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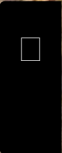
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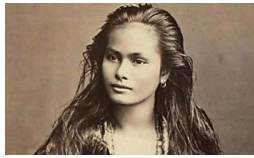
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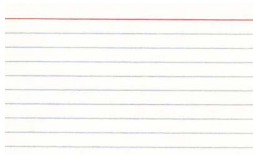
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by Adeline Duff March 18, 2016

Oh, California. When it comes to America’s third largest state (that’s after [Alaska](#) and [Texas](#), in case you were wondering), it’s nearly impossible to pick its best beaches, as almost all of them—in addition to those on its surrounding channel islands, like Catalina—have worthy attributes. However, the job had to be done, and we knew narrowing it down wasn’t going to be an easy task. So, we crowd sourced, researched, and checked in with our resident California experts to round up the best beaches the Golden State has to offer.

Into [surfing](#)? Head to Huntington Beach, a.k.a. “Surf City,” where you can spend a day challenging the waves, and end the evening with a stroll on its famed pier to watch the sun go down. Scared of the ocean, but love the seashore? Try Limantour Beach in Point Reyes, which is famed for its long, white stretches of sand and immense wildlife population, where you can whale-watching and hike for days. Or visit the picturesque town of Carmel-by-the-Sea (which also happens to be one of the world's most romantic cities—more

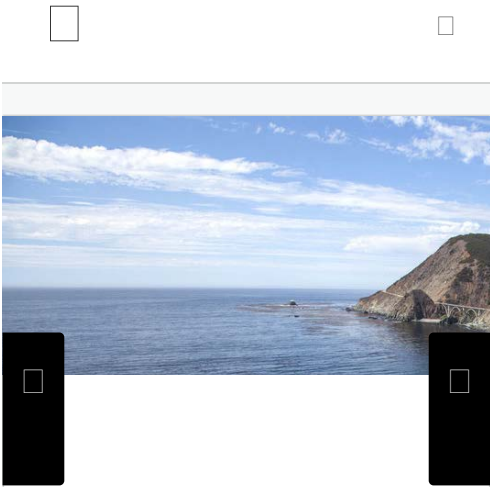
Point Lobos State Reserve, Carmel by-the-Sea

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In the small, fairytale-like city of Carmel by-the-Sea lies Point Lobos State Reserve, a beautiful area to visit for wildlife-watching, water activities (such as kayaking and snorkeling), and, most of all, hiking. Yes, you can swim in the waters—but depending on the season, the temperatures could be quite cold and the waters a bit rough. However, this is one of the best spots for outdoor enthusiasts to enjoy all the natural beauty Northern California has to offer.

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on that, [here](#)), where you can hike the trails and enjoy the exquisite scenery of Point Lobos State Reserve.

If you're a sun-worshipping beach bum, SoCal is the way to go. Famed beaches like Manhattan, Hermosa, and Huntington are all excellent options—especially for West Coast first-timers looking to recreate scenes from *90210*. For those chasing [the perfect Instagram shot](#), head to Thousand Steps in Laguna Beach, where you can take a dip in your own, personal, aqua tide pool. Or visit Malibu's El Matador State Beach, which has rock formations and ombré sunsets reminiscent of scenes from *Game of Thrones* (for all the show's fans out there, check out our official GOT travel guide, [here](#)). Looking to get lost in luxury? Check into the [Fairmont Miramar](#) in Santa Monica for a stay in one of their private bungalows, only steps from the shore, the pier, and some of the city's best shopping.

So whether you're a swimmer or a surfer, a birdwatcher or a shopper, or just a general beach lover—we've got you covered. Click through our gallery to find out which California beach is the right one for you.

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