

EDITORS' PICK | 7,369 views | Aug 28, 2019, 04:40pm

Enthusiastic Crowd Welcomes 16-Year-Old Climate Activist Greta Thunberg As She Sails Into New York Harbor



Olivia Gieger Contributor ⓘ

Leadership Strategy



Climate change activist Greta Thunberg, age 16, prepares to set sail for New York on the Malizia II ... [+] WPA POOL/GETTY IMAGES

It's been 15 days since 16-year-old climate activist Greta Thunberg hitched a ride on a sail-powered yacht from Europe to the U.S. to protest the U.N. Climate Action Summit taking place in New York in mid-September. Thunberg has vowed to avoid air travel, di

to environment-harming carbon emissions. The *Malizia II* docked this afternoon at 4:00 EDT at Coney Island in Brooklyn so its passengers could clear customs and immigration and then proceeded to North Cove Marina at the southern tip of Manhattan, just a stone's throw from Wall Street.

Despite a light drizzle, a crowd of more than 200 gathered at North Cove to welcome Thunberg. The young activist has gained an adoring following in the last few months as she's worked, with great success, to highlight the urgency of the climate situation, which she says is most accurately described as a "crisis." She has 1.2 million followers on Twitter and 1.1 million friends on Facebook, and her Facebook post announcing her arrival in New York has drawn more than 2,000 comments, nearly all celebratory. "It's like she's a superstar," remarked one woman awaiting Thunberg's arrival.

In the dockside group were many students from the Fridays For Future, the initiative Thunberg founded that calls for students to stay home from school on Fridays as way to focus attention on the urgency of the climate crisis. Fridays For Future was the driving force behind the school strikes that took place around the globe this spring, and Thunberg and the group are calling for a major student strike, [slated for September 20](#). Thunberg will join New York City Fridays For Future students in a climate strike [scheduled for later this week](#).



Making her way from the boat to the stage where she'd give a press conference
Wednesday, Greta ... [+] OLIVIA GIEGER

Today In: Leadership



For the young people waiting at North Cove on Wednesday, Thunberg's visit is a source of inspiration.

"Greta has been an incredible force who the youth rally behind," said Azalea Danes, 16, a student at the selective public Bronx High School of Science and a coordinator of New York student climate strikes.

"I look up to her. She's shown me and youth that age doesn't matter," said Olivia Wohlgemuth, also 16, a student at LaGuardia High

School who also coordinates the city's student climate strikes.

For fellow organizer Spencer Berg, 16, Thunberg's visit to New York is very meaningful. He says that if he has a chance to speak to her, he would want to thank her. "She's the reason I got into this work."

Organizers of Thunberg's welcoming committee wore neon orange vests reminiscent of those worn by the [Gilets Jaunes \(Yellow Vest\) protesters](#) in France. Although the organizers say the similarity was not intentional, it does point to a common thread uniting climate activism across the globe. Thunberg traveled from her native Sweden, and onlookers and press in New York spoke French, German and accented English while waiting for the ship to dock — evidence of the international interest in the young activist and her work.

"This is a fight across borders and across continents," said Thunberg at her post-docking press conference. "It is insane that a 16-year-old has to cross the Atlantic ocean to make a stand."

"Just her being here is an act of international cooperation, bridging across countries," said Danes, the Bronx Science student. "It shows that there are no boundaries to who we will reach out to."



Organizers coordinating Thunberg's welcome wore bright orange vests. OLIVIA GIEGER

As the crowd cheered and shouted affirmations fitting for a rockstar ("We love you Greta" echoed during breaks), Thunberg did get a bit overwhelmed by the commotion and crowd, pausing from her speech and saying "I'm sorry my mind is not working right." Climbing on stage after disembarking, she remarked that the ground was still shaking for her.

Thunberg's emission-avoiding voyage is only part of a much larger effort. "This isn't the end," said Shiv Soin, an 18-year-old sophomore at New York University, emphasizing that the youthful advocacy evidenced by Fridays For Future and Thunberg's work is on a launching pad for further action. The important question, says Soin, is: "What is next? Where do we go from here? How do we turn this into legislation and real change?"



Olivia Gieger

Follow

I write about climate change, the environment and youth leadership issues for the Forbes Leadersh section. As a rising junior at Amherst College, I spend the school ye... **Read More**