



The Main Hall at Washington, DC's historic Union Station.

John Burfitt in the USA

The train so easy, why would you fly

From Washington, DC to New York in just over three hours

WHEN IT COMES TO THE CHOICE between plane and train for shorter travelling trips, there's no competition for me – you'll always find me heading to the railway station.

From a purely practical point, it can often make more sense in terms of time and cost. So it was an easy choice on a trip from Washington, DC to New York City to take the Northeast Regional Amtrak train – downtown to downtown in just under 3½ hours. It would have taken about the same total time if I flew – and the taxi fare alone to the airport would have cost more than the train ticket!

WHAT'S MOST FASCINATING IS SEEING SMALLTOWN AMERICA IN THE MANY VILLAGES ALONG THE WAY

THE WHITE PALACE

Washington, DC's Union Station on Massachusetts Ave is a reminder of the grand old days of travel – it's a majestic white palace with ornate arched ceiling and shiny marble floors that dates back to 1908. The station's Main Hall is well-named and, in a city of imposing buildings, this is up there with the best. You line up in the main concourse to wait for your train, and about 15 minutes before departure, the gates open and there's a rush downstairs to the platform.

ALL ABOARD

Even though the ticket says Reserved seat, the conductor tells me to grab any spot. I walk through the train to a front carriage which is less crowded and settle in with a window seat to take in the 362km of scenery between the national capital and the Big Apple. The seat is comfy, with a 58cm width and 100cm pitch. There's room to get comfortable, plenty of space in the racks for

baggage and when you need to stretch your legs, there's a cafe kiosk to take a stroll to.

ALONG THE WAY

Through the windows, an unrelenting visual feast unfurls along the journey, through the cities of Baltimore, Philadelphia and centres of Wilmington and Trenton. Some of the best sights are of Chesapeake Bay, the Schuylkill and Delaware rivers and the wetlands of the Hackensack River, but what's most fascinating is seeing smalltown America in the many villages along the way. In total, there are 15 stops between DC and NYC.

THE END IN SIGHT

It's as the train reaches the flat plains of New Jersey that everyone's head in the carriage looks to the right to take in views of the iconic Manhattan skyline. There's a flurry of activity as it's 20 minutes to New York Penn Station.

While Washington's Union Station started the trip in a grand fashion, and the trip provided a kaleidoscope of sights, the destination at Penn Station is purely functional with the platforms leading up to a maze of arcades and exits. But once up on street level at 34th St, New York is every way you turn – and that's an amazing view from every angle.

The writer travelled as a guest of Amtrak, NYC & Company, Destination DC and Brand USA

NORTHEAST REGIONAL runs about every hour. A one-way fare bought in advance starts from \$US54 (about \$82) economy, and \$US109 business. In comparison, a taxi from Manhattan to JFK Airport costs about \$94. amtrak.com

STAYING THERE New York's Hotel Beacon has rooms overlooking Broadway in one direction and Central Park the other. Check website for special rates. beaconhotel.com

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