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A mother-daughter getaway to New York reignited my childlike wonder for the city

As I'd grown older, the Big Apple had lost its magic – until I saw it through my 10-year-old's eyes

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Karl Colmans with his daughter Siena

When my [gender reveal balloon](#) popped for baby number three, my then-seven-year-old daughter, Siena, was a little disappointed to be splattered with blue paint. With one bogey-flicking, wedgie-inflicting younger brother already, for months she had been dreaming of a little sister to dress up and influence. While my five-year-old son Luca was elated – a partner in crime for life – she was not.

“Can I get a lock on my door?” was her only comment.

I assured her that once baby Gabriel was born, being the only daughter and the eldest would have its perks (no little sisters pinching your clothes; solo shopping trips with mummy) – and that one day, we’d have a proper trip away, just the two of us.

This year, as her 10th birthday approached, it finally felt like the right time to deliver on my promise. I agonised over where to take her – and then all of a sudden, the answer was clear.



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After growing jaded with New York City, Kari hoped visiting with her daughter would help reconnect her with the City's wonder. Credit: M Swiet Productions/Moment RF

I visited [New York](#) several times while I was growing up, and though I've been back many times since as an adult – for work and to see family – I've never forgotten the wonder and exhilaration of my first pre-teen family holidays there. When I was young, it was one of my favourite cities – all bright lights and buzz; dazzling Broadway shows, and trips to Abercrombie & Fitch (my parents sinking lower and lower into the changing room armchairs as I emerged in one age-inappropriate outfit after another). But as I'd grown older, this wonder had given way to a jaded weariness of its noise, traffic and general schmutz.

So we'd go to the Big Apple, just the two of us, I decided – and perhaps, with her by my side, I'd see it through her eyes and rediscover the city which had once captivated me.

A few days before her birthday, I picked her up early from school – flutters palpable, all suddenly very real – and off we went, to the airport and onto the plane, birthday badge proudly on display, “start spreading the news...” on loop in our heads.

I'd booked us a hotel in [Manhattan](#), but first we made a weekend pitstop to see family in nearby Westchester, a beautiful, leafy hamlet not so dissimilar to our own suburban nook just outside London. We devoured avocado and feta on toast at local brunch spot Bluestone Lane with her cousins, got matching ear piercings at trendy piercing parlour Rowan, then hit the fabulous, shiny Westchester mall to tick off all the thrilling-sounding chain stores she'd heard about on TV (her verdict? Target makes Primark look glamorous).



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And then the big day was upon us – her 10th birthday, and her introduction to Manhattan. Her aunt had gone all out to make it matter, providing ice-cream cake to accompany present unwrapping at dawn (ah, jet-lag), before we all bundled up and hopped on the train to Grand Central Station.

We began with a stroll down to [SoHo](#) – my Nineties film references going right over her head – where we headed for The Sloomoo Institute, an experiential slime pop-up and kids’ “museum” that’s been all over TikTok of late.

We happily squigged and squelched our way around, creating our own scented, dyed, charm-filled concoctions (blue fluffy salt-water taffy for her, lilac espresso for me) and topped it all off with a Nickelodeon-level birthday slime dunk. Getting covered in goo with her cousins, in front of a chanting crowd, was her stand-out moment of the day.



Kari and Siena stayed at The Mark, an Upper East Side hotel

Next we checked into Upper East Side institution, The Mark – the same hotel I used to stay at when I’d visited as a child. I’d wondered whether it would live up to my recollections, but was thrilled to see it had only improved with age. I gleefully forced her to take a photo in the iconic monochrome marble foyer – recreating an old, cherished snap of my sister and I as children – before we headed upstairs and collapsed into our enormous bed, devouring room-service cheeseburgers in our dressing gowns.

We snuggled up and fell asleep watching *Moana*, an old favourite we both thought she’d outgrown, and I reminded her that there was a time when she would wear nothing but a Disney grass skirt and flower hair clip, no matter the weather or occasion.



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The next two days were spent exploring. An [impending Nor'easter cyclone](#) heading for the East Coast wiped out any plans for Skyline walks or Statue City Cruises (much to Siena's relief), so instead we sheltered from the wind and rain in Sephora and Brandy Melville, hunkering down for hours at the famous Ellen's Stardust Diner, where all-singing, all-dancing waiters deliver your soda and fries with a side of theatreland cabaret – pure, unadulterated fun. She even humoured me with a visit to the American Girl doll emporium – though I fear we'd missed the boat on that one.



The famous Ellen's Stardust Diner, fit with singing and dancing waiters, provided respite from wind and rain. Credit: Kumar Srisikandan / Alamy

And while we both loved every minute of mooching around Midtown, sipping overpriced lattes, and slurping delicious Noodlelove ramen, the best part was the opportunity to simply spend time together without the everyday distractions of home – reading on the bed side-by-side, floating around in the enormous bathtub, or getting crafty with the bespoke colouring book and stickers she was given by the hotel. I realised – as I watched her developing a taste for \$100 steaks at The Mark's upmarket Caviar Kaspia (which she declared “better than the street vendor's corn dogs”) – how grown up she was becoming, and how lucky we were to have this time together.

And though I battled a smidgen of mum guilt at leaving the boys behind with Dad (though all three were pleased as punch with a week of McDonald's and Top Golf), my New York adventure with Siena is a trip neither of us will ever forget. Our weekend of uninterrupted mother-daughter time was nothing short of magic – and the enchantment of seeing New York again through her eyes has reignited the wonder in mine.

Essentials

[The Mark Hotel](#) has doubles from £816, room only. [British Airways](#) flies from London Heathrow to New York City from £436 return.

