

## The summer's hottest beachside club and pool party is in Queens

It's a broiling Saturday afternoon near the beach and a pool party is in full effect. A waitress delivers a tray of tequila shots to a cabana while swimmers swig from a magnum of Champagne. Cheers erupt as a man in a blue velvet jacket yells down from the second-floor sundeck, tossing carnations and roses into the blue water. The DJ drops a Biz Markie song and the whole pool erupts into a singalong, a sun-drunk tribute to the rapper **who had passed away** the day before.

The summer's hottest new pool party is at Queens' Rockaway Hotel, a new luxury resort that opened in September blocks from the ocean, giving the city its first chic beachfront place to stay — and party — in at least a generation.

"This is a whole new world. This is beautiful," said Brooke Weingarten, who lives nearby and had rented a cabana for her mother's 59th birthday. "In my 29 years of life nobody knew what Rockaway Beach was and then all of a sudden it was like, 'Oh, I can't wait to come there.'"



When the hotel opened in the fall amid the pandemic, locals and staycationers buoyed it, patronizing its three restaurants and taking in the views of Jamaica Bay and the Atlantic Ocean from its rooftop. International travelers finally showed up this summer from places like Australia and Europe, lured by the undeniably unique appeal of a beach and a surf break just a train or ferry ride from the center of Manhattan.

But you don't need globetrotters when you've got New Yorkers craving a swanky place to party after the beach, and the most elusive of city summer amenities: a pool with a bar.



"I've hung out in Rockaway a long time, it's a different vibe," said Kate, 41, a teacher in the neighborhood who declined to give her last name for professional reasons. "You feel like you're vacationing without vacationing."

Last weekend, the entire hotel was buzzing: a "micro-wedding" took over the second-floor landing; a 40th birthday party with a DJ sprawled across the roof deck. Guests get a Chambord and Champagne cocktail upon check-in, but a group of beefy local firefighters in the pool were happy to be guzzling buckets of Coronas. Some just wanted to stay dry and lounge in chairs on the bay side of the roof, waiting for the sun to melt into the distant city skyline.



"The only reason we usually come out here is for the beach," said Kaadeer Cleaves, 21, who lives in Far Rockaway and was sharing a carafe of passionfruit margaritas with two friends on the roof. "But since the Rockaway Hotel opened up, we have been coming up here more."



His friend, Joshua Cabezas, 21, added: "This was definitely missing. Before, you used to go to the beach and you'd go back home."



The Rockaways have been on the rise as a **colorful urban beach destination** for over a decade. As hotel guests drank \$16 cocktails by the pool on Friday night, a crowd of surfers and Brooklynites packed a nearby empty lot and drank bodega beers at a pop-up punk show.



But the hotel is its first high-end spot, one that has drawn Questlove for a DJ set and David Schwimmer for a visit. It's also hosting after-parties for this summer's popular MoMA PS1's Warm Up series. So far, it's booking mostly local musicians and DJs for the pool and roof, but it wants to book national acts soon for its 400-person capacity sundeck.



The menu at its three eateries — at the poolside, rooftop and street-facing restaurant Margie's — is seafood heavy, with a raw bar featuring oysters, cherry neck clams and shrimp cocktails.

Current rates range from \$375 per night on a weekday to up to \$1,000 per night on a weekend in late August. Weekend poolside cabana rentals have a \$1,500 minimum. (While people are technically not supposed to walk in off the street to use the pool, hotel staff were being lenient.)



In the pool, Weingarten felt the scene was a victory lap for the peninsula's comeback after Hurricane Sandy nearly wiped it out.

"I like that all these different communities can come together and vibe out. It's a relaxing environment," she said. "That's what Rockaway is in a nutshell."

*The Rockaway Hotel, 108-10 Rockaway Beach Drive, Queens; 718-474-1216,  
[TheRockawayHotel.com](http://TheRockawayHotel.com)*