

by Sandra Mardenfeld

For many, the very idea of going to the seaside revolves around finding a glorious beach bordered its entire length by a lively boardwalk, a stretch of nonstop fun containing arcades, batting cages, ice-cream stalls, hot-dog stands, cotton-candy kiosks and the like. Some have never been glitzy; others possess a faint echo of a past glory, while yet others are fast becoming playgrounds for well-heeled urbanites short on play time. Although not all are made of wood or "board," the following

oceanside gems all have earned the accolade of "Best Boardwalks of the East Coast," through a mix of their aesthetic qualities, the summer memories they help create and their willingness to look to the future.

Atlantic City, N.J.

The oldest boardwalk in the United States offers more than glitzy casinos and salt water taffy. A blend of kitsch and class, the boardwalk features fine restaurants,

hot-dog stands and chains such as Rainforest Cafe, as well as a gamut of shopping, with name-brand boutiques next door to cheap souvenir stores. Tiki bars play live music all summer long, and the old Steel Pier keeps families happy with rides and helicopter tours. Hail a pedi-cab anywhere along the boardwalk, perhaps to go to the newest star in town, the Pier Shops at Caesars, which opened last year and is a complete overhaul of the former Million Dollar Pier. Want to splurge? Book a table

Planks for the Memories



at Buddakan, a Stephen Starr restaurant earning high praise for its nouvelle-Asian fare. Another excellent choice is the new Phillips Seafood, which aptly overlooks the ocean and even has a roving oyster cart.

Ocean City, N.J.

This two-and-a-half-mile-long boardwalk offers wholesome activity—and not just because alcoholic beverages aren't sold within the city limits. Scattered along the pathway are arcades, miniature golf,

water slides and fun rides. Indulge in salt water taffy and fudge at Shriver's or enjoy caramel-covered kernels from Johnson's Popcorn. The Music Pier also offers variety, from live music to silly, but enjoyable, contests. Art and craft shows are held on most weekends.

The Wildwoods, N.J.

The boardwalk might be just two miles in length, but between the three amusement piers and water parks (Morey's

Relive the good times of yesteryear on the boardwalk of Brooklyn's Coney Island.

Surfside Pier, Mariners Landing and Wild Wheels Adventure Pier), you can find more rides than at Disneyland. With its Doo Wop-era architecture, the entire city of Wildwood looks somewhat like a theme park, with neon-bright accommodations marked by odd angles and kitschy themes, including "Chinatown Revival," featuring pagodas. Although mostly

*Enjoy the sand and sun—
and some of the best
boardwalks around.*

family-friendly, the boardwalk's facilities also call out to thrill-seekers with its high-octane roller coasters.

Coney Island, Brooklyn

You have to love a place that celebrates the first weekend of summer with a Mermaid Parade, which marks its silver anniversary on June 23 (stay around long enough to witness the "mayor" of Coney Island ceremoniously "unlock" the ocean with a key, thus officially welcoming summer). There are so many activities here that a repeat visit definitely is required. Astroland, contains the world-famous Cyclone roller coaster, a remarkably twisted and steep voyage that debuted in 1927. Then there's Deno's Wonder Wheel Amusement Park featuring 17 children's rides, such as the spinning Dizzy Dragons, and five adult ones, including the Wonder Wheel. The Cyclones, Brooklyn's minor-league baseball team, offers bargain prices for sports fans—where else can you get season tickets, with field box seats, for under \$500? Summer events include fireworks every Friday night at 9:30 and Nathan's Famous annual hot-dog eating contest on July 4.

Jones Beach, Long Island

You might see some construction along the two-mile-long boardwalk at Jones Beach State Park this summer. It's only Donald Trump, who is transforming the old Boardwalk Restaurant into a catering hall, restaurant and nightclub. Until that opens, there still is plenty to do here, on an 18-hole miniature-golf course, on softball diamonds (fields #4 and #5 have the most accessible parking) and on basketball, tennis and shuffleboard courts. A pool supplements the ocean and adjacent white sand. The East and West bathhouses feature beautiful masonry, with East containing a museum with a park-history exhibit, and West boasting an ice-cream parlor and a pool. Events include fireworks on July 4 and a two-day volleyball tournament on July 21-22. (For a chance to win a new book on Jones Beach, turn to Travel Desk on page 30.)

Ocean City, Md.

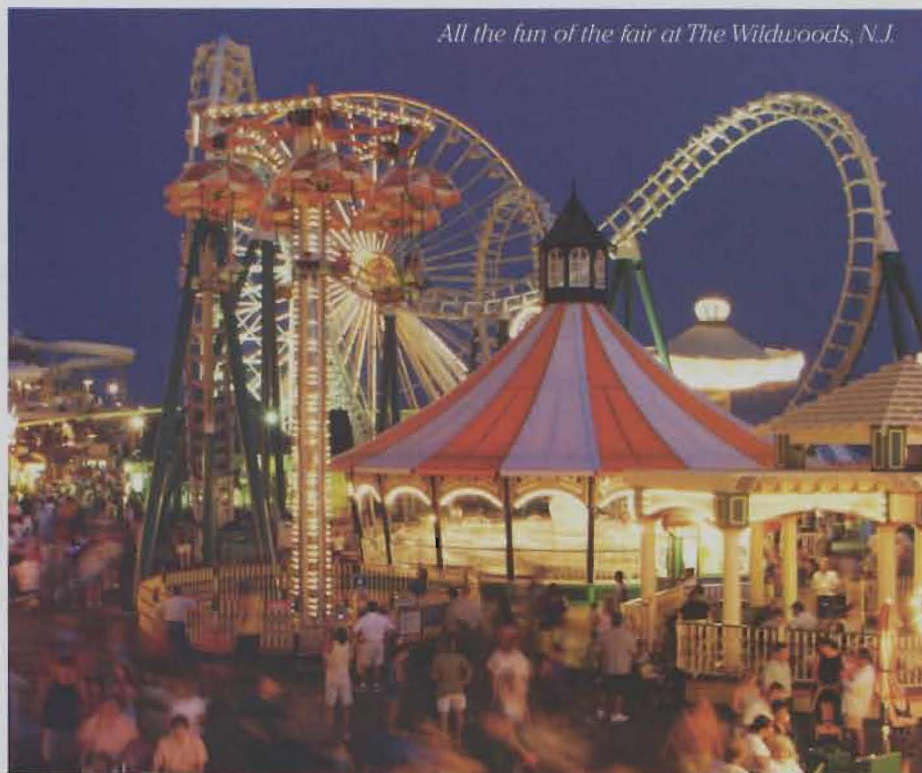
This three-mile-long boardwalk mixes the new with the old. At the southern end

Neat beach: Virginia Beach's boardwalk and strand are tidy and welcoming.

are arcades, rides and shops, including Pier Amusements, where a ride on the Ferris Wheel reveals a bird's-eye view of the city. Watch for Trimper's Rides & Amusements, open since 1890, and sit astride one of the carved animals on its beautifully restored antique carousel. You must get Thrashers French Fries, too, topped with vinegar, rather than ketchup. Other good choices for food are Dolle's Candyland for salt water taffy, fudge and caramel popcorn. The Ocean City Life-Saving Station Museum shows the town's history and offers free programs summer mornings. Other free events include beach concerts every Wednesday night and bonfires on Thursday nights (8 p.m.) in July and August at North Division Street.

Virginia Beach, Va.

Entertainment is king on this three-mile-long concrete promenade, with a separate parallel bike path. Visitors easily rent what they need, from bikes to umbrellas to boogie boards. Besides a continual round of street performers, puppeteers, musicians and magicians, oceanfront stages offer nightly entertainment at 7th, 17th, 24th and 31st streets. Free, family-oriented events take place every weekend from late spring to early fall, from the sophisticated Boardwalk Art Show & Festival (June 14-17), featuring more than 40,000 pieces of art, to the Viva Elvis & the Legends of Rock & Roll (June 21-23) show, where many "Kings," including ones that sky dive, perform to crowds. Numerous high-rise hotels and restaurants overlook the beach, including the oldest, The Cavalier, in which seven presidents have slept.



Clarion Resort Fontainebleau Hotel OCEAN CITY, MARYLAND



- ★ Luxury Oceanview Guest Rooms
- ★ Business Center
- ★ Complimentary Wireless Internet
- ★ Custom Golf Packages
- ★ 2 Oceanfront Restaurants
- ★ Oceanfront Nightclub & Beach Bar with Live Entertainment
- ★ Fully Equipped Health Spa
- ★ Kids Stay Free
- ★ Summer Children's Activities

1, 2 & 3-Bedroom Oceanfront Condos • Maid Service Available

Call Toll Free: 800-638-2100

101st ST. & OCEANFRONT • 10100 COASTAL HWY

www.clarionoc.com

**10% OFF
RACK ROOM
AND
CONDO RATES**

*Mention AAA Car & Travel
at time of reservation*

Some restrictions apply

Tourist Information:

AAA.com/hotels; AAA.com/directions

Atlantic City: 888/228-4748;

www.atlanticcitynj.com

Cape May County: 800/227-2297;

www.thejerseycap.com

Coney Island: 212/484-1200;

www.nycvisit.com

Jones Beach: 877/386-6654;

www.discoverlongisland.com

Ocean City: 800/626-2326;

www.ococean.com

Virginia Beach: 800/822-3224;

www.vbfun.com