

EXPLORE THE BRONX

The Bronx Unplugged



Pergola at Wave Hill

When Peter Novak, a business development professional, and his wife Sofia, a physician, are on the hunt for interesting family excursions, they often head to the Bronx from their home in Forest Hills, Queens, with their two daughters, ages 3 and 7. One favorite destination is the Bronx Zoo. "We've been members for years. It's a nice zoo, if you like zoos," said Novak. He happens to love them, after growing up in Hungary, home of the historic Budapest Zoo.

Novak's family is finding that the Bronx keeps pulling them back. With the mayor's office reporting that a record-breaking more than 60 million visitors came to the city in 2016, the Bronx is benefiting from both an overall tourism boom and growing recognition, among residents of the outer boroughs and travelers around the world, that it's a New York City destination worth checking out.

To make the most of the growing interest in the 42-square-mile borough north of Manhattan, local cultural, entertainment and sports organizations have unrolled a full menu of enhanced attractions and events. "There is not going to be a lack of things to do in the borough this summer," said Olga Luz Tirado, executive director of the Bronx Tourism Council. "The institutions are expanding and doing more."

One case in point is the New York Botanical Garden, one of the borough's most popular destinations and a National Historic Landmark. It currently features an outdoor exhibition by the renowned sculptor Dale Chihuly, which will run through Oct. 29. For "Chihuly Nights," the garden is open on specified evenings throughout the summer, and into fall, so that guests can view the illuminated sculptures, as a rotating lineup of performing artists and musicians entertain. In June, the botanical garden will also host its 2nd annual Plein-Air Invitational, where the painter James Gurney and more than 20 other master artists will paint outdoors in various locations throughout the garden. "The botanical garden is becoming a huge outdoor gallery for the arts," said Tirado.

Meanwhile, Yankee Stadium, a perennial summer destination, will be bustling. Many people don't know that in addition to the Yankees, the stadium is also the current home of New York City Football

Club, the city's new Major League Soccer team, which will be playing home matches there throughout the summer. The stadium also has added new amenities such as the Sunrun Kids Clubhouse, a children's play area and several new options for dining and socializing, such as Frank's RedHot Terrace.



Garden Block Party

Those are just some of the many sports and recreation activities in the Bronx. For college sports fans, Draddy Gymnasium at Manhattan College is home to the Manhattan Jaspers Division 1 basketball team, as well as the school's volleyball team. "It's named for the family of Vincent Draddy, one of the school's greatest student athletes and an innovative sportswear manufacturer," said Peter McHugh, director of communications for Manhattan College. "He is partly responsible for the popularity of the Lacoste knit shirt."

And there are also plenty of options for outdoor activities, from canoeing on the Bronx River to hiking in Van Cortlandt Park. Adventurous types will soon be able to try out the new zip line at the Bronx Zoo, slated to open this summer. For tennis buffs, the newly renovated Cary Leeds Tennis Center for Tennis and Learning in Crotona Park offers 22 courts and a 12,000 square foot clubhouse. Another local favorite is the floating public swimming pool in Barretto Point Park, where a repurposed barge offers a unique place to cool off.

A major event in the Bronx this summer will be the SalsaFest in August, which honors the borough's history as the home of musical legends such as Willie Colon and Héctor Lavoe. This year's borough-wide festival will feature talks by current performers, walking tours of historic

neighborhoods—run by the Bronx Music Heritage Center, and live performances at Orchard Beach and the Lehman Center for the Performing Arts. Salsa artists will also perform at Sunset Wednesdays at Wave Hill, the public garden and cultural center recently named the "most loved cultural venue in New York City," by Time Out New York magazine. "It's about the history of the music and the science of the music," said Tirado.

For foodies, the vibrant dining scene in Bronx neighborhoods such as Arthur Avenue and City Island is yet another temptation. Known as the Little Italy of the Bronx, Arthur Avenue is home to a variety of restaurants, bakeries, bread stores, pasta makers, butchers and gourmet delis.

Sam Lazar, an agent at Triplemint Real Estate who grew up in the Bronx and now lives in Manhattan, says she loves restaurants such as Michaelangelo's Little Italy on Arthur Avenue where, thanks to the airy interior, it feels like you are eating outside. "They have fantastic Sangria," she said. And for a quick slice of pizza, Lazar opts for Full Moon Pizzeria on Arthur Avenue. "I love the buffalo chicken slice"; and Pugsley's, on 191st Street, near Fordham University. "If you're a Fordham student, everyone has heard of Pugsley's," she said.

Lazar's favorite spot in the Bronx is the Arthur Avenue Market, an indoor farmer's market. "It's the best hidden gem in all of New York," she said. Lazar, who lived in the Bronx until she began attending Fordham University in 2013, often picked up steaks and other meats at Mike's Deli at Arthur Avenue Market. "They have fantastic little beef pinwheels with cheese in them," she said. "When you buy them and pop them in the oven, you look like a genius chef."

The Bronx Beer Hall, which is located in the market, is another popular destination. "It was an instant hit—people love the beer flights," said Lazar.

The beer hall, which features craft brews from around the state, is just one of several Bronx attractions for beer- and spirits-lovers. Other popular hubs are Bronx Brewery at 136th Street, Chelsea Craft Brewing Company at 463 E. 173rd St., and Gun Hill Tavern at 780 E. 133rd St. The New York Adventure Club, a local urban exploration company, will be hosting a tour on June 3 called, "Savoring the Bronx: Multi-Brewery Tour, Tasting and Games," on which participants will be able to sample local ales and appetizers and play games such as foosball and darts.

Some visitors prefer to stay open to unplanned possibilities when visiting the Bronx. Often, Novak and his family will simply head to City Island after a trip to the zoo and try an eatery they've only just discovered. "We usually pick a restaurant on the water's edge," he said. So far, they haven't gone wrong.