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How to Find a Rent-Stabilized Apartment in New York City

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NEW YORK CITY — [The hunt for rent-stabilized apartments](#) is not for the faint of heart — but there are deals for those willing to search for them, researchers and advocates said.

The highly sought-after apartments — which offer perks including a [guaranteed right to renew your lease and limits on how much a landlord can hike up the rent each year](#) — can be found in nearly every corner of the city, from Hunts Point to the Rockaways, experts said.

"Don't believe the myth that it's a tiny portion of the market and that in order to have one you [have to be] lucky or elite," said Sam Stein, rent regulation campaign coordinator at [Tenants & Neighbors](#).

In 2011, researchers counted more than 1 million rent-regulated apartments in New York City — thousands

fewer than 30 years earlier, but still enough to comprise nearly half of all rental units in the city, according to the [Furman Center for Real Estate & Urban Policy](#).

A determined renter who is willing to do some research and is flexible on location should have no trouble snapping up a rent-stabilized unit, Stein said.

Part of the trick of finding a rent-stabilized apartment is targeting your search to the neighborhoods that are filled with them.

In Washington Heights and Inwood, nearly 87 percent of all rentals are rent-regulated — a total of 56,173 units in all, more than in any other part of the city, the Furman Center noted.

Other neighborhoods with more than 80 percent rent-regulated units include Highbridge/South Concourse and Kingsbridge Heights/Moshulu in The Bronx, and southern Crown Heights in Brooklyn.

But rent-protected apartments are also common even in some of the priciest parts of Manhattan, with more than 35,000 on the Upper East Side and nearly 27,000 in Chelsea and Midtown, the Furman Center said.

The only neighborhoods in the city with too few rent-stabilized apartments to land in the Furman Center's survey were the majority of areas on Staten Island and in sections of Queens like Bayside and Queens Village that have more houses than high-rises.

Rent-stabilized apartments usually go for less than \$2,500 per month and are located in buildings with six units or more that were constructed before 1974.

Stein suggests checking out [neighborhoods with a high density of rent-stabilized apartments](#) and looking for units that meet those criteria.

An easy place to get started is on [Craigslist](#), the popular online classified site, which features [hundreds of apartments](#) that are advertised as rent-stabilized.

Even if the ads don't say the apartment is rent-stabilized, it is often possible to tell based on the age of the building and the price of the rent, Stein said. He lives in a rent-stabilized apartment in Elmhurst that he found on Craigslist.

Those who want to do a bit more research can download [a list of all the buildings in the city with rent-stabilized units](#), compiled by the city's [Rent Guidelines Board](#).

The list is sorted by zip code, allowing renters to target the specific area they want to live and then contact the managers of the listed buildings to see if there are any apartments available.

However, just because a building is on the list does not mean that all of the units in the building are rent-stabilized, Stein said. Some units may be market rate if the rent rose above \$2,500, allowing the landlord to deregulate them.

The city also [maintains lists of upcoming lotteries for rent-stabilized apartments and openings in large affordable housing complexes](#).

Many new luxury buildings that received tax breaks — like [Frank Gehry's new skyscraper at 8 Spruce St.](#) — are required to offer rent-stabilized apartments, though the rents often start at market rate, making them unaffordable for many New Yorkers.

The next step after finding a rent-stabilized apartment is making sure the broker or building manager provides a rent-stabilized lease, experts said. The lease should include clear language stating that the apartment is rent-stabilized, and the landlord should give the option of signing a one- or two-year lease, said George Fernandez, founder of the [Inwood Advocates Coalition for Tenants' Rights](#).

Fernandez advises that before new renters sign a lease, they ought to search for any outstanding violations the building has with the [Department of Buildings](#) and the [Department of Housing Preservation and Development](#). Common problems are complaints about heat and hot water or structural issues with the building.

"Do your research and get educated," Fernandez said. "Don't just jump on the first apartment you go see," Fernandez said.

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Another thing to watch out for is an apartment that has been illegally removed from rent-stabilization, said Bennett Baumer, tenant organizer at [Housing Conservation Coordinators](#) in Hell's Kitchen.

Landlords of rent-stabilized buildings are allowed to bump up the rent when tenants move out, and they can increase the rent even more if they do major renovations, Baumer said.

Often, landlords claim more extensive renovations than they actually did, in an attempt to illegally remove an apartment from rent-stabilization, Baumer said. In that case, tenants may be able to take action, he added.

"A lot of landlords will say they've done renovations, but the tenants can see they were minor," Baumer said. "If you think you're being overcharged, you can file a complaint [with the state] or go to court."

A good first step is to [get the apartment's rental history from the state's Division of Housing and Community Renewal](#) and look for any suspicious increases, Baumer said.

Any tenant that was illegally overcharged for rent is eligible for triple damages, which means a tenant bilked out of \$5,000 could receive a payment of \$15,000 after filing a complaint, Baumer explained.

Still, the hunt for a rent-stabilized unit is a challenging one — and will only get worse, Stein said.


There are far more people who want and need affordable housing than are able to find it, he said.

And landlords can remove apartments from rent stabilization when the rent gets high enough and old tenants move out.

"There's a large number of rent-regulated apartments, but it doesn't match the demand," Stein said. "There's very little new rent-regulated housing being built."

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Ivette Davila-Richards · Associate Producer at CBS News

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