

**Travel: New York on the Cheap**

All that Glitters: A bite of the Big Apple needn't be so pricey

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Nov. 13, 2006 issue - Last month Nicole Haagenson's 6-year-old daughter, Gia, decided she'd like to spend Christmas in New York City. "I think she saw the movie 'Elf' one too many times," says Haagenson, 29, of Houston. But when she called hotels, Haagenson learned that rooms were going for upwards of \$250 a night. "We just can't afford that," she says. Instead of giving up, she posted a note on the popular online community craigslist (nyc.craigslist.com), looking to swap her three-bedroom house for a spacious apartment. She's still weighing the offers.

The holidays have always been the most popular time of year to visit the Big Apple. But this season, forecasters are expecting an especially tight—and pricey—hotel market. "Rates for the season will average about 15 percent higher than they did last year," says Bjorn Hanson, a travel consultant with PricewaterhouseCoopers. The price hikes are due partly to a shrinking number of rooms—popular hotels, like the Plaza, are converting rentals to condos. And a growing number of businesses are holding conventions in town. Fortunately, savvy travelers can visit New York and still have money left over to buy gifts on the way back home.

**Hotels:** Apartment rentals are a good alternative to hotel stays. Haagenson has used craigslist for housing swaps and rentals in the past and has always had a good experience. "I prefer to be in a home, where I can relax and make some tea and cook," she says. This year, furnished studios and one-bedrooms are going for between \$125 and \$200 per night, according to those who have posted on the site's "housing wanted" board. To avoid scams, ask anyone who offers you housing for references, and digital photos of the apartment and building façade. Never wire money in advance. "If you know someone in the city, have them check out the apartment first," says John Broom of Rio de Janeiro, a former New Yorker who frequently rents apartments on craigslist for himself, his wife and their 12-year-old son. Still wary? Try the agency As You Like It (212-695-7143), which offers furnished, cleaned and inspected apartments starting at \$200 per night.



Gary Hershorn / Reuters

**Eats:** Avoid overpriced restaurants by heading for residential neighborhoods. Eric Scott of Montreal takes his wife and two daughters to the Indian restaurants that line Lexington Avenue in the 20s and 30s, or to Chinatown. Web sites like chowhound.com and sliceny.com, where New Yorkers compare notes on all kinds of dining establishments, will help steer you toward great, cheap eats.

**Fun:** This season for the first time, the Metropolitan Opera is selling \$20 orchestra tickets starting two hours before most Monday-through-Thursday shows (call the Met Ticket Service at 212-362-6000 for information on specific dates). Or opt for standing room. Scott and his family like to split two standing-room and two higher-priced tickets and switch off during intermission. For deals on Broadway shows, check [broadwaybox.com](http://broadwaybox.com) for discount codes that can save you up to 50 percent.

If you like to ice-skate, consider skipping pricey Rockefeller Center and heading to the Pond at Bryant Park ([bryantpark.org](http://bryantpark.org)), where admission is free. "I went last year and loved it," says Maryam Basir, a host of the NYC TV show "\$9.99." Maybe you'll even be able to afford Christmas gifts.

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