



America's Happiest Seaside Towns

Here, in our first-ever ranking, the top 15 most blissful places to live along the coasts of the United States

KIAWAH ISLAND PHOTOGRAPHER: SQUIRE FOX, WARDROBE: LAUREN LAIL, HAIR AND MAKEUP: ASHLEY PERRYMAN; NAPLES: JAMES SCHWABEL/ALAMY

1 KIAWAH ISLAND SOUTH CAROLINA

If heaven had a zip code, it would have to be 29455. This exquisite barrier island is home to 10 miles of unspoiled fine-sand beach; wild-growing palmetto, oak, and magnolia trees; a veritable Noah's ark's worth of mammals and rare birds; and 1,626 lucky residents. With small-town charms and proximity to the gracious urbanity of Charleston, Kiawah makes the ideal possible: a vacation-like lifestyle with easy access to commerce and culture.

Home to five award-winning golf courses, the island will play host to the PGA Championship in August. Frankly, life here is one sweet day of play after another—biking on the 30-plus miles of paved paths, or shopping at local hub Freshfields Village (at the crossroads of Kiawah, Seabrook, and Johns islands). Residents often kayak down the tree-shaded Kiawah River to watch egrets,

herons, and bald eagles enjoying their sanctuary. And when the sun goes down on this paradise, you'll be amazed at the sea of stars above.



KIAWAH ISLAND

WHERE TO STAY

Kiawah Island

The beachfront **Sanctuary Hotel** has spacious suites with access to five golf courses and a spa. Rates start at \$440; 800/576-1570 or kiawahresort.com.

Naples

The boutique **Inn on Fifth** is blocks from the beach in Old Naples, with plush pillow-top beds, a spa, and more than 20 nearby restaurants. Rates start at \$159; 239/403-8777 or innonfifth.com.

2 NAPLES FLORIDA

It's praise indeed to be named in honor of the wonders of Italy. Credit the romanticism of promoters in the late 1800s, who saw a town much like its namesake, with abundant fishing, the temperate climate on the Gulf of Mexico, and a view that surpassed the Bay of Naples in its grandeur. Nearly a century later, this lively town lives up to its international reputation.

With rich cultural offerings (including resident orchestral and theater groups), this town of just fewer than 20,000 people offers big-city pay-offs minutes from beaches with some of the finest snowy white sand in the region. A strong arts community has kept the downtown scene as beautiful as the shoreline. Shopping mavens love to scout for antiques and artisan finds at Tin City, an open-air marketplace with Old Florida styling. Always a center for fresh seafood (Naples is world-renowned for snow crab), the town has undergone a recent culinary boom. And with so much within reach of its neighborhoods, it's one of the most walkable cities on our list.

Go from Monet and Manhattans to mangroves and manatees. Only in Naples. >



NAPLES, FLORIDA

WHERE TO STAY

Sausalito

For stunning views of the San Francisco skyline and bay, the hillside cottages and guest rooms of **Casa Madrona Hotel & Spa** boast sleek design. Rates start at \$250; 415/331-3125 or casamadrona.com.

Lake Bluff

The Tudor-style **Deer Path Inn** is a historic retreat just south of town. Rooms are grand but cozy. Rates start at \$170; 847/234-2280 or dpihotel.com.

Tiburon

The luxury spa rooms at **The Lodge at Tiburon** are painted in soothing blue tones. Most have private balconies and patios. Rates start at \$168; 415/435-3133 or lodgeattiburon.com.

3 SAUSALITO
CALIFORNIA

Perched on the steep, wooded hillsides that give way to Marin County's Richardson Bay, this town of more than 7,000 lucky souls just north of the Golden Gate Bridge is surrounded by the lush Golden Gate National Recreation Area. (Locals rave about nearby Muir Beach's clean white sands and crystal-clear water.) Sausalito is home to about 400 houseboats, as well, and has one of the only open marinas on San Francisco Bay's coast.

The zeitgeist here echoes its bohemian roots as an artists' colony while also hosting well-heeled inhabitants. Café life informs the pace—start your morning like locals do, with an espresso at Poggio, Sausalito Bakery & Café, Il Piccolo Café, or Caffè Tutti. Then wind down your day with wine tasting—and if you score a night on a Sausalito houseboat, your life is pretty much complete.

4 LAKE BLUFF
ILLINOIS

This Midwestern village reminds us that the shores along our Great Lakes are home to a truly great "seaside" lifestyle. Originally envisioned in the 19th century



LAKE BLUFF, ILLINOIS

as a resort fashioned after the Eastern Chautauqua movement that combined culture, education, and recreation, Lake Bluff also enjoyed colorful days as an alcohol-smuggling port during Prohibition.

These layers add to the charm of this town of about 5,800 residents. Grand homes, from sprawling Queen Anne to Midwestern Prairie-style, keep company with seasonal cottages, most in walking distance of the beach. Locals enjoy seven city parks, outdoor concerts on the village green, and the annual 4th of July parade. Plus, the schools are ranked among the best on our list.

5 TIBURON
CALIFORNIA

Don't be put off by the fact that its name is the Spanish word for shark—Tiburon is one benign and happy place, settled on the



TIBURON, CALIFORNIA

steep-hilled tip of the Tiburon peninsula. One of the many lovely things about living in this town of fewer than 10,000 folks is that you can commute to San Francisco by fast ferry: no gridlock. A revitalized Main Street that made all the town's popular boutiques and restaurants handicapped accessible without forgoing quaint streetscapes is testimony to the beating heart in Tiburon. So are the top-notch schools, which brought in the highest rankings in our survey.

Perhaps most emblematic of the welcome in Tiburon is in the philosophy of one of its oldest restaurants, the beloved waterfront hangout Sam's Anchor Cafe (one of the only restaurants in the San Francisco Bay with a public dock): "Pull up. Tie up. Stay a while." It's that kind of place.

WHERE TO STAY

Laguna Beach

Casa Laguna Inn & Spa is a romantic escape within walking distance of the beach. Rates start at \$159; 800/233-0449 or casalaguna.com.

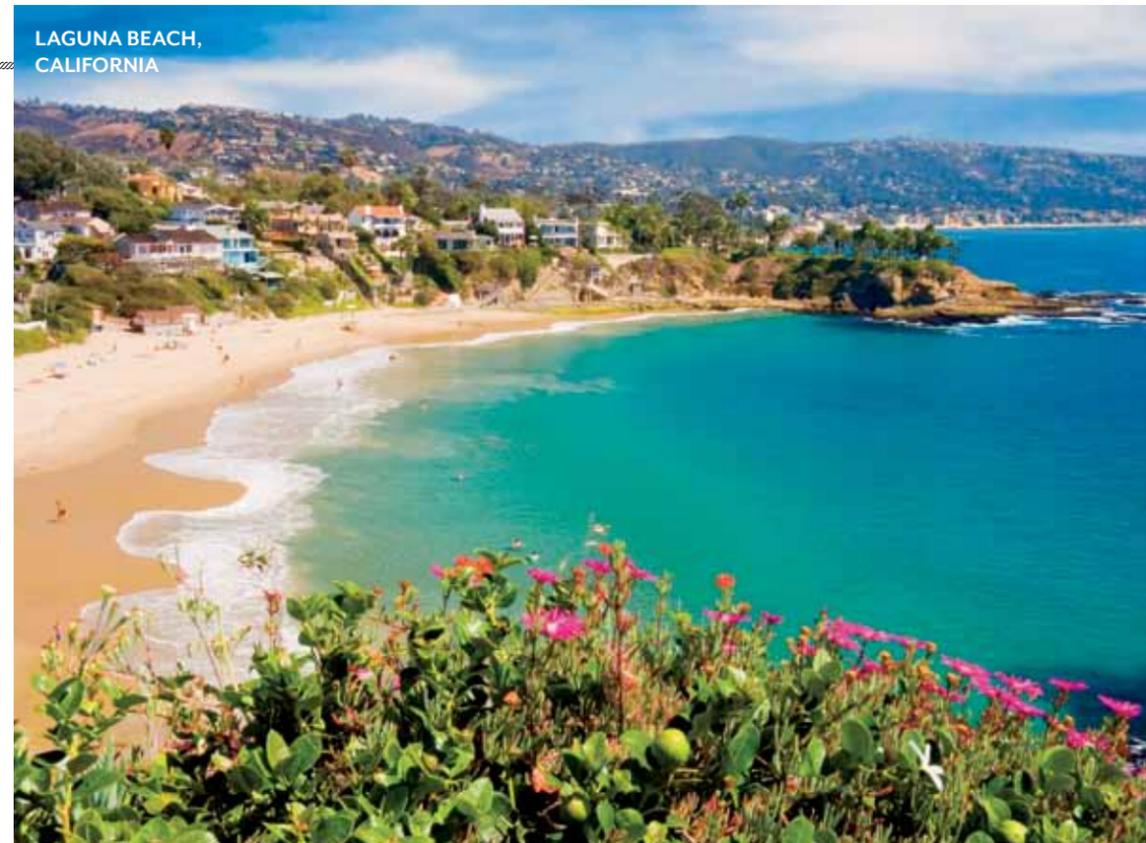
Half Moon Bay

Oceano Hotel & Spa offers suites with fireplaces and organic bamboo linens. Rates start at \$199; 888/623-2661 or oceanohalfmoonbay.com.

Chatham

Captain's House Inn is a AAA four-diamond property. Don't miss the gourmet breakfast. Rates start at \$185; 800/315-0728 or captainshouseinn.com.

LAGUNA BEACH, CALIFORNIA



6 LAGUNA BEACH
CALIFORNIA

Among Orange County's high-profile, high-priced developments, this quaint, artistic village anchored by a walkable downtown has always marched to its own drummer. From its founding as an artists' colony, Laguna Beach embraces the diverse, with funky downtown restaurants, surfing culture, and a summer full of art festivals. (Luxe outposts like the Ritz-Carlton and Montage offer high-end comforts, too.)

While some other California coastal towns piled up commerce on their shores, Laguna fought for open space, and now its nearly 25,000 residents reap the benefits of sweeping views and unparalleled public access to some of the most unspoiled coves in America.

7 HALF MOON BAY
CALIFORNIA

Everyone's first visit to Half Moon Bay feels as close to a "eureka!" discovery moment as there is. Your car navigates that vertiginous road over the coastal hills from sprawling Silicon Valley, and then you descend upon this little gem nestled against the Pacific. The place is simply overwhelmed by the abundance

of organic produce grown there. (Go in fall and you'll see a sea of the town's famed pumpkins.) That's the magic of this fertile township of more than 12,000 residents that was first discovered and cultivated by 18th-century Spanish settlers, and proudly maintains its agricultural heritage into the iPad era.

8 CHATHAM
MASSACHUSETTS

Cape Cod, redolent with the summer perfume of suntan lotion and the tang of saltwater taffy, holds in the crook of its sandy elbow this historic little town. Pure New England in its shingled cottages, cozy along its narrow streets, Chatham maintains the small-scale beauty of its 18th-century beginnings. A sense of community permeates the town (the year-round population of 6,625 more than triples in the summer), particularly among the family-owned and operated shops, restaurants, and businesses that dot downtown. Add to that a pretty little gazebo on Main Street for concerts, the bleached-white stalwart beauty of the Chatham Lighthouse, the 2 p.m.-to-4 p.m. ritual of strolling to the pier to watch the fleet come in, and the colorful presence of a local baseball team, the Chatham Anglers, for more old-fashioned fun. >

How We Picked the Winners

We began with every place we've lauded as a Dream Town over the past 15 years, and took your nominations on Facebook, too. From there, we looked at the rank on the Gallup-Healthways Well-Being Index, percentage of sunny and clear days, healthiness of beaches, commute times, walkability, school and crime ratings, education and financial security of the locals, and geographic diversity. We polled our editors on each finalist to define that special something (we called it "coastal vibe") and mixed it into the formula. What emerges is an all-star list from every coast. *Additional reporting by Anthony Faccenda.*

LAKE BLUFF: MATTHEW GILSON; TIBURON: FRANK BALTHIS; LAGUNA BEACH: DOUGLAS PULSIPHER/ALAMY

9 JUPITER
FLORIDA

Hundreds of rare loggerhead turtles know a paradise when they find one. Juno Beach, a white strand of sand along the southern Florida coast, is one of their favorite nesting places. Just north of that beach sits Jupiter, a relaxed beachfront town with 40,000 year-round residents who've chosen to nest along this network of inlets and waterways.

Life in Jupiter is easygoing and low-key, and yet there's access to plenty of luxury amenities, whether you're a visitor or a resident. On the down-home front, baseball devotees love the proximity to spring training—both the St. Louis Cardinals and Miami Marlins train and play at Jupiter's Roger Dean Stadium. And tying it all together are those lovely Florida Atlantic coast beaches—long, broad, and ranked consistently among the healthiest beaches on our list.

10 LAHAINA
HAWAII

The Hawaiian kings knew that Lahaina was the crown jewel of the islands. Which is why this town of 11,700 was once the royal capital of Maui Loa in antiquity. Now it's the charming gateway to Maui's world-famous Ka'anapali and Kapalua beach resorts to the north. Its banyan trees add a courtly air to the downtown, and its brightly colored Front Street, busy with shops and galleries, keeps things lively. Lahaina has nearly perfect air quality, and when you add its dry, sunny climate in a tropical paradise, that makes life pretty ideal.

Long a favored harbor for American whaling vessels, Lahaina maintains an exotic tinge of a mid-19th-century Hawaiian seaport in its architecture and vibe. The seafaring tradition continues each year, when the town hosts the finish of the Vic-Maui Yacht race, the longest offshore sailboat race on the West Coast, held every June through July.

Think Your Town Should Be Here?

We bet you think your town should have made our list—so tell us about it! In 150 words or less, let us know why your seaside spot is the happiest place to live. E-mail us at letters@coastalliving.com; our favorite responses may be featured on our Web site.

11 MARBLEHEAD
MASSACHUSETTS

A great harbor will always make a great coastal town, and Marblehead is exhibit A. With a sheltered harbor ringed by a rocky peninsula and a sandbar, this proud town of 19,800 on Massachusetts's North Shore has spawned generations of great sailors.

Since the late 1800s, Marblehead has been able to claim its title as yachting capital of the United States, counting six yacht clubs and the oldest junior yacht club in America. On any weekend, the harbor fills with the furled sails of regatta competition. Less than an hour from Boston, Marblehead boasts a highly educated population that has driven the town to maintain some of the highest-ranked schools on our list.

WHERE TO STAY

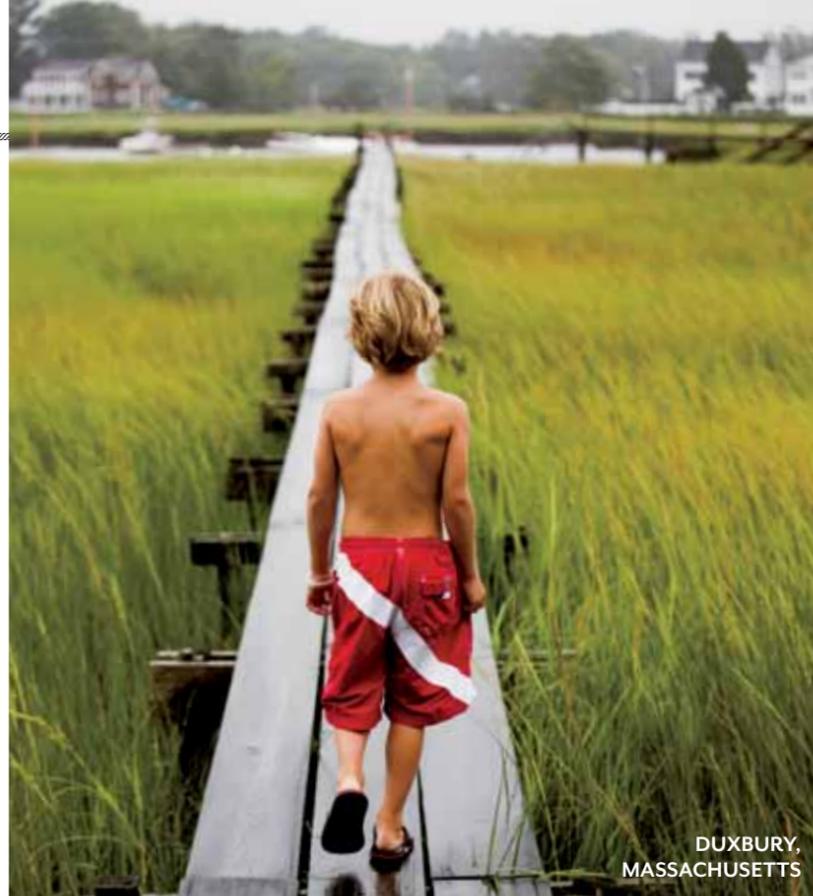
Jupiter
Jupiter Beach Resort is nestled on 1,000 feet of sandy shore. Rates start at \$181; 866/943-0950 or jupiterbeachresort.com.

Lahaina
Plantation Inn sits in the historic district. Rates start at \$158; 800/433-6815 or theplantationinn.com.

Marblehead
Harbor Light Inn is sweet and romantic. Rates start at \$145; 781/631-2186 or harborlightinn.com.



LAHAINA, HAWAII



DUXBURY, MASSACHUSETTS

14 DUXBURY
MASSACHUSETTS

While New England's Wampanoag Indians had enjoyed the sea-borne bounty of this shoreline on Cape Cod Bay for centuries, it was pilgrim Myles Standish who settled in an area now known as Standish Shore, in 1637.

Did that famous Pilgrim envision the community that would grow here, out of shipping and farming (Duxbury is dotted with the deep red of cranberry bogs, and its oyster farming is on the rise), to hold one of the United States's top 12 public high schools? Perhaps. A community commitment to education keeps this town of 14,200 residents a desirous outpost for Boston commuters. And clean air and spacious views of the bay make it a year-round escape for retirees.

12 STINSON BEACH
CALIFORNIA

Living in Stinson Beach is like being on a perpetual honeymoon. It's that romantic. Maybe because the area used to be only accessible from San Francisco by schooner, or by foot over the Dipsea Trail. Eventually, a dirt road was carved along the coast from Sausalito, and a tent camp sprang up among the willows. Now, 773 homes dot this Route 1 gem about 25 miles north of San Francisco—with 3½ miles of sand that are among the cleanest stretches of beach in California. Plus, there are surfers, rugged natural beauty everywhere you look, and lots of sand dollars for shell-collecting walks.

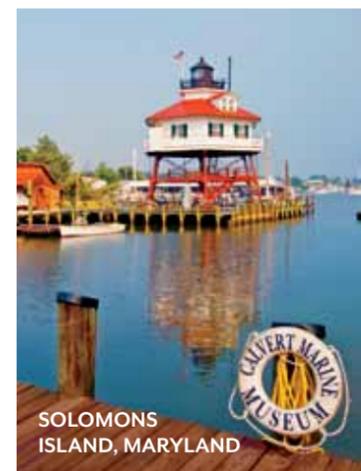
13 COHASSET
MASSACHUSETTS

Insiders who know New England coastal life know that Boston's South Shore has some of the most picturesque (and hard to get to) towns there are. And those town-folk are all the luckier for their splendid isolation. Chief among those secret-treasure towns may be Cohasset, a former fishing village tucked in along the rocky shores where greater Boston Harbor ends and Massachusetts Bay begins.

15 SOLOMONS ISLAND
MARYLAND

Tidewater living is about some fresh oysters for dinner and an icy beer, about summer hospitality and quiet pride in community. It's about a legacy of fishing, shellfishing, and exploration. And Solomons, tucked along where the Patuxent River meets Chesapeake Bay, breathes these qualities among its tidy, whitewashed homes and businesses.

A favorite getaway spot for the Baltimore-Washington area, this tiny settlement of 2,400 boasts marinas, seafood joints (including a heralded spot, Stoney's Seafood House), a well-worn boardwalk for strolling, and the gorgeous Annmarie Sculpture Garden and Arts Center, which shows world-class work on loan from the National Gallery of Art or the Smithsonian. It's like finding a pearl. And still getting to eat the oyster. Every day. 🦪



SOLOMONS ISLAND, MARYLAND

WHERE TO STAY

Stinson Beach
The Sandpiper offers quaint rooms and cabins. Rates start at \$140; 877/557-4737 or sandpiperstinsonbeach.com.

Cohasset
Red Lion Inn Resort's rooms have brick or gas fireplaces. Rates start at \$230; 781/383-1704 or redlioninn1704.com.

Duxbury
Winsor House Inn embodies New England hospitality. Rates start at \$110; 781/934-0991 or winsorhouseinn.com.

Solomons Island
Solomons Victorian Inn serves breakfast with a harbor view. Rates start at \$110; 410/326-4811 or solomonsvictorianinn.com.

LAHAINA: DOMINIQUE VORILLON; DUXBURY: MICHAEL HANSON; SOLOMONS ISLAND: PAT & CHUCK BLACKLEY