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Why You Should Consider Rhode Island for Your Next Beach Getaway

Without a doubt, Rhode Island is home to some of New England's best beaches. And you've probably never heard of most of them.



By Kassondra Cloos

I didn't take long to spot the green Del's umbrella at Portsmouth's Third Beach. Even without the jingles of ice cream trucks, we born-and-raised Rhode Islanders seem to have a homing device that can spot those iconic frozen lemonade stands from a mile away. And I was in luck: they hadn't yet run out of watermelon, the best flavor.

I sipped the sweet slush and looked out at the beach. There was almost too much to take in: Families scouring the shore for shells, windsurfers, standup paddleboarders, kayakers, swimmers and sailors.

Portsmouth is a town on Aquidneck Island, which you know even if you've never heard of it — it's also home to Newport. For centuries, the wealthiest Americans have built summer "cottages" here that make most ordinary homes look like dollhouses. Unlike the rockier New England beaches to the north, Aquidneck's beaches are soft sand.

I recently spent a few weeks back home in Rhode Island, partly to visit family and partly to explore, with fresh eyes, all the places I'd taken for granted as a kid. I took a beach weekend and did all the things you roll your eyes at when you're a local.



Rhode Island Commerce Corporation

I took a surf lesson at Narragansett Town Beach with **Warm Winds** and was shocked to find the shore anything but crowded. The waves went easy on me, and I was able to stand (albeit briefly) after a few tries. I spent the night a few minutes away at **The Break**, where you can smell the salty air from your window, and rode a bike down to the water at 5 a.m. to catch the sunrise over the Atlantic. A few fishing vessels bobbed along the horizon line. I wondered what they were catching.

After the sun was fully hidden behind cotton candy clouds, I pedaled hard toward Scarborough, the beach of my childhood. The state has dozens of beaches, and everyone has a favorite. Like the reverending debate over who has the better seafood, Iggy's or Aunt Carrie's, Rhode Islanders will go to bat for their beach as if it were truly their own.



Oliver Holmes / Block Island Tourism Council

Many of the stereotypes of small-state life are entirely true — it does seem like everyone knows everyone, or at least knows a friend of a friend of your friend's friend. It's impossible not to notice it if you're paying attention. In an Uber on the way to the Westerly airport to catch a 15-minute scenic flight to Block Island, our driver overheard us talking about the **Glass Float Project** and proclaimed that she's friends with the artist. Since 2011, Eben Horton has worked with the island to hide hundreds of blown glass orbs for people to find. Our driver made a show of reaching out to him to ask for hints (no dice; we got no hints, we found no floats).

As renowned as Newport is, the state's best beaches are undoubtedly on Block Island, a lightning-quick, 12-minute flight from the mainland on **New England Airlines**, or a 40-minute ride on the Block Island Ferry, yet seemingly a world away. The decades-old **Block Island Ferry** jingle sounds like it should belong to the Caribbean, and spotty cell service forces you onto "island time." It's easily the best beach town in New England, and one of the best along the whole East Coast, too. It's all classic New England clapboard houses, unspoiled woods ripe for exploration (and glass float scavenges) and endless beaches that pass for tropical in the right light.



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All the **beaches on the island are public**. There are so many of them, and they are all so different. Mansion Beach is one of the most popular for its views and soft sand. The dramatic Mohegan Bluffs is rarely crowded for the steep cliffs and long staircase down to the water, and it is always worth the hike. West Beach, just past the island's former landfill, is a phenomenal place to search for sea glass and other treasures and to watch sailboats race just offshore.

I've yet to find a place quite like it, nor a place that offers everything Rhode Island does along with the same Alaska-sized serving of local pride. I know that's impossible to believe until you see it. But if you grab a Del's and park yourself on a beach or a bench, you'll see the love and quirkiness as you watch everyone around you. (Do yourself a favor, though, and say no to the straws and spoons—locals almost always skip them, and they will immediately know you're a tourist.)

When you go:

Stay at **The Break** in Narragansett, which offers cruiser bikes for guests to borrow. It's a short ride to Scarborough and Narragansett **Town Beaches**. Have dinner at **Matunuck Oyster Bar**, where oysters are farmed on site (the restaurant offers free farm tours once a week) and rise early in the morning for a trip to Block Island. Take the **Block Island Ferry** from Point Judith, where you'll likely spot quite a few fishing vessels. Rent a bike or moped to explore the island, and take at least one full loop—you won't want to miss **Rodman's Hollow** for short hikes, **Mohegan Bluffs** for a secluded walk along the beach, and the **1661 Farm and Garden**, home to an eclectic mini zoo including camels, kangaroos, llamas, goats and lemurs. Don't forget to grab a Del's frozen lemonade in the harbor before getting on the ferry to head back to the mainland—it's practically illegal to visit Rhode Island and not have one.

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Best Beaches in South Carolina

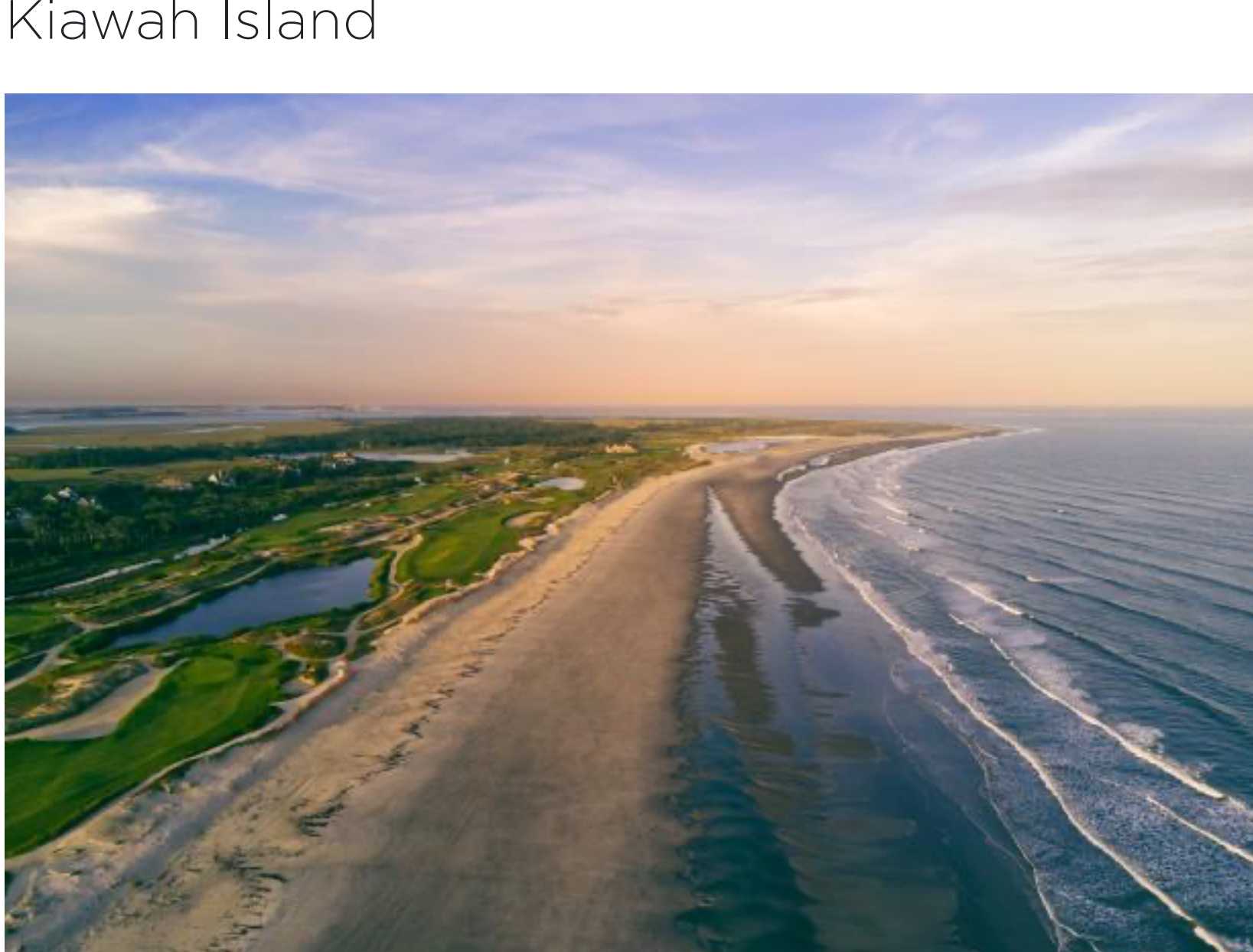
South Carolina is the perfect destination for beach lovers.



By Jennifer Plum Auell

With miles of seashore, sprawling resorts and offshore fun, South Carolina is the perfect destination for beach lovers.

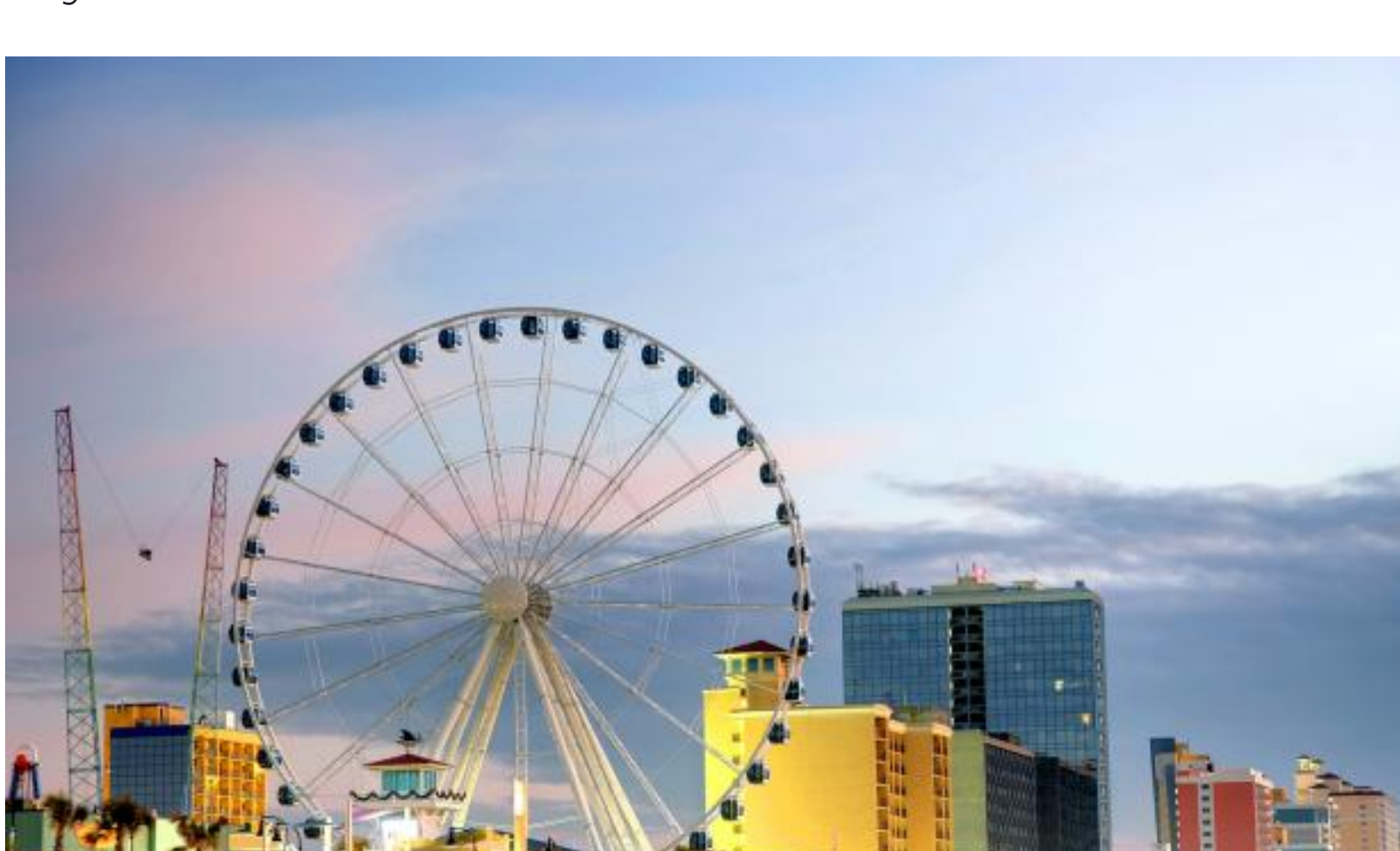
Kiawah Island



Shutterstock/Jack Siman

Kiawah Island is a coastal island off South Carolina, with 10 miles of pristine beaches, approximately 10,000 acres of natural woodlands and every amenity to meet the needs of the entire family. Kiawah offers plenty of sun and sand, and it's just a short drive to Charleston, a city check-full of Southern charm.

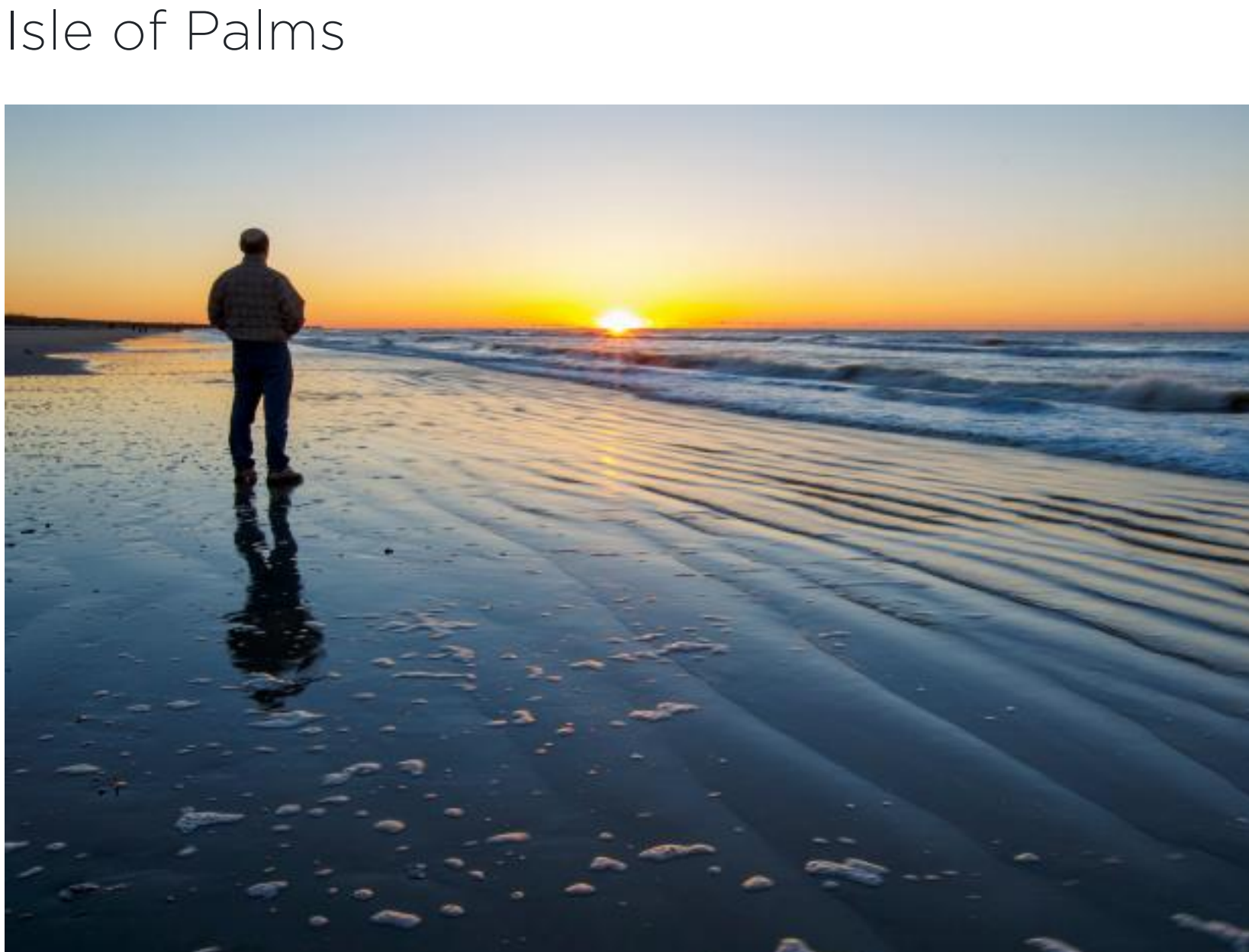
Myrtle Beach



Dennis Jr. Tanghey / E+ / Getty Images

As the largest resort along South Carolina's 60-mile Grand Strand, Myrtle Beach is the East Coast's ultimate vacation hub. The town teems with summertime action: beaches dotting the Strand, amusement and water parks, restaurants and live entertainment. Myrtle Beach's actual beach is an extensive stretch of silky white sand, with opportunities for fishing, swimming, sunbathing, sailing and surfing.

Isle of Palms



Laszlo Pador Photography / Moment Open / Getty Images

The Isle of Palms is a beach town outside of the busy city of Charleston. Front Beach is open to the public for swimming and sunbathing, and nesting sea turtles stop here to lay their eggs in the tall dunes. Idyllic private beach access is available at the family-friendly **Wild Dunes resort** at the island's northern tip with clean beaches, water activities and plenty of opportunities to play a round of golf or perfect your serve in tennis.

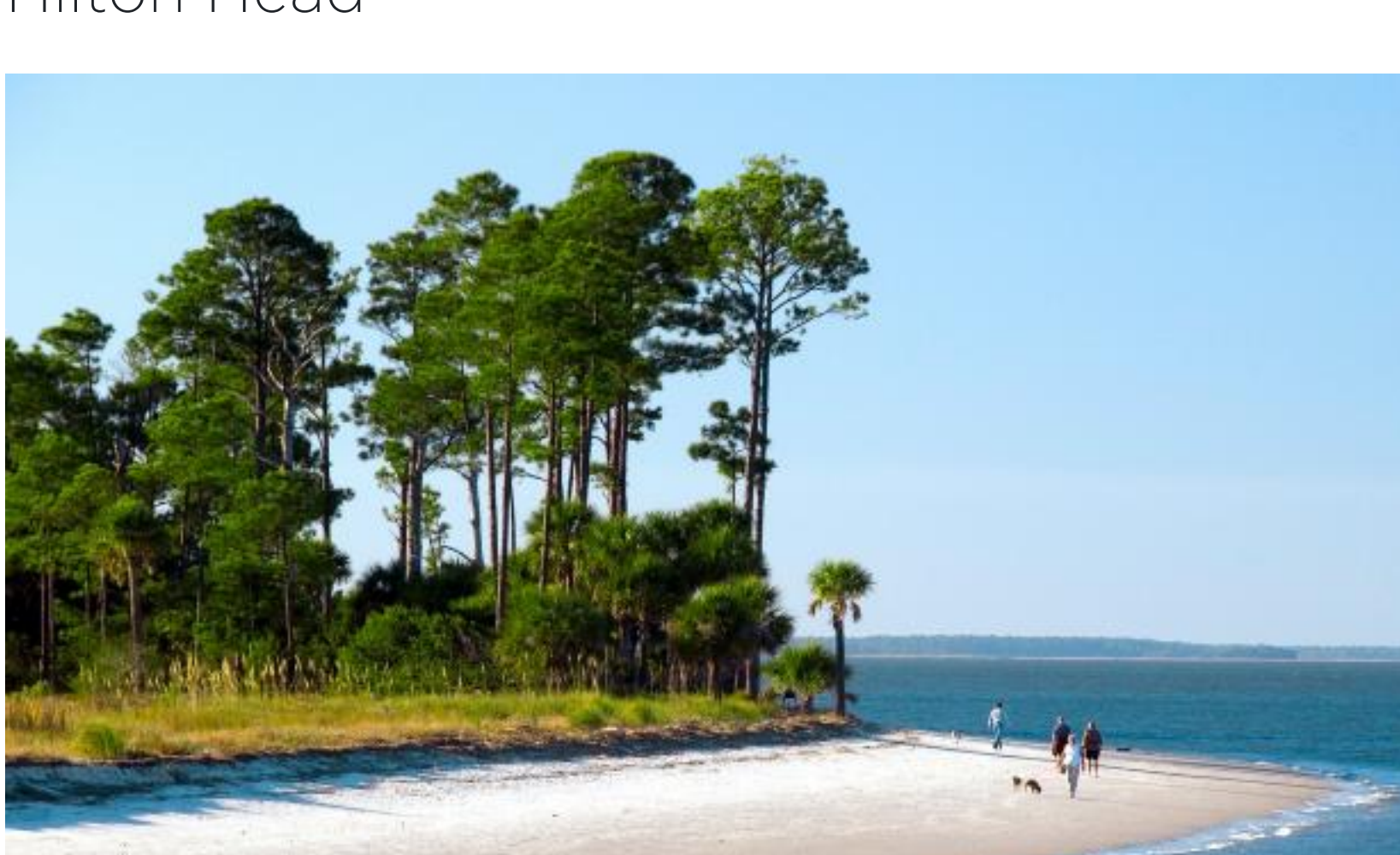
Folly Beach



Dawson Powers / Moment Open / Getty Images

Known to locals as the Edge of America, Folly Beach has a charming Southern small-town surf vibe just 15 minutes from downtown Charleston. Bring some bait and a fishing rod for saltwater fishing at the end of the 1,045-foot fishing pier that juts out over the Atlantic Ocean or sign up for surfing lessons back onshore. After riding the waves, join the locals for a hearty bowl of She-crab soup at the **Folly Beach Crab Shack**.

Hilton Head



Rachid Dahrouh / Aurora / Getty Images

One of the largest islands on the East Coast, Hilton Head is perfect for families and individuals who are looking for a large resort area with an array of activities to enjoy. Hilton Head is divided into large quadrants of developed communities called "plantations," each with an array of hotels, housing developments, restaurants and services. There are 12 miles of beaches, countless bike trails, over 30 golf courses and more than 300 tennis courts for off-beach fun.

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