



The 10 Most Beautiful Coastal Towns in the USA

With its 23 coastal states, the [USA](#) is home to some of the most varied coastlines in the world. We take in ten of its most scenic seaside towns – from the quaint, historic coastal communities of New England to the rugged Pacific Northwest and subtropical climes of the Gulf Coast.



Cape May | © David/Flickr

Cape May | New Jersey

Boasting the title of the USA's oldest seaside resort, [Cape May](#) in [New Jersey](#) is home to the biggest collection of beautifully preserved Victorian buildings outside of San Francisco – in fact, in 1976 the whole town was designated a National Historic Landmark. Simply walking its streets and shoreline



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populated with colorful 'painted ladies' is a delight for any history and architecture buffs, while discerning foodies won't be disappointed either: dubbed the 'culinary capital of New Jersey' by The New York Times, Cape May offers an eclectic and classy dining scene too. Stay true to the town's Victorian roots by seeing the sights from a horse-drawn carriage.

[Cape May, NJ, USA](#)



San Carlos Borromeo de Carmelo Mission, Carmel-by-the-Sea | © Ken Lund/Flickr

[Carmel-by-the-Sea | California](#)

World-renowned for its thriving arts scene, European-style ambience and cute cottages, [Carmel-by-the-Sea](#) is an idyllic coastal village nestled in the northern reaches of California's Big Sur. First settled by Spanish missionaries in the late 1700s, Carmel-by-the-Sea is still home to the 18th century [San Carlos Borromeo de Carmelo Mission](#) today and since its official founding in 1902 has gained a reputation as one of the USA's most romantic getaways. Honored with an array of accolades including being named one of National Geographic's Best Beach Towns, Carmel-by-the-



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Sea offers everything from white sandy beaches, boutique shopping, art galleries and solely locally owned restaurants.

Carmel-by-the-Sea, CA, USA



Bar Harbor Main Street | Courtesy Bar Harbor Chamber of Commerce

Bar Harbor | Maine

Located on Mount Desert Island off the coast of Maine, [Bar Harbor](#) was one of 19th century New England's most popular summer resorts and remains a much-loved tourist destination today. The beautiful [Acadia National Park](#) is on Bar Harbor's doorstep offering over 50 square miles of mountains, lakes and coastline perfect for hiking, biking and camping and plenty of boats offer fishing trips and nature-spotting tours out of the town harbor, while after a hard day exploring the rugged island community, visitors can relax at the lively bars and seafood restaurants that populate Bar Harbor's bustling downtown.

Bar Harbor, ME, USA



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Ho'okipa Beach, Paia | © Hawaii Savvy/Flickr

Paia, Hawaii

Formerly a booming sugarcane plantation town, [Paia](#) today is home to a much more relaxed pace of life and unlike many [Hawaiian](#) resort towns has avoided over-commercialization. While it might be small, Paia is noted for its cosmopolitan ambience and boasts a charming downtown dotted with colorful storefronts home to restaurants, boutiques and art galleries but the town is perhaps most famous for Ho'okipa Beach Park. Dubbed the 'windsurfing capital of the world', Ho'okipa attracts pro wind and kite surfers from across the globe while the beautiful white sands of Paia's Baldwin Beach Park is perfect for more relaxing recreation like shore fishing and swimming.

[Paia, HI, USA](#)



Cannon Beach | © Mark Hogan/Flickr

Cannon Beach | Oregon

Named one of *National Geographic's* 100 Most Beautiful Places in the World, [Oregon's Cannon Beach](#) is a gorgeous Pacific Northwest town that boasts not only natural, rugged beauty but a thriving arts scene and lively cultural calendar too. Nestled between the Oregon Coast Range Mountains and long stretches of sandy beaches, Cannon Beach's most famous landmark is Haystack Rock – a 235-foot high sea stack immortalized in 1980s classic film *The Goonies* – while Ecola State Park located just north of town offers hiking trails and panoramic Pacific views. Discover why writer John Villani listed Cannon Beach amongst the Best Small Art Towns in America at its many art galleries and events like the Stormy Weather Arts Festival.

[Cannon Beach, OR, USA](#)



Sanibel & Captiva Islands Chamber of Commerce

Sanibel Island | Florida

Voted one of the nation's Happiest Seaside Towns by *Coastal Living* in 2014, [Sanibel Island](#) is just west of Fort Meyers but thanks to its secluded barrier island location seems like a whole world away. Full of old [Florida](#) charm, Sanibel Island truly offers a slower pace of life – in fact, there are no stoplights or streetlights anywhere on the island – and its untouched beaches and spectacular sunsets are a perfect respite from Florida's busier Gulf Coast communities. Walk along Sanibel's beaches and you'll no doubt find yourself doing the 'Sanibel stoop', the bent over position adopted when collecting the island's world renowned seashells.

[Sanibel Island, FL, USA](#)



Edgartown Harbor | Courtesy Martha's Vineyard Chamber of Commerce

Edgartown | Massachusetts

Nestled on the easternmost edges of the beautiful [Martha's Vineyard](#), [Edgartown](#) was the first settlement on the island and the county seat since as early as 1642. Much of the town's early history is still evident today: the Vincent House built 1672, is the oldest house on the island and the late 19th century Old Whaling Church, remains one of New England's finest examples of Greek Revival architecture. Spend a day exploring Edgartown's scenic sandy beaches, home to two historic lighthouses, before heading downtown to learn about island culture at the Martha's Vineyard Museum and sampling eats fit for a foodie at Edgartown's many upscale restaurants.

[Edgartown, MA, USA](#)



Tybee Island Light Station | © Ron Cogswell/Flickr

Tybee Island | Georgia

Located just a 20 minute drive east of Savannah, [Tybee Island](#) is a scenic barrier island community twice voted [Georgia's](#) Best Beach by readers of *Georgia Magazine*. Boasting five miles of unspoiled sandy beaches, Tybee Island is the epitome of rustic coastal charm – quaint wooden piers are dotted with fishermen and dolphin-spotters, its salt marshes are a birdwatcher's paradise and home to species including white ibis and wood stork, and boats bring in their daily catch of delicious Georgia shrimp. Trek to the top of the [Tybee Island Light Station](#), built in 1773 and one of south Atlantic coast's first lighthouses, for spectacular sunset views before retreating to the town's restaurants for seafood and southern cooking.

[Tybee Island, GA, USA](#)



Port Townsend waterfront | © Ashley Courter/Courtesy Enjoy Port Townsend

Port Townsend | Washington

Nestled on the northeastern edge of Washington's Olympic Peninsula, [Port Townsend](#) is a former Victorian seaport that thanks to its dedicated residents retains much of its 19th century charm today. A walk along Port Townsend's downtown waterfront reveals beautiful Victorian buildings while venues and events like the Northwest Maritime Center and the Wooden Boat Festival pay tribute to the town's maritime culture. For arts and culture mavens, Port Townsend is a must-visit: named one of the Coolest Small Towns in America by *Budget Travel*, the town is home to a thriving arts community, numerous art galleries and cultural pursuits like the [Port Townsend Film Festival](#) held annually since 1999.

[Port Townsend, WA, USA](#)



Chincoteague Island Library | Courtesy Chincoteague Chamber of Commerce

Chincoteague | Virginia

With two nationally protected areas right on its doorstep, it's no wonder that [Chincoteague](#) has become a haven for nature lovers – the 14,000 acres of Chincoteague National Wildlife Refuge offer ample opportunities for birdwatching, fishing and wildlife photography while the [Assateague Island National Seashore](#) just north of town is home to herds of wild horses. World renowned for its clam shoals and oyster beds, a host of local seafood restaurants and the annual Chincoteague Seafood Festival celebrate island produce while for history buffs there's the Museum of Chincoteague Island, a mecca to local culture and history, and the Captain Timothy Hill House, the island's longest-standing structure.

[Chincoteague, VA, USA](#)

By Helen Armitage

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