The Mermaid Parade: What Photographers Need to Know

The Mermaid Parade is an annual event that happens in Coney Island on the first Saturday after summer solstice. It’s an odd and wonderful event that tests your street photography skills. But not to worry, it is a bit like shooting fish in a barrel – you’ll definitely come away with some fun images.

We asked members Mike & Sally Harris, Renee Giffroy, and Sandy Gennrich to provide their tips for shooting at the Mermaid Parade. Here’s their advice:

1. Buy a Photographer Pass.  This gets you into the staging area starting at 10am.  This is where most of the mermaids will get ready.  But note, there are more photographers at this event than pretty much anywhere else.  You will trip over all the photogs. Registration opens at 10am at Surf Ave and West 21st St.
2. Buy your “photographer pass” in advance.  You’ll pick it up from a much shorter line than from the masses of photographers buying it the day of the parade.
3. Counter to #1, don’t buy a Photographer Pass and just engage people on the street.  You won’t be jostling with as many other photographers. You may need to work harder than those with the pass, but you might get some more unique images.
4. Arrive early.  The setup time is more interesting than the parade itself.
5. This is your chance to get comfortable shooting people, so feel free to get close.  Everyone there expects it and is almost insulted if you don’t find them interesting.
6. Don’t be afraid to engage your subject.  If there is a pose you want, just ask.  When you find a good subject, stick with it.  The mermaids love to be photographed.  Try lots of different angles, move in, move out, move around.
7. There is action everywhere.  You can get as many good shots staking out one or two locations as you can by wandering around.
8. Remember to get detail shots – it’s a great place to get faces, hands, costumes, feet, etc.
9. The back of people is sometimes more interesting than the front.  Be sure to look at them after they pass you.
10. If it’s a sunny day you’ll need to account for harsh shadows.  A little bit of fill flash can do wonders.
11. Mermaids come in all shapes and sizes, as well as a wide variety of clothing…or not. If you don’t want to explain why Ariel is topless, you might want to leave the kids at home.
12. If you don’t plan to stay for the parade, be sure you have your exit strategy mapped out well in advance, and be sure you are on the correct side of the street before the parade begins.  If not, you’ll be trapped on the inside of the parade route for a few extra hours.
13. Bring water and maybe a snack.  There are places to eat, but lines are long.
14. Dress comfortably. You’ll be on your feet the whole time.  Bring a hat if it’s a hot and sunny day.  There’s almost no place to hide from the sun.  Wear sunscreen, but wash your hands before using your camera.
15. If you are driving, plan accordingly.  The streets will get very crowded and busy and it may take you longer to find a parking spot than you think.  There are lots available charging event parking rates. Carpool with other photographers.

The details:

2014 Event: Saturday, June 21st. Opens at 10am. Parade starts at 1pm.

Website: <http://www.coneyisland.com/programs/mermaid-parade>

Registration and Photographer Passes: <http://www.coneyisland.com/content/mermaid-parade-registration-page>

Portfolio: <https://plus.google.com/u/0/photos/109812154559522809355/albums/5759906797614095521>