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8 Best Places to Buy a Beach Vacation Home in the U.S.

Life really can be a beach.

By Selena Dedera April 19, 2022

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Owning an oceanfront vacation home means waking up to the soothing sound of waves and taking beach walks every day. Investing in a second home, especially one located by the beach, has always tempted people, but because of the COVID-19 pandemic, it has become one of the hottest real estate trends.

The appeal from home culture and desire to be closer to nature are driving demand — and the value — for beachfront properties to historic highs in some areas of the country. But that doesn't mean your dream vacation home is out of reach. Most brokers will agree that closing on a home calls for acting fast and, if possible, offering above-asking price.

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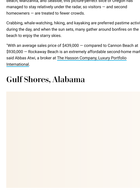
From New Jersey to Oregon all the way to Hawaii, there are plenty of oceanfront communities that offer a quintessential laid-back beach vibe. So, if you're in the market for a beach vacation home, keep reading for eight of the most attractive oceanfront destinations for real estate investment.

Hatteras Island, North Carolina



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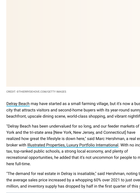
Surf's always up on Hatteras Island. Vacasa recently named the destination one of the top 10 in the country for a beach vacation home investment. But even if you're not a surfer, this beautiful North Carolina barrier island will captivate you: with its expansive beaches, laid-back atmosphere, and fresh seafood. The warmer ocean temperatures here make it perfect for fly-fishing or simply enjoying a day of winter sunshine.

"Hatteras Island, for the most part, is still like the Outer Banks you remember as a childless residential and commercial development and more beach," said Randy Jones, a broker with Howard Hanna Outer Banks Realty, Luxury Portfolio International.

In 2021, the Cape Hatteras lighthouse drew more than three million visitors; so a vacation home here also offers excellent rental opportunities.

"Home values are below the northern Outer Banks values, yet the rental returns are often just as strong, and in some cases, even stronger. For example, we recently had a home in Rodanthe sell for $1,100,000 that will generate almost $130,000 in rent in 2022," explained Jones.

Rockaway Beach, Oregon



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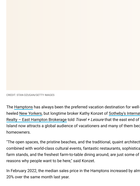
With seven miles of sandy beaches, Rockaway Beach has always been a popular vacation spot on the Oregon coast. But unlike famous towns such as Cannon Beach, Manzanita, and Seaside, this picture-perfect slice of Oregon has managed to stay relatively under the radar, so visitors — and second homeowners — are treated to fewer crowds.

Crabbing, whale-watching, biking, and kayaking are preferred pastime activities during the day, and when the sun sets, many gather around a bonfire on the beach to enjoy the starry skies.

"With an average sales price of $429,000 — compared to Cannon Beach at $930,000 — Rockaway Beach is an extremely affordable second-home market," said Michael Malone, a broker at The Hasson Company, Luxury Portfolio International.

Gulf Shores, Alabama



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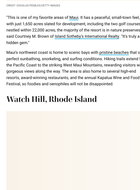
"We're so glad to see Gulf Shores being recognized by second-home buyers for all the things we locals love: a small-town feel, miles of sugar-white sand beaches, and all the fitting shops and restaurants for a beach getaway," said Frank Malone, an agent with Bellator Real Estate & Development, Luxury Portfolio International.

This dreamy corner of the Gulf of Mexico coast used to attract travelers from the South, but Malone explained that more and more second-home buyers are coming here from across the country, especially the West Coast. But as Gulf Shores' popularity soars, so does the value of its real estate — the average residential sales price in February 2022 increased by 19% over the previous year, according to Malone.

Delray Beach, Florida



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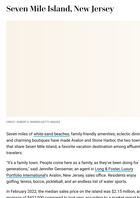
Delray Beach may have started as a small farming village, but it's now a bustling city that attracts visitors and second-home buyers with its year-round sunny beachfront, upscale dining scene, world-class shopping, and vibrant nightlife.

"Delray Beach has been undervalued for so long, and our feeder markets of New York and the tri-state area (New York, New Jersey, and Connecticut) have realized how great the lifestyle is down here," said Marc Hershman, a real estate broker with Illustrated Properties, Luxury Portfolio International. With no income tax, top-ranked public schools, a strong local economy, and plenty of recreational opportunities, he added that it's not uncommon for people to move here full-time.

"The demand for real estate in Delray is insatiable," said Hershman, noting that the average sales price increased by a whopping 50% over 2021 to just over $3 million, and inventory supply has dropped by half in the first quarter of this year.



The Hamptons, New York

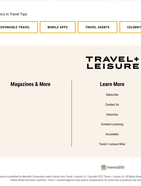
CREDIT: STAN GODLEWSKI/GETTY IMAGES

The Hamptons has always been the preferred vacation destination for well-heeled New Yorkers. But longtime broker Kathy Kurzon of Sotheby's International Realty — East Hampton Brokerage told *Travel + Leisure* that the east end of Long Island now attracts a global audience of vacationers and many of them become second homeowners.

"The open spaces, the pristine beaches, and the traditional, quaint architecture, combined with world-class cultural events, fantastic restaurants, sophisticated farm stands, and the freshest farm-to-table dining around, are just some of the reasons why people want to be here," said Kurzon.

In February 2022, the median sales price in the Hamptons increased by almost 20% over the same month last year.

Kapalua, Maui



CREDIT: DOUGLAS PEEBLES/GETTY IMAGES

"This is one of my favorite areas of Maui. It has a peaceful, small-town feel, and with just 1,650 acres slated for development, including the two golf courses nestled within 22,000 acres, the majority of the resort is in nature preserves," said Courtney M. Brown of Island Sotheby's International Realty. "It's truly a hidden gem."

Maui's northwest coast is home to scenic bays with pristine beaches that offer perfect sunbathing, snorkeling, and surfing conditions. Hiking trails extend from the Pacific Coast to the striking West Maui Mountains, rewarding visitors with gorgeous views along the way. The area is also home to several high-end resorts, award-winning restaurants, and the annual Kapalua Wine and Food Festival, so foodies and wineophiles will not be disappointed.

Watch Hill, Rhode Island

CREDIT: VERNON RAE PHOTOGRAPHY/GETTY IMAGES

If Newport's notoriety and crowds are not your cup of tea, consider making Watch Hill your second home. This quaint coastal community surrounded by water on three sides became popular in the 19th century, especially with wealthy travelers who built their sprawling Victorian-style vacation cottages here.

Located within driving distance of New York and Boston, and easily accessible from the rest of the country via Providence's T.F. Green International Airport, this stylish destination is the quintessential New England summer vacation spot, offering miles of beaches and a bustling social scene.

"Step onto Bay Street and step back in time with quaint shops, dining establishments, candy stores, and, of course, the Flying Horse merry-go-round," said Dorna Simmons of Watt & Chace Sotheby's International Realty.

Seven Mile Island, New Jersey

CREDIT: ROBERTO MACHADO/GETTY IMAGES

Seven miles of white-sand beaches, family-friendly amenities, eclectic dining, and charming boutiques have made Avalon and Stone Harbor, the two towns that share Seven Mile Island, a favorite vacation destination among affluent travelers.

"It's a family town. People come here as a family, or they've been doing for generations," said Jennifer Genemans, an agent in Long & Foster Luxury Portfolio International's Avalon, New Jersey, sales office. Residents enjoy golfing, tennis, lacrosse, pickleball, and an endless list of water sports.

In February 2022, the median sales price on the island was $2.15 million, an increase of 20% compared to last year, according to a market report by Long & Foster. Genemans added that only 14% of homes are used year-round, making Seven Mile Island the ultimate summer getaway for most homeowners.

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