

NEW YORK CITY BEACH GUIDE

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THE DYNAMIC NATURE OF NYC BEACHES

New York City's beaches exist in a constant state of transformation, shaped by natural forces that continuously erode and replenish the shoreline. The barrier beaches of Rockaway and Coney Island exemplify this dynamic process through longshore sand transport—a natural phenomenon where wave action progressively moves sand westward along the coast. This remarkable journey begins at Montauk and continues the entire length of Long Island before reaching Coney Island. At Breezy Point, this process has created tangible growth, with approximately a mile of new shoreline forming at its western tip over just twenty years.

The composition of beach sand varies across the city. Most NYC beaches feature a distinctive blend of quartz, magnetite, garnet, and other minerals. Staten Island stands as a notable exception, with beaches formed from brown stone sediment that has traveled down through the Newark Basin.

Beach environments consist of several distinct zones: the backshore (dry sand above the high-water mark), the intertidal area (below the low tide line), and the berm (the crest where these zones meet). Beyond the backshore, dune systems develop—with Fort Tilden preserving the city's last natural dune ecosystem. These delicate environments face constant challenges from storms and winter nor'easters that strip sand away to form offshore sandbars.

Conservation efforts through beach nourishment initiatives, strategic sand fence placement, and dune reconstruction have proven essential in combating erosion and promoting natural regeneration. Conversely, artificial structures like jetties, seawalls, and groins often disrupt natural sand movement, accelerating erosion downstream. Historically, Coney

Island pioneered beach preservation in 1922 as America's first beach replenishment project utilizing offshore sand resources.

CONEY ISLAND

- Setting: Atlantic Ocean along Surf Avenue spanning from West 37th Street to Brighton neighborhood
- Contact: 718-946-1350
- Features: This historic landmark—America's pioneering public beach—was initially accessible only through paid bathhouse admission. The impressive two-mile stretch is complemented by the iconic Riegelmann Boardwalk, classic amusement attractions, traditional seafood shacks, handball courts, and the restored Steeplechase Pier
- Activities and facilities: Beach volleyball, cycling paths, paid parking, fishing, handball courts, lifeguards, playgrounds, ocean pier, food vendors, public restrooms, scuba diving entry points, shower facilities, and spectacular ocean vistas
- Getting there: Subway lines F, Q, or W to Stillwell Avenue station

CONEY ISLAND CREEK PARK

- Setting: Where Coney Island Creek meets Gravesend Bay along Bayview Drive, Coney Island
- Features: A pristine narrow stretch of fine pale sand with rehabilitated dune systems, popular with fishermen who wade into the shallows and couples collecting baitfish. Offers remarkable views of the Verrazzano-Narrows Bridge framed by weathered pier supports. Provides the best access point to walk along the shoreline to Seagate's private beaches during low tide
- Activities and facilities: Fishing opportunities and scenic viewpoints (no supporting facilities available)
- Getting there: Subway W line to Bay 50th Street station, connect with Bus B74

MANHATTAN BEACH

- Setting: Atlantic Ocean frontage along Oriental Boulevard
- Contact: 718-946-1373
- Features: Intimate community-oriented beach with adjacent waterfront promenade
- Activities and facilities: Athletic fields, barbecue areas, beach volleyball, paid parking, fishing, lifeguards, picnic grounds, playground, public restrooms, tennis facilities, and waterfront views
- Getting there: Subway lines D or Q to Brighton Beach station; alternatively, Bus B1 traveling eastbound

PLUMB BEACH (GNRA)

- Setting: Dead Horse Bay area along the Belt Parkway
- Features: Untamed coastal landscape comprising cobblestone shoreline, natural sand dunes, exposed mudflats during low tide, and protected waters that attract windsport enthusiasts. The beach to witness horseshoe crabs on May evenings.
- Activities and facilities: Beachcombing, bicycle paths, fishing, free parking, protected natural habitats, kiteboarding and kitesurfing, public restrooms, surfing breaks, and scenic viewpoints
- Getting there: Subway lines D or Q to Sheepshead Bay station. By car, access point just beyond eastbound Exit #9 on Belt Parkway

SEAGATE BEACH

- Setting: Atlantic Ocean frontage
- Features: Exclusive resident-only beach within the private Seagate gated community situated at Coney Island's western edge
- Activities and facilities: Shore exploration, fishing, historic lighthouse, and coastal viewpoints
- Getting there: Subway W line to Bay 50th Street station, connect with Bus B74
- **Seagate Beach Club** located at 3716 Atlantic Avenue, contact 718-372-447



QUEENS BEACHES

BREEZY POINT (GNRA)

- Setting: Junction of Atlantic Ocean and Rockaway Inlet, Beach 222nd Street
- Contact: 718-318-4300
- Features: Residential cooperative community alongside more than 1,000 acres of protected shoreline that serves as critical habitat for endangered coastal bird species
- Activities and facilities: Beach exploration, fishing, wildlife habitat, surfing breaks, swimming areas, and scenic vistas
- Getting there: Subway A line to Beach 116th Street station, transfer to Q35 Green bus route
- Parking: Special off-road parking permits (\$50) available at Fort Tilden
- **Breezy Point Surf Club** / Beach 227th Street
- **Silver Gull Club** at Beach 193rd Street, contact 718-634-2900

FORT TILDEN BEACH (GNRA)

- Setting: Atlantic Ocean frontage
- Contact: 718-318-4300
- Features: Broad unmonitored beach protected by substantial dune systems that appeals to shoreline anglers and adventurous sunbathers
- Activities and facilities: Sports fields, cycling paths, cricket pitches, dog-friendly areas, ferry access, fishing, protected wildlife habitat, nature trails, picnic area, restrooms, sunbathing, and scenic overlooks
- Special notes: Visitors must carry out all trash they bring in
- Parking: Permit required for vehicle access
- Getting there: Subway line 2 to Flatbush terminal station, connect to Q35 bus; alternatively, A train to Rockaway Park, transfer to Q22 Bus

JACOB RIIS PARK

- Setting: Atlantic Ocean shoreline, Beach 169th Street
- Contact: 718-318-4300
- Features: One-mile stretch of sandy beach with historic boardwalk. The Art Deco bathhouse and clock tower have held NYC Landmark status since the 1930s. The eastern section traditionally accommodates clothing-optional sunbathing
- Activities and facilities: Athletic fields, barbecue zones, beach volleyball, bicycle paths, accessibility features, lifeguards, paddlesport launch areas, picnic grounds, restrooms, shower facilities, and panoramic ocean views
- Special notes: Pack-in/pack-out trash policy
- Parking: Annual permits available (\$50/year)
- Getting there: Subway line 2 to Flatbush Avenue station, transfer to Q35 Bus

ROCKAWAY BEACH

- Setting: Atlantic Ocean shoreline spanning from Beach 9th Street to Beach 149th Street.
- Contact: 718-318-4000
- Features: Extensive barrier peninsula offering 7 miles of continuous shoreline and 5 miles of boardwalk. Main commercial and recreational hub centers around Beach 116th Street. Top surfing conditions near Beach 90th Street and scuba diving access points near Beach 8th St. just west of the Atlantic Beach Bridge. Far Rockaway begins at 32nd Street to the Nassau County line.
- Best beaches: Beach 67th; Beach 90th – 98th; Beach 105th.
- Activities and facilities: barbecue grills, shore exploration, beach volleyball, cycling paths, lifeguards, playgrounds, food vendors, restrooms, shower facilities, surfing, and coastal viewpoints
- Getting there: Subway A line to Beach 116th Street station; alternatively, Bus routes Q21 or Q22
- Parking: Limited on-street parking available



STATEN ISLAND SHORES

GREAT KILLS BEACH (GNRA)

- Setting: Where Atlantic Ocean meets Great Kills Harbor along Hylan Boulevard
- Features: Extended sandy shoreline with natural dune formations and walking trails within a 1,200-acre National Park
- Activities and facilities: Shoreline exploration, cycling paths, boat launch ramps with trailer facilities, fishing areas, protected wildlife habitats, lifeguards, marina services, nature trails, parking, picnic grounds, food vendors, public restrooms, and scenic outlooks
- Getting there: Staten Island Railway to Great Kills station; or Bus S78

SOUTH & MIDLAND BEACHES

- Setting: Lower New York Bay along Father Capodanno Boulevard
- Contact: 718-987-0709
- Features: Extensive shoreline spanning Staten Island's entire south coast, extending well beyond official public beach boundaries. The historic WPA-constructed FDR Boardwalk extends 2.5 miles, terminating at Midland Beach's fishing pier
- Activities and facilities: Beach exploration, bocce courts, fishing spots, picnic areas, pier access, food vendors, public restrooms, volleyball courts, and panoramic bay views
- Getting there: Staten Island Railway to South Beach station; or Bus S78

TOTTENVILLE BEACH

- Setting: Atlantic Ocean frontage near Page Avenue
- Features: Modest beach extension just north of historic Conference House Park
- Activities and facilities: Shoreline exploration, lifeguards, parking, picnic grounds, public restrooms, and scenic viewpoints

- Getting there: Staten Island Railway to Tottenville station; or Bus S78

WOLFE'S POND BEACH

- Setting: Prince's Bay area along Hylan Boulevard
- Contact: 718-984-8266
- Features: Rocky coastline featuring gradual dune formations
- Activities and facilities: Beachcombing, protected natural habitats, picnic grounds, public restrooms, and scenic overlooks
- Getting there: Staten Island Railway to Prince Bay station; or Bus S78

THE NYC DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH TESTS WATER QUALITY AT PUBLIC AND PRIVATE BEACHES AND ADVISES OF BEACH CLOSURES DUE TO POLLUTION. THE GENERAL RULE IS TO REFRAIN FROM SWIMMING AT BEACHES FOR AT LEAST 12 HOURS AFTER HEAVY RAINFALL WHEN POLLUTION LEVELS ARE HIGH DUE TO STORMWATER RUNOFF AND COMBINED SEWER OVERFLOW. A WAIT OF UP TO 48 HOURS IS ADVISED AT EASTCHESTER BAY BEACHES IN THE BRONX.



TREASURES ALONG THE SHORE

The high-tide line, known as the strand or wrackline, is where you'll discover shells, seaweed, and various marine deposits. Urban beachcombers will find surf clams, quahogs, Atlantic slippers, common jingles, bay scallops, blue mussels, Atlantic ribbed mussels, cockle shells, razor clams, oyster, and moon snails. The Official Shell of New York State is the bay scallop. The best beach for shell collecting is Breezy Point. Treasure hunters using a metal detector need a permit on city park beaches and it is not permitted in Federal and State parks or historical sites where relics might be of archeological significance.

New York City Parks: 14 miles of beaches
Gateway National Recreation Area: 17 miles of beaches
Beach Season: Memorial Day to Labor Day
Swimming Beaches: Lifeguard on duty 10am - 6pm
Summer Average Air Temps: 75° F 24° C
Summer Average Water Temp: 67° F 19° C
Handicapped Access: City Park beaches with Mobimats
Bicycles: Boardwalks only, 5am - 10am
Dogs Friendly: Off-season, on leash only

New York City features extensive barrier beaches offering miles of public shoreline. The NYC Parks Department maintains and oversees 14 miles of designated swimming beaches, while Gateway National Recreation Area (GNRA) beaches fall under National Park Service jurisdiction. For safety reasons, swimming is restricted to lifeguarded beach sections during the official summer season.

The environmental challenge: The most commonly found litter items on NYC beaches are cigarette butts, food packaging, and drink container caps. This pollution typically originates as street litter that washes into storm drains, travels through the watershed to rivers, and eventually deposits on coastal beaches. It doesn't decompose but must be removed during beach cleanups or is pulled into the sea with the tides.





BRONX SHORELINE

ORCHARD BEACH

- Setting: Long Island Sound, within Pelham Bay Park
- Contact: 718-885-2275
- Features: This engineered mile-long crescent beach features a striking promenade and performance band shell adjacent to Pelham Bay's salt marshes and trail network
- Activities and facilities: Basketball courts, nature areas, volleyball, cycling paths, small boat launch, handball courts, accessibility features for disabled visitors, paid parking, lifeguards, environmental education center, paddlesports, picnic zones,

playground, food vendors, restrooms, rowing access, and panoramic water views.

- Getting there: Take Subway line 6 to Pelham Bay Park station, then transfer to BX12 Bus (seasonal summer service); alternatively, use NY Express Bus to Pelham Bay
- **Morris Yacht & Beach Club** 25 City Island Ave. City Island private beach club
- **The Strand** (Throggs Neck area) private membership beach and pool club
- **White Cross Fishing Club** on Eastchester Bay
- **Silver Beach** neighborhood beach at Locust Point
- **American Turner Club** Clarence Road.
- **Danish American Beach Club** Clarence Road.
- **Schuyler Hill Civic Association** Throggs Neck neighborhood





BROOKLYN BEACHES

BRIGHTON BEACH

- Setting: Atlantic Ocean frontage from East Seabreeze Walk extending to Corbin Place
- Contact: 718-946-1350
- Features: Expansive white sand shoreline with protective rock jetties, bordered by the historic boardwalk, authentic Russian eateries, retirement communities, and upscale residential developments
- Activities and facilities: Sand volleyball courts, bike access, lifeguards, picnic areas, playground, food options, public restrooms, shower facilities

- Getting there: Subway Q line to Brighton Beach station; alternatively, Bus routes B1 or B68
- **Red Tide Swim NYC** An organized open water swimming group that swims year-round at Brighton Beach and Coney Island. They swim parallel to the shore in the Atlantic Ocean, using natural markers like jetties for distance and safety.