



Shore thing

From wildlife to wild nights, discover some of the most unusual beaches to recommend for repeat visitors, writes **Katie McGonagle**

They've seen skaters and street performers doing their thing on Venice Beach in LA, rubbed shoulders with celebs amid the swaying palms of South Beach in Miami, and even watched surfers skimming the waves off Waikiki in Hawaii's Honolulu – but there's more to America's big, beautiful coastline than these popular tourist hotspots. With an estimated 90,000

beaches across the US – from tiny, secluded coves to sandy lakeside shores and undulating island coastlines – these waterfront stretches come in all shapes and sizes, so there's plenty to tempt travellers back across the pond. Whether they fancy family fun on an amusement-filled boardwalk, bird spotting from a beach towel or a gentle hike in search of a quieter shoreline, here is a handful of our favourite beaches across the US. ➤

Ka'anapali, Hawaii
PICTURE: Hawaii Tourism
Authority/Tor Johnson

DESTINATIONS

THE US | BEACHES



CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: Driftwood Beach, Georgia; Tigertail Beach, Florida; Pensacola, Florida; Half Moon Beach, Massachusetts PICTURES: Shutterstock/Margaret.Wiktor, Paul Harrison, Cheryl Casey, quiggyt4



SOUTH

Florida is renowned for its miles of golden-sand shores, but only one stretch puts it on a par with Madagascar, Australia and New Zealand – the series of rare coastal dune lakes at Grayton Beach State Park in Walton County, northwest Florida, just off scenic Highway 30A. These shallow bodies of freshwater are separated from the Gulf of Mexico by sand dunes, but when water levels rise due to high tides or heavy rain, channels flow in from the sea. This creates brackish conditions crucial for supporting the area's ecological diversity – including rare and endangered species – with kayaking, paddleboarding and birdwatching for those who want to see the flora and fauna up close.

There's even more birdlife to be found along Florida's Paradise Coast, where Tigertail Beach on Marco Island (a half-hour drive from the city of Naples) can only be reached by wading through the shallow lagoon. But the journey is worth it to reach three miles of white sand, where fiddler crabs can be seen scurrying into the water and eagles, ospreys, terns and plovers soar overhead, earning it a spot on the Great Florida Birding Trail.

There are surprises to be uncovered even among Florida's better-known beach spots - from spotting wetland birds from Pensacola Beach and Perdido Key on the Panhandle, via the seashell-filled shores

of Sanibel, all the way to coral reefs and Hemingway history on Key West.

A must for photographers, Driftwood Beach on Jekyll Island, Georgia, is no secret stateside, but remains under the radar for many British visitors. Full of gnarled, weathered driftwood left behind by years of erosion, it's a surreal setting, especially at sunset or for late-night stargazing.

But it's not the only spot for stunning sunsets over the water – back on the Gulf of Mexico coast, Dauphin Island has been named the 'sunset capital of Alabama', while Texas has its share of oft-overlooked beaches, including the five-mile sandy stretch in Mustang Island State Park, a favourite for fishing and spotting dolphins or turtles in the shallows.

NORTHEAST AND MIDWEST

New England's rugged shoreline is famed for its lighthouse trails and lobster restaurants, but there are plenty of picture-perfect beaches to discover as well – and the farther clients are willing to go, the more secluded they get.

Cape Ann, north of Boston, is a quieter alternative to the better-known Cape Cod region. Here, Half Moon Beach is a sheltered stretch of sand within Stage Fort Park in Gloucester, Massachusetts, where rocks and trees surround a small, crescent-shaped beach. With a lifeguard in summer and easily accessible parking (apply online for a permit before you travel), it's well set up for families.



URBAN BEACHES



Lake Havasu City, Arizona: With more than 400 miles of sandy shores, this man-made 'beach' town offers kayaking, canoeing, wake surfing and swimming in the midst of the desert.



Sunset Cliffs, San Diego: A dramatic stretch of coastline filled with tiny tide pools and tucked-away sea caves, along with its namesake sunset views, just minutes from the bustling streets of San Diego.



Carlin Beach, Jupiter, Florida: Get a great view of The Palm Beaches' colourful reefs and coves from Jupiter Inlet Lighthouse, or add culture with a visit during the annual Shakespeare by the Sea Festival.



Alki Beach, Seattle: Soup up a stay in Washington's biggest city with whale watching or kayaking in Elliott Bay, while enjoying the breathtaking views over Puget Sound.

PICTURES: Shutterstock/Michael Kaercher, Lars Bentrup, Sean Pavone, George ColePhoto

Similarly suited to tots is aptly named Baby Beach on Block Island, part of Rhode Island. It's popular in summer, though far less busy than nearby Nantucket or Martha's Vineyard, and this sheltered beach's shelving sand and gentle waves make it an easier option for little swimmers.

If a wilder experience appeals, however, there are off-the-beaten-track beaches to be explored – provided clients are happy to work a bit harder to get there. One of the few areas still undeveloped along neighbouring Connecticut's shoreline sits within the designated coastal reserve at Bluff Point State Beach. It's a mile-long hike through the woodlands from the nearest car park, so this is not one for a quick sun-and-sand stop, but those who make the effort will be rewarded with views across Long Island Sound and places to pause between an unspoilt setting of sand dunes, wetlands and mud flats – they might even get it all to themselves.

You'd be forgiven for looking only to the coast for the best beaches in the US – but don't forget the glorious Great Lakes region, where vast waterfronts offer all the kayaking, boating and bird spotting visitors could ask for but with quirky towns and cities to explore as well.

Chief among them is Chicago, where 24 sandy beaches sit along the freshwater shores of Lake Michigan. Oak Street Beach is a pleasant spot on the Lakefront Trail, the 18-mile path that links museums,



ABOVE: Indiana Dunes National Park PICTURE: Shutterstock/drewthehobbit

attractions and restaurants, where you can pause for a meal with the Chicago skyline in view; while locals love North Avenue Beach for its summer volleyball and buzzy vibes.

Illinois isn't the only one to share Lake Michigan's shores – just 40 miles away, Indiana Dunes National Park offers steep dunes and shipwreck dives. Active travellers can take on the Three Dune Challenge, a 1.5-mile hike up its three highest peaks, or go kiteboarding and boating on the lake.

WEST

The dunes soar just as high in Medano Creek, part of Colorado's Great Sand Dunes National Park and Preserve. The water flows down from the snowfields of the Sangre de Cristo Mountains

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into a shallow oasis, where 'surge flows' form wave-like movements across the sand to create perfect paddling conditions in May and June. However, check the dates of travel because by late summer the flow retreats and the oasis disappears for another year.

California's famous coast has no shortage of beaches both big and small. Among the state's less-obvious highlights, however, is the Kiva Shoreline of Lake Tahoe. This narrow strip sits on the fringes of a protected marsh zone where the endangered Tahoe yellow cress is among the rare plant species to be found, and within a short waterfront walk to the Tallac Historic Site, once a summer retreat for the San Francisco elite and now a fascinating glimpse into a long-gone era.

Likewise, there are few 'hidden gems' to be found on Hawaii's sandy shores, because this



ABOVE: Ka'anapali Beach in Maui PICTURE: Shutterstock/Gary Riegel

archipelago is known for its beautiful beaches, some of which are more developed than others. In Maui, where fires ripped through the resort town of Lahaina last year, many of the tourist resorts are back up and running – and rely on visitors to return to support this tourism-dependent economy.

Here, the popular Ka'anapali Beach offers three miles of white-sand shores and is famed for its daily cliff-diving ceremony. Every sunset, a cliff diver lights up a line of torches and hurtles from the Pu'u Keka'a cliffs – aka Black Rock – at the northernmost end of the beach, recreating the feat that was made famous by Maui's King Kahekili. **TW**

DESTINATIONS

BEACHES | THE US

BOOK IT

Premier Holidays offers a 12-night Sunshine Trails fly-drive taking in Key West, Naples, Sarasota and Orlando, from £1,999 with three-star hotels (room-only) and car hire; flights extra. premierholidays.co.uk

American Affair offers a 16-night The Ultimate Michigan & Great Lakes Explorer fly-drive. It skirts the shores of all five Great Lakes, with a stop in Chicago, and costs from £2,902, including flights, accommodation and car hire, for travel in July-August 2024. americanaffair.com

Cosmos offers an 11-day Hawaiian Islands tour taking in Ka'anapali Beach in Maui, Honolulu, Kona and Kauai. Prices start from £2,605 departing November 14, including flights, some meals, accommodation and a tour guide. cosmos.co.uk

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