

Meet Mermaid Rachel (Smith), left, and Mermaid Ashley (Rastad) right. They're professional mermaids.



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## Mermaid Rachel

Merpeople are having a mer-moment. Some of the credit goes to **Rachel Smith**, a professional mermaid, Dive Bar O.G. and founder of Mermaid and Mom, who, along with her equally fantastical partner, Ashley Rastad of Pixie Tribe, are hosting California's first surface world gathering for her shimmering kind. The three-day **California Mermaid Convention** shakes its fin next month with a launch party, various workshops and lectures aimed at adults, teens and guppies, and culminates with an environmentally conscious clean-up along the American River. SN&R spoke with Mermaid Rachel about the origin(s) and evolution(s) of her species—and whether it's possible to get pink eye under the sea.

### Am I catching you above ground?

(Laugh.) Yeah, I am currently not underwater, so we're doing good.

### Sacramento hit its first heatwave this week. How does a mermaid keep cool?

I mean, you just never come up for air, right? It's the air that's hot. The water's doing fine. Actually, the rivers are pretty crazy right now.

### Do you have a mermaid name?

I go by "Mermaid Rachel" for a couple reasons: One, when I first became a professional mermaid, it was because I was working at Dive Bar, where I still work, and we were trying to figure out if we were going to have mermaid names and we decided not to, because, y'know, girls working in a bar kinda don't want to have names like "Honey" or "Princess" or that sort of thing. So we went with our real names.

### This is the first statewide convention?

The Mermaid Promenade was sort of the first thing that kicked it off, and this year is going to be the ninth year. ... And it would've been the fifth

year for Mermaid Week in Sacramento, but all of the organizations decided to combine everything and make one large convention with all these really, really cool events.

### What would you attribute this renaissance in mermaid culture to?

I think this modern reinvention is due to the fact that a lot of people, myself included, grew up watching things like *Splash* and *The Little Mermaid*. We are all adults now (Laughs.), in the best sense of that word. And we either want to share that with our kids or we're really, really drawn to it for ourselves.

### Has mermaid culture changed over the years?

I think it has. ... A few of the first myths about mermaids were actually about male mermaids—way, way back with the Mesopotamians and all those folks. ... Selkies [half-seal, half-human creatures from Scottish folklore], a lot of them were male. People forget these old stories. ... That's why we're going to have a lecture by Merman Jax, who's the most successful merman out there. ... If you think being a professional mermaid is a niche industry, try being a professional merman.

### How long have you been a mermaid?

I've been a pro mermaid for almost a decade. I've been with Dive Bar since we opened [in 2011] ... I was a performer, and my mom was a seamstress, and when I was in high school, I got this idea in my head that I was going to make a mermaid costume I could swim in. And my mom said I was gonna drown. (Laughs.) But she made it for me anyway.

### I've always wanted to ask a merperson who swam in Dive Bar ... does stuff ever get in your eyes, like fish poop?

(Laughs.) We're literally swimming in a tank with fish, so, I mean, the water's in our eyes, our ears and nose—everything. □

The California Mermaid Convention runs July 12-14. For specific locations and event information, or to buy tickets, visit [californiamermaidcon.com](http://californiamermaidcon.com).

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