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The Bronx's green spaces include the 250-acre New York Botanical Garden, where an exhibit of 20 Henry Moore sculptures is running through Nov. 2.

By Kathy Willens, AP Photo

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New York promotes the Bronx's parks and gardens

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By Beth J. Harpaz, AP Travel Editor

NEW YORK — Ladies and gentlemen, the Bronx is blooming!

Despite its urban image, the Bronx has 7,000 acres of park land, about 25% of its total area. In addition to Yankee Stadium and the Bronx Zoo, the borough's green spaces include the New

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By Kathy Willens, AP Photo

In the northwest Bronx is Wave Hill, with a dozen themed gardens,

panoramic views of the Hudson River and princely frogs in a lily pond.

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Bay Park

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New York is a different place now, billed as America's safest big city and attracting a record 46 million tourists last year.

Many of those tourists are repeat visitors, and "their appetite for something other than Times Square and the Statue of Liberty is enormous," said Bronx Borough President Adolfo

Carrión, Jr., who got an enthusiastic reception talking up the Bronx at a recent tourism conference in Berlin.

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Green spaces only comprise part of the Bronx's attractions. There is also Italian food on Arthur Avenue, a hip-hop music tour, a bed-and-breakfast called Le Refuge Inn, and saltwater swimming at Orchard Beach. For more information, visit the Bronx Tourism Council website at www.ilovethebronx.com or NYC & Company at www.nycvisit.com/bronx. Meanwhile, here are some highlights.

Green spaces

Sure, the Bronx Zoo has wild animals from around the world, including a new exhibit called Madagascar. But for native wildlife, check out the Bronx River, which runs alongside the zoo. Turtles sun themselves on rocks, a red-winged blackbird calls, geese march by the shore. On a recent day, a wayward duckling hopped out of the water and drew a crowd, attracting more attention than a nearby buffalo exhibit.

You can walk along the river without paying admission to the zoo; the trail starts near the totem pole in the zoo parking lot. The Bronx River Alliance, which is restoring the waterway, hosts events and paddling on the river; www.bronxriver.org. If you want lions and tigers too, the zoo is open daily 10 a.m.-5 p.m. (5:30 p.m. on weekends); adults, \$15, children 3-12, \$11, www.bronxzoo.com.

North of the zoo is the New York Botanical Garden, a National Historic Landmark that dates to 1891, www.nybg.org, Tuesday-Sunday, 10 a.m.-6 p.m., \$20. A tram takes you around the garden's 250 acres, which include a children's garden, forest, rock garden, and a Victorian-style glass conservatory. The vast rose garden's 3,000 plants include varieties that bloom continuously spring to fall. An outdoor exhibit of 20 Henry Moore sculptures is up through Nov. 2.

Yves Soulier, a tourist from France, visited the garden recently with his wife Anne. He said the Bronx had a reputation as "a

hard banlieue," using the French term for the outskirts of a city. "I have read this in the books," he added. "But we like the flowers and plants here."

In the northwest Bronx is Wave Hill, with a dozen themed gardens, panoramic views of the Hudson River and princely frogs in a lily pond. It's open Tuesday-Sunday, 9 a.m.-5:30 p.m., admission \$6; www.wavehill.org.

Now a city-owned public garden, Wave Hill was once a private estate whose guest list included Charles Darwin, Mark Twain, Arturo Toscanini and Theodore Roosevelt. A photo exhibit opens Sept. 9 called *Surprisingly Natural: the Nature of the Bronx*. Hawks and eagles are often spotted during the garden's bird walks, which resume in the fall.

The Bronx is home to two large parks, Van Cortlandt —www.nycgovparks.org/parks/vancortlandtpark— and Pelham Bay, www.nycgovparks.org/parks/pelhambaypark. Both have golf courses, horseback riding and historic house museums: Pelham's Bartow-Pell Mansion, and the Van Cortlandt House, built in 1748 and the Bronx's oldest building.

Jack Rothman leads free birding tours around Pelham Bay Park and in the City Island area. His website www.cityislandbirds.com lists bird-watching expeditions around the city, and includes a section called, "What does a guy from the Bronx know about birds?"

Turns out he knows plenty. "You hear the birds before you see them," he said, pausing to listen to a concert of bird songs, trills and whistles along a wooded path in Pelham Bay Park. Over the course of an hour, a shushing sound he made, known among birders as "pishing," coaxed into view a yellow-throated warbler, a red-winged blackbird, an Eastern towhee, a willow flycatcher, and an orchard oriole.

Under a rusty bridge, he pointed out swallows nesting, and in the marshes, egrets fishing. "It's hard to believe this is the Bronx," he said.

Dining

Not far from the zoo and Botanical Garden is Arthur Avenue, the Bronx's very own Little Italy. "You don't eat here, you're missing everything," said Robert Francella as he ordered lunch at Mike's Deli inside the Arthur Avenue Market, 2344

Arthur Ave., www.arthuravenue.com.

David Greco, who owns Mike's Deli, looked over platters laden with delectable prosciutto, handmade smoked mozzarella, pepper pecorino cheese and bruschetta, and proclaimed, "I'm in Italy every day!"

In the mood for lobster? Head to City Island, a slice of New England in the northeast Bronx, with seafood restaurants, small shops and Le Refuge Inn, a bed-and-breakfast with a well-regarded restaurant; www.lerefugeinn.com or 718-885-2478, \$125 single room, \$145 double, prefix dinner, \$50.

The 2008 Zagat guide to New York City lists 26 restaurants in the Bronx, including Le Refuge Inn and Willie's Steak House, 1832 Westchester Ave., 718-822-9697, which also serves Latin food and offers live music Wednesday and Saturday nights.

Other Latin restaurants in the Bronx include Sabrosura, 1200 Castle Hill Ave., 718-597-1344; Cafe Sevilla, 1209 White Plains Rd., 718-792-3367; and Joe's Place, 1841 Westchester Ave., 718-918-2947.

Tours and transportation

The Bronx is easily navigated by car or mass transit. For help with subway routes, visit www.hopstop.com. Metro-North Railroad trains from Grand Central stop near Wave Hill, the New York Botanical Garden and the zoo.

A four-hour bus tour to Harlem and the Bronx, themed on the history of hip-hop music, is offered Saturdays, 11 a.m., by Hush Tours. It includes live performances and departs from near the Empire State Building. Tickets, \$58, from www.zerve.comhiphoplook/sat11 or call 212-209-3370.

New York Visions offers "A Discovery of the Bronx" four-hour tour, 9 a.m.-1 p.m. Saturdays, departing from midtown Manhattan, with stops including the Bronx Zoo, New York Botanical Garden and Arthur Avenue. Tickets, \$55, from www.harlemspirituals.com/bronx.php.

A free hop-off, hop-on trolley runs to City Island from the No. 6 train's Pelham Bay stop on the first Friday of every month, 5:30 p.m.-9:30 p.m., www.cityislandchamber.org.

A free Bronx Culture Trolley runs the first Wednesday of every month (except September and January), with stops at the Bronx Museum of the Arts and galleries, plus performances by theater companies, poets and dancers;

www.bronxarts.org/culture_trolley.asp. The July 2 and Aug. 6 trolleys were scheduled to meet at 5 p.m., 450 Grand Concourse (near 149th Street stop on the 2, 4 or 5 train).

Yankees

This is the Yankees' final season in the historic stadium where Babe Ruth played. (A new stadium is under construction.)

Tickets can be hard to come by. If Ticketmaster can't help, try StubHub.com. And don't worry: Nobody will interrupt the game to announce that the Bronx is burning.

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dink7 wrote:
 Yay! Can't wait. I can look at the beautiful gardens and get mugged, all at once!

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kidsgardener wrote: 1d 4h ago

I visited the New York Botanical Gardens three weeks ago and found something my kids can't stop showing off!

I thought USA Today readers would enjoy an activity I saw at the New York Botanical Gardens Gift Shop. The headline on the item in the Garden Shop read "Have you Ever Seen a Plant Move When You Tickle It?"

We purchased a TickleMe Plant Greenhouse, followed the growing directions and were we suprised when the plants began to lower ing thier branches and closing leaves when we tickled them.

I grew up in the Bronx and if you want to share your love for nature with your children, this is an activity will do it. This may change the way you and the kids react to plants for ever. Imagine giving your children some seeds. Having them watch them sprout and grow. Then shortly after the second leaves appear they tickle the plant and it moves its branches down and closes its leaves! This is learning experiance they will never forget. I found information and my growing kits at <http://www.TickleMePlant.com> if you can't get to the New York Botanical Garden's Gift Shop.

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