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Baby, It's Warm Outside! City Hits 69 Degrees

You wouldn't know it was Dec. 1

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Dec. 1? Yes, Dec. 1.

But the air yesterday carried the velvet touch of spring, not the crisp chill New Yorkers are accustomed to feeling as they head out to shop for the holidays.

In Columbus Park, near the federal and state courthouses in lower Manhattan, Wayne Wong, 13, had his long sleeves pushed up to his elbows as he shot hoops with his friend Anthony Riggio, 12.

"I play all the time, even when it's cold, but I prefer when it's warm like this," said Wong, who lives in Chinatown.

He touched his forehead and said, "I'm sweating. It's kind of a rush of summer."

"When it's cold in December, it's a lot better," said Anthony, who lives downtown. "But I'm enjoying it now because I like to play basketball."

Yesterday's high in Central Park reached a most un-December-like 69.1 degrees, beating the record of 68 for the date. The forecast for the coming week is for highs in the low to mid-50s. Normal highs are in the mid-40s.

All the usual holiday signs were there: At Rockefeller Center, a large crowd of people gazed at the giant Christmas tree. A block away at Radio City Music Hall, people waited in a long line to see the annual Christmas spectacular.

But they weren't bundled in the usual cold-weather gear, with scarves wrapped around the necks, or stamping cold feet while standing on line. They were in shirtsleeves, or wearing light jackets, or walking with coats in hand or tied about their waists.

On the Grand Central Parkway, a man wearing a baseball cap breezed along in his flashy red BMW convertible, the top down. In some apartments, mosquitoes were spotted.

Gene Melkiethian, 19, visiting from Washington, D.C., couldn't believe it was December.

"This is kind of weird," he said, as he held the jacket he had thought he might need. "We were not really expecting this kind of weather but we will take it. My parents come to New York often, especially for the holiday season, and this is great."

Back in Columbus Park, Simeon Magpantay of Flatbush stood beside his 3-year-old daughter as she pushed an empty swing. Little Alyssa was wearing a white T-shirt with her pink sweatpants and Powerpuff Girls' sneakers.

"We have to shop," Magpantay said, explaining that his daughter had spotted the playground and insisted on a happy diversion. "I come from the Philippines, where it's warm, so shopping now is OK. I prefer this, actually, because we can take the kids out and they can enjoy the weather."

For Lynne Davis, a tourist from Manchester, England, a park bench at the foot of the Manhattan side of the Brooklyn Bridge provided the perfect spot to catch some rays.

"This is gorgeous weather," said Davis, who was wearing a blue sweater and had her coat draped over her knees. "When I left it was cold and wet back home, but this is tremendous. I go back home on Monday, but I am going to enjoy this weather."

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