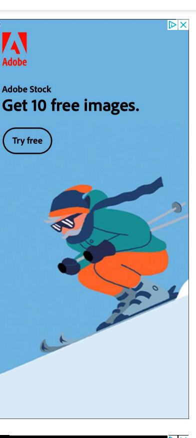
Pump up projects with 10 free music tracks from Adobe Stock.
Try now

13 Coolest Surf Towns for Sunshine and Epic Waves

Go catch a set in these perfect little towns.

By Stacey Leasca | March 06, 2022

Adobe
Adobe Stock
Get 10 free images.
Try free



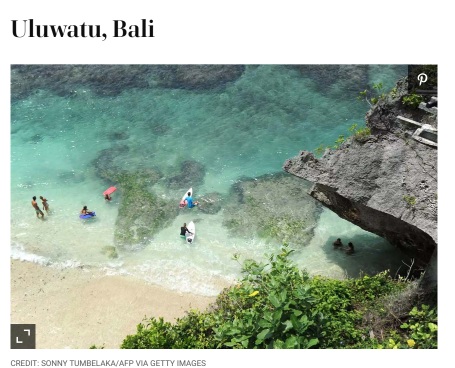
Made possible by Hosts
Explore Outdoor Getaways
airbnb
ADVERTISEMENT

CREDIT: IVETA RYSAVA/BELL COLLECTIVE/GETTY IMAGES

There's nothing quite like standing up on a wave for the first time. The thrill of having the ocean behind you, the feeling of weightlessness as you pop up on the board, and the pure adrenaline of riding straight back to shore — it's pure bliss. And it's a moment you'll want to experience over and over again on your travels.

But rather than head off to the same crowded spots, it's time to take your skills to a smaller surf town. Here are 13 of the best surf towns around the world that deserve your attention.

Uluwatu, Bali



CREDIT: SONNY TUMBELAKA/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES

Bali is already a well-known and beloved surfing destination. However, there are still a few off-the-beaten-path spots worthy of a visit. Uluwatu is located just 45 minutes from the Bali airport, but it feels an entire world away. The gorgeous cliff-lined beaches stretch out to a challenging yet accessible reef break. Visitors will also find plenty to explore in town, including the Uluwatu Temple, which sits on a cliff overlooking the break. It not only offers a great opportunity to learn more about Balinese culture, but it also offers stunning views of the clear, blue sea all the way to the horizon.

ADVERTISING

Related: The Best Time to Visit Bali for Every Activity

Nosara, Costa Rica

CREDIT: MARK HATFIELD/GETTY IMAGES

Costa Rica is spoiled with excellent surf destinations. If you want to surf here, you can hop in the water just about anywhere along the coast and likely catch a wave. But if you're looking for a charming small town, as well as some stellar waves, look no further than Nosara. Located on the Nicoya Peninsula, the town is home to a sandy break that's great for beginners, but can also pump from time to time for those seeking chest- to head-high swells. In town, visitors can dine in some divine restaurants, take part in restorative yoga, or shop in a few of the town's delightful craft shops.

Related: These Are the Best Time to Visit Costa Rica

Ericeira, Portugal

CREDIT: SANTIAGO URQUIJO/GETTY IMAGES

Portugal is home to arguably one of the most famous waves in the world, which can be found in Nazaré, located in the northern part of the country. This wave can grow as high as 78 feet across its face, so unless your name is Garrett McNamara, we suggest you avoid trying to paddle out to this. Instead, make your way further south to Ericeira, a town located just 45 minutes outside Lisbon. With beautiful swells for the everyday surfer, this quaint seaside town is the ideal spot to book a lesson or two to improve your skills. Ericeira also holds the distinction of being the only European destination named to the World Surfing Reserves, which aims to protect the best swells on Earth for generations to come.

Raglan, New Zealand

CREDIT: JORDAN STENT/GETTY IMAGES

If it's a left-hand wave you're after, make your way to Raglan on New Zealand's North Island. This coastal town is known for its stunning, volcanic black-sand beaches and what could be the longest left-hand break in the world at Manu Bay. It's so long, in fact, that NewZealand.com claims you could ride the wave for more than a mile without stopping if you have the skills. Once you're done playing in the water, you can find a tasty treat in town, as Raglan is also a rather famous foodie destination, offering an abundance of organic goodies and plentiful cafes ready to pour you a perfect espresso. While visiting Raglan, make sure to take some time to head out on a Māori cultural tour to get to know the region and the people who make it so special.

Pipa, Brazil

CREDIT: ADAM HESTER/GETTY IMAGES

Brazilians aren't just good surfers — they're great surfers. Just look at the World Surf League's rankings for proof. If you want to get a taste or improve your skills, you simply have to head to their homeland and take to the waves. One of the prime spots to do just that is Pipa, arguably one of the coolest beach towns around. It's far less frequented by tourists than its more well-known counterparts, making it a place where surfers can find both a little space in the lineup and room for their blanket on the beach. If you're fortunate, you may even spot a dolphin or two. After drying off, head into town for a bite of fresh seafood or take a hike in the nearby trails (visiting the Cajueiro de Pirangi, the world's largest cashew tree, is a must).

San Clemente, California

CREDIT: MATTHEW MICAH WRIGHT/GETTY IMAGES

Like the other destinations on this list, California also comes with many well-known surf spots. And sure, you can head to Malibu or Venice Beach and have a great time, but if you're looking for calmer swells (and fellow surfers), travel further south to San Clemente. The Orange County destination is home to San Onofre State Beach, which comes with one of the mellowest surf breaks around. It's so chill that the break is even lovingly known as "Old Man's," due to the fact that just about anyone can surf it. Be warned: Getting into San Onofre can be tricky — it's one in, one out parking, which means arriving early (we're talking 5 a.m. early) to wait in line is a must. But once you're in, you'll be rewarded with a perfect day of grilling by the beach, making new friends, and plenty of fond new surfing memories.

Tofino, Canada

CREDIT: PRISMA BILDAGENTUR/UNIVERSAL IMAGES GROUP VIA GETTY IMAGES

The town of Tofino is home to approximately 2,000 permanent residents, making it one of the smallest destinations on this list. But its relatively small population only adds to its mythical charms. Located on Vancouver Island, Tofino is known as the "surf capital of Canada," and it's a place to go if you're really looking to catch a wave in the wild. As Surfline notes, the water here can be icy cold, sharks are abundant, and you may even spot an orca breaching nearby. But if you're brave enough, you'll be treated to stellar longboard waves with only the sea creatures there to judge you.

Hossegor, France

CREDIT: CHIARA BENELLI/GETTY IMAGES

Another small town to travel to on your hunt for the perfect swell is Hossegor, a commune located in southwest France. You could spot pros mingling with the groms here, as Hossegor is also home of the Quiksilver Pro World Surf League event. Surfers will find miles of peaks at the beach, from easy to expert only. The town itself is quite the scene, filled with bars and restaurants that somewhat mimic an après-ski vibe — only everyone is in bathing suits rather than snow gear. There's lots to do out of the water, too, including shopping in the Pedebert district, mountain biking, taking community yoga classes, and more.

Puerto Escondido, Mexico

CREDIT: GETTY IMAGES

For sunshine, epic waves, and vibrant cultural history, head to the port town of Puerto Escondido, located along Mexico's Pacific coast in the state of Oaxaca. The beaches here are stunning, and the shoreline is often regarded as having one of the world's best beach breaks. It's even home to what's known as the "Mexican Pipeline," an homage to Hawaii's famous Pipeline break on the North Shore. After paddling out for a session, make your way to town to check out the gorgeous architecture and visit a few markets, where you'll undoubtedly find the perfect souvenir to bring home.

Jeffreys Bay, South Africa

CREDIT: CHRIS VAN LENNEP/GETTY IMAGES

Take your surf skills up a notch by booking a ticket to Jeffreys Bay in South Africa. The town, located in the Eastern Cape, is the place to be for what locals and surf lovers everywhere fawn over as the best right-hand break in the world. Jeffreys Bay is something of a paradise thanks to its temperate climate, plentiful wildlife, and friendly atmosphere. In town, visitors can shop in craft stores, dine in the beachside cafes, visit a nearby estuary, or simply sit and watch their fellow surfers catch waves until sunset.

Narragansett, Rhode Island

CREDIT: GETTY IMAGES

It's not called the Ocean State for nothing. Tucked away in the southern corner of the state sits the perfect little beach town of Narragansett. Though it can be quiet in the winter, come summer, it's an excellent spot, especially for longboarding. That's because not only does it offer lengthy and calm waves, but it's also the birthplace of the Peter Pan Slug, arguably one of the best longboards ever shaped. Once your arms get tired from paddling, make your way down the seawall for a sunset drink at the Coast Guard House, or grab a bite at the nearby (and highly famed) Matunuck Oyster Bar, located in the next town over.

Taghazout, Morocco

CREDIT: IVETA RYSAVA/BELL COLLECTIVE/GETTY IMAGES

The small village of Taghazout is hiding a big secret: an epic point break that must be ridden to be believed. Located along Morocco's Atlantic coast, this village is in a unique position that provides near-perfect offshore winds, creating stellar conditions almost all year long. Plus, it's a place where everyone — from extreme beginners to advanced experts — can find a swell. Out of the water, visitors can indulge in a local hammam or explore the nearby central market in Agadir.

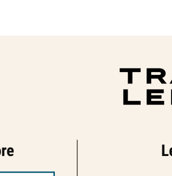
Woolacombe, England

CREDIT: DAVE COLLINS/GETTY IMAGES

If you can brave one more chilly day in the water, then it's time to head to Woolacombe. The town, located in North Devon, is as handsome as they come, with lots of outdoor space thanks to the surrounding national parks and protected coastline. In the water, surfers will find long, rolling breaks that are ideal for those looking to progress in the sport. Out of the water, visitors can warm up in the nearby restaurants and friendly pubs that would love nothing more than to pour you a pint.

Popular in Adventure Travel

Skijoring Is Like Waterskiing — Except With Snow and Horse...
Article



How My First Trip to Hawaii Pushed Me Out of My Comfo...
Article

PAID CONTENT
Rhode Island Launches New Policy For Cars Used Less...
From Smart Lifestyle Trends

Why Winter Is the Best Season to Surf at New York's...
Video

Travel + Leisure is published by Meredith Corporation under license from Travel + Leisure Co. Copyright 2022 Travel + Leisure Co. All Rights Reserved. TRAVEL + LEISURE is a registered trademark of Travel + Leisure Co.,

registered in the United States and other countries. *Travel + Leisure* magazine may receive compensation for some links to products and services on this website. Offers may be subject to change without notice.