



If They Build It, Will They Come — to Staten Island?

How big of a boon will a Ferris wheel and outlet stores be for the borough's existing attractions?

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The New York Wheel will be 60 stories tall. Each of its capsules can carry 40 people. (New York Wheel)

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More than two years before an enormous observation wheel, an outlet mall and new housing and hotels are scheduled to open on Staten Island, the borough's long-languishing cultural attractions are already drawing up plans to appeal to a new wave of tourists.

"The wheel, the outlets and the new housing that's coming to this area is going to have an amazing positive impact," said Wayne Miller, executive director of the [St. George Theatre](#), a short walk from the ferry terminal. Even before construction begins, he's planning a series of readings of new plays as well as lunchtime theater to appeal to local, national and international visitors. At the nearby [Staten Island Museum](#), the staff is expanding exhibits about the ferry. Meanwhile, many museums and attractions are exploring the idea of creating a joint ticket that could be used for multiple attractions.

"We're talking to various entities like the [Children's museum](#) and now the new [Lighthouse museum](#) about putting together a ticket package of some kind, whether it's a wristband, or actually a card of some kind," said Steve Violetta, CEO of the [Staten Island Yankees](#).

Already, the Staten Island Ferry carries two million tourists a year. With the new attractions, it's expected to carry millions more.

The impetus for this collective brainstorm are three economic development projects breaking ground this year that are expected to transform the island's North Shore from a concrete eyesore into a mixed-use neighborhood lined with parks, shopping malls and tourist attractions.

A large, unsightly parking lot next to the ferry terminal will become [Empire Outlets](#), the city's first outlet mall, with 125 shops and a 200-room hotel. A short walk down the waterfront, the [New York Wheel](#) will rise 630 feet in the

air, the largest in the world. Another project called [Lighthouse Point](#) will bring new housing, hotels, retail and restaurants to an area short on all four.

The Wheel alone is expected to attract 4.5 million tourists a year, [according to the New York City Economic Development Corporation](#).

"If I can get even just ten percent of that annual visitation, that could double what I get today," said Lynn Kelly, CEO of the [Snug Harbor Cultural Center and Botanical Garden](#), which currently sees 250,000 visitors a year. For much of the 19th and 20th centuries, Snug Harbor was a home for retired sailors. Now it features museums, a theater, a botanical garden, the city's largest working farm and [landmarked Greek Revival buildings](#). But getting there has never been easy.

The 83-acre museum campus lies just under two miles from the Staten Island ferry terminal. There's no subway access, and the walk, while possible, passes through an industrial strip lined with auto body shops, warehouses and a salt plant. Car and bus are the only realistic ways to get there now.

But once the Wheel and outlet mall are built, one out of three shuttle buses that service those sites will continue on to Snug Harbor, and the city is looking into building a [new dock for high-speed ferries](#) and water taxis.

"What you're about to see is the renaissance of Staten Island's waterfront," Kelly said. "This is a game changer for us."