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# ZOOM

in on america

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## NIAGARA FALLS

The American side of the Niagara Falls has been lit up to celebrate the birth of the Duke and Duchess of Cambridge's son, George Alexander Louis, Tuesday, July 23, 2013. (AP Photo/Gary Wiepert)

In this issue: Niagara Falls

Zoom in on America

# Niagara Falls

Niagara Falls on the Niagara River are three waterfalls on the border between Canada and the United States: Horseshoe Falls, American Falls and the smallest of them, Bridal Veil Falls. The first, which are also the biggest of the three, lie mostly on the Canadian side. The other two are on the American side of the border. American Goat Island separates Horseshoe Falls and American Falls, while the latter are separated from Bridal Veil Falls by a small island called Luna. Established on July 15, 1885, Niagara Falls State Park is the oldest state park in the United States. It comprises 400 acres of land including 140 acres under water.

## They Could Have Looked Very Different

A huge tourist attraction today, there was a time in history when the beauty of the Falls' natural surroundings was jeopardized by a rapid growth of factories and mills during the Industrial Revolution of the early 19th century. The 3,160 tons of water flowing over Niagara Falls every second promised vast opportunities for generating power and a temptation to turn the area into an industrial landscape. Today, even though the river is an important source of hydroelectric power both for Canada and the United States, a balance is sought between constructing dams and power plants and preserving the natural beauty of the area.

## What Do Niagara Falls State Park and Central Park in New York City Have in Common?

In order to protect the natural environment, a group of early environmentalists and visionaries under the leadership of landscape architect and designer of NYC Central Park Frederick Law Olmsted founded the Free Niagara movement in the late 1860s. Their position was that the natural beauty of the area surrounding the Falls should be protected from exploitation and remain free to the public. They also called for New York State to reclaim the Falls

with their surrounding land. The battle lasted 15 years and was finally won by environment protectors.

## The Oldest State Park in America

The Niagara Appropriations Bill made it possible to create the Niagara Reservation. Established on July 15, 1885, Niagara Falls State Park thus became the oldest state park in the United States. Thomas Vincent Welch, the foremost lobbyist in favor of the bill, served as the first superintendent of the park. Olmsted designed the landscape for Niagara Falls State Park, setting a network of footpaths through wooded areas and along the banks of the Niagara River.

## The Niagara River and the Falls in Numbers

The Niagara River, which is about 58 kilometers in length, connects two Great Lakes, Erie and Ontario. The elevation between the two lakes is about 99 metres, and half of it occurs at the Falls themselves. The Falls span the twin cities of Niagara Falls in the Canadian province Ontario and Niagara Falls in the state of New York in the USA. The Falls are in two main parts, separated by Goat Island. The larger division, adjoining the left, or Canadian, bank, is Horseshoe Falls with the height of 56 metres. The Ameri-



*A tourboat takes sightseers to the base of Horseshoe Falls (right), after sailing up the Niagara River past the American Falls (left) in this August 28, 1997 photo at Niagara Falls, N. Y. (AP Photo/BillSikes)*

can Falls, adjoining the right bank, are 58 meters high. The width of Niagara Falls is 3,950 feet or 1,203.96 meters. Even though it is not the largest waterfall in the world, it is one with the largest volume of water traveling through it.

### Popular Appeal

Niagara Falls have been a huge tourist attraction and favorite destination for newlywed couples ever since tourism became a popular pastime. The popularity of Niagara Falls periodically skyrocketed as a result of particularly successful movies featuring their beauty. They include such films as: *Niagara*, starring Marilyn Monroe and Joseph Cotten, a movie released in 1953, the 1980 movie *Superman II*, an episode in the 1987 *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* cartoon series, the 2006 movie *Pirates of the Caribbean: At World's End*, or an IMAX film, *Niagara: Miracles, Myths and Magic*. The Falls are equally powerful inspiration for music composers (e.g. Ferde Grofé or Michael Daugherty) and writers, including H. G. Wells (*The War in the Air*.)

Most visitors to Niagara Falls State Park fly into New York's Buffalo Niagara International Airport or drive in on Interstate 90. It's only 20 minutes from Buffalo, just off the

Robert Moses Parkway in the heart of downtown Niagara Falls, U.S.A.

### Niagara Winters

While summer might be the best time to plan a visit to Niagara Falls, winter also has its charms. Hundreds of natural ice sculptures are sculpted by the mist and spray from the falls and winter winds. Nearby buildings, walls, lamp posts and trees assume a fairy-tale look. Every year from November to the end of January the Winter Festival of Lights takes place in the area. New Year's Eve is no less picturesque with fireworks over the falls at 10 p.m.

### Don't Miss It

Niagara Falls State Park is open 24 hours a day, 7 days a week so, there is no excuse for not visiting while on a trip to the USA.



Two workmen, one from Canada and one from the United States, met, shook hands and exchanged flags on the center of the new Rainbow Bridge, over the Niagara Falls, May 1941. The 53 ton center iron arch of the bridge had been swung into place, leaving an 11-inch gap, seen between the two men, to be filled in later. (AP Photo)

## Attractions

**Rainbow Bridge** is 300 meters long and spans the Niagara gorge. The footbridge allows visitors to cross from the U.S. shore to Goat Island. The bridge was completed in May 1941.

**Maid of the Mist** is the name of a boat tour that navigates the turbulent waters of the Niagara River. A round-trip starts from the base of the Observation Tower at Prospect Point and takes passengers beneath the American and Horseshoe Falls. Maid of the Mists has been in operation for more than 150 years offering generations of visitors an unforgettable journey through the crashing waters beneath the Falls.

A walk to the famous **Cave of the Winds** must be performed in a rain poncho and specially designed sandals, which nevertheless will not protect you from getting soaking wet. An elevator takes tourists 175 feet down into the Niagara Gorge, and then they walk a wooden walkway along Niagara River to the Hurricane Deck, where they end up just a few feet from the Falls' thundering cascades falling from above. The wooden boardwalks and decks are removed in November and assembled anew the following spring; a procedure that protects them from harsh weather conditions in winter.

**Niagara Gorge Discovery Center** and **Niagara Legends of Adventure Theater** provide information about the 12,000-year-old history of the Niagara River in a 180° multi-screen theater as well as recreation of legends and real life.

**Aquarium of Niagara** showcases more than 1,500 aquatic animals that represent different ecosystems. Guests of all ages enjoy performances by sea lions, shark feeding and penguin antics.

**Observation Tower** is an overlook over the Niagara Gorge which provides spectacular panoramic views of both the American and Horseshoe Falls. The elevators take guests down to the Niagara Gorge and a boarding area for Maid of the Mist.

**Niagara Falls Scenic Trolley** offers an overview of the park in half an hour with a knowledgeable guide, or get off at each of the six stops and explore the Niagara Falls attractions.

**Crows Nest** is an observation deck at the edge of the American Falls.



*The Maid of the Mist navigates the turbulent waters of the lower Niagara river at the base of Horseshoe Falls, as seen from Niagara Falls State Park in Niagara Falls, N.Y., Friday, September 28, 2007. (AP Photo/Don Heupel)*

# Niagara's Daredevils

Nowadays most visitors to Niagara Falls want to take in the beauty of their unique views and are satisfied with walking along paths, which itself involves a thrill of coming within feet of the waterfall while getting soaked on the way. Nevertheless, the place has occasionally appealed to daredevils who take the challenge personally and want to perform stunts such as going over the falls in a barrel or walking over them on a wire. Whereas most of these attempts are a thing of the past, there are sporadic requests for permission to do such acts also today. Going down the falls either as a result of an accident or as a pre-planned stunt is highly dangerous and more often than not is fatal for the victim or daredevil. Though some people survive, even the lucky ones suffer broken bones, wounds, bruises or hypothermia. This does not stop some people from trying to show off, gain popularity, or earn some money.

## Leaps

Sam Pitch was one of the first recorded daredevils who jumped into the Niagara River. He did the feat twice in the fall of 1829. While he survived both leaps from the Niagara Falls, he died later that same year jumping before 8,000 spectators at the Upper Falls of the Genesee River in Rochester. He was 22.

## Barrel Stunts

A 63-year-old woman, Annie Edson Taylor, was the first person to perform a barrel stunt. She used a custom-made barrel made of oak and iron. The inside was padded with a mattress. A barrel had been tested for breaking a few days before Taylor's act when it was sent down the Horseshoe Falls with a domestic cat inside. The cat survived and Taylor followed suit. The barrel with Taylor inside was recovered and except for some minor injuries she was all right. However, the experience was traumatic for her and she commented later: *If it was with my dying breath, I would caution anyone against attempting the feat...*



Source: Francis J. Petrie Photograph Collection

## Not Legal Anymore

Some other daredevils who did a similar stunt survived, but there were also drownings. Such stunts are illegal and daredevils face persecution. A 1984 barrel plunge without a license cost the person who performed it hundreds of dollars in fines for performing the stunt without a license.

## Tightrope Walking

Another chapter in Niagara Falls and daredevil history is tightrope walking across the gorge of the Niagara River, which took place between the late 1850s and 1896 when tightrope crossings of the falls were forbidden by law. The first recorded stuntman to have performed the feat (and not only once, but on a few occasions) was Jean François Gravelet, better known under his nickname "Blondin". Not only did he walk along a wire several times, but in so doing he carried his manager on his back. Competing with him was William Hunt, nicknamed "The Great Farini," who did the stunt turning somersaults and other seemingly impossible stunts on the rope. Daredevils were not only men. In 1876, Italian Maria Spelterini made as many as four crossings over 18 days on the tightrope. On one occasion peach baskets were strapped to her feet, and on another, she walked blind-folded. Recently, Nik Wallenda obtained special permission to cross by tight rope, the first person to cross by tight rope in more than 100 years. He also chose a different venue for his feat, fixing his 550-meter tightrope near the brink of the Horseshoe Falls.



Crew members of a tourist sightseeing boat look over a rubber-coated steel ball in which Nathan Boya, 30, of the Bronx, N.Y., successfully rode over Horseshoe Falls in Canada on July 15, 1961. (AP Photo)



*Tourists ride the Maid of the Mist tour boat at the base of the American Falls in Niagara Falls, N.Y. (AP Photo/David Duprey)*



*June 15, 2012 photo shows Nik Wallenda walking across Niagara Falls on a wire in Niagara Falls, N.Y. (AP Photo/David Duprey)*

# ACTIVITY PAGE

## JUNE 2016 TRIVIA QUESTION

Which American state park is the oldest?

Send the answer  
(with your home address) to:  
KrakowAIRC@state.gov

The 4th, the 9th and 14th  
sender of the correct answer  
will be awarded with a book  
prize.

MAY 2016 Answer:

Grover Cleveland

The winners are:

Gosia from Krakow, Irena  
from Brodnica and Maria  
from Lima

CONGRATULATIONS!!!

The prizes will be sent to you  
by mail.

Exercise 1: Niagara quiz.

Answer the questions below:

1. How long is the Niagara River?

- a. 58 km      b. 30 km      c. 98 km      d. 357 km

2. What is the elevation between two lakes connected by the Niagara River?

- a. 55 m      b. 99 m      c. 150 m      d. 16 m

3. Which two lakes does the Niagara River connect?

- a. Huron and Ontario      b. Superior and Ontario      c. Ontario and Erie

4. Which is the highest waterfall in the world?

- a. Niagara Falls      b. Angel Falls      c. Iguazu Falls      d. Victoria Falls

5. Which is not one of the Great Lakes?

- a. Superior      b. Ontario      c. Erie      d. Badwater

6. Which American state park is the oldest?

- a. Niagara Falls State Park      b. Dead Horse Point State Park      c. Dayton State Park      d. Bottle Beach State Park

Exercise 2: Speaking

Work in pairs. Choose a picture and describe it to another student. Compare your photos and discuss what advantages a winter visit to Niagara might have.



(AP Photo/Nick LoVerde)



Photo Janina Galas

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Pat Kelecseny of Hermitage, Pa., wears a Nik Wallenda balloon hat before Wallenda's walk across Niagara Falls in Niagara Falls, N.Y., Friday, June 15, 2012. (AP Photo/David Duprey)