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## America's Best Beaches

While we're firm believers that there's something to love about nearly every beach (sun, sand, and ocean breezes for starters), a few sandy strips of coastline stand out from the rest.



VEER

Written by Jessica Dodell-Feder

### No. 1 BEST ALL-AROUND

#### Poipu Beach Park

At Poipu Beach Park on the south shore of Kauai in Hawaii, ocean lovers can sunbathe under the palms, take a dip in the Pacific, view endangered monk seals, and snorkel nose-to-nose with green sea turtles. There's also a protected cove that's perfect for toddlers; [poipubeach.org](http://poipubeach.org).



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### No. 2 FOR SHELL SEEKERS

#### Sanibel Island

This lush 12-mile-long barrier island on Florida's Gulf Coast represents the holy grail for shell collectors. In fact, the term Sanibel Stoop is used to describe all the visitors bent over the sand in search of the perfect specimen. If you go, you'll also see dolphins and manatees; [sanibel-captiva.org](http://sanibel-captiva.org).

### No. 3 FOR BIRDING

#### Cape May

Take exit zero on New Jersey's Garden State Parkway to reach this historic Victorian municipality, which is America's oldest beach resort. Not only is the seashore beautiful, but the area is also a major stopover point for songbirds migrating along the Atlantic Flyway; [capemay.com](http://capemay.com).

### No. 4 HEALTHIEST

#### Ocracoke Beach

Part of North Carolina's Outer Banks, this 16-mile stretch of sand is largely untouched — which is why Dr. Stephen P. Leatherman ("Dr. Beach") ranked it first on his 2007 list of the country's top 10 beaches. His criteria include water quality, safety, and erosion levels; learn more at [drbeach.org](http://drbeach.org).

### SET SAIL

Have only a few days to spare? Reserve a berth on one of the new crop of mini getaways being offered by cruise lines nationwide. During major four-day holiday weekends, Cunard offers four-day, three-night trips from New York City to the Bahamas and Canada on the luxurious *Queen Mary 2* ([cunard.com](http://cunard.com)); Norwegian Cruise Lines has a full roster of one-night dinner and dance cruises departing from Seattle, L.A., and New York City ([ncl.com](http://ncl.com)); and the Maine Windjammer Assn. features weekend getaways along the Maine coast on all 12 of its sailboats ([sailmainecoast.com](http://sailmainecoast.com)).

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