



## Gateway to America

Gateway National Recreation Area spans over 27,000 acres from Sandy Hook in New Jersey to Breezy Point in New York City. It is both the gateway from the Atlantic Ocean into New York Harbor and the entry point to the National Park System for millions of visitors every year. Assembled from city parks, cultural sites, disturbed lands, and varied habitats, Gateway weaves together history, nature, and

recreational opportunities to create an extraordinary national park. Designated in 1972 as one of the first urban national parks, Gateway showcases the importance of open space and quality of life for city residents while preserving habitat for wildlife. Its components tell the American story: places of resistance and resilience, loss and hope. You're invited to help write the next chapter.

**Physical Landscape** New York City marks the southern edge of the Laurentide Ice Sheet, which advanced and retreated over much of North America over the course of 90,000 years. Around 21,000 years ago the retreating glacier scoured the land down to bedrock and created a terminal moraine, a landform marking the furthest extent of a glacier.

The moraine that connected Brooklyn and Staten Island was breached as the weight of a giant meltwater lake, today's New York Harbor, pushed through. This created The Narrows, a gap between the two boroughs where the Verrazzano-Narrows Bridge is now. These geologic processes carved out the landscape of New York City, determining where forts and lighthouses were built, salt marshes formed, and plants and animals thrived.

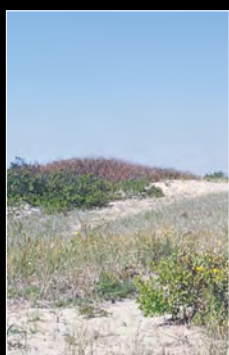
**Dwelling Place of the People** Human connections to this land extend back to time immemorial. The area called Lenape Hoking, or "Dwelling Place of the People" by Munsee and Unami speakers, encompasses all of Gateway and also extends far beyond the borders of today's New York Harbor. It stretches hundreds of miles, including all of New Jersey and parts of Pennsylvania, Delaware, and Maryland. It has been

an important place for commerce, international trade, political negotiations, and settlement throughout history. When Europeans arrived on this continent, it is estimated that as many as 65,000 Lenape people resided in New York City's greater metropolitan area. Gateway commemorates the historical, ongoing, and future relationships between the Lenape people and this land.

Battery Weed at Fort Wadsworth and Verrazzano-Narrows Bridge NPS / Brian Feeney

### A Closer Look at Nature

**Preservation** Gateway protects and preserves thousands of acres of diverse habitats, from Sandy Hook's dunes to Jamaica Bay's salt marshes. In return these areas provide vital services like water filtration, carbon sequestration, and flood protection.



Sand dunes

**Getting Involved** Stewardship is crucial to the future of national parks. Looking for ways to get involved? Rangers, volunteers, and environmental groups reestablish grasslands, maintain gardens and beaches, and much more. See the park website for opportunities.



Grasslands



Prickly pear cactus

**Surprising Plants** Gateway's protected habitats offer many surprises. Holly trees grow next to the ocean. Salt marsh grasses adapt to changing tides. Colorful wildflowers bloom in the warmer months. Even prickly pear cactus is found in the park's sandy soils.



Piping plover



Scarlet tanager

**Birds Galore** Over 330 species of birds—from as far north as the Arctic to the southern tip of South America—have been recorded in the park. Thousands rest and feed here during migrations along the Atlantic Flyway (right). Their numbers make Gateway one of the best birding spots in the Northeast.

**Animals on the Move** Gateway is a migratory hotspot. Bats, butterflies, birds, and fish use its rich ecosystems on annual migrations along the coast. In spring horseshoe crabs return to shallow bays. In fall hawks migrate south to hunt along the dunes. Some animals stay for a season; others for a moment.



Monarch on goldenrod

## Defending the Nation

The United States defended its shores for centuries with a complex system of fortifications. One heavily defended area was New York City, the nation's center for business and finance. The harbor defense system started in lower Manhattan and eventually extended to Sandy Hook, New Jersey. Mainly active in wartime, New York's harbor system defended the region until 1974. Remnants of these harbor defenses can be seen throughout the park.



Fort Wadsworth disappearing rifle, 1907



Fort Hancock, 1942



Fort Hancock Nike missile, ca. 1960



Aviator Jimmy Mattern's Lockheed, 1933



Battery Harris at Fort Tilden



Sandy Hook Lighthouse, 1913

**Fort Wadsworth** Staten Island's Fort Wadsworth, Guardian of the Narrows, protected the entrance to New York Harbor for over 200 years. Because of its strategic location, the fort continually evolved as new technology became available. From Battery Weed, the Civil War-era gun battery, to modern anti-aircraft headquarters through the Cold War, Fort Wadsworth presented a formidable defense. The overlook offers views of the forts and the expansive New York Bay.

**Fort Hancock** The Sandy Hook peninsula has long served as a site of strategic military importance and innovative technological developments. In 1874 the US Army established the nation's first official weapons proving ground here. Fort Hancock, the outermost defense point for New York City, was designated in 1895 to protect New York Harbor from invasion by sea. Over the years the fort's defenses included concrete gun batteries, anti-aircraft emplacements, and advanced Nike air defense missiles.

**Floyd Bennett Field** Boasting strong concrete runways and modern facilities, Floyd Bennett Field opened as New York City's first municipal airport in 1931. In the 1930s the airfield became legendary for its record-breaking flights by aviators like Wiley Post, Howard Hughes, and Jacqueline Cochran, the first female pilot to break the sound barrier. Ownership of the field passed to the US Navy in 1942. It was the busiest military airport in the United States during World War II.

**Fort Tilden** With a prominent view overlooking the approach to New York Harbor, Fort Tilden was an active coastal defense site from World War I until the Vietnam War. It included gun batteries and a Nike missile launch site. The observatory deck atop historic Battery Harris offers spectacular views of Jamaica Bay, New York Harbor, and the Manhattan skyline.

**Sandy Hook** New York City merchants, wanting to guide cargo ships safely into New York Harbor, financed the building of the Sandy Hook Lighthouse. First lit on June 11, 1764, the Sandy Hook Light is the nation's oldest standing lighthouse in operation. The lighthouse originally stood at the end of the peninsula, but centuries of shifting currents have driven sand northward. Today the lighthouse is over a mile and a half from the tip of the peninsula.



# Enjoy Your National Recreation Area

## Jamaica Bay (New York)

The Jamaica Bay Unit of Gateway includes thousands of acres of natural and historic areas, many linked by the Jamaica Bay Greenway, in the boroughs of Brooklyn and Queens.

### BROOKLYN

#### Floyd Bennett Field

Famous aviators used New York City's first municipal airport for record-breaking flights during the pioneering days of aviation. The field became one of the country's most important naval air stations.

**Activities:** Aircraft restoration, archery, biking, birding, camping, education center, exhibits, fishing, gardening, hiking, kayaking, military history, model airplane field, nature study  
**Ryan Visitor Center: 718-338-3799**

#### Canarsie Pier

This historic fishing hotspot welcomes anglers for some of the best fishing on Jamaica Bay and offers opportunities for picnicking and enjoying the sunshine.

**Activities:** Fishing, kayaking, picnicking, playground

#### Shirley Chisholm State Park

Named for the trailblazing, Brooklyn-born, first African American Congresswoman, this new

park rises 130 feet above sea level, occupying some of the highest ground in New York City and offering spectacular panoramic views.

**Activities:** Biking and bicycle library, birding, environmental education, fishing, hiking, picnicking

### QUEENS

#### Jamaica Bay Wildlife Refuge

Over 330 species of birds stop at the refuge on their migratory journey. Many insects, reptiles, mammals, and native plants also call it home.

**Activities:** Birding, hiking, nature-study programs, photography, pollinator garden  
**Refuge Visitor Center: 718-318-4340**

#### Frank M. Charles Memorial Park

This park memorializes a local soldier lost in battle during World War I. Its tree-lined paths offer ample recreational opportunities in the Howard Beach neighborhood of Queens.

**Activities:** Baseball, basketball, bocce, handball, picnicking, playground, tennis, walking track

#### Jacob Riis Park

Called "the People's Beach" and named for an activist and journalist, this area was set aside in the early 1900s to provide outdoor access to working New Yorkers living in crowded conditions.

**Activities:** Basketball, biking, golf, paddle tennis, picnicking, sunbathing, swimming, volleyball

**Caution:** Lifeguards are only on duty from Memorial Day to Labor Day.

#### Fort Tilden

Once an active defense site, this area continues to protect the federally threatened piping plover and other nesting shore birds.

**Activities:** Art exhibits, athletic fields, biking, birding, hiking, fishing, military history, music and theater performances, nature study, picnicking

## Staten Island (New York)

The diversity of the Staten Island Unit reflects a rich cultural and natural history. Park sites extend along the eastern shore of the island and include Fort Wadsworth, Great Kills Park, and Miller Field. Natural habitats include shoreline and dunes, grassy uplands, woodlands, and freshwater wetlands.

#### Fort Wadsworth

Fort Wadsworth is one of the oldest active military sites in the United States. Remnants of military history like Civil War-era gun batteries and 1900s anti-ship batteries are located here.  
**Activities:** Biking, birding, camping, fishing,

hiking, panoramic views of New York City, ranger-led tours of historic fortifications, self-guided tours

**Fort Wadsworth Visitor Center: 718-354-4500**

#### Great Kills Park

The name Great Kills is derived from the Dutch word meaning "many creeks." Though the waterways were later filled, the park includes a series of coastal systems like marshes, dunes, and maritime forest. At the entrance is a multi-use path that ends at Crookes Point.

This peninsula is named after John Crooke, a naturalist and inventor who studied Staten Island's plant and animal life in the 1800s.  
**Activities:** Beaches, biking, boating, fishing, hiking, jogging, nature study, swimming  
**Caution:** Lifeguards are only on duty from Memorial Day to Labor Day.

#### World War Veterans Park at Miller Field

This 187-acre open space offers organized athletics and individual recreational activities. Constructed as a US Army air base in 1921 on land owned by the Vanderbilts, it was named for Captain James Ely Miller, the first American aviator killed in World War I.  
**Activities:** Biking, community gardening, hiking, organized sports, picnicking, playground

## Sandy Hook (New Jersey)

Officially known as the Fort Hancock and Sandy Hook Proving Ground National Historic Landmark, Sandy Hook features six miles of ocean beaches. The unique maritime ecosystem includes salt marshes, dunes, and the largest stand of American holly (*Ilex opaca*) trees found along the Eastern Seaboard.

#### Sandy Hook Lighthouse

The lighthouse has guided ships into New York Harbor since 1764. Check the park website for tour schedule. The former Lighthouse Keepers Quarters, completed in 1894, serves as the park visitor center with a gift shop, lighthouse exhibits, video room, and public restrooms.  
**Sandy Hook Visitor Center: 732-872-5970**

#### Fort Hancock

The fort defended New York Harbor from 1898 until 1974. Visit Officers Row Quarters, History House (a restored officer's house), Parade Ground, Post Museum, Mortar Battery, and Battery Gunnison. Check the park website for tour schedule.

**Activities:** Exhibits and historic sites (seasonal), military history

#### Beaches

Six miles of ocean beaches offer breathtaking views of the New York skyline and habitat for nesting endangered shorebirds.

**Activities:** Beachcombing, birding, fishing, sunbathing, surfing, swimming, windsurfing  
**Caution:** Lifeguards are only on duty from Memorial Day to Labor Day.

#### Multi-Use Path

The path begins at the park entrance and runs along the length of the park to Parking Lot M in Fort Hancock. The 7-mile path provides opportunities for hiking, bicycling, and in-line skating. Bike repair stations are located along the path.

**Activities:** Biking, hiking, skating



Students learn about nature at Sandy Hook.



Friends and families enjoy the beach at Jacob Riis Park.



Historic aircraft at Floyd Bennett Field.



Reenactors parade at Sandy Hook Lighthouse.



Ranger shares kayaking tips at Staten Island.

STUDENTS, AIRCRAFT—NPS; ALL OTHER PHOTOS—AP/WIDE WORLD

## Visit Us

Gateway National Recreation Area has three units: Jamaica Bay and Staten Island in New York and Sandy Hook in New Jersey. Each offers many opportunities to explore nature and history. Check the park website for details.

Because Gateway is within the highly developed New York metro area, many visitors are surprised by the expanse of nature found here. To best enjoy over 27,000 acres of recreational opportunities, plan to immerse yourself in the natural world for a day. Make sure to "know before you go." Dress for the weather, consider sunscreen and insect repellent, and bring water, snacks, and any special equipment you'll need. Certain activities like camping, dog-walking, and swimming are not permitted in some areas.

Before you visit, check the park website and social media for closures and alerts and the schedule of events and guided programs. Be safe and enjoy the park.

#### Transportation

Detailed cycling, driving, mass transit, and ferry directions to park sites are on the park website. For more information see njtransit.com or mta.info or call 511 in New Jersey or New York. If driving an RV, use caution. Only passenger vehicles are allowed on parkways.

#### Accessibility

We strive to make facilities, services, and programs accessible to all. For information go to a visitor center, ask a ranger, call, or check the park website. Service animals are allowed.

#### Camping

Camping is available seasonally at all three Gateway units. For more information visit [www.recreation.gov](http://www.recreation.gov).

#### Leave No Trace

During your visit follow Leave No Trace principles. Remember: Take only pictures, leave only footprints.

#### Park Partners

Gateway partners with many different organizations, including Jamaica Bay-Rockaway Parks Conservancy and The Sandy Hook Foundation, to provide visitors with programs, services, and experiences that enable them to enjoy outdoor recreational opportunities and natural and cultural resources.

#### Safety and Regulations

Remember: Your safety is your responsibility. Ask at a visitor center or check the park website for details about safety, regulations, and permits.

- In natural areas watch out for ticks and poison ivy.
- Do not enter or disturb protected habitat.
- Keep wildlife wild. Don't feed animals.
- Where pets are permitted, they must be leashed and attended.
- Swimming is prohibited on all unguarded beaches.
- Drive carefully. Vehicles, bicycles, and pedestrians share park roads.
- Federal laws protect all natural and cultural features in the park.
- For firearms regulations check the park website.
- Using remotely piloted aircraft like drones is prohibited.

#### Emergencies call 718-354-4700

**More Information**  
Gateway National Recreation Area  
210 New York Ave.  
Staten Island, NY 10305  
[www.nps.gov/gate](http://www.nps.gov/gate)  
718-354-4606

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Use the official NPS App to guide your visit.

Gateway is one of over 400 parks in the National Park System. Learn more at [www.nps.gov](http://www.nps.gov).

**National Park Foundation**  
Join the park community.  
[www.nationalparks.org](http://www.nationalparks.org)

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