

New York: Broadway »



Broadway on a budget

On a recent New York trip, Tara Wells tries to nab last-minute tickets to some of the hottest Broadway shows

Stuffed into a 12-block strip lies the heart of an oversized cultural influence. It's the all-singing, all-dancing Broadway. Technically a street running New York City's length, over time "Broadway" has come to refer to the 41 shows being performed nearly every night and day. Add Off Broadway performances and the list expands to 69 musicals, plays, magic shows and more.

With choice like that, the sensible thing is to book a show before leaving home. But if it's too late—or there's even a whisper of a last-minute bargain—be ready to dive deep.

More than 14 million people catch a Broadway show each year, pushing the average capacity for each production to more than 90% full. That number tells bargain-hunters two things. First, producers know it's smarter to sell a discounted ticket than to not sell a full-priced seat. Second, there aren't many last-minute seats available. It's like waiting for the Boxing Day sales only to discover they've sold out of your size.

That's the level of risk I was living for on a recent New York visit... although it wasn't meant to be like that. I had tried for sensibly purchased advance tickets to *Hamilton*. The decade-old musical is still one of the most popular Broadway shows alongside *Wicked* and *The Lion King*. Unfortunately, an original cast member is reprising his role for a limited run at exactly the same time I'm there. Tickets are snaffled up. My



only hope to be in the room where it happens is via last-minute sales. This is my desperate attempt.

There's an app for that

Scalpers don't cut it any more. Ain't no one buying a dodgy ticket to be turned away at the door. So how are people getting rid of tickets they can no longer use? And how can I get my hands on one?

Enter, the Theatr app; a community marketplace for buying and selling last-minute Broadway tickets. Sellers can't sell for much

more than they purchased. They also don't receive the buyer's money until after the show, allowing time for a shady sale to be reported.

Tickets are sometimes listed within half an hour of showtime so it's worth staying close by. No need to dress up fancy on the off-chance of a win—people often head straight to a show after a day's sightseeing.

Demand is high and palmed-off tickets can sell within a few minutes of listing. I set filters for my travel dates, preferred show, maximum price I'm prepared to pay (nosebleed section, please) and number of required tickets. Still, no luck for *Hamilton*.

TKTS please

The most established last-minute ticket seller has prime location but no vowels. The Times Square TKTS booth has been selling heavily discounted same-day performances (and next-day matinees) for five decades.

I pause my *Hamilton* aspirations to settle for any Broadway show. Checking online first, the TKTS booth is selling tomorrow's matinee of 2024 Tony-awarded best musical, *The Outsiders*. The attendant offers me the best available seats at a hefty discount but the exchange rate still hurts. I ask instead for the cheapest. Next day, I'm clapping madly as the final curtain falls, not least for the price. Our two seats should have cost

New York: Broadway »



From p19

US\$450 but we nabbed them for US\$172 (\$300), saving 60%. This price includes a TKTS service charge helping support other not-for-profit theatre programmes.

Hashtag not all shows

The TKTS booth doesn't work as magically as Glinda's *Wicked* wand. Not every performance is available. Long-running musicals are more likely to have discounted seats; limited-run plays less likely (expect to wait for *Godot*). Mondays are a day of rest on Broadway — no shows, no matter the price.

Wait for it

I'm still aiming to see *Hamilton* in the greatest city in the world but don't have a spare month's rent to drop on three hours of entertainment. Tickets start from US\$127 but only the US\$1645 seats (\$2900) are available during my trip dates. Entering the *Hamilton* lottery via the official app could win me US\$10 seats. Drawn weekly, winners must buy their cheap tickets within two hours before the offer is passed to someone else. Remarkably similar to other lotteries, I don't win. Wishful thinking drives me towards the standing-room only line on the sidewalk. I'm in last place. Those with better strategy have arrived in the early afternoon. When doors open, ticketed patrons pour past security to their seats. A pause. Eventually, an usher takes a couple inside from the front of our line. We're sweating with anticipation, despite the cold. Three more are allowed in. Queue barriers are being packed away but still we wait. The usher reappears. "That's all folks. Try again tomorrow." For everyone else, the show must go on.

The writer travelled at her own expense.

Where to buy tickets

[Broadway.com](https://broadway.com) is an official ticket seller for advance buys.
Download the Theatr app, theatr-app.com
TKTS booths are located in Times Square and the Lincoln Centre, tdf.com
Enter the *Hamilton* lottery via the official app, hamiltonmusical.com
Search "standing room only" on playbill.com for current shows accepting standing-room.

Inside the theatre to see *The Outsiders*; left, Tara Wells waiting for standing-room only tickets for *Hamilton* — better luck next time!
Photos / Tara Wells

