

Pokémon Go Fest Introduces Massive Crowds to Liberty State Park



by **Ben Ackman**
June 11, 2025



Pokemon Go players at Pokemon Go Fest play the game on their phones at Liberty State Park. (Ben Ackman/Jersey City Times)

Over 50,000 people visited Liberty State Park last weekend to participate in Pokémon Go Fest, an annual event that also brought tents, carnival games, and enormous inflatable mascots to the park's 1,212 acre grounds.

They were playing Pokémon Go, an augmented reality mobile game developed by San Francisco-based software company Niantic Labs. The crowds of so-called Pokémon Trainers came to earn exclusive in-game challenges and rewards, but more content was available for players willing to visit greater Jersey City and the five boroughs of New York. From June 6 to June 8, players could be seen on streets and public transportation, wearing Pokémon merchandise with cell phones in hand.

In total, more than 500,000 people across Jersey City and New York participated in the three-day event, according to a spokesperson from Niantic.

Jersey City is the latest American city to host Pokémon Go Fest, joining Seattle, Chicago, and New York.

Instead of interacting with a virtual space, the player character in Pokémon Go moves on a map of the real world using the phone's GPS location, capturing characters known as Pokémon and interacting with real locales for resources.

Jonathan Gilyana, a content creator who goes by JTGily on several platforms, attended the festival as an affiliate with Niantic Labs. He said he had met players from all over the world, including some from Europe.

Gilyana, from the Bay Area in California, said Jersey City's Pokémon Go Fest has been the most beautiful one he's seen, and he's been to all of them.

"It's the most aesthetically pleasing thing," Gilyana said. "The view is great. From the park, you can see the Statue of Liberty, the New York City skyline, and you have the water."



A banner for visitors to mark their hometown with stickers. (Ben Ackman/Jersey City Times)

Many attendees agreed with Gilyana. Kaitlyn and Nicole Esposito, two sisters in town from Philadelphia, said the park was gorgeous.

“We were thinking about bringing our dog up here because it’s so spacious,” Kaitlyn said. “Great place to train.”

The event’s organizers were well aware of the park’s panoramic vistas, which offer looks at the Jersey City and Manhattan skylines.

“Who doesn’t want a park with these incredible views?” said Divya Erram, the global Pokémon Go Fest marketing and live events manager, citing the park’s proximity to the Statue of Liberty and Ellis Island.

But the first reason she gave for using the space was its accessibility.

“When we look at these cities and host locations, we don’t really consider name recognition or that star power,” Erram said. “We really think about accessibility first and foremost, and there’s Newark right down the way. We have a massive train station out in Newark. It’s very accessible to folks all across the Eastern Seaboard just for a drive.”

For the past two years, Niantic hosted the festival from Randall’s Island in Manhattan. Erram said the move across the Hudson was chiefly determined by the availability of certain parks, with visitor experience second.

“There’s a lot of construction or renovations, restorations that are happening all across our different parks,” Erram said.

Marc Lieberman, a Pokémon Go community ambassador from Reston, Virginia, said it was an easy trip. As a community ambassador, he volunteers to organize events for players in his local scene.

“In general, it’s great to meet the community members and build the community in my local hometown,” Lieberman said. “And now to get here and see everybody else playing is really amazing, to see so many people in one place. And all ages.”

Participants ranged in age.

61-year-old Sarah Schuler and 62-year-old John Wagenhurst came from Allentown, PA. Wagenhurst picked up Pokémon Go from his coworker when it first came out, and Schuler from her children. 35-year-old

Taneisha Smith, from Baltimore, MD, started the game at its launch, then returned from a hiatus about a year ago. Nine-year-old Mason Guerrero, from Totowa, NJ, was in Jersey City for his first Pokémon Go Fest, with his mother Teresa who was at her second.

Sam Pesin, president of Friends of Liberty State Park, and Paula Mahayosnand, president of Jersey City Parks Coalition, were there too. They said Niantic invited them and other nonprofits to visit the festival and had given them redeemable codes to share with volunteers and local youth.

Sam Pesin, the son of the park's founder Morris Pesin, is a fierce opponent of privatization in Liberty State Park. He stressed that ticketed events at the park like the festival should be very periodic. Tickets to the event started at \$30 and could go up to \$180 with optional content added, according to the Niantic spokesperson.

"It raises some money for the park, and it does expose new people to Liberty Park, but it does disrupt [people's regular] use of the park," Pesin said.

But he and Mahayosnand were pleased with what they saw. In particular, they praised Niantic for providing shuttle transit into the park.

"It's beautiful," Mahayosnand said. "Today's a gorgeous day to see everyone playing calmly, and with families, all ages."

The only complaint many attendees had was the weather. Storms on Saturday night forced some players to quit early. But Gilyana said people enjoyed themselves despite the rain and heat.

"People are going through it," he said. "They're grinding."