

Zoos, Nature Centers, and Botanical Gardens

By Alyssa Sparacino



Celebrate the great outdoors with a day trip to one of these seasonally splendid spots.

Suffolk

The Animal Farm Petting Zoo

296 Wading River Road, Manorville
631-878-1785; www.afpz.org
Hours: Open weekdays 10am-5pm;
weekends 10am-6pm. Price: \$13.50;
\$11.50 seniors and children ages
2-16; free children under 2.

At the zoo, see a large selection of rare and unusual birds, monkeys, llamas, reptiles, and other exotic animals. Hold and bottle-feed baby cows, goats, pigs, and lambs. There are also pony rides, turtle train rides, a Super Cow musical puppet show, and Safari Tour Train.

Bayard Cutting Arboretum

440 Montauk Highway, Great River
631-581-1002
www.bayardcuttingarboretum.com
Hours: Tuesday-Sunday 10am-5pm
through October. Price: Free; \$8 per
car for parking on weekends.

Located along the Connetquot River, the arboretum contains more than 690 acres of meadows, centennial oaks, and brightly colored nature walks among rhododendron and swamp cypress. Don't miss the Pinetum—it has one of Long Island's largest collections of fir, spruce, pine, and hemlock. The arboretum is also home to many varieties of bird species.

• For information on classes and programs, visit www.bcans.net.

Bridge Gardens Trust

36 Mitchell Lane, Bridgehampton
631-537-7440
www.gardensoflongisland.com
Hours (April 16 through October):
Saturday and Sunday 2pm-5pm.
Price: \$10; \$20 for groups of four
or more.

Bridge Gardens Trust is five acres

of lush Long Island landscape. Not only are there traditional gardens of seasonal flowers and herbs, but there are also unique garden mazes, a knot garden, and beds of culinary, medicinal, ornamental, textile, and dyeing herbs. Learn how herbs and plants are cultivated and used in kitchens, hospitals, and factories. Walk through the woodland paths, smell the lavender and roses, and view the water garden.

Caleb Smith State Park Preserve

Jericho Turnpike, Smithtown
631-265-1054; www.nysparks.com
Hours: Trails and museum open
8am-4pm Wednesday-Sunday.
Closed Monday and Tuesday.
Price: Free; \$8 parking (Memorial
Day through Labor Day)
Most of Caleb Smith State Park
Preserve's 543 acres are undeveloped, allowing views of its many different habitats, including freshwater wetlands, ponds, streams, fields, and woods. The preserve is a refuge for wildlife and its diverse habitats support a variety of trees, shrubs, wildflowers, and ferns. It offers hiking opportunities and also operates a nature museum with wildlife displays and nature programs for children and adults.

Cold Spring Harbor Fish Hatchery & Aquarium

1660 Route 25A,
Cold Spring Harbor
516-692-6768; www.cshfa.org
Hours: Open 10am-5pm daily,
closed Easter Sunday, Thanksgiving,
and Christmas. Price: \$6; \$4 seniors
and children ages 3-17; free children
under 2.

The nonprofit center is dedicated to educating visitors about the freshwater ecosystems of New York. It has the largest living collection of New York State freshwater reptiles, fish, and amphibians. Tour two aquarium buildings and eight outdoor ponds, or feed the hungry trout. The Catch

and Keep Fishing program is available Friday-Tuesday from 10am-12pm, or 1-3pm for an additional charge.

Long Island Game Farm Wildlife and Children's Zoo

638 Chapman Boulevard, Manorville
631-878-6644

www.longislandgamefarm.com

Hours (May 28-September 5):
Monday-Friday 10am-5pm; Saturday-Sunday 10am-6pm. Price (+ tax): \$17.95; \$15.95 children 3-11 and seniors; free children under 2.

"Please touch" is the motto at Long Island's largest zoo and encounter park. There are hundreds of animals, including an 18-foot giraffe, red kangaroos, kinkajous, cougars, peacocks, and the only lemurs born and bred on Long Island. Pet-able animals include ducks, rabbits, ponies, and turtles. Camp Zoo a week-long day camp in the summer is also available to children ages 4-11.

Sweetbriar Nature Center

62 Eckerkamp Drive, Smithtown
631-979-6344; www.sweetbriarnature.org

Hours: Preserve open 9am-4:30pm daily; butterfly and moth vivarium open 10am-4pm daily (see below). Price: Free; donations accepted. Butterfly House: \$3; \$2 seniors and children under 12.

The center is located on 54 acres, with nature trails going through diverse areas that include wetlands, fields, and forests along the Nissequogue River. It is home to a large rehabilitation aviary, public gardens, working farm, and the Butterfly House (open June 11 through September) that contains more than 20 species of native North American butterflies and moths. The center will also hold a Nature Fair on June 11 with attractions such as a wolf and birds of prey.



Uplands Farm Nature Sanctuary The Nature Conservancy, Long Island Chapter

250 Lawrence Hill Road,
Cold Spring Harbor

631-367-3225; www.nature.org
Hours: Grounds open daily, dawn to dusk. Price: FREE; donations appreciated by mail.

At the sanctuary, you can walk trails through 97 acres of fields; the marked, mostly level trails make this a good place for family friendly hikes. Red maple, black cherry, red cedar, and hickory trees are in the eastern woodlands, while tulip trees, black birch, and maple-leaf viburnum are in the western woodland. The fields and hedgerows provide habitats for a wide variety of animals, including birds, small mammals, and 40 species of butterflies.

Nassau

Garvies Point Museum & Preserve
50 Barry Drive, Glen Cove
516-571-8010

www.garviespointmuseum.com

Hours: Tuesday-Saturday 10am-4pm; closed holidays. Price: \$3; \$2 children ages 5-12; free children under 5 with an adult.

A 62-acre site set along Hempstead Harbor, Garvies Point has permanent exhibits and educational programs about Long Island and New York State geology, and Long Island Native American culture and archaeology. Changing exhibits cover a variety of natural history subjects, including the glacial exhibit, which illustrates and explains the formation of contemporary land features. The Discovery Room, available to children in kindergarten through 3rd grade, is an interactive Native American exhibit, and will begin in June.

Science Museum of Long Island
1526 North Plandome Road,
Plandome; 516-627-9400
www.smlti.org

Program times and prices vary. A science activity center located on the Leeds Pond Preserve, this museum offers hands-on science workshops for children. All programs and workshops are by preregistration only.

Tackapausha Museum and Preserve

Washington Avenue between
Merrick Road and Sunrise Highway,
Seaford; 516-571-7443

www.nassaucountyny.gov

Hours: Wednesday-Saturday
10am-4pm; Sunday 1-4 pm.
Price: \$3; \$2 children ages 5-12;
free children under 5 when accompa-
nied by a parent.

The Tackapausha Preserve is an 84-acre wildlife sanctuary consisting of oak forests, ponds and streams, a variety of small mammals, and more than 170 species of birds. There is a 3,000-square-foot museum located on the preserve that showcases the ecology of Long Island, including the plants and wildlife of different seasons, in addition to animal exhibits and interactive activities for families and children.

Queens

Alley Pond Environmental Center
228-06 Northern Boulevard,
Flushing

718-229-4000; www.alleypond.com
Hours (September-June): Monday-Sunday 9am-4:30pm; (July-August): Monday-Saturday 9am-4:30pm.
Price: Free.

The center is an aquatic and terrestrial habitat and nature preserve that features a learning center and



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Where-To...

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environmental laboratory. Its mission is to educate children and adults in the New York metro area about preservation of open spaces and water, while advocating for sustainability and crucial environment policies and practices. Animal, science, and nature programs are offered at the Center at Alley Pond Park for students in prekindergarten through high school and adults.

- The site also hosts monthly events, including nature walks, teach workshops, and Evenings with the Stars (an astronomy program).

Flushing Meadows Corona Park

Grand Central Parkway,
Van Wyck Expressway

www.nycgovparks.org/parks/fmcp

At 1,255 acres, it's the largest park in Queens, so there's plenty of recreational space. The park also encompasses the Queens Zoo, Queens Museum of Art, Queens Botanical Garden, The New York Hall of Science, Arthur Ashe Stadium (home of the U.S. Open), an aquatic center, carousel, six playgrounds, and two lakes. Spring trees and flowers are in bloom, such as Cornelian cherry tree, forsythia, redbud tree, tulips, and horse chestnut tree, as well as roses and other planted beds in the summer.

Forest Park

Between Jackie Robinson Parkway
and Park Lane South

www.nycgovparks.org/parks/forestpark

Hours: Open daily 6am-1pm, unless otherwise posted. Price: Free.

In this large, multineighborhood park, there is a golf course, multiple playgrounds, and a walking and bike trail that weaves through the entire park. Visitors can also choose to ride a horse from one of two stables to explore on horseback.

Jamaica Bay Wildlife Refuge

Between North Channel Bridge and
Cross Bay Bridge on Cross
Bay Boulevard; 718-318-4340

www.nps.gov/gate

Hours: Visitor Center open 8:30am-5pm daily; park open sunrise to sunset, daily year-round. Price: Free. A 1.75-mile-long loop trail features views of the west pond, Jamaica Bay, and an osprey nest.

Queens Botanical Garden

43-50 Main Street, Flushing
718-886-3800

www.queensbotanical.org

Hours (April-October): Tuesday-Sunday 8am-6pm. Price: \$4; \$3 seniors; \$2 students and children; free children under 3; free November through March.

The Queens Botanical Garden includes the Queens Rose Garden, Green Roof Plant Collection, Fragrance Walk (shrubs, perennials, and bulbs that are especially fragrant during the growing season), Children's Garden, Bee Garden, and other thematic gardens and historic plantings. Visitors can see a variety of different plants in bloom each month.

- The garden regularly hosts programs that demonstrate environmental stewardship, promote sustainability, and celebrate the rich cultural connections between people and plants. Children can get involved by planting vegetables, herbs, and annual flowers in the Children's Garden during QBG's spring, summer, and fall Children's Garden sessions.

- An Arbor Day Festival event will take place on May 1. Check the website's calendar of events for more information.

Queens Zoo

53-51 111th Street, Flushing

718-271-1500; www.queenszoo.com

Hours (April-October): Monday-Friday 10am-5pm, weekends and holidays 10am-5:30pm. Price: \$8; \$6 seniors; \$5 children ages 3-12; free children 2 and under. Parking is free. Besides being home to a wide variety of wildlife—from penguins, to mountain lions to Andean bears—that visitors can view at their leisure, the zoo also offers hands-on learning experiences for kids with an emphasis on wildlife conservation, as well as a walk-through aviary. Young children can also relax and explore in the Discovery Center, which offers projects and special activities along with a library full of animal themed storybooks and games, a microscope and fossils, and a crafts station.

- Watch California sea lions Butch, Phoenix, and Howie flip for fish during their 11:15am, 2pm, and 4pm feeding times at the sea lion pool in the center of the zoo.

Socrates Sculpture Park

Broadway at Vernon Boulevard
718-956-1819

www.socratessculpturepark.org

Hours: 10am to sunset, daily.

Price: Free.

Socrates Sculpture Park is an outdoor park that features large-scale sculptures and hosts weekly workshops for children.