

Outside

The 21 Wildest East Coast Beaches

Not all stretches of sand are created equal. These are the Atlantic's best, most adventurous shorelines, from Maine to Florida.



By Ryan Krogh | Apr 17, 2024

If you've ever lived along the East Coast, there's a secret that all curious, outdoorsy people soon discover: the wildest, most deserted places are often those abutting the Atlantic. That's right, the best East Coast beaches can be every bit as remote-feeling as Western landscapes. This is easier to comprehend when you realize that the East Coast has roughly 30,000 miles of coastline. (The entire Pacific Coast, by contrast, has 7,863.)

This revelation came to me early, while exploring New England in my twenties, and re-confirmed it in my 30s and 40s, as I looked to escape New York City on weekends. Since then, I've driven as far as Maine and North Carolina's Outer Banks—roughly eight hours in either direction—from NYC to explore an “undiscovered” beaches and maybe catch a fish or two. I've also road tripped all over the south's Lowcountry looking for an empty stretch of sand, and have spent way too much time on Florida's Atlantic Coast trying to catch a redfish or bonefish on a fly rod.

Look, I'm not foolish enough to think anyone can be an “expert” on 30,000 miles worth of barrier islands, salt marshes, and tiny beachside communities. But I've explored enough to say with confidence that there are some wild damn places out there, and I've been lucky enough to discover a few that are well worth a visit.

Here are just a handful of my favorites. This list also includes a mix of both remote, undeveloped gems and impossible-to-ignore standbys that are great simply because of their, well...beach vibes. It's a whole thing, and any town that has it, like Cape May, New Jersey, or Folly Beach, South Carolina, is worth a look-see, too. Trust me, you can't go wrong with any of these beaches, as long as you're packing some sunscreen (and maybe a bottle of bug spray for the real remote ones).

Best Beach in Rhode Island

Sachuest Beach, Rhode Island



Sure, Sachuest Beach, also known as Second Beach, isn't secluded, but it offers the best surfing and nearby hiking in Middletown, Rhode Island. (Photo: Brad Yurcisin/iStock/Getty)

Location: In Middletown, next door to Newport

Why We Love It: A city-person's beach that has a good hike within walking distance

Locals call this mile-long stretch of sand on the southeastern shore of Aquidneck Island [Second Beach](#), but it is anything but secondary. Not only does it have great swimming and sunbathing, the western flank of Sachuest, called Surfer's End, is known for its consistent swells. If you get bored sunbathing on the beach, you can also easily walk to the eastern end, which is the beginning of [Sachuest Point National Wildlife Refuge](#), with three miles of trails. Birdwatchers are common here because of the diversity of species, including the second largest wintering population of harlequin ducks on the Atlantic coast. It also has great fishing from shore, including an active [night fishing permit system](#) for striped bass.