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A Day at the Beach: The Photographs That Moved Them Most

By Rachel Lowry
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Joseph Szabo
Priscilla, 1969

"When my wife and I first moved to Long Island, a friend suggested I visit Jones Beach because of my love of photographing people. The ever changing variety of people, faces, bodies and expressions, decade after decade, always fascinates me. Priscilla seems to embody strength and determination and the quality of a timeless image."

Beach day is more than an activity; it's an event, a summer tradition. From the era of layered Victorian bathing suit to today's bikini and speedo days, the timeless weekend activity continues to entice outdoor lovers to kick off their heels and ditch the suit and tie for some prime sand time. And for photographers, the beach is a captivating place.

"I keep returning to shooting beaches all around the world," the British photographer Martin Parr tells TIME. "I am tantalized by the similarities and differences in how each country regards their beaches. I love the spatial aspect of how a beach works, it has become my favored shooting location, and like a lemming I keep being drawn back to this subject."

Over the years, photographers have returned to the bustling beaches to frame some of the world's most charming human moments: photographer Arlene Gottfried's humor in contradiction at Riis Beach framing a nude body builder with a Jew, at Coney Island; Harvey Stein's iconic man in a bow tie nods its head to a disappearing way of life; Parr traveled to India, capturing a quiet woman catching early morning rays, oblivious to the hustle of fishers behind her. Joseph Maida's Hawaiian beaches examines the varied shores of layered identities, while Gillian Laub turns nostalgic to the childlike whimsy of beach play.