

Title: What drew New Yorkers to the New York State Parks this summer?

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Hypothetical publication: The Palladium-Times

Nothing about the summer of 2020 was normal. Some typical summer activities were prohibited by both state and federal governments to help slow the spread of the coronavirus. State parks were given the greenlight to reopen once they've adapted to the COVID-19 precautionary measures being implemented throughout the state.

At the beginning of the coronavirus pandemic, many New Yorkers needed a safe way to get out of the house and de-stress. On March 16, Gov. Cuomo announced that state parks would be open free of charge, providing a safe outdoor environment during the statewide [PAUSE](#).

New York State Parks saw a giant increase in visitor population this summer, even with the new COVID-19 regulations. During the 2019 season the total New York State Park attendance in the [central region](#) was 4,505,792 visitors, including the state fair.

Through Sept. 30 2019, there were 4,063,377 people who visited the central region parks and historic sites. That includes 1,119,578 people who visited the “mini” park at the New York State Fair. Subtracting state fair attendance, brings attendance through Sept. 30 to 2,943,799 of visitors. Whereas through Sept. 30, 2020, there were 3,610,028 visitors, with no state fair. Comparing 2019 and 2020, attendance has increased by 666,229 people. Data provided by Guy C. Hulbert, Central Region Public Information Coordinator.

Although the current 3,610,028 visitors may seem low in comparison to the total number of visitors last season, this season isn't truly over. Considering there wasn't a state fair this past summer, these last three months will determine how much New Yorkers went to the parks.

Many parks gained popularity this summer through the use of social media. More people than ever were going out and visiting them, so more people posting photos of the places they went. These photos that were posted became free advertisements for the parks, and definitely increased visitor numbers this summer.

"Parks that feature the waterfalls were incredibly popular," said Fred Bonn, Director of Finger Lakes Region State Parks. "They're very scenic, people will post pictures and that's what generates a lot more interest."

With the increase of visitors to the parks, staff worked hard to ensure visitor safety. Kelly Morissette, Park Manager of Selkirk Shore State Park and Sandy Island State Park, provided information on how capacity was kept this summer. Morissette shared that both state parks she manages were at 60% capacity each day, but this was dependent on the beaches. On the beaches, groups had to maintain a 10 foot distance between people. When the beach began to fill up the park staff looked into the shelters that were rented out for the day. During the summertime, people were allowed to have gatherings of 50 people. The staff at Selkirk Shores worked to make sure those 50 people would not be turned away at the gates; they accounted for those 50 people within their capacity of the day.

“It was a challenge, that part of it,” said Morisette. “Nothing I want to look forward to doing again, but if we have to, we know how to do it and we will do it.”

Morisette also spoke about the changes in cabin rentals this summer. This summer, cabin rentals were a bit more spread out than usual. Before COVID-19, there were same day turnovers, now there’s a day or two between rentals. This gap was used to ensure the cabins were given a sufficient cleaning. Historically, cabins were cleaned by three people, but this summer that rule changed to one person so staff members couldn’t contaminate each other. Even then, cabins were sanitized after visitors left, cleaned by staff and sanitized once again.

Whether the park was historic or known for its sights, this season was still seen as a success for most of the state parks. Paul Lear, Historic Site Manager at Fort Ontario State Park, considered this as a successful season, even though most events at the fort had to be cancelled.

“Visitation was strong, it probably wasn’t as high as it was in previous years, but people were much more appreciative than normal,” said, Lear. “It was a different type of clientele, it wasn’t as many out of state visitors, but many New Yorkers were travelling.”

Although the 2020 season isn’t over yet, there is still plenty to say about the power of social media bringing New Yorkers to the state parks this summer. Whether it was a state park, or historic site, New Yorkers were interested in visiting new places during the coronavirus pandemic and parks worked tirelessly to make this a safe experience for the 3,610,028 park visitors.

(780)

Source List:

Fred Bonn- Regional Director of Finger Lake Region State Parks 1-607-387-7041

Kelly Morissette - Park Manager for Selkirk Shores and Sandy Island Beach 1-315-298-5737

Paul Lear - Fort Ontario Historic Site Manager 1-315-343-4711

New York PAUSE information:

<https://coronavirus.health.ny.gov/new-york-state-pause#:~:text=On%20Sunday%2C%20March%2022%2C%20all,assure%20uniform%20safety%20for%20everyone.>

Governor Cuomo not charging an entrance fee:

<https://www.syracuse.com/coronavirus/2020/03/cuomo-briefing-park-fees-waived-news-for-local-government-workers.html>

2020 Population numbers: These numbers were received from Guy C. Hulbert, Central Region

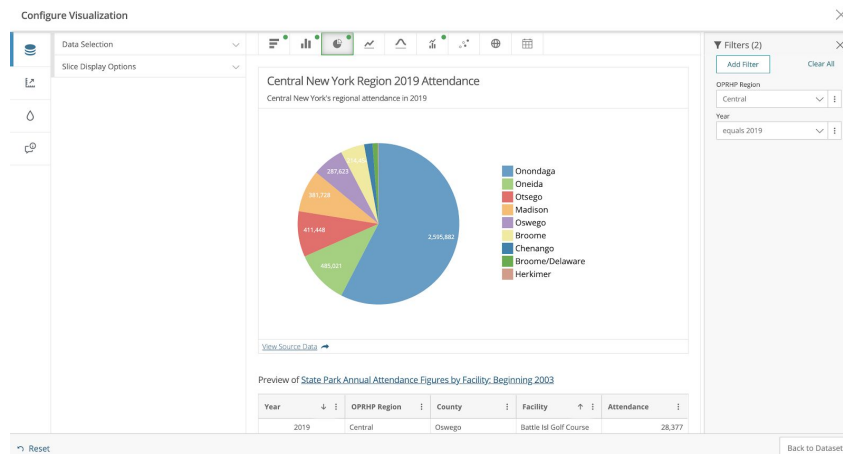
Public Information Coordinator. Office: 315-479-3221 Work Cell: 315-800-9821

Guy.Hulbert@parks.ny.gov (in contact both through email and phone).

2019 Population numbers:

<https://data.ny.gov/Recreation/State-Park-Annual-Attendance-Figures-by-Facility-B/8f3n-xj78>

I visualized the 2019 season for only the central new york region (because I was given the central new york region for 2020). This is what my chart looked like, I couldn't figure out a way to export them from the website so here they are in screenshot form.



Configure Visualization

Data Selection

Slice Display Options

Preview of State Park Annual Attendance Figures by Facility, Beginning 2003

Year	OPSH Region	County	Facility	Attendance
2019	Central	Oswego	Battle Isl Golf Course	28,377
2019	Central	Oswego	Betty And Wilbur Dav...	18,562
2019	Central	Chenango	Bowman Lake St Pk	75,582
2019	Central	Oswego	Canadago Boat Lndg	17,129
2019	Central	Broome	Chenango Valley St Pk	214,454
2019	Central	Madison	Chittenango Fls St Pk	194,257
2019	Central	Onondaga	Clark Reservation	163,346
2019	Central	Oneida	Delta Lake St Pk	268,084
2019	Central	Oswego	Fort Ontario	123,852
2019	Central	Oswego	Gilbert Lake St Pk	202,304
2019	Central	Oswego	Glimmerglass State P...	173,453
2019	Central	Onondaga	Green Lakes State Park	1,103,261
2019	Central	Herkimer	Herkimer Home	6,000
2019	Central	Chenango	Hunts Pond State Park	0
2019	Central	Madison	Lorenzo	45,820
2019	Central	Oswego	Mexico Point Boat La...	11,520
2019	Central	Madison	Old Erie Canal	141,651

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