

IMPRESSIVE 2013 VISITOR NUMBERS FOR NEW YORK STATE PARKS



State park visitation figures in New York are being celebrated for yet another year as over 60 million people continue to make trips to the state's beautiful national parks and monuments. Many experts will focus on the economic benefit of these numbers, especially when the regional director of the New York National Park Service emphasises the impact of tourist spending at these sites on the national economy and talks about a return of \$10 for every \$1 invested. While this is encouraging, it is also important to see this increase as a sign of growing interest in these important natural and historical tourist spots and to look at the potential for yet another rise in 2014.

This unexpected visitation figure is the result of some important initiatives and local pride.

Officials at the Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation may have expected a large dip in this generally steady climb in visitor number because many popular sites were closed for a long period as they dealt with the aftermath of Superstorm Sandy, Robert Moses State Park being restricted for nearly six months; however, it seems locals and visitors certainly made the most of these natural facilities while they could because 60.1 million visited in 2013. This is only marginally behind 2012's figure of 60.3 million and it is also reported that an impressive 16.6 million still visited those parks that were badly hit on Long Island. Another interesting development seen in these studies is the record numbers of campers that were staying in the parks overnight: 578,428 camped there in 2012 but in 2013 this rose to 583,016.

This rise in numbers of visitors of New York parks is being largely attributed to the work of Governor Cuomo via the New York Works Initiative. This scheme is using a number of measures to promote and develop state parks as tourist destinations, including a budget of \$170 million for continued improvements and the "I Love My Park Day", where volunteers can connect with their local park through beautification and stewardship projects. These different approaches are vital because these parks are not just important tourism destinations for foreign visitors looking to learn about America through historical monuments, like the Theodore Roosevelt Birthplace National Historic Site or Women's Rights National Historical Park; they are also important sites for locals looking to get away for a weekend or afternoon of peace and schoolchildren on field trips. As a result, the state has to attract all kinds of visitors into their parks and continue to develop them with these different users in mind.

State Parks Commissioner Rose Harvey says that New York is looking forward to seeing returning visitors for "even more fun and exploration in 2014".

Understandably, there are high hope for another rise for the current year. With aims of increasing investment in tourism funding to almost \$60 million, making funding for New York State the third highest nationally, and high profile events being brought to the parks in the future, such as the 2019 PGA Championship in Bethpage State Park, the long term goals of this New York Works Initiative look promising and there is a there is a good chance of more visitors and campers in these state parks in 2014 and beyond.

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