New York: The Ultimate Skyscraper Laboratory

A timeline of skyscraper completions in New York uncannily resembles the boom and bust cycles of the United States in the 20th and early 21st centuries. The most active year was 1931, when the final excesses of the Roaring ’20s were thrown skywards and frozen in concrete and steel. The scarcity of building materials clearly had their effects in the flat World War II period. The rise of multinational corporations may explain the relative surge in skyscraper construction in the 1970s, even as New York City itself endured its darkest financial hours. Then come the wild “Wall Street” years of the 1980s, followed by the lagged effect of the early 1990s slump. The singular event of 9/11 did not have nearly the dampening effect on skyscraper construction, compared to the financial crisis of 2008-9. The current boom demonstrates New York’s persistence as a magnet for capital, and it’s standing as the ultimate skyscraper laboratory over time.

Timeline of Tall Building Completions over 100 Meters in the New York City Region

Bars represent the total number of buildings completed each year. Dots represent a specific building and its height and function.

Note: chart begins in 1908 with the completion of the Singer Building, the world’s tallest building at the time

Office Building with 325 buildings

Residential Building with 378 buildings

Mixed-use Building with 63 buildings

Hotel Building with 52 buildings

Other Building with 8 buildings

1908: Singer Building
1909: Metropolitan Life Tower
1910: Woolworth Building
1914–1918: WWI
1914: Municipal Building
1920–1929: “Roaring 20s
1929–1939: Great depression
1931: Most active year to date, 32 buildings completed
1933: Comcast Building
1936: Thurgood Marshall U.S. Courthouse
1938: MetLife Building
1939–1945: WWII
1940: Municipal Building
1950: Trump Building
1959: The Chrysler Building (world’s first super-tall)
1960: JPMorganChase Tower
1963: MetLife Building
1969: Citigroup Center
1973–1974: Oil Crisis
1977: Citigroup Center
1990: JPMorganChase Tower
1990s – 65 buildings
2000: 18 buildings
2005: 26 buildings
2010: 8 buildings
2011: 8 buildings
2014: 8 buildings
2015: 8 buildings
2016: 8 buildings
2017: 8 buildings

Total 100 m+ buildings: 826

3. Graphics and statistics only include buildings compete or under construction, at least 150 m tall.
4. All references to the “New York City region” includes all five boroughs – Brooklyn, Queens, Manhattan, the Bronx, and Staten Island, as well as Jersey City.

Footnotes

Prior to the completion of One57 in 2014, there were only four supertalls in New York City and none along 57th Street. Currently, there are 4 supertalls planned for completion by 2024 along 57th street alone.

Although it was the world’s tallest building for 41 years, from 1931–1972, there are now seven buildings in New York City that are complete, under construction, or proposed that will surpass the Empire State Building in height.

Along with the 64-story tower, One Vanderbilt Place will include improvements to Grand Central Terminal, including extra capacity for 65,000 passengers and a commuter waiting room.

Skyline elevation of 57th Street, looking North. All supertalls are highlighted.
Tall Building Locations in New York City

The recent skyscraper boom has been characterized by an increase in luxury residential construction, an increase in slenderness, aspect ratios, and substantial construction in new locations away from Lower and Midtown Manhattan, in areas once considered “fringe,” such as Brooklyn, Queens, and Jersey City. The research below examines the function and location of tall buildings over 100 meters, recently completed or under construction, in the New York City region, with supertall buildings represented by larger dots.

New York City Region Totals
- Total Population: 8,421,602
- Total Land Area: 522.1 km²
- Population Density: 10,243.5 people/km²

Building Totals:
- Total 100 m+ buildings: 826
- Tallest building height: 413.1 m (One World Trade Center)
- Average height of 100 m+ buildings: 145.7 m

Key:
- Height: 300m+
- Function: Office, Residential, Mixed-Use, Hotel

Footnotes:
1. The focus on buildings over 100 meters is driven by the need to ensure accuracy of data, rather than suggesting that this is the threshold for a tall building.
2. All tall building data is from the CTBUH Skyscraper Center as of August 2015.
3. Graphics and statistics only include buildings complete or under construction at the time of research (August 2015).
4. All references to the New York City region includes all five boroughs – Brooklyn, Queens, Manhattan, the Bronx, and Staten Island, as well as Jersey City.
5. All population data and land mass data is taken from the United States Census Bureau, 2010 Census.