

The most underrated U.S. coastal destinations to visit this summer

Where to find the best beaches and local charm without the crowds on the East Coast, West Coast and Gulf Coast.



America's coastline is dominated by famous names, but heed my advice: Leave Miami Beach to the spring breakers and discover something new this year.

In my more than 15 years of travel writing, I've come to realize that smaller coastal destinations offer just as much activity, history and scenery as the big names, but with far fewer crowds, lower prices and a more relaxed attitude.

From Florida fishing ports to laid-back California surf towns, the destinations below are unique for their own reasons. But here's what they have in common: each is off the national radar and offers a distinct sense of place, alongside great outdoor and beach access. These are the six underrated coastal destinations I recommend you check out this summer.

Beaufort, N.C.



Not to be confused with the South Carolina town of the same name, Beaufort, North Carolina, was founded in 1709 and is one of the state's oldest towns, combining a working waterfront, historic homes and, most importantly in my book, easy access to some of the Atlantic Coast's least-developed barrier islands.

In Beaufort, the ideal plan is to take a boat to the beach. Ferries depart regularly for offshore islands — places like Shackleford Banks and Cape Lookout National Seashore offer undeveloped beaches, wild horses, maritime forests and long stretches of coastline. The harborfront itself is compact and walkable, and filled with old homes, seafood restaurants and docks overlooking Taylor's Creek. Shrimp boats still line the waterfront, as fishing culture remains central to daily life.

The town is also deeply connected to pirate history. Blackbeard's flagship, the Queen Anne's Revenge, ran aground nearby in 1718. Today, many artifacts recovered from that era are displayed in town at the North Carolina Maritime Museum.