



A GUIDE TO CONEY ISLAND, BROOKLYN

When you step off the train at Coney Island, take a deep breath and inhale its very essence—the scent of salty sea air and the hunger inducing aroma of Nathan’s hotdogs.

Where is Coney Island?

Coney Island is, of course, in Brooklyn, on a peninsula that extends into the Atlantic Ocean. Originally an island, the term “Coney Island” referred to the entire peninsula including Manhattan Beach in the far eastern section, Brighton Beach in the middle section, and Coney Island in the western section. Coney Island today refers to the western section of the peninsula.

It's easy to get to Coney Island

By subway from Manhattan, take the F, W, or Q trains to the last stop, the Coney Island Terminal/Stillwell Avenue. The subway station is currently undergoing an extensive renovation to restore it to its former grandeur. As you stroll through the station, remember that in its zenith more than one million people passed through there daily on the way to enjoying a day of beach, entertainment and food.

By bus, the B36, B64, and B74 serve Coney Island.



About Coney Island

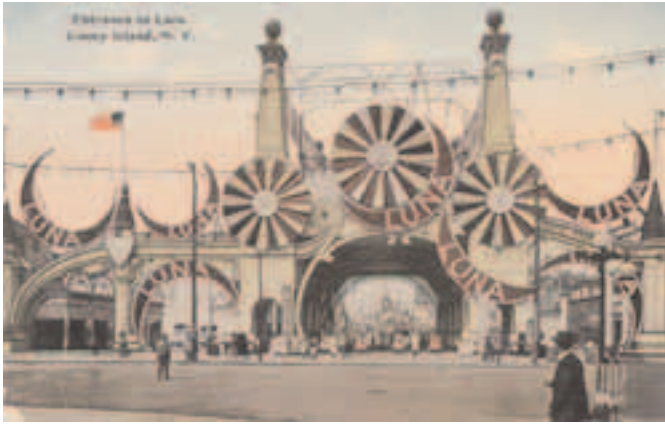
There has always been a mystique about Coney Island, and it has long occupied a special place in history and imagination. Native Americans collected shells from the beach to be used as wampum, a form of money. The area was referred to by the local Nyack and Canarsie tribes as “Narrioch, the place without shadows.” During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Coney Islanders enhanced its reputation for treasure on the beach with beguiling tales of pirates. Rumors of buried treasure still surface from time to time.

Coney Island has long been associated with controversy. Often referred to in hushed tones, Coney Island was often seen as a place of forbidden pleasures. The name itself is controversial, although it is commonly believed to originate from the Dutch word *konijn*, or rabbit. As you might expect, wild rabbits were once plentiful on Coney Island.

It is difficult to believe, but for much of history regular bathing in water was seen as sinful. Many of the other attractions of Coney Island were also considered questionable. Early establishments in Coney Island were known for hard drink and shady card games. Later on, in the 1800s, Coney Island developed an even stronger reputation for gambling when the surrounding area was home to three of the top racetracks in the country. For a time, it was considered the racing capital of the world; this was in addition to its reputation as the boxing capital. The fact that people by the name of Vanderbilt were associated with the tracks did nothing to lessen the stigma. In the 1800s, Coney Island gained the title of “Sodom by the Sea.”

However, Coney Island did not enter its golden era until the early 1900s with the advent of that new scientific phenomenon, the incandescent electric light bulb. By day, many of the Victorian hotels in the eastern end of Coney Island would host world famous entertainers such as John Philip Sousa. At night, the western end of Coney





Island came alive with light. Electricity and the light bulb in particular, were fundamental to the development of amusement parks. The architecture of the amusement parks was emblazoned with light bulbs. The amusement parks featured thrilling rides and spectacles, events or scenes that were wildly re-created. Examples included the Galveston Flood and the eruption of Mount Vesuvius.

In less than 10 years, three major amusement parks were opened—Steeplechase Park (1897), Luna Park (1903) and Dreamland (1904). Steeplechase Park was located near where the current Keyspan Stadium is located. Luna Park was located behind the elevated railroad tracks on the site of the current Luna Park Houses. Dreamland was located on the present-day New York Aquarium site. However, these replaced prior attractions including Sea-Lion Park, an elephant-shaped hotel, and the world's first roller coaster. These attractions had in turn replaced Coney Island's earlier attractions, mostly card games and primitive saloons.

Attractions

1 Coney Island has much to offer. First among its attractions is the jewel that has attracted people for hundreds of years—the beach itself. The best things in life are free and truly one of the best features of Coney Island is the water. To dip your feet into the bracing water of the Atlantic Ocean and to savor its salty tang is a thrill. Take a stroll along its famous boardwalk, originally built in 1923 and extended over time to reach the length of Coney Island. It is the widest and longest boardwalk in the world. The beach is utilized year round.

2 While its three most famous amusement parks are no more, there are two remaining amusement parks in Coney Island. One is Astroland, the home of the Cyclone rollercoaster, constructed in 1927, and considered by enthusiasts to be the finest wooden rollercoaster in existence. In Coney Island's heyday, there were more than

30 roller coasters. This is the last operating one from that era. It has been landmarked and sits near the site of the world's first rollercoaster—the 1884 Switchback Railroad.



3 Coney Island has been home to the famous New York Aquarium since 1957. Prior to moving to Brooklyn, the world-class aquarium had been located in Manhattan at Castle Clinton in the Battery. The New York Aquarium is operated by the Wildlife Conservation Society, formerly the New York Zoological Society, which operate four of the New York City's zoos including the Bronx Zoo. It is known for its exhibits on whales, sharks and penguins.

4 A great way to spend an afternoon or evening is at a baseball game, which returned to Brooklyn in 2001 with the opening of Keyspan Park, the home of the Brooklyn Cyclones. The Brooklyn Cyclones are a Class A minor league team associated with the New York Mets. It is an affordable and fun filled alternative to major league



baseball, but be prepared, the team is very popular locally and games are often sold out.

5 Across the street, is a wonderful example of carousels—spelled in its own Coney way, the B&B Carrousell.



6 The second amusement park in Coney Island is Deno's Wonder Wheel Park. The major attraction is its landmarked colossal 150-foot Ferris wheel built in 1920.

7 Running perpendicular to Keyspan Park, is the Bowery between Surf Avenue and the Boardwalk. Originally built by George C. Tilyou to provide better access to Steeplechase Park and other properties he owned, it eventually became the mid-way for Coney

Island and was known for its lively entertainment. Superstars such as Mae West, Sophie Tucker, Irving Berlin, Eddie Cantor, Jimmy Durante and



Cary Grant all started in establishments that lined this street. Little remains of the Bowery today but do stop for a moment, close your eyes and imagine what was.

8 One remaining remnant of Steeplechase Park is the Parachute Jump. Originally built for the 1939 World's Fair, it was moved to Steeplechase Park after the fair closed. Originally, parachute jumps were built for the military to train soldiers safely in the use of parachutes. It was then adapted by the inventor for civilian use as entertainment. It is painted in the bright colors to resemble a roll of LifeSavers, the original sponsor of the ride during the

World's Fair. What a thrill it was to experience your first, and possibly only, parachute jump.

9 The Coney Island Lighthouse in the Seagate section of Coney Island is the last manned lighthouse in the country and was built in 1890. Seagate is the eastern most point of Coney Island and was originally called Norton's Point. It is the only gated community in New York City.

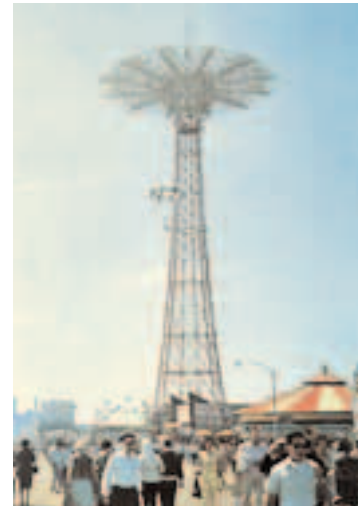
10 The Coney Island Museum at 1208 Surf Avenue is a small museum dedicated to the history of Coney Island and its amusement parks. The museum also sponsors the Mermaid Parade and other events that showcase the glory of Coney Island. The Mermaid Parade is held the first Saturday after the summer solstice in June.

11 During summer, people enjoy a free series of summer concerts in Asser Levy Seaside Park, which is located on the border between Coney Island and Brighton Beach. Concerts feature top name act such as Tom Jones, Kenny Rogers and Pat Benatar.

Fireworks and Coney Island are synonymous. Young and old, who can resist the dazzling bursts of color as they splash across the darkened sky? Each Friday evening during July and August there are fireworks galore at the Wonderwheel. The fun begins at 9:30 in the evening.

Food and Coney Island

12 Fresh air will make you hungry. Many will tell you that it is sacrilege to go to Coney Island and not have the traditional dish, the hot dog. Local lore says that the hot dog was invented in Coney Island at the famous Feltman's restaurant. Whether or not this is true is hotly debated, but everyone will tell you that it was perfected by an employee of Feltman's —Nathan Handwerker who went on to open a





small stand in 1916 that sold only hot dogs, and does so today as Nathan's Famous. Nathan's is a Coney Island institution and is open year round. Located at 1310 Surf Avenue at the corner of Surf Avenue and Stillwell Avenue, it is directly across from the train station. Every July 4th, they hold their annual hot dog eating contest. If you can't wait, the internet link is for a buy one get one free hot dog coupon. <http://64.45.18.110/nathans/coupon.html>

13 Another Coney Island legend is Tototonno's. To people in the neighborhood, this is unquestionably the best pizza in New York City. It is an old fashioned pizzeria that uses a coal oven and all fresh ingredients. Served in pies only, if they run out of dough that is it for the day. They are opened from Wednesday through Sunday and are located at 1525 Neptune Avenue.

14 Upscale dining is also possible in Coney Island. Gargiulo's is a long-time resident and one of the area's finest Italian restaurants. They are open seven days a week from 12 noon to 10 p.m. on the weekdays and from 12 noon to 12 midnight on the weekends. They are located at 2911 West 15th Street.

Links to Coney Island

For Coney Island history see

<http://naid.spps.ucla.edu/coneyisland/>

Bathing and Coney Island go together

<http://www.winterbathers.com/index.htm>

More about the aquarium can be found at

<http://wcs.org/home/zoo/nyaquarium/>

To learn about baseball as a neighborhood event see

<http://brooklyncyclones.com>



Text by Shara Cohen. Modern photos by Bernard Saper. Archival photos and historical information courtesy of Paul De Luca, Coney Island historian, lecturer and founder/director of COLORQUEST, NYC.

About Big Apple Greeter

Established in 1992, Big Apple Greeter is a "welcome visitor" program whose aim is to introduce foreign and domestic visitors to a "New Yorker's New York." A large network of volunteer Greeters help visitors to feel welcome and comfortable and to make the most out of their stay in the world's most exciting and diverse city. Our goal is to encourage visitors to return to New York again and again. As a non-profit voluntary organization, Big Apple Greeter receives financial support from New York City's business and philanthropic communities, and offers its services to visitors free of charge. Greeters do not accept tips.

Who Is A Big Apple Greeter?

Nearly 400 adults of all ages, from all of the five boroughs of New York City have volunteered to become Greeters. Each is eager to portray his or her enthusiastic view of New York City. More than 20 foreign languages are spoken among the volunteer Greeters.

What Does A Greeter Actually Do?

Share with a visitor what life in New York is really like by walking in their own neighborhood, or a neighborhood familiar to the Greeter—not just to see the well known sights of New York, but to highlight the little things that distinguish one New York neighborhood from another. Share with visitors the wonders of New York's mass transit system using FUN PASSES generously donated by the Metropolitan Transportation Authority.

How Do Visitors Learn About Big Apple Greeter?

Information about Big Apple Greeter is available on our multi-lingual Web site, www.bigapplegreeter.org, as well as extensive national and international newspaper, magazine and radio coverage. "Word-of-mouth," travel agents, guidebooks and other pertinent information sources also disseminate information about Big Apple Greeter.

Big Apple Greeter has a nondiscriminatory policy on race, religion, color, national origin, age, gender, sexual orientation, marital status and disability.

