

# An Englishman in New York

Following on our light-hearted, fun-in-the-sun theme for this July issue, **David Spiller**, chief executive of Guy Carpenter and Company, shares his experiences of trans-Atlantic transition: 'Sting sang about it — I'm living it'



**David Spiller is chief executive of Guy Carpenter.**

I joined Guy Carpenter, a US-based firm, in early 2006. Since then, I have spent much of my time on the road meeting new colleagues while planning to move to New York from London. I have travelled to New York many times on business and on holiday, but visiting New York is not at all like planning to live there.

While New York has much in common with London and other major cities of the world, in many ways it is quite unique. Brits and Yanks may share a common language, but one could be quite confused by certain English-sounding phrases and places — for example, Greenwich Village, Soho and South Hampton.

However, I've found that the language has taken some major twists and turns on its way to the streets

of Manhattan. So although I recognised the name Soho from the London area of that name, in New York City I found that the same name, spelled SoHo, is short for "South of Houston" Street. Houston, the street, is pronounced "How-ston" in New York, but "Hew-ston" in Texas. Tell a cab driver in New York to take you to "Hew-ston" and you will have a very large fare by the time you arrive!

Speaking of New York cab drivers, they are justifiably infamous the world over. They are known for their rude behaviour, heavy foot on the accelerator and lack of regard for pedestrians. I am quite comfortable with this, as there are many similarities with London drivers. I view them as customer-focused entrepreneurs. And I've actually yet to be harmed in a New York City taxi. I will say, however, that I'd rather be *in* one than *in front of* one as it screeches up and down crowded Manhattan streets!

In my search for a new home, the price of real estate is a familiar shock. Even the names given to some of the communities I've researched remind me of the UK. There is a Greenwich in Connecticut, which is beautiful; Connecticut is in the region known as "New" England, just north of "New" York City, all pleasant reminders of England. I have been advised that South Hampton on Long Island is a marvellous spot for a family holiday. I must say, however, that I am suspicious given the similarities in the name with Britain's own

Southampton — I trust the similarities end there.

New York prides itself on its

restaurants, and that pride is well placed — from five-star restaurants to the best pizza on the planet — but when I need a taste of home cooking, I can still find a traditional English pub in New York's West Side that reminds me of rowdier times in the West End of London.

New York has a wealth of professional sports to enjoy, from basketball and hockey to golf and tennis. I love Wimbledon, but there is something compelling about watching proper tennis players compete simultaneously with their opponent, the New York crowd and the planes zooming in and out of LaGuardia airport.

My children were surprised to see the body

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armor required to play football in America, and that it is played in the snow. They will happily trade American football for 'soccer' and will no doubt discover that sport is truly an international way to meet new friends. I, however, cannot find a cricket match anywhere in the entire

US. But if I pine for a sport that takes a long time to play, I can always go to a baseball game where a 16 extra-inning game can seem never-ending, particularly when they stop serving your favorite beverage after the seventh inning. I admit I have not chosen to pull for either of the professional New York baseball teams as yet for fear of offending the fans of the other. The rivalry in New York appears a bit safer than, say, supporting the wrong football club in the UK at times, but still...

Culturally, Broadway compares well with Piccadilly. In fact, several plays are running simultaneously in both cities. Many television programmes have been imported and changed. I am proud of the British impact on US culture, and vice-versa, though I admit that hip-hop and rap are not my cup of tea — I can't help but feel it is America's revenge for the "British Invasion" of the 1960s. Still, my children seem to like it. I find myself gravitating more toward Rod Stewart and his versions of US standards. I suppose if Rod can uncover American music that suits him, so can I.

All in all, I don't suspect I'll be losing my British accent anytime soon, and I'll continue to pull for Britain during the Ryder Cup. Still, when it comes to settling down, I'm sure I'll eventually find a way to feel right at home here in "Noo Yawk".

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