

Best North Carolina Beaches



From a family-friendly vacation to a Nicholas Sparks-inspired getaway, the coast of North Carolina is characterized by wide, sandy beaches with conserved dunes, beachfront rental houses and a laid-back approach to life. To decide which stretches of shoreline are worth your vacation days, U.S. News considered scenic beauty, nearby amenities and the opinions of experts and travelers to decide the best North Carolina beaches. Have a favorite? Vote below to help determine next year's list. (Note: Some of the below destinations may be affected by the coronavirus outbreak. Check with the CDC and the U.S. Department of State before traveling.)



Emerald Isle

#1 in Best North Carolina Beaches

Families return to Emerald Isle year after year for its 12 miles of clean beaches, relaxed atmosphere and popular fishing pier. There are plenty of reasons to choose this stretch of sand to settle on: Emerald Isle offers a wide shoreline and beach amenities galore, including grills, showers, picnic pavilions and parking. It's also part of the Crystal Coast section of North Carolina, with Indian Beach and Pine Knoll Shores (which is home to an outpost of the North Carolina Aquarium) both nearby.

Belongs on List? ☒ Yes ☐ No



Atlantic Beach

#9 in Best North Carolina Beaches

Just 12 miles north of Emerald Isle, Atlantic Beach is one of the most developed beach areas in North Carolina, offering many amenities that families love, including a fishing pier and bike and water sports equipment rentals. As part of the Walk Atlantic Beach initiative, there are four marked walking trails around the city to help visitors explore on foot. Want to venture out? From here, you'll have easy access to the aquarium in Pine Knoll Shores and the Civil War-era Fort Macon State Park.

Belongs on List? ☒ Yes ☐ No