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Seaside Heights is worth visiting

by Peter Genovese / The Star-Ledger
Thursday August 20, 2009, 2:55 PM

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In the firmament of Jersey Shore boardwalks, Seaside would rank a very dead last. Tacky, seedy, dump - these are some of the nicer things people have said about the Shore's most-maligned destination.

But Seaside Heights and its somewhat better-behaved cousin, Seaside Park, make for the second best Jersey boardwalk experience. Only Wildwood -- livelier boardwalk, more rides and that incomparable, and free, beach -- tops Seaside.

You can spend a day on the Seaside boardwalk and have enough material for a major motion picture, or novel. And enough food to last all summer. Start with a cheesesteak at Midway Steak House (on the boardwalk at Webster Avenue, Seaside Heights) or Steaks Unlimited (a block off the boardwalk, at 21 Ocean Terrace, Seaside Heights).

You can partake of the "world's largest slice of pizza" at the redoubtable Sawmill Cafe (1807 Boardwalk, Seaside Park) -- no other "cafe" in the world is less deserving of the title. But the best boardwalk slice, or pie, can be found at just one place -- Maruca's (boardwalk at Porter Avenue, Seaside Park).

Pick up a Jersey-proud T-shirt at one of the souvenir shops, then wander over to Funtown Amusement Pier for the rides. The Ferris wheel in Wildwood is bigger, but the one at Funtown is more intimate. If you don't flip over Ferris wheels, try the HipHop, Arctic Circle, Loop Roller Coaster or the ultimate in Jersey Shore cheap thrills, the Tower of Fear, which plummets passengers 200 feet to the ground and does not care whether you just had a big drippy cheesesteak or a couple slices of pizza.

Play video and other games at Lucky Leo's (311 Boardwalk, Seaside Heights) or the Coin Castle (500 Boardwalk, Seaside Heights), enjoy a near-perfect soft serve at one of the Kohrs stands, then play a round of nighttime golf at Wacky Golf, above Casino Pier, still the most colorful miniature golf course in New Jersey. Eighteen holes? Please. Wacky Golf gives you 25.

Seaside can surprise you like that. I can't tell you how many people I've met who put the place down -- without ever having gone there. You want a G-rated boardwalk experience, head to Point Pleasant or Ocean City. You want a real slice of Jersey Shore life, sidle over to Seaside.

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