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New voices, new views

Niagara Falls State Park unveils 2 new immersive exhibits

'Voices of the Falls,' 'Above the Roar' provide new ways to experience park



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Part I

The New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation, along with licensed concession partner Delaware North, recently celebrated the opening of two new attractions in the Ralph C. Wilson Jr. Welcome Center in Niagara Falls State Park. "Voices of the Falls" and "Above the Roar" invite visitors to experience Niagara Falls through diverse perspectives and cutting-edge technology.

'Voices of the Falls'

The \$4.4 million "Voices of the

Falls" is a permanent interactive exhibit that explores the past, present and future of Niagara Falls – the park as well as the surrounding community – in the voices of those who have been part of its history. Featuring first-person perspectives, historical narratives, artifacts, hands-on interactive and video presentations, the nearly 5,000-square-foot exhibit highlights the cultural, environmental and personal connections that have formed the nation's oldest state park.



Stories from the Indigenous who first inhabited the land to the Underground Railroad to the tragedy of Love Canal as well as the flora and fauna of the park are included and will provide visitors with a richer view of the park beyond the waterfall. Additional elements of the project include outdoor models, a lenticular mural and signage. The material covered throughout the exhibit is consistent with the principles of New York State Park's "Our Whole History" initiative.

"We are thrilled to open 'Voices of the Falls' and 'Above the Roar.' Together, these exhibits enrich the visitor experience and create new year-round opportunities for learning, exploration and discovery," New York State Parks Commissioner Kathy Moser said. "I am especially grateful for our partnership with the Seneca Nation, Tuscarora Nation, and Underground Railroad collaborators, whose contributions helped bring these stories to life. By sharing a more complete and inclusive history, these exhibits ensure that visitors gain a deeper understanding of the people, cultures and events that shaped New York and our nation."

Seneca Nation President J.C. Seneca spoke of the importance of preserving culture, heritage and language by sharing stories with others, and from generation to generation.

"We appreciate the opportunity for us to be here, to be able to educate, and for people to learn about who we are," he said. "Who better to tell our story than ourselves."

"It's an important story and there's a lot of history here," Seneca noted.

"Voices of the Falls" was designed by Haley Sharpe Design of the U.K. and Toronto and fabricated by Buffalo's Hadley Exhibits.

'Above the Roar'

"Above the Roar" is a fully immersive, multisensory virtual reality (VR) experience that takes participants on a thrilling journey around the most powerful waterfall in North America. Through exclusive aerial footage, motion-enhanced seating and immersive sound, participants will soar along the U.S. side of the Niagara River just above the rapids and then over the American, Bridal Veil and Horseshoe Falls before gliding through the gorge and plunging into the depths below. There, under

the water, they will encounter seven species of fish that are native to the river before returning to the brink of the American Falls and ending back inside the Welcome Center.

"Above the Roar" offers a completely new way for people to experience Niagara Falls as part of their visit to the park," said Derek Zwickey, chief operating officer of Delaware North Parks & Resorts. "We are proud of our partnership with New York State Parks and thrilled that Delaware North could bring this attraction to life as another way for visitors from around the globe to experience Niagara Falls State Park."

Delaware North worked with MDSX, an award-winning experiential design and media production firm.

"Working with MDSX, we used cutting-edge virtual reality content to create a perspective that has never been accessible to the public – a cinematic, awe-inspiring journey that is as emotional as it is exhilarating," Zwickey said. "Every moment is designed to bring guests closer to the scale, power and beauty of Niagara Falls in a way that feels immediate and unforgettable."

Ralph C. Wilson Jr. Welcome Center at Niagara Falls State Park

These installations complete the 28,000-square-foot visitor center that was opened by Gov. Kathy Hochul in December 2023. The welcome center features glass walls and a low roof to maximize views and connections to the falls. It includes new ticketing and information desks; new concession spaces; restrooms and associated support spaces; a rooftop PV array; special patterned glass to prevent bird impacts; green roof elements; and a separate restroom building. Enhanced site amenities include new, accessible paths; native plantings; and wayfinding elements.

The Ralph C. Wilson Jr. Welcome Center at Niagara Falls State Park complements the \$150 million revitalization of Niagara Falls State Park landscape. Launched in 2011, the Niagara Falls State Park landscape revitalization plan was a multi-year commitment to renew the park in a manner that better reflects noted park designer Frederick Law Olmsted's vision for the landscape. The plan renovated the park's major viewing areas including Luna Island, Prospect Point, Lower Grove, Three Sisters Islands, North Shoreline Trail, Luna Bridge and Terrapin Point with new pedestrian walkways, enhanced landscaping, new benches, light posts and railings.

The interactive Cave of the Winds pavilion, which highlights the natural and cultural history of Niagara Falls, opened in 2017. Removal of the Niagara Scenic Parkway (formally the Robert Moses Parkway) in the City of Niagara Falls provided unprecedented access to the Niagara Gorge by connecting the city to its waterfront for the first time in a generation. It was the largest expansion of Niagara Falls State Park since its creation.

Niagara Falls State Park is a state and national treasure. Created in 1885, it is the oldest state park in the nation, attracting over 9 million visitors annually.

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