

Allen Ginsberg in the East Village: A Self-Guided Walking Tour

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This tour is offered in conjunction with the exhibition *Beat Memories: The Photographs of Allen Ginsberg*, on view at the Grey Art Gallery, New York University, 100 Washington Square East, from January 15 to April 6, 2013.

After growing up in Paterson, New Jersey, Allen Ginsberg began his freshman year at Columbia University in Morningside Heights in fall 1943. There he met many of the Beats who would remain his lifelong friends, including Jack Kerouac, William S. Burroughs, Lucien Carr, Neil Cassady, and Gregory Corso, among others. After graduating from Columbia and some traveling, Ginsberg moved downtown to an area that is now called the East Village (but until the mid-1960s was considered part of the Lower East Side). This walking tour explores the area he called home for over forty years.

The tour begins in Greenwich Village and moves east, featuring sites that Ginsberg frequented with his friends in the Beat circle. The tour is designed either to be taken all at once or split into two parts, with numbers 1–18 covering Greenwich Village and the St. Marks area, and numbers 19–29 exploring the East Village and Alphabet City. Depending on your walking speed, we estimate that the entire tour will take two-and-a-half to three hours. While exploring these iconic New York City locales, we encourage you to stop and enjoy the scenery and perhaps have a bite to eat.

Please note that while store and restaurant names were current at the time of publication (January 2013), it's possible that some properties will have changed hands (and names) by the time you take this tour.

1) Washington Square Park

A beloved landmark of Greenwich Village and a major hub for New York University, Washington Square Park was once frequented by Beat artists, writers, and musicians. Allen Ginsberg gave poetry readings here, and he references the park in his best-known poem, "Howl."

Exit the park south of the fountain at the intersection of Washington Square South and Thompson Street. Walk on the west side of Thompson Street for two blocks to Bleecker Street, then cross the street. The next destination is near the southwest corner of Thompson and Bleecker, past the CVS.

2) Mills House, 160 Bleecker Street

This is the site of a former flophouse where Ginsberg lived in 1951 at the cost of \$2.00 per night. Established as a hostel for “poor gentlemen” in 1896, the building originally had 1,500 small rooms. Though it has since been converted into an apartment building, the name “Mills House” is still visible above the front door.

Continue walking west on Bleecker Street for about a block and a half until you reach MacDougal Street. Cross MacDougal Street, then cross Bleecker Street to reach the northwest corner of MacDougal and Bleecker. Walk north on MacDougal to reach the next destination.

3) Former San Remo, 93 MacDougal (now La Pasta Bistro Grill)

This is the site of the former San Remo, a popular bohemian hangout for many of the Beat generation (nothing remains of the original building). Also among those who frequented it were Stanley Gould, Anton Rosenberg, Gore Vidal, John Cage, Merce Cunningham, Miles Davis, Frank O’Hara, Jackson Pollock, and Tennessee Williams. Carl Solomon brought Ginsberg to meet Philip Lamantia at the San Remo in 1948. Ginsberg also met Dylan Thomas here, and tried to impress the older poet with his own work.

Ginsberg referred to the San Remo as the “center of Kerouac’s N.Y. social life.” Kerouac often got drunk at the bar, and he was kicked out or beaten up outside the premises several times. The Remo inspired the bar “The Mask” in Kerouac’s *The Subterraneans*. Though the novel takes place in San Francisco, most of its locations are based on places in New York City. The novel’s title is derived from a term Ginsberg coined to describe “the alienated, the disaffected, and the bohemians who hung out in places” like the Remo.

Turn around and cross MacDougal Street at the crosswalk at the MacDougal/Bleecker intersection. Now that you are on the east side of MacDougal, walk north again to the next destination.

4) Former Kettle of Fish, 114 MacDougal Street

This location, which was formerly Kettle of Fish, was a very popular, hip bar frequented by the Beats. Kerouac was a regular here, and other patrons included Ginsberg, Gregory Corso, Bob Dylan, Edie Sedgwick, and Andy Warhol. A famous photograph of Kerouac casually leaning outside Kettle of Fish with his then-girlfriend Joyce Johnson was used in a 1993 ad for Gap khakis. In the ad, Johnson is brushed out, replaced by the headline “Kerouac wore Khakis.”

Continue walking north on MacDougal for a few steps to reach the next destination.

5) Former Gas Light Café, 116 McDougal Street

Originally a gay bar, this spot became a Beat hangout when owner John Mitchell converted it into a café. The Gas Light was the first café to offer poetry readings in the Village, featuring readers such as Ginsberg, Ray Bremser, Gregory Corso, Diane di Prima, Lawrence Ferlinghetti, LeRoi Jones, Jack Kerouac, Jack Micheline, and Peter Orlovsky. Mike Wallace's television interviews with the Beats were filmed on location at this well-known site on May 15, 1960.

Continue walking north on MacDougal until you reach Minetta Lane. This street will intersect on your left (it is not a through street) and you will be able to cross MacDougal. Cross at Minetta Lane so that you are once again on the west side of MacDougal Street. The next destination is at the southwest corner of Minetta Lane and MacDougal Street.

6) Minetta Tavern, 113 MacDougal Street

Minetta Tavern has played host to many famous writers over the years. During Prohibition it served as a speakeasy for Ernest Hemingway and John Dos Passos, in 1932 *Reader's Digest* was founded there, and starting in the 1950s it was a hangout for Ginsberg, Lucien Carr, and several of their friends. William S. Burroughs often bought dinner here for Ginsberg, Carr, Kerouac, and others, and Ginsberg and Carr remembered writing graffiti on the bathroom walls. It was also the site of a 1951 brawl between Gregory Corso and another patron over Marisol Escobar, whom Corso was dating at the time.

Cross Minetta Lane to reach the next destination at the northwest corner of Minetta Lane and MacDougal Street.

7) Café Wha?, 115 MacDougal Street

In the early 1960s, Café Wha? was the site of Bob Dylan's first New York performance. Joan Rivers, Lenny Bruce, Bill Cosby, Jimi Hendricks, Woody Allen, and many others began their careers at Café Wha?, which was sold in 1968 and renamed before switching back to its original name in the late 1980s. The venue is still a popular Greenwich Village music spot.

Continue walking north on MacDougal Street toward West Third Street for a few steps to reach the next destination.

8) Café Reggio, 121 MacDougal Street

Café Reggio is one of very few remaining bohemian coffeehouses in the Village. Open since 1927, the café has been frequented by many celebrities, featured in films, and visited by tourists seeking an authentic Greenwich Village coffeehouse experience.

Turn left at the corner of West Third Street and MacDougal Street. Walk west on West Third Street toward Sixth Avenue. Cross Sixth Avenue and turn left. Walk south on Sixth Avenue toward Carmine Street. The next destination is on Sixth Avenue between West Third Street and Carmine Street.

9) Former Fugazzi's Bar and Grill, 305 Sixth Ave (now LensCrafters)

Unfortunately, nothing remains of Fugazzi's Bar and Grill, which Kerouac used as a hangout for the characters in his novel *The Subterraneans*. The bar also makes an appearance in Ginsberg's epic poem *Howl*, which mentions people "Who sank all night in submarine light of Bickfords floated out and sat through the stale beer afternoon in desolate Fugazzi's, listening to the crack of doom on the hydrogen jukebox."

Turn around and walk north on Sixth Avenue toward West Third Street. Continue walking to the intersection of Sixth Avenue and West Fourth Street. Cross Sixth Avenue and continue walking east on West Fourth Street (on the south side of the street) to reach the next destination.

10) Former Pony Stable Inn, 150 West Fourth Street (now Washington Square Diner)

The former Pony Stable Inn, now Washington Square Diner, was a lesbian bar where Ginsberg and Gregory Corso first met around 1950. Corso showed some of his poems to Ginsberg, who found them impressive.

Turn around and walk west on West Fourth Street to Sixth Avenue. Cross Sixth Avenue and walk north (toward Washington Place) until you reach the pedestrian island between West Eighth Street and West Ninth Street.

11) Pedestrian island between West Eighth Street and West Ninth Street at Sixth Avenue

Ginsberg was famously photographed here, wearing a sign that read "Pot is a reality trip" at a marijuana legalization rally (photo not in Grey exhibition).

Cross Sixth Avenue and walk toward West Eighth Street. Cross West Eighth Street and walk on its south side toward Washington Square West. The next destination is on the southeast corner of Washington Square West and West Eighth Street.

12) Former Eighth Street Books, 32 West Eighth Street

The former Eighth Street Books was originally located here at the southeast corner of Eighth Street and MacDougal, before moving to No. 17 across the street. Opened by Ted and Eli Wilentz in 1947, the local bookshop was frequented for decades by Ginsberg and the Beats. The Wilentz brothers were publishers as well as booksellers, establishing Corinth Books and publishing poetry by Kerouac, Ginsberg, Gary Snyder, and others. After returning from his travels in India, Ginsberg stayed briefly with Ted Wilentz above the store. Ginsberg first met Bob Dylan here in 1964. At the time of this tour's creation, this building was vacant and unmarked.

Continue walking east on West Eighth Street to University Place. Turn left on University Place, crossing West Eighth Street, and continue walking north past West Eleventh Street. The next destination is on University Place between West Eleventh and West Twelfth Street.

13) Former Cedar Street Tavern, 82 University Place

The tavern at this location, which opened in 1964, was closed in 2006 to make way for today's luxury high-rise apartment building. From 1945 to 1963, the Cedar Street Tavern stood at 24 University Place, where it served as a hot spot for writers and artists. Among its patrons were Ginsberg, John Ashbery, Gregory Corso, LeRoi Jones, Jack Kerouac, Willem de Kooning, Franz Kline, Al Leslie, Jackson Pollock, Larry Rivers, Mark Rothko, and David Smith. Although many favored the Cedar's relaxed atmosphere, several artists managed to run into trouble during their visits. Jackson Pollock was banned from the Cedar for a month after kicking in its bathroom door, and Kerouac was barred after urinating into an ashtray.

Turn around and walk south on University Place to East Tenth Street. Cross East Tenth Street, then cross University Place. Walk east on East Tenth Street toward Broadway. Continue walking east on East Tenth Street until you reach Second Avenue, then turn left. The next destination is on Second Avenue between Ninth and Tenth Streets.

14) Former Café Le Metro, 149 Second Avenue (now The 13th Step Bar and Grill)

Known as Saint Marks, this area marks the transition from Greenwich Village into the East Village. Café Le Metro, which is no longer extant, was a popular site for literary readings. It was at the center of controversy in 1964, when it was issued a summons for hosting a reading that the city considered "unlicensed entertainment." Ginsberg and many other members of the poetry community who used this space and other coffeehouses for readings fought the requirement for cabaret permits and won. Others who read or sang here include Julian Beck, Bob Dylan, Lawrence Ferlinghetti, Pete Orlovsky, John Wieners, and Diane di Prima.

Continue walking south on Second Avenue (toward East Ninth Street) until you reach Saint Marks Place. Turn left on Saint Marks Place and walk west until you reach the next destination (between Second and Third Avenues).

15) Former The Dom, 23 Saint Marks Place (now Grand Sichuan Restaurant)

This site was formerly home to The Dom, a very popular Beat nightclub. In 1966, Andy Warhol and Paul Morrissey performed here with The Velvet Underground for the first time. This group, among others, performed here with light shows. The club's name changed to The Electric Circus, which closed after a small bomb injured several people there in March 1970.

Turn around and walk east on Saint Marks Place until you reach Second Avenue. Cross Saint Marks Place; the next destination is on the southwest corner of Saint Marks Place and Second Avenue.

16) Gem Spa, 131 Second Avenue

Gem Spa, still in its original location, sold newspapers and magazines to many in the area—including Ginsberg, who references it in his poem “Rain-Wet Asphalt Heat, Garbage Curbed Cans Overflowing.” Over time, it has attained the status of an East Village icon.

Continue walking south on Second Avenue until you reach East Seventh Street. Cross East Seventh Street; the next destination is on the southwest corner of East Seventh Street and Second Avenue.

17) Former Kiev Restaurant, 117 Second Avenue

Ginsberg frequented what was once Kiev Restaurant with friends, including Philip Glass and Robert Frank. He references it in his 1986 poem “Hard Labor.”

Continue walking south on Second Avenue for four blocks until you reach East Third Street. Cross East Third Street, then cross Second Avenue. Walk west on East Third Street (on the south side of the street) for one block until you reach First Avenue. Turn right and walk a few steps to the next destination.

18) Bill Keck/Norman Mailer's apartment, 41 First Avenue

Bill Keck and Norman Mailer once lived in this apartment building. Kerouac and Ginsberg stayed at Bill Keck's apartment here, which overlooked a cemetery referenced in “Howl.” Here Ginsberg tried peyote for the first time, given to him by Keck.

You have now completed the first half of the tour. The second half explores the East Village and Alphabet City. At this point, you may either continue or stop for the day and come back another time.

Continue walking south on First Avenue until you reach East Second Street. Cross First Avenue and walk east on East Second Street (on the north side of the street) for a block and a half past Avenue A to the next destination.

19) 170 East Second Street

Ginsberg lived in this apartment building from 1958 to 1961 with Peter Orlovsky, his lifelong partner. Ginsberg's celebrated poem *Kaddish*, which he dedicated to his mother Naomi after her death, may have been written in this building, which was located close to the first place she lived in New York after emigrating from Russia. Ginsberg and Orlovsky paid \$60 per month for their four rooms. Herbert Huncke, Bob Kaufman, and Elise Cowen also lived in the building.

Continue walking east on East Second Street for a block and a half until you reach Avenue C. Cross Avenue C and turn left. Walk north on Avenue C for three blocks until you reach East Fifth Street. Turn right at East Fifth Street to arrive at your destination.

20) 704 East Fifth Street

Ginsberg and Orlovsky lived here in apartment #5A from 1964 to 1965 after returning from their trip to India, where Ginsberg had sought spiritual guidance and met with many holy men. They paid \$35 per month for three rooms with a view of the Wall Street skyline. Gregory Corso and Julius Orlovsky (Peter's brother) also lived in the building for a time. In this apartment, Ginsberg wrote the screenplay version of *Kaddish* with Robert Frank and took his last photographs of Kerouac.

Turn around and walk west to Avenue C. Cross Avenue C and turn right, crossing East Fifth Street. Walk north two blocks to East Seventh Street and turn left. Walk half a block west on East Seventh Street to arrive at the next destination.

21) 206 East Seventh Street

From 1952 to 1953, Ginsberg lived with William S. Burroughs on the third floor of this building. Burroughs was infatuated with Ginsberg, and they were lovers for a time. After Ginsberg broke things off, Burroughs moved to Tangier, where he remained for the next fifteen years. Ginsberg took some of his best-known photographs of the Beats in this apartment, on the building's roof, and on the fire escape. After living here, Ginsberg traveled through Mexico and moved to San Francisco (where he wrote "Howl"), then traveled to Morocco and around Europe before settling in Paris (where he stayed for some time). During his stay in San Francisco, he met Peter Orlovsky, a young artist's model. They became partners for life and traveled together before moving back to New York.

Continue walking west on East Seventh Street for a block and a half until you reach Avenue A. This corner is the next destination.

22) Leshko’s Restaurant, Seventh Street and Avenue A

Leshko’s Restaurant, no longer extant, was frequented by Ginsberg, who described it as “cheap” and “popular” and lived down the street.

Cross East Seventh Street and walk north to the next intersection, Avenue A and Saint Marks Place, the next destination.

23) Avenue A and Saint Marks Place

It was at this intersection that Ginsberg photographed “the first shopping cart street prophet I’d directly noticed.” Ginsberg and his friends spent time walking around this neighborhood, especially in 1952–53 when he lived nearby.

Turn around, this is Tompkins Square Park. Explore the park.

24) Tompkins Square Park

Tompkins Square Park was a popular hangout for the Beats. Ginsberg came here often with friends, and the park was the site of social and political events, such as the 1988 Tompkins Square riots, which Ginsberg witnessed. The well-known photograph of Kerouac posing in front of the statue of Congressman Samuel Cox was taken on East Seventh Street after a visit to Ginsberg’s nearby apartment—Ginsberg captioned it: “Jack Kerouac wandering along East Seventh Street after visiting Burroughs at our pad, passing statue of Congressman Samuel ‘Sunset’ Cox, ‘The Letter Carrier’s Friend’ in Tompkins Square toward corner of Avenue A, Lower East Side. He’s making a Dostoevsky mad-face or Russian basso be-bop Om, then involved with *The Subterraneans*, just walking around the neighborhood, pencils and notebook in the wool shirt-pocket, Manhattan Fall 1953.” Tompkins Square Park is now the site of the Howl Festival—a yearly event, named for Ginsberg’s epic poem, that celebrates local artists and writers.

Exit the park and walk to the corner of the park at Avenue B and East Tenth Street (the park’s northeast corner). Cross Avenue B and East Tenth Street to walk east on East Tenth Street for half a block to reach the next destination.

25) Former Peace Eye Bookstore, 383 East Tenth Street

Opened by Ed Sanders in 1964, Peace Eye Bookstore was a second home to the Beats. It was frequented by poets, musicians, and activists. Sanders recalled: “The bookstore became pretty famous. It was the stopping off point for all visiting librarians and professors because I had a lot of well-known writers hanging out there—William Burroughs, Allen Ginsberg.”¹ The shop not only played host to writers but also sold “literary curiosities,” including pubic hair from sixteen poets, Ginsberg’s cold-cream jars, and hairs from his beard. The shop was raided by the police on January 2, 1966, under the pretense of responding to a burglary. Sanders was charged with selling lewd and obscene prints and literature, and although the case was dismissed, the confiscated items were never returned, and he was effectively forced out of business.

Continue walking east on East Tenth Street past Avenue C (Loisaida Avenue) until you arrive at the next destination (just before Avenue D).

26) 408 East Tenth Street

Peter Orlovsky found this apartment after his and Ginsberg’s home at 704 East Fifth Street was condemned. They lived here from 1965 to 1975, during which time Ginsberg began receiving increased international attention for his poetry and political activism—protesting the Vietnam War, fighting censorship, and advocating for the liberalization of drug laws. He wrote many poems in their apartment here, #4C, including *Mugging*, which referenced an incident in which Ginsberg was set upon by neighborhood kids who took his money and watch but left his valuable manuscripts.

Turn around and walk back, moving west on East Tenth Street until you reach Avenue C. Cross Avenue C, then turn right and walk to East Eleventh Street. Walk two blocks west on East Eleventh Street until you reach Avenue A. Cross East Eleventh Street to reach the next destination, at the northeast corner of Avenue A and Eleventh Street.

27) Paradise Alley, northeast corner of Avenue A and Eleventh Street

Kerouac’s girlfriend Alene Lee lived in the building that once stood on this now-vacant lot. She served as the model for Mardou Fox in Kerouac’s *The Subterraneans*. He referred to Lee’s building with a courtyard as “Heavenly Lane.”

Cross Avenue A and turn right, walking north on Avenue A toward East Twelfth Street. Cross East Twelfth St and turn left. Walk half a block west on East Twelfth Street to arrive at the destination.

¹ Daniel Maurer, “The Day: Chuck Schumer on Avenue C, and 13 Other Morning Reads,” *The Local: East Village* (blog produced by the NYU Arthur L. Carter Journalism Institute in collaboration with the *New York Times*) May 7, 2012, <http://eastvillage.thelocal.nytimes.com/2012/05/07/the-day-chuck-schumer-on-avenue-c-and-13-other-morning-reads/>.

28) 437 East Twelfth Street

Ginsberg lived here from 1975 to 1996, owning three apartments in the building: one to work in, one to live in, and one to sublet to friends and family. He wrote many poems here over his twenty year stay, including “In My Kitchen In New York” and “The Charnel Ground.” Ginsberg’s partner Peter Orlovsky kept the place until 2009; one year later it was put on the market, with Ginsberg’s former ownership touted as a selling point. Opposite this apartment stands the Roman Catholic Church of Mary Help of Christians (now closed), which Ginsberg references in many poems including “Love Returned” and “Fourth Floor, Dawn, Up All Night Writing Letters.”

Continue walking west on East Twelfth Street to First Avenue. Turn right on First Avenue and walk to East Fourth Street. Turn right on East Fourth Street to arrive at the next destination.

29) 404 East Fourteenth Street

This was Ginsberg’s last apartment in the East Village, where he lived from 1996 until his death in 1997. He had just finished unpacking his last box when he found out he had liver cancer. Ginsberg died in his own bed here a week later, with friends and family close by.

You have reached the end of the tour.

For exploring other locations steeped in Beat history, we highly recommend Bill Morgan’s book *The Beat Generation in New York: A Walking Tour of Jack Kerouac’s City* (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1997), upon which we relied heavily in compiling this tour. In addition to highlighting other Beat sites in Greenwich Village and the East Village, Morgan ventures uptown to Chelsea, Times Square, Rockefeller Center, and Ginsberg’s alma mater, Columbia University, as well as to places in the Bronx, Queens, and Yonkers.