

## 20 amazing American beaches

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August 10, 2012

Give real life the slip and wile away the hours on a dreamy coastline of sugar-white sand, a lakeside beach with endless rock formations, or a top-secret cove. Check out these 20 awe-inspiring beaches that America has to offer, from Alaska to Washington state (and nearly everywhere in between).



By Lucy Pemoni, AP

Hawaii has no shortage of beautiful beaches, but Lanikai on Oahu's windward side may be one of the finest, due to its small size and sublime teal waters

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### Shell Island Florida

Sitting in the [Gulf of Mexico](#), this [seven-mile-long barrier island](#) is only reachable by private boat or shuttle. Since there are no places to grab a snack on land, pack a picnic lunch and enjoy Caribbean-like waters teeming with bottlenose dolphins.

### Anini Beach Kauai, Hawaii

[Anini](#)'s strong currents make it one of Kauai's most popular windsurfing spots. Intense waves batter the far-off reefs, but calm, shallow waters and crowd-pleasing food trucks make this beach a destination for pint-sized beachgoers, big-wave enthusiasts, and food lovers alike.

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## **Natural Bridges State Beach** **Santa Cruz, Calif.**

[This state park](#) shows off a magnificent mudstone natural bridge that rises dramatically out of the [Pacific Ocean](#). Enjoy year-round swimming on the small beach, and, in the fall, catch the annual monarch butterfly migration.

## **Cannon Beach** **Oregon**

Just about 80 miles west of Portland sit [Cannon Beach](#) and its famous [Haystack Rock](#), a 235-foot sea stack. In summer, swim and explore tide pools packed with starfish, crabs, and sea cucumbers. Winter brings to the area an especially bleak, windswept quality that photogs love to capture.

- **OREGON COAST:** [Come for the rotten winter weather](#)

## **Old Orchard Beach** **Maine**

Perennial family favorite [Old Orchard Beach](#) is packed to the gills with old-fashioned fun (and tourists, but don't let that stop you). A long pier houses shops and state-fair-style food, while [New England](#)'s only beachfront amusement park entertains thrill-seeking visitors as it's done since 1902.

## **Secret Cove** **Lake Tahoe, Nev.**

Find Tahoe a tad crowded? Then take a hike. (Well, a short one.) A moderate three-quarter-mile jaunt through the Nevada wilderness brings you to [Secret Cove](#), a private, unspoiled utopia of rocky coastline and cerulean water. A word to the wise: Signs warn that clothing is optional in this tucked-away haven.

## **Montauk Point State Park** **New York**

Nicknamed "The End," [Montauk](#), just two hours from [New York City](#), is the perfect break from the busy city dweller's workweek. The hamlet's 1796 lighthouse is perched on the easternmost tip of [Long Island](#), overlooking pleasant public beaches.

**Isla Blanca Park**  
**South Padre Island, Texas**

Warm, inviting waters await visitors to Texas' tropical coast, where the Gulf of Mexico and the Laguna Madre Bay meet. [Isla Blanca Park](#) is the island's crown jewel, with endless sandy beaches and prime jetty-fishing perches.

**Pictured Rocks National Lakeshore**  
**Michigan**

Michigan may not have access to an ocean, but along the shores of [Lake Superior](#), you'll find soaring geological formations like sand dunes, waterfalls, and the famous [Pictured Rocks](#) (mineral-stained sandstone cliffs). The serene beaches and coves are best explored via sea kayak.

**Aquinnah Cliffs**  
**Martha's Vineyard, Mass.**

The teeny-tiny beach town of [Aquinnah](#) boasts brightly colored clay cliffs with fossils tucked in their dramatic red striations. Take a stroll on the shoreline against this stunningly steep, millennia-old backdrop.

**Second Beach**  
**Washington**

Just outside the village of [La Push](#) lie three spectacular spots: First, [Second](#), and Third beaches. While First Beach is easy accessible and thus overcrowded, and Third Beach requires an exhausting trail hike, Second Beach, with its battered sea stacks and eagles' nests, is just right.

**Lanikai Beach**  
**Oahu, Hawaii**

Hawaii has no shortage of beautiful beaches, but [Lanikai](#) on Oahu's windward side may be one of the finest, due to its small size and sublime teal waters. Catch a wave, or just catch a peek of a Hollywood star on holiday; they love to populate this idyllic paradise.

- **MORE:** [Hawaii's most famous beach gets a facelift](#)

## **Leigh Lake**

[Grand Teton National Park](#), Wyo.

Canoe up String Lake through a short passage that brings you to one of Grand Teton's best-kept secrets: the beach at [Leigh Lake](#). Here, beneath Mt. Moran, a pine-forested peninsula forms a pebbly shoreline. Paddle around the crystalline, glacial lake before stopping for a picnic lunch or setting up camp onshore.

## **Folly Beach**

**South Carolina**

The eclectic island community of [Folly Beach](#) offers everything from wildlife-watching to some of the [East Coast](#)'s best surfing. Peaceful waters, quaint cottages, and artsy charm make this island a hot spot for Charleston day-trippers.

## **Icy Strait Point**

**Alaska**

Thirty-five miles west of Juneau, [Icy Strait Point](#) awaits, with the world's longest zip-line and authentic Alaska Native performances. The popular cruise port can get crowded, but the stony beach's expansive shoreline can offer a break from the hustle and bustle of town. Snap photos, look for humpback whales, or kayak Port Frederick's waters.

## **Presque Isle State Park**

**Pennsylvania**

Eastern Pennsylvanians head "down the shore" to [New Jersey](#), but picturesque [Presque Isle](#), just four miles from Erie, has 13 beaches to enjoy right at home. Diving, boating, kayaking, bow-fishing, and water skiing are permitted in this impressive [Keystone State](#)enclave.

## **Biloxi, Miss.**

Although Hurricane Katrina badly damaged Biloxi in 2005, the [white-sand beaches](#) have largely been redeveloped and revitalized. And with luxury casino resorts, golf courses, and world-class seafood restaurants, the area earns Mississippi's Gulf Coast its nickname of "the Playground of the South."

## **Children's Pool Beach**

**La Jolla, Calif.**

The harbor seal sanctuary at family-friendly [Children's Pool Beach](#) is an ideal place to observe California's marine life. While swimming is allowed (but strongly discouraged), the 200-plus wily, whiskered critters are the stars of this seaside show, so skip the bikini and pack a camera instead.

## **Harkers Island**

**North Carolina**

A three-mile ferry ride takes you to this remote island, part of North Carolina's [Cape Lookout National Seashore](#). Find an iconic lighthouse and nature trails or enjoy a day of languid sunbathing on 56 miles of completely undeveloped coastline.

## **Fort Zachary Taylor**

**Florida**

Explore the Civil War-era [Fort Zach](#), as locals call it, to get a dose of history before jumping into deep waters and reefs rife with tropical fish. The fort's public beach is rocky, but for killer [Key West](#) views, the bumpy trek is worth it.