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NEW ENGLAND

10 Best New England Beach Towns

Dreaming of sun, sand, and shopping? Here are some of the best spots in New England to find all three.

Katherine Keenan · March 8, 2022 · Read Comments (19)

3.67 avg. rating (73% score) - 3 votes

Please note that many establishments throughout New England have modified their hours and/or operations in response to COVID-19. Please check with individual businesses and organizations for the latest information before making travel plans.

You may be dreaming of the beach, but if you want the full summer experience, you should also consider the beach town. Here's our breakdown of the best New England beach towns.

10 Best New England Beach Towns

The Marginal Way in Ogunquit, Maine
Kindra Clineff

Ogunquit, Maine

Our #1 best New England beach town has it all. No matter where you stay along the Route 1 strip in Ogunquit, you'll be within easy walking distance of the beach. That's a prerequisite for a world-class beach town, yet you'd be surprised how few New England communities offer the ability to walk from your hotel to the beach, and onward to classic seafood shacks and boutiques filled with the wares of local artisans.

Don't Miss: The mile-long cliff walk called the Marginal Way, a float down the Ogunquit River where it rushes into the Atlantic, a show at the Ogunquit Playhouse, and the clam chowder and lobster rolls at Barnacle Billy's.

Provincetown, Massachusetts

The Pilgrim Monument in Provincetown, Massachusetts
Mark Fleming

Frankly, it was tough choosing between Provincetown and Ogunquit for the top spot. Located at the tip of Cape Cod, P-town checks all the boxes: Cape Cod National Seashore beaches where, if you're willing to walk, you can always find a strip to yourself; stunning sunsets; a vibrant gallery and restaurant scene; popular whale-watching cruises; and the most eclectic (and at times electric) people-watching of all. For all these reasons, Provincetown is without a doubt one of the best New England beach towns.

Don't Miss: A chance to explore the Cape Cod National Seashore either with Art's Dune Tours or by biking on the Province Lands Bike Trail, a visit to the Provincetown Art Association and Museum, a walk down Commercial Street to browse the shops, and a harborside meal at Tin Pan Alley.

Nantucket, Massachusetts

Outside Bartlett's Farm on Nantucket, Massachusetts
Mark Fleming

In comparison with the other best New England beach towns, Nantucket offers notably sophisticated dining and an intriguing mix of shops, plus bike paths that branch off in every direction to a variety of beaches. Just remember that it takes some organization to get here: The ferry trip is lovely, and you have options — high-speed or not, there are six ferries a day — but you can't just show up at the Hyannis terminal and hop on.

Don't Miss: The impressive collection of scrimshaw at the Nantucket Whaling Museum, the sunset at Madaket Beach, a visit to Bartlett's Farm for locally grown produce, and a beer tasting at Cisco Brewers.

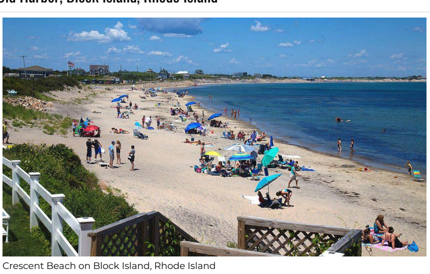
Newport, Rhode Island

Second Beach in Middletown, next door to Newport, Rhode Island
Leslie Lindeman via Discover Newport

Home to historic mansions, the International Tennis Hall of Fame, and Touro Synagogue (oldest existing synagogue in America), Newport has more than enough diversions for those who want to step away from the shoreline. Add strolling atop the rugged shoreline via the Cliff Walk and sailing on Narragansett Bay, and you've got a world-class summer getaway. One quirk: The area's best beach, Second Beach on Sachuest Bay, is actually in neighboring Middletown.

Don't Miss: A tour of one of the Gilded Age mansions, a visit to the National Museum of American Illustration, and a meal at the Black Pearl. Plan in advance, and you can catch one of the two famous festivals that happen in Newport, the Newport Folk Festival and the Newport Jazz Festival.

Old Harbor, Block Island, Rhode Island

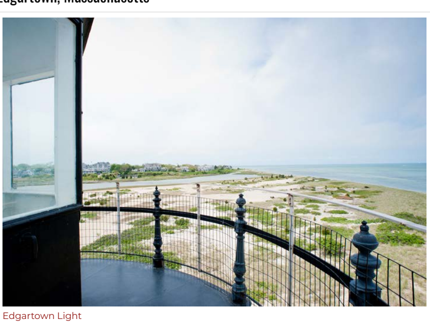


Crescent Beach on Block Island, Rhode Island
Timothy J. Quill/Wikimedia Commons

Old Harbor offers dramatic bluffs, secluded beaches, and quaint accommodations. Rent a bike and take a 13-mile loop around the island, stopping at the many lemonade stands, or hike the Greenway walking trails. Hungry? Check out Eli's, an eclectic, no-reservations restaurant nestled into a clapboard cottage. Head north and you arrive at the glorious three-mile-long Crescent Beach, packed with day-trippers in the summer months.

Don't Miss: The views at Southeast Light and Mohegan Bluffs, where sea-gouged cliffs plunge toward the water 200 feet below.

Edgartown, Massachusetts

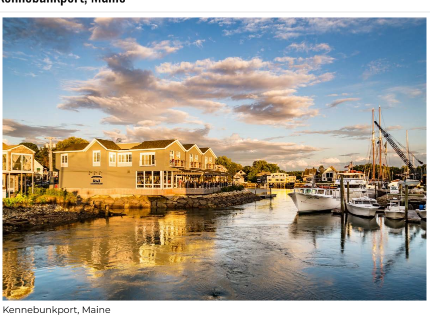


Edgartown Light
Alison Shaw

Amble along the sidewalks of this Martha's Vineyard town, dotted with whaling captains' homes from the 18th and 19th centuries. Then take your bike on the two-minute ferry ride over to Chappaquiddick and the remote Cape Poge Wildlife Refuge, a long coastal stretch that you can call home for the rest of the day. If you feel like getting even closer to the sea, the Trustees of Reservations offers guided kayaking tours on Cape Poge and Wasque Reservation waterways. For an indulgent night out, try the lobster mac and cheese at L'étoile.

Don't Miss: A cone at Mad Martha's, the requisite stroll over to the docks, and a visit to Edgartown Light.

Kennebunkport, Maine

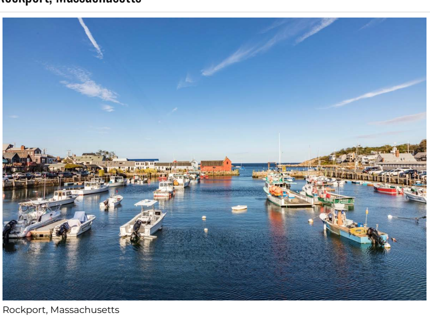


Kennebunkport, Maine
iStock.com/edella

Most people associate Kennebunkport with the shopping at Dock Square, one reason why many consider it to be one of the best New England beach towns. That's a shame, because the true joy of visiting Kennebunkport is driving on back roads to find the lobster traps stacked high on Cape Porpoise, the small strip of sand at Goose Rocks Beach, and the many favorite local eateries in between (like the Clam Shack, Nunan's Lobster Hut, and the Ramp).

Don't Miss: The four-course prix fixe menu at the White Barn Inn, across the river in neighboring Kennebunk Beach.

Rockport, Massachusetts



Rockport, Massachusetts
iStock.com/travelview

There are a few reasons we think Rockport is one of the best New England beach towns. Bearskin Neck, with its collection of boutiques, ice cream shops, and restaurants, juts out into Sandy Bay, ending at a rock jetty. Front Beach, a two-minute walk from Bearskin Neck, is ideal for sand-castle building and a swim. Neighboring Gloucester boasts two of the finest beaches on Cape Ann — Good Harbor and Wingaersheek — but you'll want to spend most of your evening hours in Rockport.

Don't Miss: A visit to Motif No. 1, famed as the most painted building in the world, and a classical music performance at the Shalin Liu Performance Center, whose floor-to-ceiling stage window overlooks the Atlantic.

Chatham, Massachusetts

Chatham, Massachusetts
Chris Martino/Flickr

You'll find a quintessential village green here, replete with gazebo and bands playing concerts in summer, surrounded by a fine selection of restaurants and shops. This is definitely one of the best New England beach towns, but others know that, too: Parking at some of Chatham's prime strips of sand is limited, so go early.

Don't miss: A cup of chowder at Chatham Pier Fish Market, a 2018 *Yankee* Editors' Pick for best chowder in Massachusetts.

Watch Hill, Rhode Island

Ocean House in Watch Hill, Rhode Island
Courtesy of Ocean House

This classic summer retreat offers a pretty town beach, one of the oldest carousels in the country, long coastline walks, and an inviting array of shops and restaurants. If that weren't enough to make this one of our best New England beach towns, the fact that Watch Hill is not directly off I-95 means you have to *earn* this slice of beachfront beauty.

Don't Miss: Drinks on the glorious wraparound verandah of Ocean House and a visit to the aforementioned Flying Horse Carousel, where you can watch riders fly by on steeds that have revolved for more than 130 years.

Which New England beach town is your favorite?

This post was adapted from a 2016 Yankee digital feature by Steve Jermanok. For more, see Steve's expanded list of the 25 Best Beach Towns in New England, including how he chose the best.

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Comments

Wesley A Smith F. March 8, 2022
I think you nailed it this time! I have enjoyed each of your top ten and feel most blessed. On a sunny day, I would love being at any one of these top ten!
Reply

Reader L. March 8, 2022
K'port for Dock Square? No. Flat out No. great shops, but you can 'shop' a zillion different places. Unfortunately, since so many have 'found' this wonderful place, it is Crowded, pricey, did I mention crowded? Still beautiful, just longing for what it once was.❤️
Reply

Kate B. March 8, 2022
and PS Crane Beach in Ipswich – to die for. Then go to Essex for the fried clams and antiquing. There's your quintessential New England Summer Day out.
If it was good enough for Steve McQueen . . .
Reply

Kate B. March 8, 2022
Duxbury usually gets listed on these lists. But alas . . .
Reply

Mary C. July 29, 2021
Camden my favorite
Reply

Fern P. July 22, 2021
My favorite is Good Harbor Beach snd downtown Gloucester. It has the oldest Art Colony and the oldest seaport in the US.
Reply

William S. July 22, 2021
What No CT beach towns? Old Saybrook, Madison, or are these too far South. Still a New Englander at heart.
Reply

Mark K. July 22, 2021
You nailed it with Watch Hill, used to be a secret place, not anymore. East beach right under Swifty's place is awesome, sandy and good waves.
Reply

Cynthia P. July 22, 2021
Gosh, I thought you would mention Salisbury, Massachusetts. The beach is amazing and endless. Unlike Martha's Vineyard and Nantucket, it doesn't cost you a ferry ride to get to.
Reply

Cheryl R. July 22, 2021
I like Plymouth beach and Kalmus beach in Hyannis, especially for sea shelling!
Reply

William W. March 17, 2021
I want to walk the Marginal Way one more time before I die.
Reply

Reader L. July 22, 2021
I'm with you on that! I'm actually going to be an hour away in MA when I travel "home" next month (from GA). My niece and her boyfriend already have a day in Ogunquit planned for us, just because they know how much change I love it there. I hope you get there, too.
Reply

Lynn B. July 24, 2021
These are my feelings, exactly! It was a favorite of my husband and me. He proposed to me (again, on our 35th wedding anniversary) along the Marginal Way! He passed from COVID this year. We had hoped to walk the Marginal Way again this year on our 50th anniversary. Perhaps I'll make the trip from California just to walk it one last time.
It's the best, and guaranteed to create memories.
Reply

Jeri S. March 5, 2021
How could you miss Camden, my favorite
Reply

Mary M. March 5, 2021
Was very disappointed with Rockport. Very honky honk as compared to when I visited years ago.
Reply

Anthony O. March 5, 2021
Love Rockport ! Have gone there for the past 46 years.
Reply

Joann M. July 1, 2020
You missed my favorite, but that's ok. More for me!
Reply

Brian Ford M. July 22, 2021
Shhhh!
Reply

Lynn M. July 1, 2020
7 of them are my most favorite places to be.
Reply

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