

NYC'S WATERFRONT PARKS

Does Central Park make you think: “Been there. Done that?” Then head to the waterfront. Even New Yorkers are just discovering some of these new green getaways. And with those helpful city bike lanes, doing a tour from one to the next is a great full-day outing, with one-way bike rentals available at key spots along the route. If biking isn't your thing just hit the park to walk, kayak, watch stunning sunsets, or try to catch a free event from spring to fall.

The Hudson River Park

This five-mile greenway park hugs the Hudson River from 59th Street to Battery Park. Although the park has a unified design, it's divided into seven distinct sections that reflect the different neighborhood just across the Westside Highway. The star attraction here—especially for kids—is the Intrepid Sea, Air, and Space Museum at Pier 86 across from 46th Street. A few blocks south, The Circle Line and World Yacht offer boat tours of the Hudson. At piers 96 and 40, The Downtown Boat House (downtownboathouse.org) offers free kayaking. A classic summer experience is the free outdoor movies with popcorn are shown on Wednesday and Friday nights at Pier 54.

Chelsea Piers, the mammoth sports center between piers 59 and 61 offers bowling, a driving range, ice skating, even trapeze classes. At Pier 66 Boathouse, you can take a two-hour \$60 introductory sailing course with Hudson River Community Sailing (hudsonsailing.org) The park also sponsors free tours and classes including free fishing. (Yes, fishing in NYC.) For a calendar of events and activities, go to hudsonriverpark.org.

Getting Here: With its location across the Westside Highway, the Hudson River Park isn't exactly easy to get to. Crosstown buses at 14th, 23rd, and 42nd will get you close, but you'll still have to hike across the highway. At Pier 84 across from 44th Street, you can rent a bike at Bike and Roll with an option of dropping it off at any of its locations in Central Park, Riverside Park, or Battery Park.

Governors Island

A new addition to the city's parks scene, this little island feels like a small New England town just 800 yards from NYC's financial district. Tourists love the unparalleled views of the Harbor and Lower Manhattan, and locals love the out-of-the-city experience. The 172-acre park, built in part from landfill from subway excavations, was a base for the US Army and Coast Guard for almost two centuries. Until 2003, it was off limits to the public, which could be why the 19th-century homes here are so well-preserved.

Anytime from May to October (when the park is open), you'll find numerous weekend programs including art showings, concerts, and family programs. Bikers take a bike over on the ferry or rent one on the island. It's ideal biking conditions with five miles of car-free lanes (although you will have to watch for people-movers!). For more information including updated ferry schedules and a calendar of activities, go to govisland.org.

Getting Here: Governors Island is accessible by a pleasant seven-minute ferry ride that leaves from a dock at 10 South Street, next to the Staten Island Ferry. (Don't expect to get a seat for the trip!) By Subway: 1 to South Ferry Station; 4, 5 to Bowling Green; or R, W to Whitehall St. Station. By bus: M1 (weekdays only), M6, M9, and M15.

The High Line

Another new attraction, the High Line was once an elevated railroad track that serviced the long ago factories along the lower west side. Neglected and forgotten, it went through a dramatic conversion into to a highly acclaimed park that integrates landscaping with witty rail-inspired design. Vegetation here includes 210 species of plants, trees, and shrubs intended to reflect the wild plants that flourished for decades after the tracks were abandoned in 1980.

The park—30 feet above street level—is open between Gansevoort Street in the Meatpacking District to 20th Street with another section extending up to 30th street expected to open in 2010. The viaduct runs alongside and sometimes through buildings including Chelsea Market. Wonderful sweeping views of the Hudson River and an extended sightline of the Meatpacking district are the highlights, but some visitors also report getting an eyeful of uninhibited couples at the nearby Standard Hotel. On Sundays at 2 PM during warm-weather months, the park offers guided tours. For more information and a calendar, go to thehighline.org or call 212/500-6035.

Getting Here: The High Line is accessible at Gansevoort, 14th, 16th, 18th, and 20th streets with elevator access at 14th and 16th. Sorry, the elevated route is strictly for pedestrians, so park that bike and walk. The High Line is two block west of the subway station at 14th Street and 8th Avenue which is served by the L/A/C/E. You can also take the C/E to 23rd street and walk two blocks west. The 1/2/3 stops at 14th Street and 7th Avenue, three blocks away. By Bus: M11 to Washington Street, M11 to 9th Avenue, M14 to 9th Avenue, M23 to 10th Avenue, M34 to 10th Avenue.

Battery Park City

Built over the past 30 years on landfill jutting out into the Hudson River, Battery Park City is a high-rise residential neighborhood split in two by the World Financial Center and its marina. Although the Hudson River Park promenade borders BPC alongside the Westside Highway, locals prefer the route that follows the river's edge through BPC—it's the more scenic path heading to the World Trade Center site from Battery Park. In South Battery Park City, you'll pass by the Museum of Jewish Heritage, 36 Battery Place. Nearby are several reasonably priced outdoor restaurants with stunning views of the Statue of Liberty.

Gigino of Wagner Park (E20 Battery Pl. P212/528-2228) offers Italian cuisine and reservations for the outside patio are a must. Or skip the food in favor of high art, public exhibits are scattered throughout BPC. In Wagner Park, Louise Bourgeois has created "Eyes," two large balls that represent oversized, ahem, body parts. At Vesey Street is the Irish Hunger Memorial by artist Brian Tolle, which includes an Irish cottage dismantled stone by stone and reassembled here. And in Rockefeller Park at Chambers Street, Tom

Otterness has created “The Real World” a popular collection of whimsical—and dark—bronze sculptures, including tiny workers rolling giant pennies.

Getting Here: Subway: South Battery Park: 1, W, R to Rector Place, 4, 5 to Wall Street. North Battery Park: 1, 2, 3, A, C to Chambers Street, E to World Trade Center. Bus: M9, M20, M22.