# New York: The latest Broadway shows you must see

ANGELA SAURINE ESCAPE AUGUST 31, 2014 12:00AM

SHARE <b>f y</b> in <b>g</b> <sup>+</sup> <b>w</b> 0
--

Ads By Google

**Advertising on YouTube** Reach more viewers and boost sales with AdWords for Video. youtube.com/Google/Ads



Motown: The Musical at the Lunt-Fontanne Theatre.

# AS A lover of musicals, walking through the buzzing hub of New York's Times Square is nothing short of heaven.

Billboards surrounded by flashing lights scream down at me, showcasing the overwhelming number of shows. A long queue weaves from the TKTS booth, where you can get last-minute tickets to performances that day – if you don't mind risking missing out on your first choice.

Over the years some of the best-known musicals in the world have played here, including Cats, Les Miserables, Phantom of the Opera, Miss Saigon and Wicked. There are 40 theatres in the district, as I learn on a new "Broadway – Behind the Scenes" walking tour.



Signs for Broadway shows at Times Square.

Broadway wasn't always the tourist-friendly hub it is today, says our scriptwriter-cum-guide Jeff. The area was once home to hundreds of brothels.

Things began to change when the subway opened and The New York Times moved in, and by the 1920s the area was the centre of the city's entertainment industry.

At its peak in 1927, 264 shows opened in 67 theatres, and the streets were lined with gentlemen in tuxedos and ladies in evening gowns.

But interest in theatre began to wane when the film The Jazz Singer opened and the stock market crashed. Many theatres were converted into nightclubs and cinemas, and much of the talent moved to Hollywood.

In the 1980s and '90s, the area represented the worst of New York – drug trafficking, prostitution and crime.

"You could see all Ten Commandments broken in 10 minutes," Jeff says.

Then Disney invested \$44 million in the New Amsterdam Theatre, where Aladdin is now playing, and the Broadway neighbourhood transformed again. With matinees and evening shows every day except Monday, I was able to squeeze in five musicals during my week in New York.

# **BOOK OF MORMON**

If you only see one show on Broadway, make sure this is it. The hilarious parody by South Park creators Trey Parker and Matt Stone has won nine Tony awards, including best musical, and made \$US850 million (\$A912 million) at the box office.

I was in stitches from the opening scenes, set in a missionary training centre where a group of over-the-top optimistic and enthusiastic young men are about to set out to change the world. But the show's stars – including Pitch Perfect actor Ben Platt – are in for a rude shock when they are sent to warlord-ruled Uganda.

This politically incorrect offering is hugely entertaining, with a large dose of ham and laughout-loud mocking of other well-known musicals. Unfortunately, The Book of Mormon is also the most expensive musical on Broadway, with premium tickets selling for up to \$US477. But don't let that put you off as there are plenty of seats available around the \$US200 mark.



The Book of Mormon appearing at the Eugene O'Neill Theatre.

#### **BEAUTIFUL - THE CAROLE KING MUSICAL**

Carole King has wanted to be a songwriter since she was a schoolgirl, growing up in the New York borough of Brooklyn.

She wrote her first No.1 hit Will You Still Love Me Tomorrow at age 17 with her husband and musical collaborator, the late Gerry Goffin, whom she married in 1959. Since that time more than 400 of her songs, including The Loco-Motion and (You Make Me Feel Like) A Natural Woman, have been recorded by more than 1000 artists, resulting in more than 50 top ten hits and six Grammy awards.

This musical follows her life from her teen years, with plenty of toe-tapping tunes and rock'n'roll hits performed by artists including The Drifters, Righteous Brothers, The Shirelles and Little Eva (who was the couple's babysitter).

Much of the musical focuses on the friendly rivalry between the pair and another songwriting couple, Barry Mann and Cynthia Weil, whose songs include We Gotta Get Out of This Place, On Broadway (co-written with legendary duo Jerry Leiber and Mike Stoller) and You've Lost That Lovin' Feelin' (co-written with Phil Spector).

Despite her early success, King encounters her share of hardships along the way and it's interesting to see how the lyrics of her songs were inspired by life events, which I knew little about going in.

By the time her character sings It's Too Late later in her career, I am moved to tears.



Beautiful, The Carole King Musical appearing at the Stephen Sondheim Theatre.

#### **MOTOWN: THE MUSICAL**

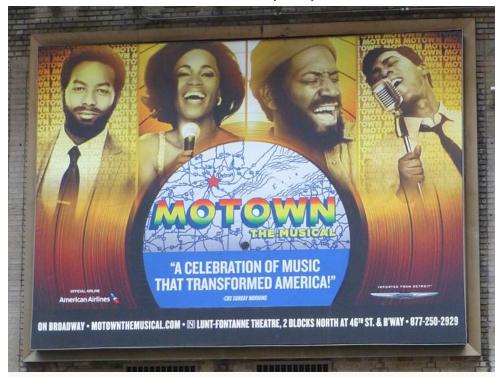
This flashy musical abounds with hits by Motown artists including The Temptations, Four Tops and The Supremes.

It is based on the book To Be Loved: The Music, The Magic, The Memories of Motown by Berry Gordy, who started Motown Records in the motoring town of Detroit.

Berry signed Stevie Wonder as a 12-year-old, as well as Marvin Gaye and The Jackson Five, whose characters steal the show with their performances of ABC and I Want You Back.

The musical is set in a time when there was still racial segregation in some parts of the US, against the backdrop of the assassination of political activist Martin Luther King and the Vietnam War.

It is more like a series of concerts, with stunning lighting, great dancing and fabulous costumes.



A sign for Motown the Musical in Broadway.

#### **KINKY BOOTS**

With music and lyrics by Cyndi Lauper, this sassy show won six awards, including best musical, in last year's Tony awards.

Based on the book by Harvey Fierstein, and also a film starring Australian actor Joel Edgerton, it tells the story of a young man who has his own dreams shattered when his father dies and he has to take over his dreary shoe factory in Northampton, England.

Faced with the prospect of shutting it down, he must come up with a niche market – making shoes for drag queens.

The result is a vibrant show, full of hilarious one liners, sequins, sparkling sets and great performances. The comical performance by cute blonde actress Jeanna de Waal is a standout.



Kinky Boots - running on Broadway.

#### **ONCE**

Set in Dublin, this show is a different offering, full of Irish music and dancing, songs and powerful performances. When the audience arrives most of the cast are already on stage jamming in a pub with violins, guitars, accordions, ukuleles, bass and harmonicas.

It tells the story of a heartbroken singer-songwriter who works in his dad's vacuum repair shop and a Czech woman who inspires him.

During intermission, the bar on stage becomes a real-life bar where the audience buys drinks.

\*The writer was a guest of Creative Holidays, Brand USA and NYC & Company.



Once, running at the Bernard B. Jacobs Theatre.

#### **GO2 - NEW YORK**

#### STAYING THERE

The writer stayed at Hotel Beacon, booked through Creative Holidays. Ph 1300 301 711.

## **TOURING THERE**

For more information on Walks of New York's new "Broadway – Behind the Scenes" walking tour.

## **EATING THERE**

- Opened in 1927, Sardis Restaurant and Grill stays open late after shows and is a favourite venue for opening night parties. The walls are decorated with 1300 caricatures of Broadway performers, including Australian Hugh Jackman, Lucille Ball and Sammy Davis Jr.
- Edison Cafe on 47th St is where theatre owners and producers meet and deals are done. An area is even roped off for the Shuberts, who own a chain of theatres on Broadway.
- Decorated with posters of Broadway flops, Joe Allen Restaurant is a popular place for actors and producers to come for lunch and dinner. Bar Centrale next door opened as an alternative venue for actors to hang out after shows away from tourists. Visitors can still go there, but they must make a reservation.

MORE: nycgo.com or discoveramerica.com

"Like" Escape.com.au on Facebook

Follow @Escape\_team on Twitter