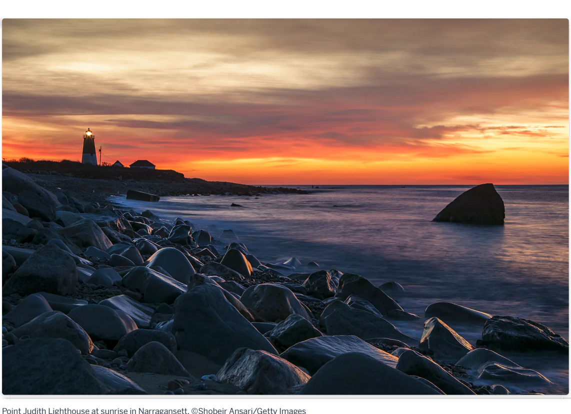
# The 6 best beaches in Rhode Island

ANNIE DALY *Lonely Planet Writer* ABOUT 23 HOURS AGO

Watch Hill Beach, Rhode Island. ©Getty Images

It should come as no secret that Rhode Island has some of the best beaches in the USA — it is nicknamed the Ocean State, after all! With more than 40 miles of stunning coastline, the state (which is actually not an island, by the way!) is absolutely filled with salt water gems. But the best part?

Despite its incredibly gorgeous scenery and authentic local vibe, Rhode Island has remained relatively out of the limelight, with many visitors often choosing the classic shores of the Cape or the glitzier sands of the Hamptons for their beach vacations instead.



Point Judith Lighthouse at sunrise in Narragansett. ©Shobeir Ansari/Getty Images

That means that the state has managed to maintain a distinctly "Little Rhody" energy, one that will surely satisfy your inner beach bum — and leave you feeling like you stumbled upon the country's best-kept travel secret at the same time.

The only question is: Which beach should you go to first? For the smallest state in the US, Rhode Island has an overwhelming number of options to choose from. Some are best for surfers, others for sunset seekers, and still others for those who want nothing more than a cold, dripping ice cream cone after they've taken their last dip. Read on for the best places to enjoy the ocean in the Ocean State.

*Editor's note: during COVID-19 there may be additional travel restrictions. Check the latest guidance in Rhode Island before planning a trip, and always follow local government health advice. All events are subject to change.*

## *Best beach for après beach fans:* Watch Hill Beach, Westerly

Make no mistake: Watch Hill Beach is an incredible stretch of coastline. The sand is wide and soft, the crowd is fun, and the waves are mild — all perfect qualities for pure relaxation. But the thing about Watch Hill is that it's not just about the beach — it's about the town itself. This is one of those towns that people think of when they think of charming New England, filled with white picket fences and cute seaside shops with shell mobiles hanging in the windows, and old-school restaurants that serve your food through a sliding screen door (be sure to get some ice cream at St. Clair Annex, which has been open since 1887). Watch Hill is so quaint and picturesque, it even captured the heart of Taylor Swift, who bought a house there back in 2013 that remains the most expensive private home in Rhode Island today.

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Watch Hill Rhode Island. © Getty Images/iStockphoto

**Your move?** Get to Watch Hill early (the beach parking lot fills up pretty quickly), spend the morning and early afternoon getting your saltwater fix, then head out for a golden hour stroll through town followed by a round of sunset cocktails at the Olympia Tea Room.

## *Best beach for nature lovers:* Goosewing Beach, Little Compton

As part of Goosewing Beach Preserve — a 75-acre historic landmark filled with unspoiled ponds, dunes, and the beach — Goosewing Beach is one of the most treasured eco-friendly spots in Rhode Island. Getting there requires a bit of effort, as there isn't a direct entrance, but that's part of its appeal. Visitors must park in the parking lot for South Shore Beach, a rocky beach that tends to get quite crowded, and walk to the end of South Shore (about ten minutes or so) before crossing a small stream that leads to Goosewing. The payoff is worth it: Goosewing feels more remote than South Shore, with wider, softer stretches of sand and heaps of beachgrass that sway in the wind.

Little Compton, Goosewing Beach, Rhode Island. ©Getty Images

The beach preserve is also home to two rare seabirds, the piping plover and the least tern. Those who want to learn even more about the surrounding wildlife can head over to the beach's Benjamin Family Environmental Center for a guided nature walk.

## *Best beach for surfers:* Narragansett Town Beach, Narragansett

In-the-know surfers usually get to Narragansett Town Beach early in the morning, so they can enjoy the water before the crowds arrive. And there are definitely crowds: This beach is one of the most popular in all of New England, let alone Rhode Island. The waves here can get pretty tall, up to four feet on a good day, which is perfect for people who want to learn the sport themselves. Two local surf shops, Narragansett Surf & Skate and Warm Winds, even offer lessons and rentals.

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Narragansett Bay, Jamestown Rhode Island in the background. ©Anna Saxon/Lonely Planet

That said, if you're not a surfer, this is still a great spot for a solid beach day. The surfers tend to stick to the south end of the beach anyway, leaving the rest of the area to families and beach bums. The beach is located right next to the heart of town, too, so it's easy to pop out and grab a bite and a drink. There are a variety of beachy burger and seafood joints, and the rooftop at The Coast Guard House is an especially popular spot for golden-hour cocktails. The beach pavilion even has changing rooms and bathrooms, so you can get out of your wet bathing suit to transition into evening mode.

## *Best beach for adventurers:* Mohegan Bluffs, Block Island

Admittedly, this is not the best spot for classically trained beach bums who want nothing more than soft sand, clear water, and a spot to put their cooler. But for any ocean lovers with a wild side, those who may appreciate a bit more of a rugged vibe, this one's for you. Mohegan Bluffs is a patch of sea cliffs that sits on the southern tip of Block Island, which is only accessible by ferry (visitors depart from either Point Judith, RI or New London, CT). At about 150 feet tall, the tall clay cliffs are just past the Southeast Lighthouse and are reminiscent of the Cliffs of Moher in Ireland. The view from the top is stunning — you can even see Long Island (specifically, Montauk in the Hamptons) across the Atlantic.

Southeast Lighthouse, Block Island, Rhode Island. ©Bill Kennedy/Shutterstock

But all views aside, the beach that sits at the base of the bluffs is one of Rhode Island's most scenic as well. To get there, just take the 141-step staircase that leads to the bottom (and try not to think about the fact that you'll have to walk back up on the return trip). The sand is a bit rocky, but it's great for no-frills chilling, as most people don't want to drag a bunch of beach gear down those steps — so sitting on a towel with a book and a beer is definitely the move. And be sure to snap some photos while you're down there; the sea cliffs make quite the stunning backdrop!

## *Best beach for families:* Misquamicut Beach, Westerly

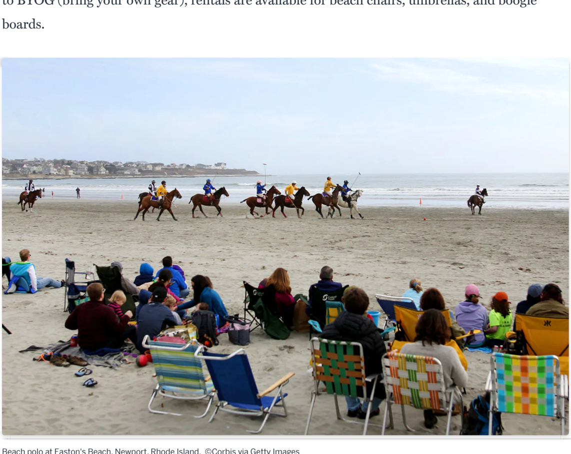
When trying to find a good beach for kids, there are a lot of factors to consider: Is the water calm? Are there good bathrooms? Are there lifeguards? Are there other things to do in the area? Misquamicut State Beach checks all of those boxes, making it a perennial family favorite in Rhode Island. There are bathrooms, changing areas, food stands, and a big pavilion, not to mention plenty of shaded areas for sunburned kiddos who need to take a break. Plus, the beach itself is gorgeous, with three miles of wide sand and fairly calm water.

Misquamicut State Beach in Westerly, Rhode Island. ©Ritu Manoj Jethani/Shutterstock

For those who want to take a break from the shore, nearby Atlantic Beach Park offers all sorts of kid-friendly entertainment, from a carousel to an arcade to a snack bar. Finish it off with a bite and a beer at the park's Windjammer Surf Bar, which also hosts live music on the patio most nights and even a kids' movie night on the beach on Tuesdays.

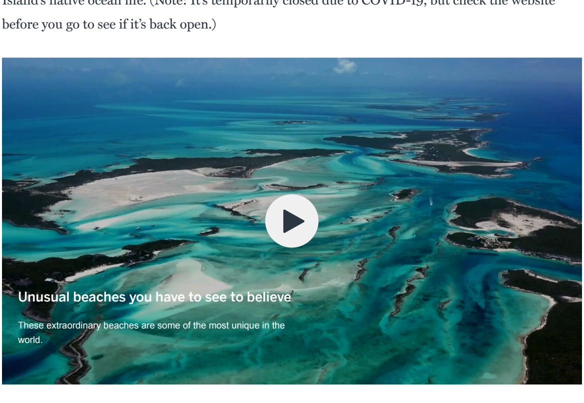
## *Best beach for fun seekers:* Easton (First) Beach, Newport

The area around Newport (including Middletown, right next door) has three main beaches that are colloquially referred to as First, Second, and Third Beach. All of them are great, but First Beach has the most to offer in terms of other activities that are not the beach. While Second and Third Beach are both pretty chill — Second Beach is located by the Norman Bird Sanctuary; Third Beach has virtually zero waves — First Beach is packed with activities, from summer carnivals and concerts, a skateboard park, and more. There's even a boardwalk and a vintage carousel. And if you don't want to BYOG (bring your own gear), rentals are available for beach chairs, umbrellas, and boogie boards.



Beach polo at Easton's Beach, Newport, Rhode Island. ©Corbis via Getty Images

There are also lots of great activities nearby for those who get bored of the sunbathing life. First Beach sits right by the entrance of the famous Newport Cliff Walk, a 3.5-mile walk along the cliffs with views of the crashing waves on one side and Newport's famous mansions on the other. Visitors can also check out the nearby Save the Bay Exploration Center and Aquarium to learn about Rhode Island's native ocean life. (Note: It's temporarily closed due to COVID-19, but check the website before you go to see if it's back open.)





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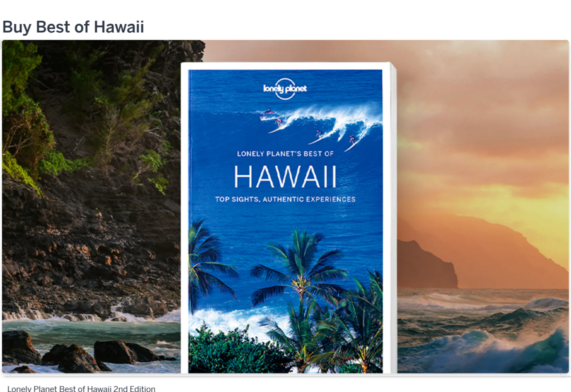



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