



Flatbush Avenue is a journey to the sea in both directions. Walking Flatbush might seem a linear pursuit; however, there is plenty of room to wander along the way. On the northern half, Flatbush is not only the road you are on but also the direction you are going. On the southern half there are vestiges of village centers and the eventual experience of flatness great enough to lend the namesake. The avenue's history is layered with centuries of development yet it began as a series of footpaths connecting various Native American villages and planting grounds. Walking the entire route is an ambitious and worthy goal as both ends offer romantic landscapes of departure and arrival.

Where Flatbush Avenue begins and ends is hard to say: perhaps on the Manhattan Bridge, under it, at the first street sign or at Fulton Street. The water's edge seems most suitable and certainly the most historically appropriate place to begin a walk, when considering the generations whose Brooklyn-bound journeys involved a boat or canoe. The numbered landmarks on the map are a mix of historical notes, observations, personal anecdotes, pointers and instigations.

- The East River:** On the shore near the carousel there are small pockets of sand between the large breakwater stones that contain an engrossing mix of geological time and human history. The rounded chunks of marble, brick, coal and tile seem natural here. For most of recent history these shores were not accessible over the crush of boats, piers, pilings, garbage, chemicals and flossam. Now migratory brants might honk at you as they peck at seaweed. A surprising amount of flint can be found here mixed into the sands; this is a reddish brown stone sometimes in curious shapes and with a glass-like look and feel when freshly broken. There are also many Hudson River stones so round and polished they could be mistaken for small brown eggs. What better location to find a lucky walker's stone!
- Main Street Park:** The parkland under the Manhattan Bridge is in a state of growth. Only a few months ago, at the point where Adams and John streets meet the water, there were a number of early 19th-century redbrick and flat stone arches at the water's edge. They were a surviving clue to the history of the place but were recently bulldozed.
- Water Street:** How many photo shoots are going on right now? The cobblestones and old tracks, aged brick and rusty metal all combine to make a post-industrial backdrop that no one can resist.
- Manhattan Bridge Archway Plaza:** This passage offers a chance to hear train thunder.
- York Street:** At this point one must choose whether to take Jay Street or Pearl Street in order to continue walking near Flatbush Avenue.
- Four Corners:** Prospect and Pearl streets intersect at what might be, the most symmetrical four corners in Brooklyn.
- Pocket Park:** At High Street between Jay Street and the Manhattan Bridge there is a strange park-like place. It scoops you in one way but provides no exit and a great deal of traffic dodging to continue moving forward.
- The Concord Wall:** Concord Street meets Flatbush Avenue creating a small green space with a few full trees that obscure an old apartment building. The brick wall of the building faces Flatbush and is full of clues. Old advertisements are rubbed out like mistakes in drawings. "The Perfect," "Need a biscuit" and "Company" are the only words I can make out. Creeping vines draw lines that come to life in spring. Next door to the apartment building is a boarded up wooden building, one of the last of its kind in the area. Next to that is a parking lot. If you are walking here before both buildings are torn down, peek over at the backyard with the crumbling stucco brick wall. An old grape vine, which was a staple addition to the backyard of so many immigrant families, has stood the test of time.
- Brooklyn Public Library:** The façade of the library has many interesting details derived from the world of books including quotes etched near the windows of the library. "THE SPIRIT AND THE SENSES SO EASILY GROW DEAD TO THE IMPRESSIONS OF THE BEAUTIFUL AND PERFECT THAT ONE OUGHT EVERY DAY TO HEAR A LITTLE SONG - READ A GOOD POEM - SEE A FINE PICTURE AND, IF IT WERE POSSIBLE, TO SPEAK A FEW REASONABLE WORDS."
- Old Flatbush:** East Drive is part of the busy main loop that circles Prospect Park and teems with bikers and pedestrians. Before the construction of the park, Flatbush Avenue ran on sections of this old drive. The forested space between the old and new routes is laced with footpaths and offers walkers the perfect place to wander in the right direction.
- Vale of Cashmere:** Between East Drive and Flatbush is a section of the park still called the Vale of Cashmere. Three large empty circular pools overlook a low stagnant pond with ornately planted surroundings. The gardens were once the jewel of the park housing tropical lily gardens above and a well-manicured coy pond below. In all likelihood, these areas fell out of favor with the attention given to the Botanical Garden.
- Bike Ramps:** The forested area between Flatbush and East Drive is an unmitigated place that has given rise to winding, narrow trails and steep bike jumps made out of gathered sticks and mounded dirt.
- Battle Pass:** The main advantage to walking down East Drive is the chance to walk through Battle Pass. One of the most celebrated landscapes in Brooklyn's history, there are a number of plaques and markers serving as a reminder of what happened here. The hills that form the pass are a few of the only landmasses not smoothed or controlled to form the park. Many footpaths wind through the steep slopes here but most people are not searching for a view. Lookout Hill on the other side of the park provides vistas reaching to Coney Island and the open ocean.
- Sea Lions:** The main advantage of walking down Flatbush proper is the chance to peer through the gates of the Prospect Park Zoo and see the sea lions swimming and jumping out of their central island.
- Brooklyn Botanical Gardens:** The Flatbush Avenue/Empire Boulevard entrance is temporarily closed and the long straightway between the garden and the park is surprisingly unceremonious considering the amazing parkland on either side.
- Lefferts House:** If the house is open, it is free to go in. If the house is closed, it is free to peer in the windows. The structure is a preserved original moved to this site from a nearby farmstead to make way for the development of the Lefferts Garden neighborhood.
- Tolls and Tiles:** Near the Empire Boulevard-Flatbush entrance to Prospect Park there are two other side steps worthy of a visit. Flatbush Avenue was once a toll road and the old toll-booth now stands near the carousel. A few paces from the booth is a facilities building with restrooms and a fantastic ceiling of teal tile work by Guastavino & Company.
- Bond Bread Clock Tower:** Time still stands still.
- Metal Trees:** Three bare cement columns support three metal treetops painted green that seem to have come out of the Super Mario Brothers game. Not grand but awfully charming and clearly filled with good intention. I vote for restoration.
- Canton Market:** A rare indoor market that provides a venue for local entrepreneurs and vendors.
- The Church:** The first iteration of the Flatbush Reformed Dutch Church was built at the order of Peter Stuyvesant in the late 1600s. The church has always been a landmark for the village of Flatbush. History is in the air here.
- Kings Theater:** The rehabilitation of this theater is a big deal. The venue is slated to open in 2015; however, if you are walking under the marquee you might catch a glimpse of the gilt interior through the construction scaffolding.
- Dorchester:** Flatbush never turns but it does bend. The most significant bend is rather subtle at the intersection of Dorchester Avenue.
- See the Signs:** One could make a map devoted just to the amazing signage found along Flatbush Avenue and the other intersecting thoroughways. One of my favorites at the intersection of Nostrand and Flatbush is the two-story sign for Lords Photocakes.
- Last/First:** The last or first stop of the 2 and 5 trains is Flatbush Avenue-Brooklyn College. Along the walls of the station platform are the enigmatic bronzes titled *Flatbush Floogies* by the late artist Muriel Castanis.
- Freight:** Walking on Flatbush will take you over a freight rail line that cannot be seen here; however, it is visible to the thousands of New Yorkers who live along the deep and winding channel. The line extends from the Brooklyn Army Terminal in Bay Ridge around outer Brooklyn and into Queens where it loops down to Astoria, over the East River, through Wards Island and merges with other lines at Hunts Point in the Bronx. One day it will get a lot of attention.
- Brooklyn College:** If you have never walked through campus it is worth the detour.
- Flatbush is Here:** If you type "Flatbush Avenue, Brooklyn, NY" into Google Maps, the red tack will drop you at the intersection of East 35th Street and Flatbush.
- The Church:** The Flatlands Dutch Reformed Church sits on the site of a Native American village called Keschaechquereren. The church has been operating in some form on this site since the late 1600s. Kings Highway and Flatbush were important Native American trails connecting rich coastal fishing, gathering and growing lands with other parts of Long Island.
- Floridian Dinner:** I find this place irresistible in its design. Florida is a style. In the middle of a long walk sometimes dinner coffee and breakfast anytime is exactly what you need.
- McDonalds:** There are other McDonalds along Flatbush but this one makes for a suitable outpost should you need facilities or coffee before the long straightway to the Atlantic. I stopped in on the first sunny Sunday in March and the warmth permeated everywhere. Normally I avoid all fast-food chains but this one surprised me. The interior was clean and bright with white walls instead of the usual aggressive red and yellow. Everyone behind the counter seemed to know everyone coming in, several tables were occupied by lone seniors watching the cars drive down Flatbush, other tables were filled with families, a Vivaldi cello concerto played overhead and flat screens were tuned to muted CNN. I sat with my coffee at a high table and chatted with a 90-year-old regular from Czechoslovakia with a dramatic biography.
- Marine Park Salt Marsh Nature Center:** The center presides over 530 acres of marshland and offers access to trails and great views.
- Mill Basin:** Kings Plaza is a commercial attraction and a terminus for several bus lines. Unlike other malls, here you can test drive a new boat.
- The Fringe:** Jamaica Bay was once fringed with ponds, inlets, bays and creeks many of which were filled in or channeled. Each body of water, no matter how small, had a name: Cornell Creek, Barbadoes Creek, Thurstons Creek, Long Neck Creek, Spring Creek, Nortons Creek, Bergen Basin, Gerritsen Creek, Mudd Creek, Second Creek, Cedar Creek, Hog Point Creek, Bull Ditch, Paerdegat Basin, Fresh Creek, Cedar Creek, Hog Point Creek, Mill Creek, Shell Bank Creek, Strome Kill and Ryder Pond, to name a few.
- Ashlandia:** The neighborhoods and landmasses along coastal Brooklyn owe their existence to ash. Coal from Pennsylvania heated every home and fired the factory furnaces of industrial Brooklyn but all of that ash and incinerated household refuse had to go somewhere. Most of it was carted down Flatbush, fired again and spread out over marshland until the land was "reclaimed" and deemed suitable for building.
- Short Cut to the Bay:** Flatbush Avenue is straight and somewhat unforgiving in this last stretch. If you are tired of streetscapes and want to continue along the coast, then follow the abandoned sidewalk along the off ramp of the Belt Parkway. It disappears into undergrowth but continue along the parkway and as you approach Mill Basin Bridge look for a footpath leading to the shore. You can take this down under the bridge and then follow the coast for amazing views of Jamaica Bay with eventual access to hiking trails and paths of Floyd Bennett Field.
- The Coast:** If you see a horseshoe crab on its back with its spear in the air, it might be alive and in need of a little help turning over. The coastline is passable at low and middle tide, but at high tide the mudflats will force you onto the trails.
- Tarmac:** One problem with walking from Dumbo to Barren Island is that you could spend a whole day just walking around under here. If you did not stray from Flatbush and avoided the shortcuts to the coast you absolutely must stray out onto the open tarmacs of Floyd Bennett Field. No place else in New York City has bigger sky. The fields are now protected grassland and many of the service roads that connect the perimeters are slowly dissolving into nature. There might be a car or two but otherwise you will have a four-lane highway to yourself. On the horizon you might see a grove of white pine trees, which are a worthwhile stop on a walking tour.
- Dead Horse Bay:** On the opposite side of Flatbush Avenue across from the old airplane hangers is the start of Dead Horse Bay. The landscape has recently tumbled its way to Internet fame as New York City's Trash Beach. Even if you are not one to stuff your pockets with the fragments of yesteryear, it is an important place to visit. Seeing the edge of the coast helps one comprehend what exactly is underfoot. Several quiet trails wander through the dune landscape of phragmites and twisted wild cherry all on top of ash and fill.
- The Bus Stops Here:** The Q35 runs along Flatbush from Brooklyn College to Jacob Riis Park and Fort Tilden in the Rockaways. You might be the only one to use this bus stop today so linger in plain sight to prevent the bus from skipping the stop.
- Horse Power:** On the shoreline near the Marine Parkway Gil Hodges Memorial Bridge are the remains of wooden piers covered in tar. Not far from this point, according to old maps, was "The Factory for the Disposal of Dead Animals," which likely gave the landscape its morbid name.
- The End/Beginning:** Flatbush ends and begins at Marine Parkway Gil Hodges Memorial Bridge. You can walk under the bridge and approach the water's edge to officially stand on the southernmost point of Flatbush. The bridge is pedestrian friendly and offers a straight shot to Fort Tilden and Jacob Riis Park. If you began your walk with a view of the Manhattan skyline, there can be no greater contrast and reward than the vast open Atlantic Ocean.

Why People are Crazy to Come to Flatbush

- BECAUSE it is the most healthy spot on earth to live.
- BECAUSE it is the most beautiful spot on earth to live.
- BECAUSE we are drinking the purest water that comes out of the earth.
- BECAUSE we are compelled to use this pure water for bathing.
- BECAUSE when our subways are completed we are 15 to 20 minutes from the great NEW YORK business centre for \$5. car fare.
- BECAUSE when our subways are completed we are 15 to 20 minutes from the great SURF BATHING for \$5. car fare.
- BECAUSE no suburb has so many lovely people as FLATBUSH.
- BECAUSE property is cheaper to-day in FLATBUSH than any other suburb out of NEW YORK, considering what you get.
- BECAUSE we have absolutely no competition from any other suburb to the GREAT NEW YORK BUSINESS CENTRE.
- BECAUSE if you buy a home or an investment in FLATBUSH, and for any reason you do not want it, you can sell it always at a profit.
- BECAUSE if you have cash to pay for a home or investment you can get GREAT BARGAINS in FLATBUSH.
- BECAUSE if you can make a small cash payment down, you can pay balance same as paying rent.

N. B.—We have the finest properties that are for sale in Flatbush. If you are interested in buying a home or an investment in Flatbush, call or write us, giving us full particulars of what you want. If we have not what you want, we will get it, and get it the way you want it.

TELEPHONE No. 1594 FLATBUSH

Star & Crescent Realty, 1905

Walking Flatbush

(or Crossing Brooklyn, Bay to Bay)

(Front) June, Flatbush Avenue & Walking Flatbush (Back), Matthew Jensen, 2014

The photograph on the front is a collection of found objects and plants collected along Flatbush Avenue: curly dock, common mullein, ragweed, broomsedge, couch grass, linaria, sycamore, and carrageen.

