



Spring Is the Perfect Season for Day Trips Outside Queens

by Laurel Angrist, Chronicle Correspondent March 31, 2005

New York in the spring is positively kid-friendly, and there's no shortage of fun-filled activities here in Queens to keep young urban explorers entertained. But if you're looking to get out of the city for the day, there's plenty of great places to visit just a short drive away.

To help you plan your escape we've compiled a short list of ideas for fun family adventures just out of town.

Westchester County

Much of Southern Westchester is densely suburban, a maze of towns filled with corporate commuter-types. But along Route 9, near the Hudson River, the county begins to open up. Between the grand old turn-of-the-century estates and quaint historic villages, you'll find more than enough to spark your kids' interests-and imagination. Head straight for Tarrytown and Sleepy Hollow, two townships where timeless legends come alive.

Just off Route 9 in Tarrytown lies Sunnyside, the beautifully restored home of world-renowned author Washington Irving, who penned such classic tales as Rip Van Winkle and The Legend of Sleepy Hollow. Purchased by Irving in 1835, the cottage still holds much of its original 18th-century furniture, including the author's oak writing desk. Sunnyside is open every day except Tuesday, from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. House tours are \$10 for adults, \$6 for children. A grounds-only pass is available for \$4.

A few miles north in Sleepy Hollow is Philipsburg Manor, a colonial milling and farming estate that is now a living history museum. Guides in 18th-century dress discuss colonial life in New York, and the system of slavery that kept the estate running. Midweek, Philipsburg is packed with groups of school kids, so it's best to visit on the weekends if you can. Admission is \$10 for adults, \$6 for children.

Be sure to check out the Old Dutch Church and Cemetery across the street, but beware of the ghost of a headless horseman, Irving's inspiration for his Legend of Sleepy Hollow. Down the block, at the newer Sleepy Hollow Cemetery, is where the writer himself is buried.

Catch Tarrytown's Third Friday festivities on either April 15th or May 20th from 5-9 p.m. to sample local wines and culinary delights, hear about town legends and browse through stalls where local merchants sport their wares.

Also worth visiting are the Donald M. Kendall Sculpture Gardens at 700 Anderson Hill Road in Purchase, on the campus of the State University of New York. Open daily from 9 a.m. to dusk, the gardens are a great spot to let your kids run wild with culture, between works by such sculpture giants as Alexander Calder and George Segal.

If you're up for a totally kid-centered day, head for Rye Playland at Exit 19 off I-95, the oldest theme park in America. The park opened in 1928, and a number of its original rides are still running. Don't skip the magnificent carousel, an ornate art deco construction with 66 painted horses.

Rockland County

Home to two of the Hudson Valley's largest state parks, Bear Mountain and Harriman, Rockland County is the place to go for an endless variety of outdoor sports and adventures. Just 33 miles from the city, these parks combine to offer an overwhelming 200 miles of well-marked trails. Before you set out, be sure to pick up a map at the Palisades Interstate Park Headquarters on Route 9.

Lake Sebago in Harriman State Park is a particularly good spot for picnics, with wide lawns and playfields surrounding its scenic beaches. To get there, take Seven Lakes Drive from Exit 16 off the Palisades Parkway. A few miles beyond is Lake Tiorati, a favorite among boating and fishing enthusiasts.

While considerably more crowded than its neighbor to the south, Bear Mountain State Park is still the place to go for stunning views of the Hudson River and its surrounding highlands. The round-trip hike to the summit takes roughly four hours, which can also be reached via the Perkins Memorial Drive. Bear Mountain is located at the intersection between the Palisades Parkway and Route 9W. Parking is \$6.

Long Island

Spring is a great time to visit the island, before the summer beach-goers grind traffic to a halt. Just next door to Queens, Long Island's Nassau County is chock full of fun family attractions, many of which are easily accessible from Queens via the Long Island Rail Road. For those with more time, there are also many great things to do farther out on the island. For more information on Long Island sights and events, go to www.livb.com.

Once known as the Hempstead Plains, Nassau County is an important focal point in the history of aviation. At the Cradle of Aviation Museum on Charles Lindbergh Boulevard in Garden City, visitors can learn about the many record-setting and historic flights that transpired here, and experience the magic of air travel at the museum's Imax theatre. The museum is open every day except Mondays, and general admission is \$9 for adults, \$8 for children. Additional fees apply for Imax showings.

At the Old Westbury Gardens, you can ramble among 160 acres of perfectly manicured lawns, tree-lined walks and formal English gardens. Said to be one of the finest examples in period landscape design, these sprawling grounds were once owned by American financier John S. Phipps and his wife, Margarita Grace.

General admission to both the gardens and their palatial Charles II-style mansion is \$10 for adults and \$5 for children. Starting April 16th, Old Westbury is open every day except Tuesday, and tours of both the house and gardens are free with admission. Join the students of the Long Island Conservatory on April 17th for an afternoon of Mozart and let resident horticulturist Maura McGoldrick help your kids create hands-on crafts and "garden art" on May 6th from 4-5 p.m. For directions to the gardens and more information on their weekly special events, visit www.oldwestburygardens.org.

Just north of Port Washington, the 216-acre Sands Point Preserve affords hikers an excellent glimpse of the diverse habitats that hug the shoreline of the Long Island Sound. Six well-marked trails lead past the magnificent "Gold Coast" estates once owned by the Guggenheims, and continue on through woodlands, meadows, ponds and beaches.

The preserve is open year-round from 10 a.m.-5 p.m. and a \$2 admission fee is collected on weekends. For information on castle tours, call 516-571-7900.