



## Business Discovers

# Green In Houston

By Greg Varhaug

### Welcome to Discovery Green

The most frequent question from people calling the main office at Discovery Green (DG) is, “How much does it cost to get in?” The fact is that the park is free. Most of the events that take place there—including film screenings, live concerts, festivals, writing workshops, live discussions, and exercise classes—are also free.

DG is a welcoming, open space with no perimeter fence. The nearly 12-acre park includes a small lake, two separate live-performance areas, one amphitheater opposite a sloping lawn, a central walkway shaded by more than twenty large live oaks, and a tranquil garden with a variety of palms and flowering plants. In summer, kids can

cool off in two separate water-play areas. In the McGovern Playground, there is a kid’s climbing module modeled after a suspension bridge. It is partially shaded with a long, elevated walkway and tubular slides.

DG opened in 2008. The park is a prime example of what public-private partnerships can accomplish, even in a troubled economy. It has transformed the East side of downtown Houston and is especially important to the more than 3,000 people who live in and around the Downtown District. Visitors to the park have an impressive view of several of Houston’s newest high rises. The George R. Brown (GRB) Convention Center dominates the western horizon. Its bold facade,



like a Bauhaus-inspired cruise ship, compliments the festive atmosphere of the park. The park lends an inviting air to the GRB that the building itself otherwise lacks. Views from the surrounding buildings have greatly improved, and the park is also a big hit with tourists.

### Dog Friendly

DG is dog-friendly, though there are restrictions during some events. Dogs must remain on a leash, and, unsurprisingly, owners are expected to clean up after their pets. There are two fenced dog runs: one for large dogs and one for small dogs.

The events calendar at the DG website shows which events are

family-friendly and dog-friendly. Most events don't require any registration, though some events require people to sign an exercise release form.

The DG website cautions to "consult your physician before engaging in exercise, but also consult your physician before avoiding exercise." Some exercise classes have limits on the number of participants.

### Weekly Events

The park hosts a number of weekly events. Regular participants often get to know each other over time. Some regular events center on health and fitness, like Zumba, Parkour, and Hatha Yoga. Other events are more cerebral.

"Discovery Discussions," a series of talks scheduled in April and May, will cover topics like "The Greening of Houston," "H-Town Music," and "What will our city look like in 10 years?"

Apart from Hatha Yoga on Saturdays and core-focused yoga on Tuesdays, the Military Veteran Peer Network conducts a yoga session and, right after that, a mindfulness meditation session. Exercise and meditation classes can help veterans readjust to civilian life, but these sessions are open to all. No distinction is made between veteran and non-veterans. In fact, a goal of these sessions is to strengthen the ties between veteran and non-veteran communities. The yoga session is from 11am to 12 pm at the Lindsey Waterside Landing. The meditation session is held from 12 to 1 pm at the same location. Many people who attend the yoga sessions stay for the meditation sessions. They also hold a group fitness class on the Grace Event Lawn (next to the Grove) Thursdays from 11 am to 12 pm.

Carlos Garcia, who helps run the classes, says "Our mission is to bring the community together: invigorating the mind through yoga, meditation, and getting a good workout; and really promoting a healthy lifestyle for all people."

The HPL Express is a small Houston Public Library reading room that offers free wi-fi, as well as most services available at any HPL branch. You can apply for an HPL MY Link library card, check or renew books (including ebooks), or put books on hold. With your MY Link card, you can also use one of their three PCs or

check out one of seven laptops to use there at the library. HPL Express is only open on Fridays, Saturdays, and Sunday afternoons.

HPL Express at DG, together with Writers in the Schools, holds its Young Writers Workshop for kids aged 6 to 10 each Saturday. These creative writing workshops are free, materials are provided, and there's no registration. Walk-ins are welcome.

### Enjoy Kinder Lake

Kinder Lake is a shallow, oblong pond where, in summer, you can rent a kayak or a standup paddleboard. Other times, they allow model boats on the lake during park hours. The park even has model boats for rent on weekends during warm months. In September, Kinder Lake hosts a "Dock Dogs" event, where dogs compete in water-based contests.

Between November and February, part of Kinder Lake is transformed into an ice-skating rink. A portion of the lake can be dammed off to accommodate a temporary deck next the main stage, as it was during the recent NCAA March Madness Music Festival.

The Lake House, next to Kinder Lake, is a family-friendly restaurant with burgers, hot dogs, sweet-potato fries, fish tacos and shakes, all at reasonable prices. The Grove, next to the Wortham Foundation Gardens, is more upscale and specializes in steaks, chops, and fish.

### Concerts and Festivals

For concerts and festivals, DG is a venue unlike any other. It was designed from the ground up to accommodate large, outdoor events. It's a highly flexible space in a central location, close to other major venues. Parking in the garage directly beneath the park is less expensive than most other nearby



event parking. The two permanent stages, with power, sound, and lighting systems built-in, make it an ideal site for promoters and attendees alike. This well-known public space is frequented by people

from all walks of life. DG even has built up a considerable following on social media, which is valuable to promoters in publicizing events. DG offers rentals for special events like weddings, reunions, and corporate

events and can accommodate groups of up to 25,000 people.

Discovery Green lives up to its name by getting all of its electricity from renewable sources like wind and solar through Green Mountain Energy. They also hold regular “Recycling Saturdays” where, between 11 am and 2 pm, volunteers will take your sorted recyclables from your car so you don’t have to park. They accept paper, glass, plastic, and aluminum recyclables.



## Getting To The Park

Parking downtown can be expensive, but you don’t have to spend a lot to visit DG. Discovery Green is surrounded by metered parking. It costs \$1.50 per hour to park. You can buy as much time as you want and pay by cash or credit card. (Don’t forget to put the receipt on your dashboard.) The parking garage beneath the park charges \$12 for an entire day with the entrance on Avenida De Las Americas, on the west side of the park, across from the George R. Brown.

If you’d rather not drive downtown, METRO has a handy trip-planner on their homepage. This is also available as an app. Trips from most Park and Ride locations to DG take between 30 minutes and an hour. You may have to transfer between buses. Bus fares range anywhere from 60 cents to \$4.50 per ride. The Convention District stops on the Green and Purple METRO light rail lines are within two blocks of DG.

Greenlink buses are free to ride. These fully air-conditioned buses run on clean-burning Compressed Natural Gas (CNG). They make it easy to get to DG from Smith and Louisiana streets. There’s one leaving every 10 minutes from each of the 18 stops along the two and a half mile route. They’re great for getting from Main Street Square or the Central Library to DG.

There are also two B-Cycle stations at DG. B-Cycle allows you to rent a bicycle from any of the 29 stations. Most of B-Cycle’s 29 docking stations are in the downtown and midtown areas. B-Cycle’s free app can tell you how many bikes are available at each station. The park also provides places for you to store your own bike.

Discovery Green welcomes volunteers to help with everything from gardening to conducting surveys. Volunteers also hold workshops, help keep kids safe in the fountain areas, help with recycling, and help install public art works like the Los Trompos exhibit that ended in March.

Sarah Gish is a local infopreneur, whose *Gish Picks* and *Spirit Picks* e-newsletters often feature Discovery Green events. Reflecting on what

makes Discovery Green a unique Houston landmark, Sarah says, “This may be the only place in town where instead of paving paradise and putting up a parking lot, they took a parking lot and built a paradise on top of it.” **N**

*Greg Varhaug owns Pecos Multimedia, which produces video and written content.*