



# Coney Island

1

**Length:** 5.5 miles (loop)  
**Estimated travel time:** Biking—45 minutes; Walking—3 hours  
**Attractions:** Coney Island Beach and Boardwalk, Keyspan Park, Nathan’s Famous, Asser Levy/Seaside Park, Astroland Amusement Park (slated to close at the end of 2007 or 2008 summer season), Abe Stark Skating Rink, Parachute Jump, Deno’s Wonder Wheel Amusement Park, The Cyclone Rollercoaster, Brighton Beach, The New York Aquarium, Coney Island Museum & Sideshow

**Character:** Surf Avenue is a busy commercial street with no marked bike lane and plenty of distracted drivers. The boardwalk is a well-used, auto-free pedestrian route. Bikes are allowed on the boardwalk between 6 a.m. and 10 a.m.

**Directions at a Glance**

*Starting at the end of Ocean Parkway*

- 0.0 **Mile**  
Travel towards the right, west, on Surf Avenue.
- 1.9  
Turn left on 37th Street.
- 1.95  
Turn left onto Riegelmann Boardwalk (Between 10:00 a.m. and 6:00 a.m., cyclists must dismount and walk their bikes on boardwalk. For alternate bike route see below.)
- 4.6  
At the end of the boardwalk, turn around and backtrack.
- 5.4  
Veer right onto Seabreeze Walk.
- 5.5  
End at Ocean Parkway at Seabreeze Avenue.

Coney Island Alternate Bike Route

When the boardwalk is closed to cyclists, follow this route. Instead of turning left onto West 37th Street, turn right onto West 37th Street and ride to Neptune Avenue. Turn right onto Neptune Avenue and ride to Ocean Parkway. Turn left onto Ocean Parkway to pick up the next segment of the Greenway.



CONEY ISLAND

## Subways

The D, F, N, and Q lines all stop at Coney Island. (For the latest transit information, visit the MTA website at [www.mta.info](http://www.mta.info) or call 718-330-1234).

## Where to Eat

Go past the Wonder Wheel for take-away hotdogs, corn on the cob, fried clams and other classic American fast food. In Brighton Beach, you can pay a little bit more and get a sit-down meal at several boardwalk cafés.

## Public Restrooms



There is a restroom near West 27<sup>th</sup> Street and Surf Avenue. The boardwalk has public restrooms at West 30<sup>th</sup> Street, Stillwell Avenue, West 8<sup>th</sup> Street, and Brighton 2<sup>nd</sup> Street. They are open Memorial Day to Labor Day from 9 a.m. to 6 p.m.

## Area History

Coney Island is no longer a true island. When European settlers first arrived, it was a narrow sliver of land, separated from the rest of Long Island by a salty creek that was crossable at low tide. Coney Island's name comes from the Dutch name "Konign Eisland" or Rabbit Island. The reasons for the name are lost in the murk of time. It could be that the original grasslands and scrub here supported a hopping colony of long ears.

Development began in 1829, upon completion of the Coney Island Hotel



*Wonder Wheel: The ferris wheel with the roller coaster on the inside. When the inside car swings out, many a stomach has been left behind.*

in the area now known as Sea Gate. This was a respectable establishment, but by the turn of the nineteenth century, Coney Island had become New York's wild west, an area notorious for its rowdy drinking and gambling halls, prize fights, and rampant prostitution. Respectable society had moved east. The era's most wealthy and celebrated flocked to Manhattan Beach, where majestic hotels lined the beach. The prosperous middle class summered at Brighton Beach, where the architecture was impressive, but less grand.

West Brighton was the buffer zone between the high and low-life. This was the destination for day-tripping, working class folks who came by steamship, ferry, or trolley to sing in the beer halls, eat in the enormous restaurants, shake a leg in the dance halls, and try their luck in the penny arcade. This is the section of the beach that became the Coney Island of popular imagination, especially with the advent of pioneering amusement parks: Steeplechase in 1897, Luna Park in 1903, and Dreamland in 1904. These were ambitious creations, forerunners to today's Disneyland and

Six Flags parks. For a dime, you were admitted to fanciful exotic villages, crowded as any Lower East Side street, where every twist in the way brought another enticement to spend some fun money on a ride, a show, a game, or a dance.

As the twentieth century wore on, these amusement parks lost much of their novelty. They disappeared in reverse order of their completion. Dreamland burnt to the ground in 1911; it took a series of fires in the 1940s to close down Luna Park. Steeplechase Park didn't close until 1964. But the three decades from 1920 to 1950 were arguably Coney Island's heyday. On a hot summer weekend afternoon, thousands of New Yorkers would take the subway to partake of Coney Island at its most elemental: sand, surf, and Nathan's hot dogs.

With the rise of the automobile, Coney Island's primacy waned, with

thousands making the trek to Long Island and New Jersey beaches instead. Some would say that this was a relief. The well-known photographer, Weegee, published three famous pictures—one each in 1940, 1945, and 1952 showing thousands of beachgoers packed shoulder to shoulder. Today, however, Surf Avenue and the Coney Island boardwalk remain a lively scene, a favorite trip for many New Yorkers. Significant changes within Coney Island are anticipated with the area's planned redevelopment, guided by a strategic plan that was unveiled for the area in 2005. The plan focuses on creating new housing and strengthening the area as a year-round entertainment destination with seaside attractions.

### Trip Description

The trip starts at the corner of Surf Avenue and Ocean Parkway. Most people will be tempted to head



*Thrills: Coney Island art tends toward the brightly colored Macabre.*

CONEY ISLAND



*Nathan's: A table for four without the table*

straight to the Boardwalk, which has many entrances beckoning from Surf Avenue. But Surf Avenue is also well worth exploring in its own right, with many star attractions and a lively pedestrian scene. For bike riders, Surf Avenue offers an opportunity to stay mounted and rolling when the boardwalk is closed to bike riding.

Heading west on Surf Avenue, you'll quickly notice **Asser Levy/Seaside Park**. The centerpiece of this park is its amphitheater, whose stage is crowned by a high-tech white tent. Information on amphitheater events can be found on the Parks & Recreation website, [www.nyc.gov/parks](http://www.nyc.gov/parks). The park provides a nice refuge from the hurly-burly of the surrounding streets and the boardwalk, for those just seeking some good old-fashioned green grass and shade.

The world-famous **Cyclone** roller-coaster stands proud at West 10<sup>th</sup> Street. Don't let the wood and the antique looks fool you—the ride is as much fun as any of the high-tech theme park extravaganzas in the suburbs.

The zone between West 12<sup>th</sup> and West 16<sup>th</sup> Streets is the haunt of the outrageous. The happening corner here is West 12<sup>th</sup> Street and Surf Avenue, where you'll find the **Coney Island Sideshow**. This modest showhouse is dedicated to keeping alive the thrilling underbelly of Americana—besides the sideshow, the venue hosts regular burlesque and rock-and-roll shows. Hours of operation can be found at [www.coneyisland.com](http://www.coneyisland.com) for both the Sideshow and Museum.

Look no further than the **Coney Island Museum** at 1208 Surf Avenue

CONEY ISLAND

for photographs and artifacts from the resort area's yesteryears. Up for a game of chance and/or skill? You can try your hand in the amusement arcades along this stretch of avenue.

Moving along, you'll go from honky-tonk to spiffy family fun. The old site of Steeplechase Park is occupied by Keyspan Park, a minor league baseball stadium that is home to the Brooklyn Cyclones. Visit [www.brooklyncyclones.com](http://www.brooklyncyclones.com) for game and event schedules.

The **Abe Stark Skating Rink** stands at the corner of West 19<sup>th</sup> Street and Surf Avenue. If you want to take a spin on the ice, this pro-quality facility is open

to the public on weekends and school holidays from the Beginning of October to the beginning of April. Other times it's used by ice hockey leagues. Don't have a pair of skates? No problem—you can rent them here.

After Keyspan Park, Surf Avenue becomes a residential area, a zone of housing developments and assisted-living facilities. One worthy detour is the Santos White Community Garden at 2110 Mermaid Avenue. Turn right at West 21<sup>st</sup> Street, and go up one block. This garden looks great anytime of year.

Turn left on West 37<sup>th</sup> Street to reach the boardwalk (or right for the



*Sunset at Coney Island Beach*

## CONEY ISLAND



*Coney Island skyline*

alternative bike route).

The Coney Island boardwalk is true New York, not just for its legend, but for its here-and-now, quick-change transformations. On a summer weekend, the entire two-and-a-half mile stretch is a crowded blur of good-natured pleasure seekers. The boardwalk's varied qualities shine forth best midweek or in the off-season, when the crowds have thinned. The boardwalk's one true and constant companion is the beach, a well-kept stretch of sand punctuated by several stone jetties and a fishing pier. In fact, some pedestrians might be tempted to skip the boardwalk and walk the entire length of the beach.

The boardwalk is quietest near its western terminus at West 37<sup>th</sup> Street. For beach and ocean lovers, this is the place to come if you're seeking a little more solitude, especially early in the morning or on a nippy winter day.

Coney Island's iconic **Parachute**

**Jump**, rises near West 19<sup>th</sup> Street. At 262 feet, the Parachute Jump is Coney Island's most distinctive landmark. It was first installed at the New York World's Fair of 1939-40 at Flushing Meadows in Queens, then moved in 1941 to its present location. When it was operating, riders were lifted by a cable to the top then dropped, to float gently down to the ground. The Parachute Jump ceased operating in 1964, and fell into disrepair. It recently underwent a \$5 million refurbishment. While it no longer functions as a ride, it remains an icon of Coney Island history.

**Steeplechase Pier** juts out into the ocean across from the West 16<sup>th</sup> Street walkway. This is a popular spot for anglers and those who just want to get out over the water. You'll probably find the beach starting to become a bit more crowded here.

Moving past the back end of Keyspan Park, you will arrive at the Coney Island of popular legend, a zone of

CONEY ISLAND

rambunctious amusements. **Astroland** is the heart of the scene here.

Astroland was opened in 1962 and, as its name implies, many of the park's original rides took their cue from the era's space program. These days you're more likely to hear hip-hop rather than doo-wop, but you can still ride smiling satellites and rockets to the moon. Astroland was recently purchased by a private developer and is anticipated to close at the end of the 2007 or 2008 summer season. Want to get up higher than anybody? Buy a ticket to **Deno's Wonder Wheel**, an immense Ferris wheel at the foot of West 12<sup>th</sup> Street.

**The New York Aquarium at Coney Island** is the next stop along the boardwalk. This is not a sideshow attraction, but a world-class zoological facility. The Aquarium covers 14 acres, is home to 350 species of aquatic wildlife, including penguins, sharks, and seals, and is a terrific place for

families. For information, visit [www.nyaquarium.com](http://www.nyaquarium.com).

**Brighton Beach** fronts the boardwalk between Asser Levy/Seaside Park and Corbin Place. Today, Brighton Beach is a neighborhood of Russian émigrés; some have called it Little Odessa, after a town in the Ukraine on the Black Sea. On a warm day, the boardwalk here sports plenty of folks wearing bathing suits and sunglasses. But the boardwalk is also a European-style promenade, the route of dressed up folks walking arm in arm with shined shoes and perfect hairdos. If you appreciate the beauty of the ocean, but can do without gritty beach culture, this is the perfect destination.

Boardwalk cafés invite you to sit down and watch this parade go by while you enjoy a selection from the Russian/English menu.

Backtrack on the boardwalk to a stairway known as Seabreeze Walk, which



*Brighton Beach fruit stand*

CONEY ISLAND