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TRAVEL

The 20 Best East Coast Beaches—from Maine to Florida

By: Lindsay Cohn | May 18, 2021

When summer rolls in, we've got one thing on our mind: the beach! (The nostalgic jingle of the ice cream truck ranks a close second. Choco Taco, anyone?) Whether you can swing a week-long escape or just a quick day trip, knowing the best sandy spots within driving distance from home is key. Luckily, there are countless coastal gems up and down the eastern seaboard. From quiet coves in Maine to the bustling shores of South Florida, scroll on for 20 of the best East Coast beaches.

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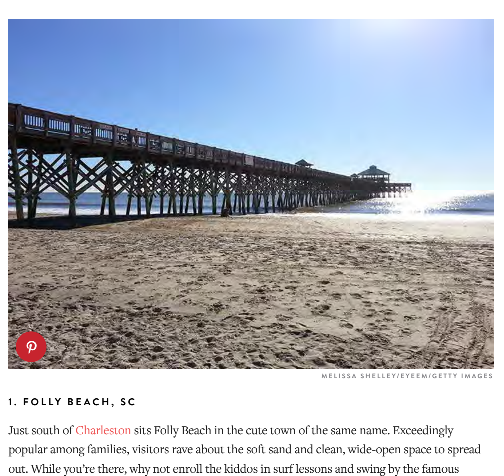
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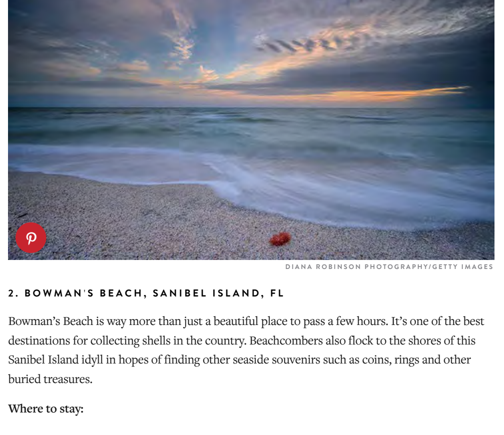
1. FOLLY BEACH, SC

Just south of Charleston sits Folly Beach in the cute town of the same name. Exceedingly popular among families, visitors rave about the soft sand and clean, wide-open space to spread out. While you're there, why not enroll the kiddos in surf lessons and swing by the famous 1,000-foot-long Folly Beach Pier?

Where to stay:

- *Water's Edge Inn (2 guests)*: $329/night
- *Tides Folly Beach (2 guests)*: $339/night
- *Four-Bedroom Townhouse (8 guests)*: $345/night


DIANA ROBINSON PHOTOGRAPHY/GETTY IMAGES

2. BOWMAN'S BEACH, SANIBEL ISLAND, FL

Bowman's Beach is way more than just a beautiful place to pass a few hours. It's one of the best destinations for collecting shells in the country. Beachcombers also flock to the shores of this Sanibel Island idyll in hopes of finding other seaside souvenirs such as coins, rings and other buried treasures.

Where to stay:

- *Song of the Sea (2 guests)*: $219/night
- *Sundial Beach Resort & Spa (2 guests)*: $469/night
- *Vacation Condo (6 guests)*: $147/night

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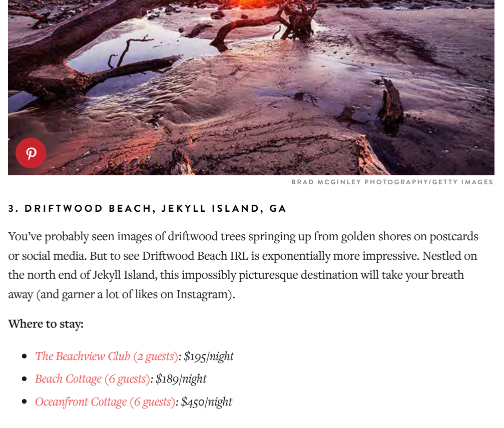
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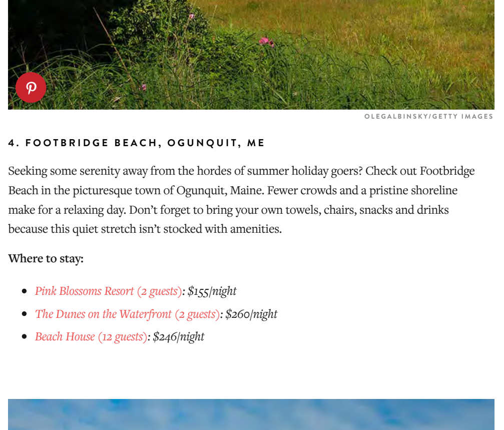
3. DRIFTWOOD BEACH, JEKYLL ISLAND, GA

You've probably seen images of driftwood trees springing up from golden shores on postcards or social media. But to see Driftwood Beach IRL is exponentially more impressive. Nestled on the north end of Jekyll Island, this impossibly picturesque destination will take your breath away (and garner a lot of likes on Instagram).

Where to stay:

- *The Beachview Club (2 guests)*: $195/night
- *Beach Cottage (6 guests)*: $189/night
- *Oceanfront Cottage (6 guests)*: $450/night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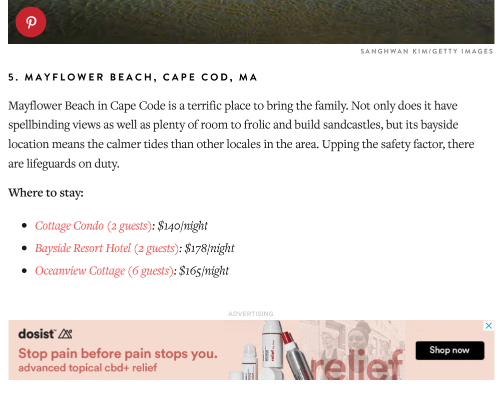
4. FOOTBRIDGE BEACH, OGUNQUIT, ME

Seeking some serenity away from the hordes of summer holiday goers? Check out Footbridge Beach in the picturesque town of Ogunquit, Maine. Fewer crowds and a pristine shoreline make for a relaxing day. Don't forget to bring your own towels, chairs, snacks and drinks because this quiet stretch isn't stocked with amenities.

Where to stay:

- *Pink Blossoms Resort (2 guests)*: $155/night
- *The Dunes on the Waterfront (2 guests)*: $260/night
- *Beach House (12 guests)*: $246/night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5. MAYFLOWER BEACH, CAPE COD, MA

Mayflower Beach in Cape Code is a terrific place to bring the family. Not only does it have spellbinding views as well as plenty of room to frolic and build sandcastles, but its bayside location means the calmer tides than other locales in the area. Upping the safety factor, there are lifeguards on duty.

Where to stay:

- *Cottage Condo (2 guests)*: $140/night
- *Bayside Resort Hotel (2 guests)*: $178/night
- *Oceanview Cottage (6 guests)*: $165/night

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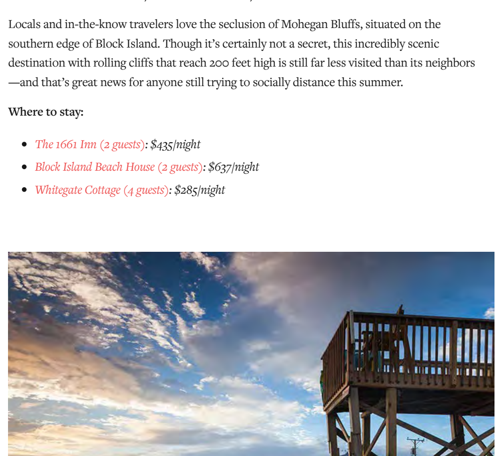
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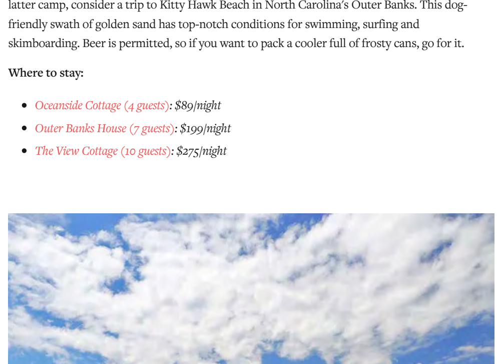
6. MOHEGAN BLUFFS, BLOCK ISLAND, RI

Locals and in-the-know travelers love the seclusion of Mohegan Bluffs, situated on the southern edge of Block Island. Though it's certainly not a secret, this incredibly scenic destination with rolling cliffs that reach 200 feet high is still far less visited than its neighbors—and that's great news for anyone still trying to socially distance this summer.

Where to stay:

- *The 1661 Inn (2 guests)*: $435/night
- *Block Island Beach House (2 guests)*: $637/night
- *Whitegate Cottage (4 guests)*: $285/night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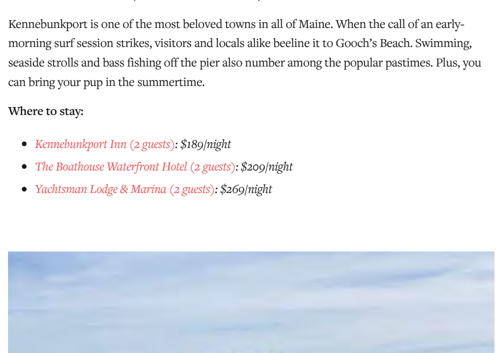
7. KITTY HAWK BEACH, OUTER BANKS, NC

Some people are content sunbathing all day while others prefer activities. If you fall into the latter camp, consider a trip to Kitty Hawk Beach in North Carolina's Outer Banks. This dog-friendly swath of golden sand has top-notch conditions for swimming, surfing and skimboarding. Beer is permitted, so if you want to pack a cooler full of frosty cans, go for it.

Where to stay:

- *Oceanside Cottage (4 guests)*: $89/night
- *Outer Banks House (7 guests)*: $199/night
- *The View Cottage (10 guests)*: $275/night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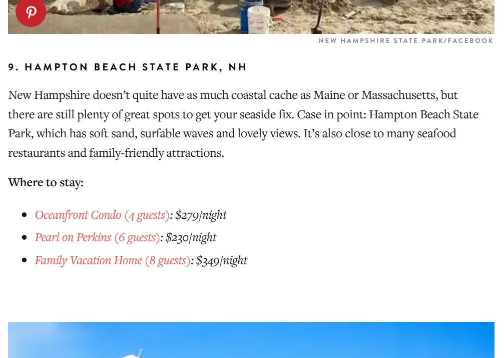
8. GOOCH'S BEACH, KENNEBUNKPORT, ME

Kennebunkport is one of the most beloved towns in all of Maine. When the call of an early-morning surf session strikes, visitors and locals alike beeline it to Gooch's Beach. Swimming, seaside strolls and bass fishing off the pier also number among the popular pastimes. Plus, you can bring your pup in the summertime.

Where to stay:

- *Kennebunkport Inn (2 guests)*: $189/night
- *The Boathouse Waterfront Hotel (2 guests)*: $209/night
- *Yachtsman Lodge & Marina (2 guests)*: $269/night

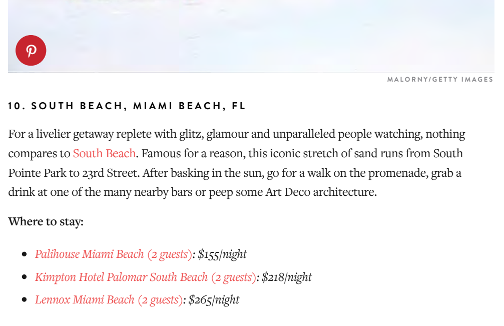

NEW HAMPSHIRE STATE PARK/FACEBOOK

9. HAMPTON BEACH STATE PARK, NH

New Hampshire doesn't quite have as much coastal cache as Maine or Massachusetts, but there are still plenty of great spots to get your seaside fix. Case in point: Hampton Beach State Park, which has soft sand, surfable waves and lovely views. It's also close to many seafood restaurants and family-friendly attractions.

Where to stay:

- *Oceanfront Condo (4 guests)*: $279/night
- *Pearl on Perkins (6 guests)*: $230/night
- *Family Vacation Home (8 guests)*: $349/night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10. SOUTH BEACH, MIAMI BEACH, FL

For a livelier getaway replete with glitz, glamour and unparalleled people watching, nothing compares to South Beach. Famous for a reason, this iconic stretch of sand runs from South Pointe Park to 23rd Street. After basking in the sun, go for a walk on the promenade, grab a drink at one of the many nearby bars or peep some Art Deco architecture.

Where to stay:

- *Palihouse Miami Beach (2 guests)*: $155/night
- *Kimpton Hotel Palomar South Beach (2 guests)*: $218/night
- *Lennox Miami Beach (2 guests)*: $265/night

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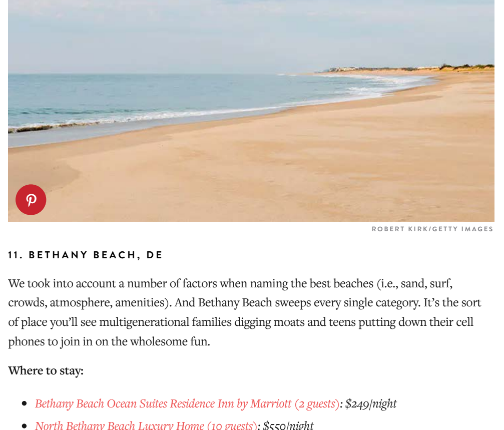
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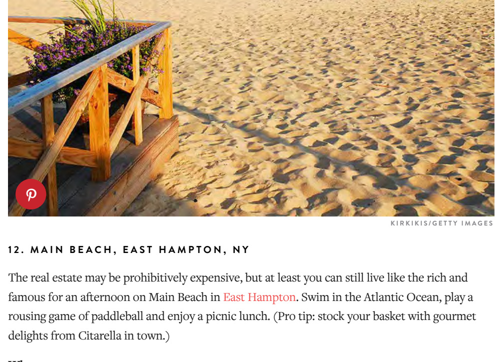
11. BETHANY BEACH, DE

We took into account a number of factors when naming the best beaches (i.e., sand, surf, crowds, atmosphere, amenities). And Bethany Beach sweeps every single category. It's the sort of place you'll see multigenerational families digging moats and teens putting down their cell phones to join in on the wholesome fun.

Where to stay:

- *Bethany Beach Ocean Suites Residence Inn by Marriott (2 guests)*: $249/night
- *North Bethany Beach Luxury Home (10 guests)*: $550/night
- *Elegant Vacation House (12 guests)*: $379/night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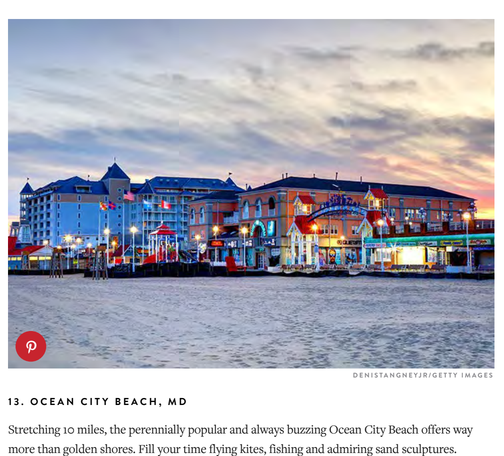
12. MAIN BEACH, EAST HAMPTON, NY

The real estate may be prohibitively expensive, but at least you can still live like the rich and famous for an afternoon on Main Beach in East Hampton. Swim in the Atlantic Ocean, play a rousing game of paddleball and enjoy a picnic lunch. (Pro tip: stock your basket with gourmet delights from Citarella in town.)

Where to stay:

- *Renovated Classic Cottage (6 guests)*: $533/night
- *Cottage by the Beach (6 guests)*: $1,250/night
- *Sweet Cottage in Village (8 guests)*: $495/night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13. OCEAN CITY BEACH, MD

Stretching 10 miles, the perennially popular and always buzzing Ocean City Beach offers way more than golden shores. Fill your time flying kites, fishing and admiring sand sculptures. Want to try a high-altitude activity? Give parasailing a whirl. There's also a boardwalk with shops and eateries, plus an amusement park.

Where to stay:

- *Dunes Manor Hotel, Court & Suites (2 guests)*: $322/night
- *Residence Inn by Marriott Ocean City (2 guests)*: $326/night
- *Oceanfront Condo (8 guests)*: $117/night

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14. MYRTLE BEACH, SC

A long-time favorite amongst South Carolinians and out-of-towners, Myrtle Beach hits the mark every time. The boardwalk-backed section, which runs between 2nd and 14th Avenue piers, is particularly popular with families as kiddos can't get enough of the amusement rides such as the SkyWheel, arcades, mini-golf courses and ice cream parlors.

Where to stay:

- *South Bay Inn and Suites (2 guests)* $49/night
- *Island Vistas (2 guests)* $183/night
- *Ocean Enclave by Hilton Grand Vacations (2 guests)* $180/night

MARCUS CONNOR/PHOTOLIBRARY

15. SCARBOROUGH STATE BEACH, NARRAGANSETT, RI

With a relaxed ambiance and stunning views, Scarborough State Beach in Narragansett holds its own against the other spots on our list. Hours fly by soaking in the vitamin sea (sorry, but you had to know that pun was coming), swimming in the refreshing waters of the Atlantic Ocean and marveling at the views from the observation tower.

Where to stay:

- *Newly Renovated Rental (6 guests)* $183/night
- *Oceanfront Vacation Home (8 guests)* $300/night
- *Three-Bedroom Home (8 guests)* $187/night

MARGARETHOFFT/GETTY IMAGES

16. COLIGNY BEACH PARK, HILTON HEAD, SC

For a stress-free day of fun in the sun, look no further than Coligny Beach Park. The well-maintained facilities include gazebos, swings, outdoor showers, changing rooms and picnic tables. You basically just have to bring a swimsuit and SPF because everything else is available to rent. Two-final weeks free parking.

Where to stay:

- *Beach Villa (2 guests)* $159/night
- *Inn & Club at Harbour Town - Sea Pines Resort (2 guests)* $362/night
- *Surf Court 62 (8 guests)* $1,180/night

AMELIA ISLAND/PHOTOLIBRARY

17. MAIN BEACH PARK, AMELIA ISLAND, FL

With its irresistible mix of pleasant weather, sun-kissed decors and warm waters, Main Beach Park on Amelia Island really does have it all. Add to that immaculate facilities—volleyball courts, a playground, picnic areas, restrooms, outdoor showers and a skate park. It does get a bit crowded, especially during peak season, so best to go early.

Where to stay:

- *Amelia Schoolhouse Inn (2 guests)* $202/night
- *The Ritz-Carlton, Amelia Island (2 guests)* $599/night
- *Renovated Beachfront Cottage (4 guests)* $333/night

JONAS/GETTY IMAGES

18. SOUTH BEACH, BALD HEAD ISLAND, NC

Another family-friendly spot to take the kiddos for some seaside fun, South Beach on North Carolina's Bald Head Island offers calm waters for swimming and wide stretches of sand for playing games. Visitors can even rent boxes tents, lounge chairs and umbrellas (thus eliminating the need to lug around all your beach gear).

Where to stay:

- *Bluff Cottage (4 guests)* $247/night
- *Remodeled Home (4 guests)* $277/night
- *Creek Estates Home (13 guests)* $599/night

JOHANNES/GETTY IMAGES

19. JETTIES BEACH, NANTUCKET, MA

Nantucket calls to mind fresh-caught seafood, preppy red pants and salty breezes. Located within walking distance of town, Jetties Beach encapsulates all that in a single sublime destination. After catching some rays, toss on a coverup and head to Sandbar at Jetties Beach for fish 'n' chips and frozen drinks.

Where to stay:

- *Martin House Inn (2 guests)* $259/night
- *Nantucket Resort Collection (2 guests)* $200/night
- *19 Main (2 guests)* $346/night

CAPTAIN GULLIVER/GETTY IMAGES

20. SHIP BOTTOM BEACH, LONG BEACH ISLAND, NJ

Ship Bottom Beach is the sort of place that people keep returning to year after year. And it's not hard to figure out why. This quiet strip of Long Beach Island (or LBI as locals refer to it) boasts an endlessly scenic shoreline to swim, surf, paddleboard, collect shells and relax under the sun.

Where to stay:

- *Half LBI (3 guests)* $146/night
- *Newly-Fit Mini LBI (3 guests)* $333/night
- *Beach Condo (8 guests)* $140/night

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