

The Pulse of Parks:

A look at who's visiting Bear Mountain State Park

A REPORT OF THE OPEN SPACE INSTITUTE'S ALLIANCE FOR NEW YORK STATE PARKS FALL 2015



"As often as we can, my family and I make the short trip from New York City to Bear Mountain to enjoy hiking and swimming in the summer, along with sledding and ice skating in the winter."

— New York State Senator
Manhattan-Bronx
José M. Serrano

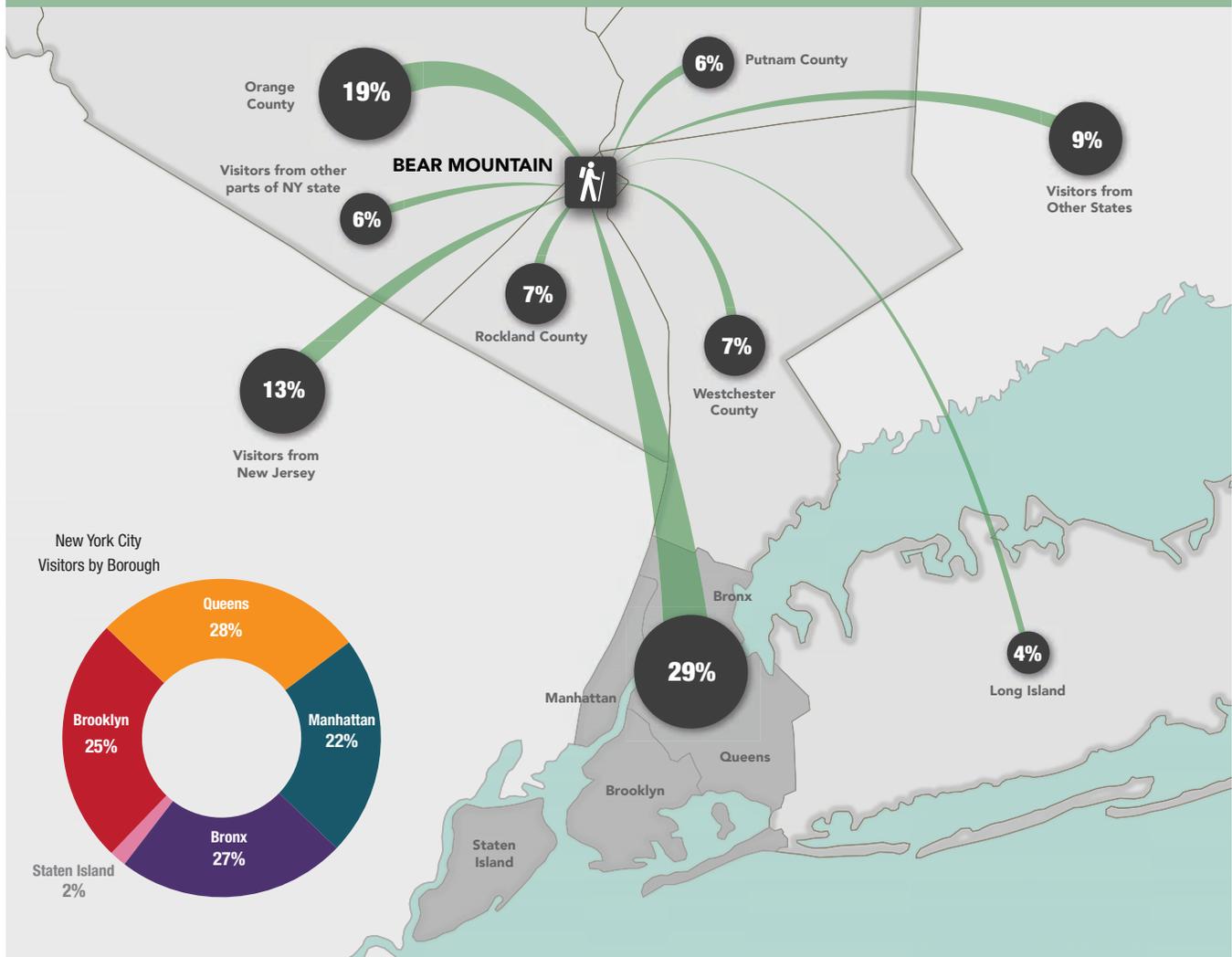
A celebration of scenic beauty, family activity and visitor diversity

Just an hour from Manhattan's high-rises, conveniently located off the Palisades Interstate Parkway, Bear Mountain State Park is a popular recreational and tourism destination in the lower Hudson River Valley. With over 5,000 acres of rolling hills and lush scenery—a beautiful setting for the park's pool, lodging, boating and festivities—it's easy to understand why Bear Mountain is a family-friendly favorite.

Every year, nearly 2 million people flock to hike Bear Mountain and picnic in the stunning mountain scenery, or sample the park's more unique amenities with a turn on the merry-go-round or a stroll through the zoo. The park's success is reflected in its ethnically diverse fan base that keeps Bear Mountain humming.

This issue of The Pulse of Parks reports on a sample survey of over 400 visitors to Bear Mountain from July through September 2014.

Bear Mountain State Park visitors



“The best thing is having family all in one place. I’m glad we have this beautiful park to do it in.”

“Where we go for our anniversary and nostalgia.”

“It’s beautiful and affordable for students.”

“I come five days a week to walk.”

Visitors come from New York City and beyond

As the map above reveals, Bear Mountain is a park worth traveling to. Approximately half of all visitors call the New York City metropolitan area home, driving in from Westchester or Rockland counties, Long Island, New Jersey or one of the five boroughs.

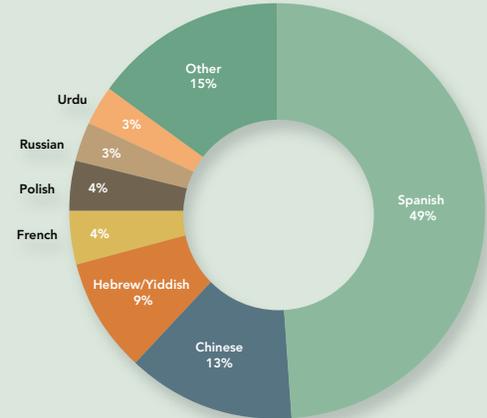
Almost a quarter of visitors come from out of state, while the remainder arrive from the Hudson Valley or upstate New York.

Just 50 miles from New York City and directly off the thruway, Bear Mountain is so convenient that it’s easy to become a regular visitor; one in ten of those surveyed reported visiting more than ten times a year.

A celebration of diversity

Visitors from many backgrounds come to enjoy Bear Mountain. In fact, this diversity is a major factor in Bear Mountain's success as a Hudson River Valley tourism and recreational destination and economic driver. Four in ten visitors surveyed self-reported as an ethnicity other than white or European. Though mainly Hispanic, non-white visitors also self-reported as African-American, Jewish, Asian and other races.

Also of note, nearly 25 percent of all visitors speak a language other than English at home.



Percentage of visitors speaking a language other than English.

A favorite place

Whether it was their first visit or their tenth, visitors across the board mentioned the park's convenience and alluring natural beauty as the reason they keep coming back. Many of these repeat visitors had a specific natural place in mind. Hessian Lake, a mountain lake lying on a plateau 150 feet above the Hudson River, or the Trailside Museum and Zoo, with its kid-friendly animal exhibits, were a hit with all ages. The hiking and biking trails that wind up to the peak of Bear Mountain, with bucolic views of four states and the Manhattan skyline, drew in visitors as well.

Regional benefits

Bear Mountain's 2 million visitors yearly make a substantial economic contribution to the state and local economy.

About three-quarters of all visitors stop to eat, get drinks or buy groceries en route to or from Bear Mountain, while about 10 percent stop for retail purchases or entertainment. Many of these purchases are rung up at local, independent Hudson Valley businesses or in New York City.

Keep the park unique

Bear Mountain visitors gave the park high marks for staff quality, cleanliness, availability of parking and other qualities. About half asked for minor improvements such as restroom upgrades, more grills and better signage. Notably, visitors desired to maintain this special place as an escape from bustling city life.



Open Space Institute and New York State Parks



The Open Space Institute protects scenic, natural and historic landscapes to provide public enjoyment, conserve habitat and working lands and sustain communities. Over the past 40 years, with nearly 80 conservation initiatives, OSI has added more than 40,000 acres to the 335,000-acre New York State Park system.

For more information

This report is part of a series of New York State Park user demographic studies. Previous reports have focused on Fahnestock State Park, Minnewaska State Park Preserve, Jones Beach State Park, Harriman State Park's Lake Welch, and Walkway Over the Hudson. They are available for download at www.osiny.org/Publications_Alliance.

The Open Space Institute's Alliance for New York State Parks works to protect and enhance state parks and historic sites for present and future generations. To learn more, visit www.osiny.org/alliance.



www.osiny.org/alliance

About this study

A capital needs assessment completed in 2010 by the New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation identified a statewide backlog of more than \$1 billion. The state parks suffered from broken and outdated facilities, the result of decades of insufficient funding for regular maintenance and infrastructure improvement. Recognizing the parks' importance to all New Yorkers, Governor Cuomo and the state legislature

have taken strong steps to remedy the problem.

To evaluate the merits of continued investment, the Open Space Institute, with the support of the Dyson Foundation, commissioned a visitor survey of Bear Mountain State Park. The study, aimed at finding out who visits the park and how they value it, was conducted by the Economic & Strategic Planning Consultancy of Randall Gross/Development Economics.

Surveyors conducted a quantitative demographic study of 406 visitors over 14 weekdays, 9 weekend days and the Labor Day holiday, during the months of July through September 2014. The sample has a 4.86% margin of error at the 95% confidence level. The results are meant to inform park planning and communication efforts and also to provide input on specific questions relating to park utilization.

All photos by Steve Aaron