

Arrivals

A recent poll found that even in these times, almost half of young America wants to move to New York. On the following pages we spoke to 160 people who recently followed that dream—and 30 who achieved it.

BY ADAM
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My first memories of New York were of murder, mayhem, killer clowns, and subway vampires. I'd never been to New York—I was just a little kid at the time—but that's how the city existed in my mind. I'd read Spider-Man comics, I'd seen posters for *The Warriors* and *Death Wish*, and I'd heard firsthand stories from my older half-sister, who actually lived in New York. She's the one who told me about the subway vampires. ¶ An aspiring comic-book artist, R. Crumb disciple, and *Rocky Horror Picture Show* fanatic, my older half-sister, with her western-Pennsylvania hometown and wild flame-colored hair, was an inevitable New Yorker. She moved here in 1981, on the day of her 21st birthday, and she still lives in the East Village today. In the mid-eighties, when I was 15 and living in Toronto, a friend of hers wrote a horror novel about vampires in the New York subway and, in between her tales of junkies in Tompkins Square Park or her VW bug getting broken into (again), she gave me a copy of that novel for Christmas. I read the whole thing in one night, then lay awake with the lights on, freaked out and bewildered, wondering: Who in their right mind would ever want to move to such a place? ¶ Twenty years later, I answered that question by moving to New York myself. ¶ It's been a long time since anyone's had to justify a decision to move to New York. In the decade from 1970 to 1980—roughly, the hellhole years—the city's population shrank by 800,000, but from 1990 to 2008, the city grew by a million people.

OVERLEAF: A gaggle of some of the newest New Yorkers, fresh off the bus.

According to a 2007 American Community Survey, just over half of current New Yorkers—50.5 percent to be exact—moved here either from another country or another state. In fact, there's a very good chance that, if you're reading this, you're one of those people, too.

Lately, though, the idea of up and moving to New York has started to seem almost as borderline-insane as it did back in the subway-vampire era. As you may have heard, the past year has not been kind to the city: New York's lost 85,000 jobs (and counting); we face a whopping budget deficit (\$1.5 billion, give or take); two of our magnet industries—Wall Street and the media—are reeling, and judging from the empty storefronts that pockmark the streets, kraft-paper brown is the hot new color for spring.

Yet despite the Great Recession—or, in some cases, because of it—people are coming. They pack their bags, sell their furniture, jam their cars full of everything else, and move to New York. And for each one who comes, many more are still dreaming of getting on a plane or strapping a mattress atop the family's old station wagon. When a recent Pew Research poll asked Americans about different cities and whether or not they'd like to live there, 45 percent of the people under 35 said they'd like to live in New York. So if you're already here, roughly half of young America would happily switch places with you right now.

But we didn't need a poll to tell us this. Because we've talked to these young people, the ones who just crossed the Hudson, or the Atlantic. We put out a call to recent arrivals—people who've moved here in the last six months, in the teeth of the recession—through our nymag.com website, and Craigslist, and that old standby, word-of-mouth. Then we invited these new arrivals to get together for a giant group photo, where we plied them with pizza, Rolling Rock, and James Brown, as well as the chance to meet a bunch of other people who, like

them, had only recently moved here. The atmosphere was, as you might expect, celebratory—the photo shoot basically doubled as a Welcome to New York mixer—and we imagine it won't be the last these arrivals see of each other during their time in the city. (It may not have been the last some saw of each other that day.)

We also asked them a question. Why in the world did you decide to move here right now? Some of their reasons were practical and predictable: They came for jobs or trailed after love. ("I followed an awesome redhead," said one man.) Others were more esoteric, yet still familiar. One guy, a 24-year-old who moved from France last December, said, "I had already traveled in Manhattan through the movies, and I just wanted to see that in reality." (When we asked which movies, in particular, inspired him, he said *American Gangster*.) One guy, Brian Jones, offered simply, "Back in high school, while my friends had posters of Michael Jordan or Pamela Anderson over their bed, I had one of downtown Manhattan." Now he's traded that poster for a

window, through which he can see the Manhattan skyline from his apartment in Greenpoint.

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OR THE most part, our arrivals offered reasons that were not radically surprising, but that were optimistic, heartening, and endearingly dreamy. No one, for example, said he'd moved here to take advantage of a depressed rental market, but many offered some variation on "I came here to live out my dream." Marc Devine, a 38-year-old jazz pianist, followed a kind of personal Taj Mahal pilgrimage: He'd been living in Austin, and the club he played at shut down, so he sold all his stuff and moved to Harlem, where he now lives one block away from Minton's, one of the most important jazz clubs in the world. Others admitted they'd come because, believe it or not, they hope the job prospects will be better in New York than they were back home. (If you think it's bad here, try Florida.) In fact, if anything, the severity of the recession served not to anchor these people to the spot, but rather shake them loose—stripping away the last excuses that might have stalled them from moving in the past. (When you get laid off from your job, or get dumped by your boyfriend, New York is the best revenge.) And nearly all of our arrivals share the same irrational, blind bravado that spurs someone to relocate to the most expensive city in the country in the middle of the worst recession in a century. You know, the same kind of irrational, blind bravado that may have once spurred you to move here yourself.

Kit Schultz, for example, is 28 and just arrived from Columbus, Ohio. In some ways, her story could have been told anytime in the last 50 years, and in other ways, it's very typical of right now. She lost her job as a nanny late last year and found her prospects were dim. Before Christmas, she went out for drinks with some old college friends who are living in Brooklyn, and they invited her to come out and stay with them. So she packed a van, headed east, and arrived in New York on New Year's Eve. *A new year, a new life*, she thought. Now she says, "I am having a great time here, but it's also very hard. I've never been this poor in my life. I don't exactly know what tomorrow's stories will be or even how I will pay my cell-phone bill. But I am confident this city will continue to open up for me in ways that I cannot even imagine, and I look forward and forward."

That seems like a pretty good motto, not only for our brand-new arrivals but for the slightly beleaguered city to which they've arrived. So to inspire Kit and all the other newly minted, forward-looking New Yorkers—and, frankly, all the rest of us, too—we asked several more-seasoned citizens to tell us what their arrival in the city was like, whether that happened 76 years ago (David Dinkins) or last fall (James Franco). Diane Von Furstenberg came by boat with a suitcase full of stencils, then got invited to lots and lots of parties. Andy Samberg lay on his couch, shooting at mice with a water gun. Richie Rich met Madonna on his very first day here. Maggie Gyllenhaal hid from a man on PCP. Padma Lakshmi lost her vegetarianism to a series of street-cart vendors. And everyone, in one way or another, fell in love—with men, women, hot dogs, drugs, even the subway (vampires be damned), and, of course, with New York, a city you never just move to. Because you always remember the day you arrive.

PHOTOGRAPH BY JORDI ROSEN

The recession has served not to anchor people but to shake them loose, stripping away their last excuses for not moving here.