets waiting to be discovered, among them where to get the yummiest grilled corn. Resident **Carissa Villacorta** suggests some great must-dos

VISIT DE LA VEGA

His mantras on New York walls and sidewalks cause harried New Yorkers to stop and ponder. "Become your dream", "The world is conspiring in your favour" and "Be mindful even if your mind is full" are few of his famous quotes that he often adorns with fishbowl or people figures. Thankfully, this "sidewalk philosopher" has a gallery of shirts, mugs, cards and magnets full of his logical and wonderful musings. 102 St Marks Place (between 1st Avenue and Avenue A, take 6 train to Astor Place), tel 1 212 876 8649, www.delavegainternational.com. Open daily 1300 to 2100; Sunday closed by 2000.

HANG OUT AT MORGAN'S

The quintessential New York bar that will make you feel like you've uncovered a New York secret, or hit on buried treasure. Unmarked and unnamed in midtown's Madison Avenue, you open a door to the left of the hotel entrance, descend the stairs, and then find yourself in an eclectic basement bar.

The deep green backdrop, orange chairs, gold furnishings and muted lighting make this spot perfect for an intimate date or a classy party. Appetisers from neighbour Asia de Cuba are also available. Try the sliders with the fries. Don't forget to order Morgan's Martini – the best drink in the city. 237 Madison Avenue (between 37th and 38th Streets, take the 4/5/6/7 train to Grand Central), tel 1 212 726 7755. Open daily from 1700 to 0300.

CHOMP ON GRILLED CORN

In Nolita, the corner of Prince and Elizabeth Streets is the one spot that's crammed with people, and

with great reason: grilled corn at Café Habana, a tiny yet trendy Cuban-Mexican restaurant. Messy but irresistible, you'll keep waiting for the corn with white cheese, chilli powder and a hint of lime. Toothpicks are on hand, but even its beautiful model-like patrons don't mind. They happily follow their maize cravings with delicious tacos, rice and beans, and then finish with a fantastic mojito. Be sure to drop by Character, the stylish home accessory store next door, while waiting for a table. 17 Prince Street at Elizabeth Street (take the N/W/R train to Prince Street), tel 1 212 625 2002. Open daily from 0900 to 2400.

ENTER PHOEBE'S WORLD

Blue Tree is a wonderful boutique of exquisitely made and hand-picked dresses, shoes and accessories for the little girl or grown woman with impeccable taste. Stylish jewellery and cute toys for babies and tweens are found in this inviting world created by actress Phoebe Cates.

Definitely worth a trip uptown to give your mum, baby or even yourself a well-deserved gift. The kind and charming Phoebe and company make it so easy. 1283 Madison Avenue (between 91st and 92nd Streets, take the 4/5/6 train to 96th Street), tel 1 212 369-BLUE, www.bluetreenyc.com. Open Monday to Friday from 1000 to 1800, Saturday 1100 to 1800, Sunday closed.

SPOT THE TREND

Ever wondered who the trendsetter is in modern industrial design? Head for the corner of Prince and Greene Streets in Soho and you'll step into a time machine, museum, gallery and store all in one. Ever since former fashion entrepreneur

Murray Moss opened this concept store in 1994, it has been instrumental in shaping the direction of design retail and serves as authority, advocate and host for new product design. There are awesome chairs, furniture, lighting, watches, jewellery, table ornaments and kitchen gadgets, many of which spring from the imagination of some of the greatest designers of the 21st century.

Moss is eye candy for design enthusiasts, but one can only look (or buy) and not touch. The store's stern rules of "Please do not touch" and "Photography is not permitted" have become so well known to their clients and fans that shirts, pens and mouse pads with these slogans have become Moss' signature souvenir. And if you like the forward sounding music in the store, you can purchase that as well. Then you can touch. 146-152 Greene Street (take the B/D/F/N/6 train to Broadway/Lafayette), tel 1 866 888 6677, www.mossonline.com. Open Monday to Saturday 1100 to 1900, Sunday 1200 to 1800.

ZOOM IN ON THE ZOO

Right smack in midtown, Central Park Zoo has been there since the 1860s. The sight of polar bears and penguins playing and swimming is the best respite from a week's hard work. As with an amusement park in the park, you're sure to look around with a smile, and leave the place happy. Be sure to treat yourself to a stuffed toy – reminding you of the ones you just saw – from the fascinating "zootique". East 64th Street entrance of Central Park (take the N/R/W train to Fifth Avenue). Open all year round, but the April to October hours are from 1000 to 1700. Admission is US\$8 (adults) and US\$3 (children). ■