

PROSPECT PARK, BROOKLYN

PROSPECT PARK: THE GREATEST HITS

A MUSEENYC WALKING TOUR · FREE, AND NOT SPONSORED BY ANYONE

DISTANCE 3.4 miles	TIME 2.5 to 3 hours
STOPS 15	START Grand Army Plaza (2/3 to Grand Army Plaza)
END Brooklyn Museum and Botanic Garden (2/3 to Eastern Parkway)	MAP museenyc.com/tours/13-prospect-park-greatest-hits/map

Olmsted and Vaux built Central Park first and Prospect Park second, and they thought the second one was better. They had learned what worked, they had a site with real topography, and no city street grid cut through it. This is the loop that gets you the landmarks: the arch, the Long Meadow, the lake, the Boathouse, the zoo, ending at the museum and botanic garden on the far corner. Bigger than it looks on a map and almost entirely local. You will be the only person here who came specifically to see it.

ROUTE CARD

Screenshot or tear off this page. Full detail for each stop follows.

1 Grand Army Plaza and the Soldiers' and Sailors' Arch	8 The Boathouse and the Lullwater
2 Endale Arch	9 Camperdown Elm
3 The Long Meadow	10 Prospect Park Lake
4 Picnic House	11 LeFrak Center at Lakeside
5 Litchfield Villa	12 Concert Grove and the Oriental Pavilion
6 Lena Horne Bandshell	13 Prospect Park Zoo
7 The Nethermead	14 Lefferts Historic House
	15 Brooklyn Botanic Garden and Brooklyn Museum

GETTING THERE AND BACK

START	2/3 to Grand Army Plaza, at the arch. Or B/Q to 7 Av and walk down.
FINISH	2/3 at Eastern Pkwy-Brooklyn Museum, right at the last stop.
ALONG THE ROUTE	The park is ringed by stations: 2/3 at Grand Army Plaza and Eastern Pkwy, F/G at 15 St-Prospect Park on the west, B/Q/S at Prospect Park and Parkside Av on the east and south, Q at Church Av. Buses on every edge: B41 on Flatbush Ave, B69 on Prospect Park West, B68 on Prospect Park Southwest, B48 on Lincoln Rd. No bus crosses the park, so plan exits by edge.

Cutting it short

Every walk here has exits. Good ones on this route:

- After stop 6 (Bandshell): F/G at 15 St-Prospect Park, two blocks west.
- After stop 8 (Boathouse): B/Q/S at Prospect Park, about 8 minutes east.
- After stop 11 (LeFrak Center): Q at Parkside Av, five minutes south.
- After stop 13 (Zoo): B/Q/S at Prospect Park, at the gate.

THE WALK

1 GRAND ARMY PLAZA AND THE SOLDIERS' AND SAILORS' ARCH

OPEN TO THE PUBLIC

Olmsted and Vaux designed the oval plaza as a formal approach to the park, a decompression chamber between the city and the landscape. The arch went up in 1892 as a Civil War memorial, and the bronze groups on it are by Frederick MacMonnies, with two interior bas-reliefs of Lincoln and Grant by a young Thomas Eakins and William O'Donovan. Urban Park Rangers occasionally run tours inside the arch, so check the NYC Parks events calendar. The Bailey Fountain sits in the plaza in front.

[Open in maps](#) · 40.67380, -73.97010

2 ENDALE ARCH

OPEN TO THE PUBLIC

Walk: South from the plaza into the park's main entrance. The arch is on your right, low and easy to miss.

Heads up: Walk through slowly and look up. The banded wood ceiling was under paint for decades.

One of the first things built in the park and the single best piece of theater Olmsted and Vaux ever staged. You enter a dark, low, banded tunnel of alternating black walnut and yellow pine, walk through the compression, and the Long Meadow opens in front of you all at once. The interior woodwork was buried under decades of paint and plaster and was fully restored in 2020. Do not walk through this one while looking at your phone.

[Open in maps](#) · 40.67230, -73.97010

3 THE LONG MEADOW

OPEN TO THE PUBLIC

Walk: Straight out of the arch. The meadow opens in front of you.

Heads up: Before 9am the north end is off-leash dog hours and it is a spectacle in itself.

A mile of unbroken rolling grass with the edges deliberately screened by trees so you can never see the whole thing at once, which makes it feel endless. Olmsted's rule was that no building, road or hard edge should be visible from the middle of it, and by and large it still holds. On a Saturday it is drum circles, cricket, birthday parties, and several hundred off-leash dogs before 9am.

[Open in maps](#) · 40.66980, -73.97160

4 PICNIC HOUSE

OPEN TO THE PUBLIC

Walk: South along the meadow's west edge, about 8 minutes.

Heads up: Reliable bathrooms and water. The next ones are a while away.

The original shelter burned down, and this brick replacement went up in 1927. Practical stop: reliable bathrooms, water, and a colonnade with a long view down the meadow. Rented out constantly for weddings, so you may be looking at it from outside.

[Open in maps](#) · 40.66790, -73.97180

5 LITCHFIELD VILLA

OPEN TO THE PUBLIC

Walk: Two minutes southwest, just inside the Prospect Park West wall.

Or ride: B69 bus runs along Prospect Park West.

Heads up: Ground-floor rotunda is open on weekdays. Walk in, it is a working parks office.

Alexander Jackson Davis built it for railroad developer Edwin Litchfield, whose estate covered much of what became the park. When the city took the land by eminent domain, it took the house too, and rather than tear it down it moved its offices in. The Brooklyn parks department still works out of it. You can walk into the ground-floor rotunda on a weekday. The corn-and-wheat capitals on the columns are original.

[Open in maps](#) · 40.66720, -73.97290

6 LENA HORNE BANDSHELL

OPEN TO THE PUBLIC

Walk: South along the west edge about 6 minutes.

Or ride: F/G at 15 St-Prospect Park is two blocks west if you want out.

Renamed in 2021 for Brooklyn-born singer and civil rights activist Lena Horne. BRIC Celebrate Brooklyn runs here every summer and is one of the oldest free outdoor performing arts festivals in the country. Off-season it is an empty concrete shell with good acoustics and skateboarders. Worth knowing about if you are in the city between June and August.

[Open in maps](#) · 40.66590, -73.97490

7 THE NETHERMEAD

OPEN TO THE PUBLIC

Walk: East and downhill into the middle of the park, about 10 minutes, under the Nethermead Arches.

Heads up: Most people never find this meadow because you have to cross water or pass under an arch to reach it.

A large open lawn in the geographic center, ringed by woods and reachable only by crossing water or passing under an arch, which is why most people never find it. Quieter than the Long Meadow by a wide margin. Nearby, the Nethermead Arches carry a bridle path, a footpath and a carriage drive over the stream in one triple-arched structure.

[Open in maps](#) · 40.66430, -73.96830

8 THE BOATHOUSE AND THE LULLWATER

OPEN TO THE PUBLIC

Walk: East across the Nethermead and down to the water. About 8 minutes.

Heads up: Free Audubon Center inside, weekends and some weekdays. Terrace over the water is the best sit-down in the park.

Modeled on Sansovino's library in Venice, built in glazed white terra cotta, and scheduled for demolition in 1964 until a public campaign stopped it. That fight is credited with helping create the city's Landmarks Preservation Commission. It now houses the Audubon Center, the first urban Audubon center in the country. Free, open weekends and some weekdays, and the terrace over the Lullwater is the prettiest sit-down in the park.

[Open in maps](#) · 40.66230, -73.96560

9 CAMPERDOWN ELM

OPEN TO THE PUBLIC

Walk: Fifty yards below the Boathouse, on the slope. Small, twisted, propped up.

Heads up: It looks like a pile of branches until you know what it is.

A grafted weeping elm planted in 1872, twisted and low, standing just below the Boathouse. Marianne Moore wrote a poem about it in 1967 that raised money to treat its rot, and it has been fussed over ever since. It looks like a pile of branches until you understand it, and then it is the most interesting thing within a hundred yards.

[Open in maps](#) · 40.66250, -73.96580

10 PROSPECT PARK LAKE

OPEN TO THE PUBLIC

Walk: South along the Lullwater and around the west side of the Lake. About 15 minutes.

Or ride: B68 bus runs along Prospect Park Southwest.

Dug out of swampy low ground at the south end and fed by the same engineered watercourse that starts at the top of the Ravine. Swans, herons, and a genuinely surprising amount of fishing. The path around the west side past the Peninsula gives you the widest water views.

[Open in maps](#) · 40.65600, -73.96900

11 LEFRAK CENTER AT LAKESIDE

OPEN TO THE PUBLIC

Walk: East around the south shore of the Lake, about 10 minutes.

Built on the site of a 1960s concrete rink that had been dropped on top of a filled-in section of the lake. The 2013 project tore out the old rink, restored the shoreline and the lost Music Island, and put the new facility partly underground with a green roof. One of the better pieces of park architecture built in New York this century.

[Open in maps](#) · 40.65530, -73.96470

12 CONCERT GROVE AND THE ORIENTAL PAVILION

OPEN TO THE PUBLIC

Walk: North from the rink about 5 minutes. The pavilion is the open ironwork structure.

Heads up: Look up at the stained glass skylight from directly underneath.

Built so audiences could hear concerts played from Music Island across the water. The pavilion burned in 1974 and was rebuilt to the original design, with cast-iron columns, and the skylight was restored in the 1980s. The surrounding Concert Grove holds busts of Beethoven, Mozart, Grieg and a very earnest statue of Lincoln that used to stand in Grand Army Plaza.

[Open in maps](#) · 40.65860, -73.96440

13 PROSPECT PARK ZOO

OPEN TO THE PUBLIC

Walk: North on the east side path, about 10 minutes.

Or ride: Q at Prospect Park station is right at the zoo entrance.

Heads up: Admission charged. Skip it unless you have a kid with you.

Opened in 1935 as a WPA project with six brick buildings around a sea lion pool, all in a restrained Beaux-Arts style. It was rebuilt in the 1990s as a modern small zoo focused on animals children can actually see up close. Not a reason to come to Brooklyn on its own, but a good hour if you have a kid with you.

[Open in maps](#) · 40.66400, -73.96350

14 LEFFERTS HISTORIC HOUSE

OPEN TO THE PUBLIC

Walk: Two minutes north. The white clapboard farmhouse next to the carousel.

Heads up: Free, seasonal hours. Honest about the fact that the family enslaved people on this land.

Built by the Lefferts family, burned by American troops during the Battle of Brooklyn in 1776 to keep it from the British, and rebuilt in the 1780s. It stood on Flatbush Avenue until the family donated it to the city and it was hauled into the park. The interior is set up as a working museum of Dutch Brooklyn farm life. Free, seasonal hours, and honest about the fact that the Lefferts family enslaved people on this land.

[Open in maps](#) · 40.66430, -73.96230

15 BROOKLYN BOTANIC GARDEN AND BROOKLYN MUSEUM

OPEN TO THE PUBLIC

Walk: Northeast out of the park at Flatbush Ave and Eastern Parkway, about 10 minutes.

Or ride: B41 bus up Flatbush Ave, or 2/3 one stop from Grand Army Plaza to Eastern Pkwy.

Heads up: Both charge admission and both deserve their own day. This tour ends at the door on purpose.

The garden opened in 1911 on a former ash dump and holds one of the oldest Japanese gardens in the country, the first ever built in a public botanic garden, plus a cherry esplanade that draws enormous crowds for about two weeks each spring. Next door, the Brooklyn Museum is the second-largest art museum in New York and one of the least crowded great museums in the country. Both charge admission and both are worth a separate visit, which is why this tour ends on their doorstep rather than trying to include them.

[Open in maps](#) · 40.67130, -73.96380

COMBINING THIS WITH OTHER TOURS

- [Tour 14 \(Prospect Park: The Ravine and the Watercourse\)](#) is the same park done slowly and off the pavement. It shares the Boathouse, the Lullwater and the Camperdown Elm. If you are doing both, do 13 first for the layout and 14 second for the detail.
- [Tour 6 \(Fort Greene and Clinton Hill\)](#) is 15 minutes north on the B/Q from Grand Army Plaza, and both end near a museum. A Brooklyn day that runs Fort Greene in the morning and Prospect Park in the afternoon works well.
- **Short version:** stops 1, 2, 3, 8, 9, 12. Arch, Endale, Long Meadow, Boathouse, Camperdown Elm, Oriental Pavilion. About 2 miles.

WALKING NAVIGATION LINKS

Google caps a directions link at ten points, so the route is split. Open a segment on your phone and it starts walking navigation.

- [Stops 1–10](#)
- [Stops 10–15](#)

THE MAP

Open the MUSEENYC map for this walk at museenyc.com/tours/13-prospect-park-greatest-hits/map. Every pin carries its own walking directions, transit alternative and notes.

- **Green pin** = open to the public.
- **Orange pin** = private, look from the sidewalk. Several are people's homes: no gates, no doorways, no photographing into windows.

The orange line is a straight-line guide between stops, not the walking route. Use the navigation links for turn-by-turn.

MUSEENYC

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Questions about a stop, a closure, or anything else on this walk? Reach MUSEENYC at museenyc.tours@gmail.com or [@museenyc](https://www.instagram.com/museenyc) on Instagram. More walks at museenyc.com/tours.