

Downtown Boathouse

Free Public Kayaking – New York City

Introduction

The Downtown Boathouse runs the oldest and largest free public kayaking program in the world. It has been providing free public kayaking since 1995 and has served more than 400,000 people since it began.

We are a community boathouse that is committed to serving Lower Manhattan residents. But we also provide free public kayaking to residents from every borough in New York City, every state in the country, and to visitors from more than one hundred counties.

Everything Free

Everything that the Downtown Boathouse does is free:

- Free kayaking.
- Free classes.
- Free trips.
- Free conferences.
- Free group visits.

We never charge.

Contact

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Free Public Kayaking

Items Provided

In addition to the boat, every kayaker is given:

- Paddle.
- Life jacket.
- Use of a locker with key.
- Suntan lotion.
- Changing room.
- Hose to wash off.
- Bench to sit on.

Everything is free.

Rules – Free Kayaking

Before You Go Out

- Sign a waiver (good for the day)
- You must know how to swim
- Put on a lifejacket

On the Water

- Stay inside the line of red buoys
- Keep away from pier and wall
- Come back in 20 minutes
- Come back in if called
- No swimming

Under Eighteen

- Legal guardian must be present
- Under 13, must go with an adult
- One child per boat

Pier 26, Hudson River Park



Governors Island



Free Public Kayaking

The most popular free public kayaking program in the world.



Persons per Year

Total Users

The Downtown Boathouse runs the largest free public kayaking program in the world. Since we began more than 400,000 people have gone kayaking with us.

Repeat Users

For most of our history a person going kayaking had to sign a waiver once per season. So the number of waivers signed equaled the number of distinct users each year. Our waiver policy has changed, but for continuity we continue to count the number of distinct users per year.



Kayaker # 400,000 Aug/13 2017

Persons per Year							
Year	Pier 26	Pier 40	Pier 96	72nd St.	Gov Is.	Other	Total
1995	100	0	0	0	0	0	100
1996	1,200	0	0	0	0	0	1,200
1997	2,800	0	0	0	0	0	2,800
1998	5,400	0	0	0	0	0	5,400
1999	6,700	0	0	0	0	0	6,700
2000	7,600	0	0	0	0	0	7,600
2001	10,200	0	0	0	0	0	10,200
2002	11,141	0	0	0	0	889	12,030
2003	8,666	0	0	3,829	0	1,098	13,593
2004	9,670	0	0	6,951	0	1,267	17,888
2005	12,417	0	735	8,945	0	856	22,953
2006	0	1,387	5,920	7,365	0	1,252	15,924
2007	0	5,232	6,149	9,529	0	1,190	22,100
2008	0	6,947	7,318	7,584	1,863	1,068	24,780
2009	0	10,461	7,779	7,893	575	1,375	28,083
2010	0	11,383	9,548	7,970	1,392	716	31,009
2011	0	10,152	7,649	6,546	617	815	25,779
2012	0	17,412	12,095	6,765	612	638	37,522
2013	0	11,906	11,936	1,676	1,885	0	27,403
2014	15,154	4,703	0	0	371	0	20,228
2015	25,930	0	0	0	0	0	25,930
2016	21,891	0	0	0	366	0	22,257
2017	27,064	0	0	0	1,460	0	28,524
2018	23,641	0	0	0	1,531	0	25,172
2019	27,721	0	0	0	768	0	28,489
Total	217,295	79,583	69,129	75,053	11,440	11,164	463,664

Demographics

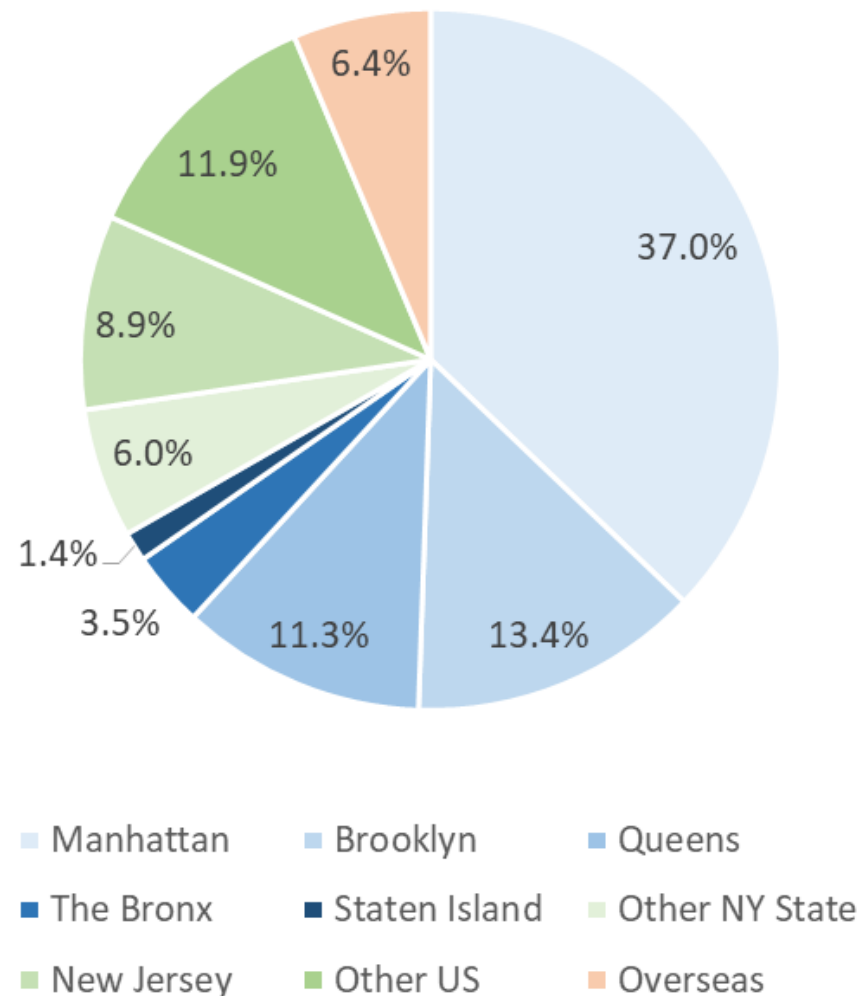
Every few years we count our signed waivers by zip code to determine where the persons going kayaking are coming from.

Weekday vs. Weekend

The percentage of visitors coming from the outer boroughs has generally been significantly higher on weekday evenings, while the number of people from New York City as a whole was unchanged. We asked New Yorkers why they chose to come on weekday evenings. Many people replied that the subway was too unreliable on weekends to bother coming to Manhattan.

Visitors by Day of Week		
Residence	Weekend	Weekday
Manhattan	39%	24%
Brooklyn	13%	17%
Queens	10%	20%
The Bronx	3%	7%
Staten Island	1%	2%
New York City	67%	69%
Other NY State	6%	6%
New Jersey	9%	6%
Other US	12%	10%
Overseas	6%	9%
Total	100%	100%

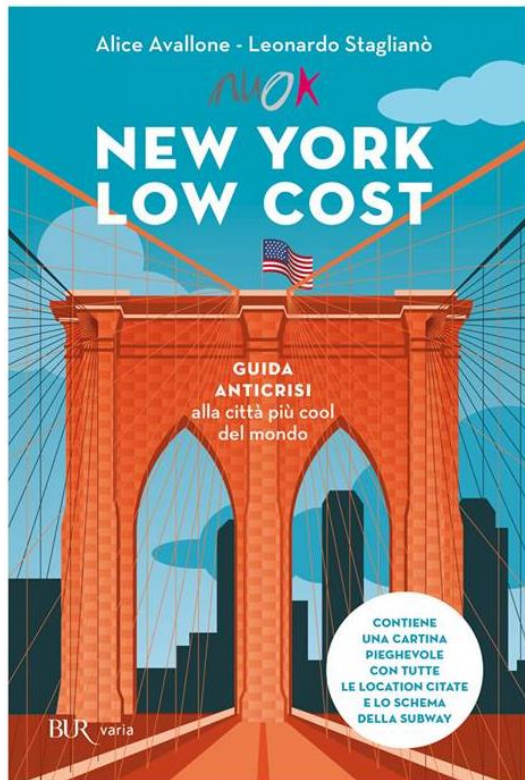
Kayakers by Residence – 2015



Tourism

Some tourists come to New York City in order to go kayaking at the Downtown Boathouse. We know this, because they tell us.

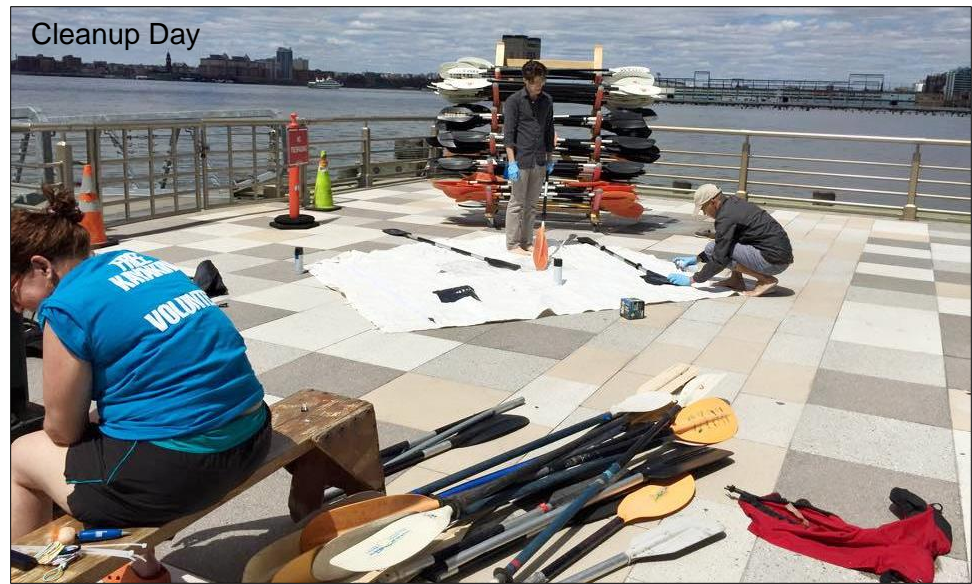
Tourist Guidebook



Visitor Country – 2014				
Africa	Americas	Asia Pacific		Europe
Botswana	Argentina	Afghanistan	Syria	Belarus
Algeria	Antigua	Armenia	Thailand	Austria
Burundi	Bahamas	Australia	Turkey	Belgium
Central Afr. Rep.	Barbados	Azerbaijan	Turkmenistan	Bulgaria
Chad	Belize	Bangladesh	U. Arab Emirates	Croatia
Congo Dem Rep.	Bermuda	Burma	Uzbekistan	Cyprus
Eritrea	Brazil	Cambodia	Vietnam	Czech Republic
Egypt	Canada	China	Yemen	Denmark
Equatorial Guinea	Chile	Georgia		Estonia
Ethiopia	Columbia	India		Finland
Guinea	Costa Rica	Indonesia		France
Kenya	Cuba	Iran		Germany
Liberia	Dominican Rep.	Iraq		Greece
Libya	Ecuador	Israel		Hungary
Madagascar	El Salvador	Japan		Iceland
Mauritania	Guatemala	Jordan		Italy
Mali	Guyana	Kazakhstan		Ireland
Mauritius	Haiti	Korea		Latvia
Morocco	Honduras	Kyrgyzstan		Lithuania
Niger	Jamaica	Laos		Netherlands
Nigeria	Mexico	Lebanon		Norway
Rwanda	Panama	Malaysia		Poland
Sierra Leone	Paraguay	Maldives		Portugal
Somalia	Peru	Mongolia		Romania
South Africa	Saint Kitts & Nevis	Nepal		Russia
Sudan	Trinidad & Tobago	New Zealand		Serbia
Tanzania	United States	Oman		Slovakia
Togo	Uruguay	Pakistan		Spain
Tunisia	Venezuela	Philippines		Sweden
Uganda		Qatar		Switzerland
Zambia		Saudi Arabia		Ukraine
Zimbabwe		Sri Lanka		United Kingdom

Volunteers

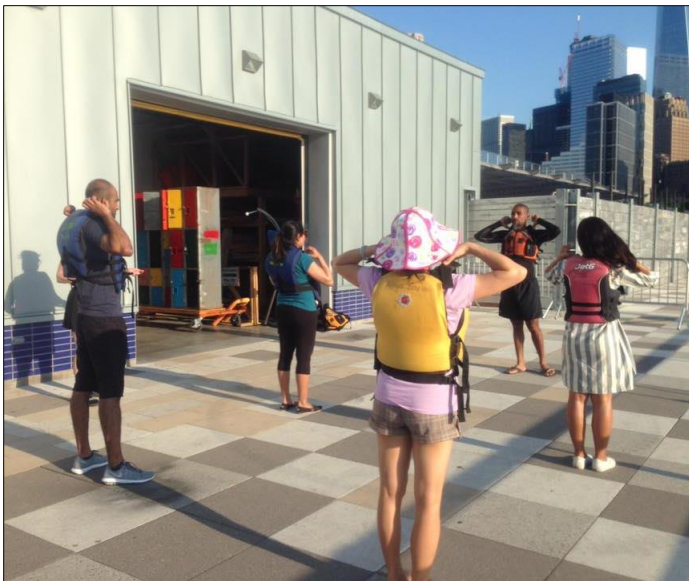
Our volunteers are our greatest resource. They do an enormous amount of work (i.e. more than 7,000 hours in 2018) all year long in order to enable tens of thousands of people to go kayaking for free each summer.



Volunteer Training

The Downtown Boathouse provides free training to active volunteers in:

- First Aid and CPR.
- Harbor Conditions.
- Kayaking Skills.
- Running free kayaking.



Volunteer Trips

The Downtown Boathouse organizes kayak trips for volunteers – so can they learn about safe kayaking in local conditions.

Manhattan Circumnavigation



Statue of Liberty



Hudson River



Dock Building

Most of the public kayak docks that have been built on NY Harbor were constructed by Downtown Boathouse volunteers.

We regularly work with public authorities to help design boathouses, docks, and other facilities so as to maximize free public access to the harbor and promote safe, recreational, human-powered boating in the city.

Locations

Kayak docks have been built at:

- Pier 26, Hudson River Park.
- Pier 40, Hudson River Park.
- Pier 64, Hudson River Park.
- Pier 66, Hudson River Park.
- Pier 96, Hudson River Park.
- 72nd Street, Riverside Park.
- Governors Island.



Group Visits

In addition to our free public kayaking program, we host local schools, groups of children, and other non-profits.

Participating Organizations, 2018

- Career and Technical Education Industry Scholars Program Administrators
- Chinese American Planning Council
- Columbia College of Dental Medicine Students
- Community Board 1 - Community Paddle
- Hudson River Park Trust Wetlab & EcoPaddle
- NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund
- New York City Hemophilia Chapter
- NYU Freshman Welcome Day
- Plastic Patrol
- RAPP (Relationship Abuse Peer Prevention Program) Summer Leadership Program
- Ronald McDonald House New York
- Yale Alumni Service Day

PS 234 Kindergarten

Every spring the students of PS 234 come to Pier 26 to learn about the harbor and kayaking.



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To whom it may concern:

For the past six years, the team at the Downtown Boathouse has brought immeasurable joy to children and families battling pediatric cancer. Each summer, the Boathouse crew welcomes families from our Camp Ronald McDonald program (one of the largest programs at Ronald McDonald House New York) to come enjoy a day of kayaking on the Hudson River. We are fortunate to be able to do this several times per summer.

Ronald McDonald House New York is a nonprofit 'home-away-from-home' for children and families battling pediatric cancer. We support each family and coordinate emotional and physical services, psychological care, ministry support, wellness programs, tutors, music, art, and transportation, activities for siblings, holiday and birthday parties and camaraderie for parents struggling with their child's cancer diagnosis.

The Downtown Boathouse has been an integral part of our family programming. Their support ensures that our children and families, most of whom have never been to New York before, get to enjoy a quintessentially New York experience at no cost to them. Our kayaking trips are the absolute highlight of our summer and we cannot thank the team at the Downtown Boathouse enough. We look forward to many, many more summers paddling around on the Hudson River with them.

With heartfelt thanks,

Ben Winsten
Senior Program Associate / Camp Director
Ronald McDonald House New York
bwinsten@rmh-newyork.org
(212) 639-0817



Ronald McDonald House New York is a home-away-from-home for children undergoing cancer treatment and their families.
Welcome to the heart of NYC.

Demo Days

As part of our broad community outreach work, the Downtown Boathouse has hosted a number of kayaking demo-days throughout the tristate area. This program is similar to our main walk-up kayaking program except that we take some of our boats to other locations for several days to bring free public paddling to other communities and encourage safe boating. In recent years we have run demo days at the following locations:

Locations

- Central Park Lake
- DUMBO Cove, Brooklyn
- Hoboken waterfront
- Jersey City Reservoir
- Governors Island
- Freshkills Park, Staten Island

Brooklyn Bridge Park



Coney Island



Central Park

Incubator Space

The Downtown Boathouse has incubated and helped launch nearly a dozen organizations across the tristate area that are committed to offering free public kayaking that serves their local communities.

Organizations Supported

- Hoboken Community Boathouse.
- Freshkills Park kayaking program.
- Jersey City Reservoir.
- Manhattan Community Boathouse.
- Red Hook Boaters, Brooklyn.



Free Public Kayaking Conference

Every spring the Downtown Boathouse hosts what is the only conference in the world that is dedicated to free public kayaking.

Organizations Attending

- Brooklyn Bridge Park Boathouse
- Downtown Boathouse
- Gowanus Dredgers Canoe Club
- Hoboken Cove Community Boathouse
- Inwood Canoe Club
- Kayak Staten Island
- Long Island City Community Boathouse
- Manhattan Community Boathouse
- National Park Service
- North Brooklyn Canoe Club
- Red Hook Boaters

100,000 People

More than 100,000 people go kayaking on NY Harbor every summer – mostly for free, and mostly thanks to numerous volunteer-run and community-based free public kayaking programs. In no other major city in the world does this occur.



Community Hosting

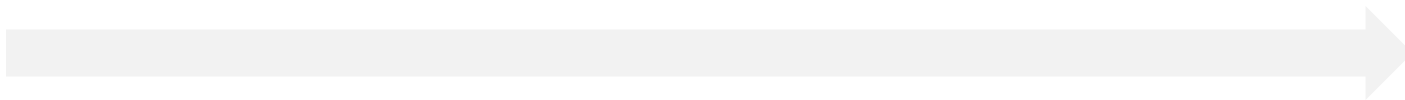
Every May the Downtown Boathouse hosts the CB1 (i.e. Lower Manhattan Community Board) full-board monthly meeting in our Pier 26 boathouse. It is an excellent way for community members to start the summer, and also for volunteers to engage with local residents.

US Coast Guard Classes

We also host free public classes about boating on NY Harbor that are run by the US Coast Guard.



25 Years



1994 Downtown Boathouse is incorporated. It is dedicated to the realization of the proposed Hudson River Park.

1995 Start free public kayaking program at Pier 26. One hundred people in our first year.

2002 Start doing free kayaking demo days at other locations.

2003 Build dock and provide free kayaking in Riverside Park.

2005 Old Pier 26 boathouse demolished. Move to Pier 96.

2005 Build dock and provide free kayaking on Governors Is.

2006 Build dock and provide free kayaking at Pier 40.

2012 Our busiest year – 37,522 people served while operating at four locations – plus demo days.

2014 Return to our new Pier 26 boathouse in Lower Manhattan.

2016 Build new plastic kayak dock on Governors Island. The old wooden dock was eaten by ship worms.

2017 Host the first ever conference for free public kayaking. It's free!

2017 Our busiest day ever at one location is Aug/13 when 951 people go kayaking at Pier 26.

2018 Start summer intern program with Harbor School.

