

Everything You Need to Know Before You Head to Charleston County Parks' Beach Parks

Spring break and warmer weather mean our beach parks will be seeing more visitors with both locals and travelers eager for sun, sand and surf.

Charleston County Park and Recreation Commission (CCPRC) operates three county beach parks: Kiawah Beachwalker Park, Isle of Palms County Park and Folly Beach County Park. We want every guest to have a safe, smooth, and enjoyable visit. Here's everything you need to know for the upcoming beach season.

Plan Ahead: Please watch for digital highway signs that indicate the current parking status for CCPRC's beach parks' parking lots. Park staff update these signs in real time so you'll know before you arrive whether the lot is open or full.

We strongly encourage you to have an alternate parking plan in case a park is full. Download the Berkeley-Charleston-Dorchester Council of Governments' Beach Reach app (Apple and Android) to keep up with the latest beach traffic reports. Consider carpooling to maximize parking availability, have payment ready to speed entry at park gates, and remember to use only one parking space per vehicle.

Park-by-Park Details

Kiawah Beachwalker Park

- Capacity: 150 parking spots.
- Typical busy time: Often fills to capacity early in the morning on peak summer days.
- The Town of Kiawah prohibits idling or parking outside the park entrance. If the lot is full, CCPRC staff can add guests to a virtual line; text notifications alert you as you move forward in the queue.
- Parking for buses, RVs and campers is not guaranteed. Please follow Kiawah Island ordinances when approaching and parking.

Isle of Palms County Park

- Capacity: 445 parking spots.

- Typical busy time: Often fills early on weekends and holidays; spots can free up again in the late afternoon.
- When full: Police typically allow up to about 20 vehicles to wait in line for opening spots. Once the turn lane outside the park is full, police will direct vehicles to other parking areas not operated by CCPRC.
- Traffic considerations: There are only two lanes of traffic leaving Isle of Palms and Sullivan's Island. On very crowded days or when large numbers of people try to leave at once, traffic can back up severely. It can take up to two hours for the park to empty in those conditions.
- Alternative transit: CARTA's free Beach Reach Shuttle provides a convenient option for reaching Isle of Palms County Park without driving.

Folly Beach County Park

- Capacity: 225 parking spots.
- Typical busy time: Usually full by 10:30 a.m. on weekends and holidays; spots often become available again in the late afternoon.
- When full: Look for City of Folly Beach parking lots on West Ashley Avenue to avoid blocking roads and driveways. Be sure to follow City of Folly Beach parking ordinances to avoid being towed or ticketed.

General Beach Season Patterns

From spring break through September, weekdays are typically quieter while Fridays, weekends and holidays draw the largest crowds. However, nice weather weekdays and long holiday weekends can also see heavy visitation. Mornings and late afternoons are often the least crowded times to visit.

Traffic & Parking Etiquette

- Carpool when possible to reduce competition for spots.
- Have your payment method ready to reduce wait times at park gates.
- Do not block roads or driveways; park only in designated spaces and use one parking spot per vehicle.
- Obey municipal parking ordinances for each island (Isle of Palms, Folly Beach, Kiawah) to avoid fines or towing.

Virtual Queue & Waiting Lines

When parks reach capacity, staff may implement virtual lines (Kiawah) or police-managed waiting lines (Isle of Palms) to manage incoming traffic. Follow staff and officer directions, and pay attention to digital highway signs to help you decide whether to continue toward the park or use an alternate plan.

Beach Safety: Rip Currents, Pier Hazards, and Lifeguards

- Don't swim near the pier: The area around the Folly Beach Pier is prone to dangerous rip currents. Lifeguard staff frequently respond to emergencies when swimmers go too close to the pier and get pulled by currents. Stay at least 200 feet away from the pier while swimming.
- Learn to spot and escape rip currents: Look for differences in water color, gaps in breaking waves, or channels of churning, choppy water. If caught in a rip current, remain calm and swim parallel to shore until free from the current, then swim back to shore. More information: USLA Rip Currents page — <https://www.usla.org/page/RIPCURRENTS>.
- Swim near a lifeguard when possible and obey lifeguard commands.
- Watch children at all times.
- Seek shelter immediately if lightning or severe weather approaches.
- Take a quick photo of your group when you arrive. The photo can help if someone gets separated.
- Bring water and stay hydrated.

Pets, Alcohol, and Smoking Rules

- Dogs and other pets must always remain leashed within the county beach parks. Note that each municipality has its own ordinances regarding dogs on the beach (City of Folly Beach, City of Isle of Palms, Town of Kiawah Island). Pets are not permitted on the Folly Beach Pier or Mount Pleasant Pier.
- Possession or consumption of alcohol is prohibited at CCPRC beach parks. Smoking, vaping and tobacco use are also prohibited.

Other Park Amenities and Accessibility

Each park offers features to make your beach day pleasant: ocean views, convenient beach access points, picnic areas and restrooms. Seasonal amenities and lifeguard stands are provided as available. If you're planning a visit for a larger vehicle (RV, bus), be aware that parking is not guaranteed for oversized vehicles.

Alternative Transportation

- CARTA Beach Reach Shuttle: Free shuttle service to Isle of Palms is a great alternative to driving and can help reduce congestion and parking demand.
- Beach Reach App: Use the Beach Reach app for real-time traffic and parking updates.

Contact & More Information For more details about park rules, hours, seasonal updates and safety, visit the Charleston County Parks beach parks page:

<https://ccprc.com/3222/Beach-Parks> or call 843-795-4386.

We look forward to seeing you at Kiawah Beachwalker Park, Isle of Palms County Park and Folly Beach County Park this season. Help us keep the beaches safe, accessible, and enjoyable for everyone and enjoy your day by the ocean!