

New Yorkers to celebrate start of 2023 outdoors with 'First Day Hikes'

Events at 100 state parks, historic sites, wildlife areas, canal trails & public lands on New Year's Day

Gov. Kathy Hochul encouraged New Yorkers to spend time in the outdoors this holiday season and celebrate the new year at state parks, historic sites, wildlife areas, canal trails and public lands across the Empire State on Jan. 1, 2023. The "First Day Hikes" program is offering 100 varied hike options for people across the state to enjoy.

"There's no better way to kick off the new year than with family and friends among the winter beauty of our public parklands and state lands," Hochul said. "With so many 'First Day Hikes' to choose from around the Empire State, New Yorkers can take a break from the hectic pace of the holidays and find the perfect setting to welcome a bright, optimistic new year."

The New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation, the Department of Environmental Conservation, and the Canal Corp. are partnering to host the many walks and hikes being held throughout the state as part of the 12th annual "First Day Hikes" program.

State Parks Commissioner Erik Kulleseid said, "'First Day Hikes' are a family-friendly tradition that offers a fresh seasonal perspective of our state's natural treasures in winter and all there is to do year-round at state parks. I encourage New Yorkers to embrace the outdoors this New Year's Day with a fun trek in New York's breathtaking scenic settings."

DEC Commissioner Basil Segos said, "Participating in any of these popular 'First Day Hikes' is a great way to start the new year and experience New York's outdoor destinations. DEC is proud to partner with State Parks to help New Yorkers of all ages and abilities participate in this growing annual tradition, which brings friends and families together to enjoy our natural resources and



the great outdoors."

The walks and hikes are family-friendly, and typically range from one to five miles depending on the location and conditions. More than 90 hikes are being offered at state parks, historic sites, DEC state lands, wildlife areas, forest preserve and canal trails and environmental education centers. New for 2023, the statewide celebrations are introducing additional hikes along the Genesee Valley Greenway, the New York State Birding Trail, and four new hikes as part of the "On the Canals" program, including walks along the Empire State Trail.

New York State Canal Corp. Director Brian U. Stratton said, "As we celebrate the arrival of a new year, the Canal Corp. is delighted to collaborate with Gov. Hochul and our state partners on the 12th annual 'First Day Hikes' program by offering four unique, guided hikes and snow treks, as

part of 'On the Canals,' along the New York State Canal system and Empire State Trail. It is a joy to continue sharing free opportunities for families and travelers to learn about and experience the canal waterways and adjacent trails in all their glory, season after season, and we applaud the governor's vision to get more New Yorkers outside to explore our state's public spaces."

Empire State Development Vice President and Executive Director of Tourism Ross D. Levi said, "The 'First Day Hikes' program provides an invigorating way to start the new year, and helps introduce more people to New York's unparalleled state parks, state canal system and other protected lands, providing ideas and inspiration for travel later in the year. I LOVE NY encourages residents and visitors alike to come be a part of it and explore all the wonder that awaits them in some of the best outdoor

recreation areas in the country right here in the Empire State."

A list of New York state "First Day Hikes," location details, format, preregistration requirements and additional information can be found online for state parks, DEC and canals. Interested participants are encouraged to check the details of their preferred host site and preregister where required.

A press release said, "Starting in Massachusetts in 1992, 'First Day Hikes' are now a national event taking place in all 50 states. Other ideas for New Yorkers to celebrate 2023 in the outdoors include finding a local park or trail, or exploring local neighborhoods."

In Western New York, "First Day Hikes" will be held at:

- Allegany State Park – Quaker Area, Salamanca; 716-354-9101, ext. 232
- Amherst State Park, Williamsville; 716-631-7132

- Beaver Island State Park, Grand Island; 716-282-5154
- Boutwell Hill State Forest, Charlotte; 716-363-2052
- Brockport Welcome Center Canal Hike, Brockport; elinden@brockportny.org
- Clear Lake Wildlife Management Area, North Collins; 718-851-7019
- Evangola State Park, Irving; 716-549-1050
- Fort Niagara State Park, Youngstown; 716-282-5154 (two hikes)
- Genesee Valley Greenway, Hinsdale; 585-493-3614
- Genesee Valley Greenway, Cuba; 585-493-3614
- Genesee Valley Greenway, Avon; 585-493-3614
- Genesee Valley Greenway, Piffard; 585-493-3614
- Genesee Valley Greenway, Nunda; 585-493-3614
- Genesee Valley Greenway, Rochester; 585-493-3614
- Genesee Valley Greenway, Scottsville; 585-493-3614
- Genesee Valley Greenway, Fowlerville; 585-493-3614
- Genesee Valley Greenway, York; 585-493-3614
- Genesee Valley Park, Rochester; 585-520-9984
- Golden Hill State Park, Barker; 716-282-5154
- Hamlin Beach State Park, Hamlin; 585-964-2462
- Knox Farm State Park, East Aurora; 716-549-1050
- Letchworth State Park Humphrey Nature Center, Castile; 585-493-3680 (four hikes)
- Letchworth State Park Highbanks Picnic Shelter, Mt. Morris; 585-493-3680 (two hikes)
- Niagara Falls State Park, Niagara Falls; 716-282-5154
- Phillips Creek State Forest, Ward; glenngebhard@gmail.com
- Reinstein Woods Environmental Education Center, Depew; 716-683-5959
- Whirlpool State Park, Niagara Falls; 716-282-5154
- Zoar Valley Multiple Use Area, Collins; 440-983-0023

IN THE NEWS

Old Falls Street USA to host 'Family Fun New Year's Eve Party'

Old Falls Street USA will host the annual "Family Fun New Year's Eve Party" from 5-10 p.m. Saturday, Dec. 31. To ring in 2023, families can enjoy activi-

ties such as face painters, balloon artists, inflatables, a balloon drop and a DJ.

All attendees aged 3 and up will require a ticket for entry, and children ages 2 and under admitted for free. Tickets for the event are \$10 each, and can be purchased online or at the door. For more information or to purchase tickets, visit <https://bit.ly/familyfunnye>.

The mission of Destination Niagara USA is to expand the economic prosperity of the Niagara Falls USA communities by generating individual and group visitation. For more information, visit niagarafallsusa.com.

'Festival of Slice' off

Due to a lack of registrations from pizzerias, the "Festival of Slice" for 2023 will be canceled. Organizers said they did not receive enough interest from vendors to make the event successful. "Festival of Slice" was planned for Saturday, Jan. 28, at the Niagara Falls Convention Center.

Staff from Destination Niagara USA, the Niagara Falls Convention Center and Old Falls Street USA will work on planning other community activities for 2023.

Visit www.niagarafallsusa.com to view the current calendar of events.



Old Falls Street USA will host a "Family Fun New Year's Eve Party" at the Niagara Falls Convention Center from 5-10 p.m. Saturday, Dec. 31. (Submitted)

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