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THE BEST

# Lakes & Beaches



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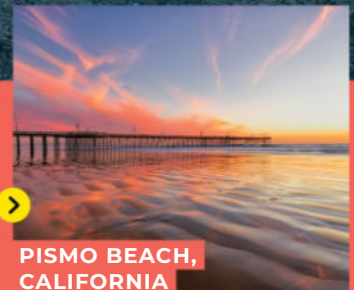
LAKE MCDONALD,  
MONTANA

Magnificence in the  
Rocky Mountains



LAKE WILLOUGHBY,  
VERMONT

Rest & Recreation  
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PISMO BEACH,  
CALIFORNIA

Casual Vibe on the  
Central Coast





WELCOME

## THE BEST

# Lakes & Beaches

There's something about water in its natural surroundings that calls to us in an almost primal way. Water plays to all of our senses: The feel of it when we swim in a clear lake. The exhilaration we get slicing through waves on a boat. The calm we experience listening to crashing surf or watching the sun rise or set from shore. The unforgettable memories of its heady fragrance.

In this book, we celebrate water, and our love for it, by showcasing some of the best lakes and beaches in the U.S. Take a virtual tour of spectacular coastal destinations, pristine mountain escapes, fun-filled vacation spots, and historic maritime outposts where water is the main attraction. Besides beautiful photos, you'll find tips on when to visit, where to stay, and what to do in and out of the water.

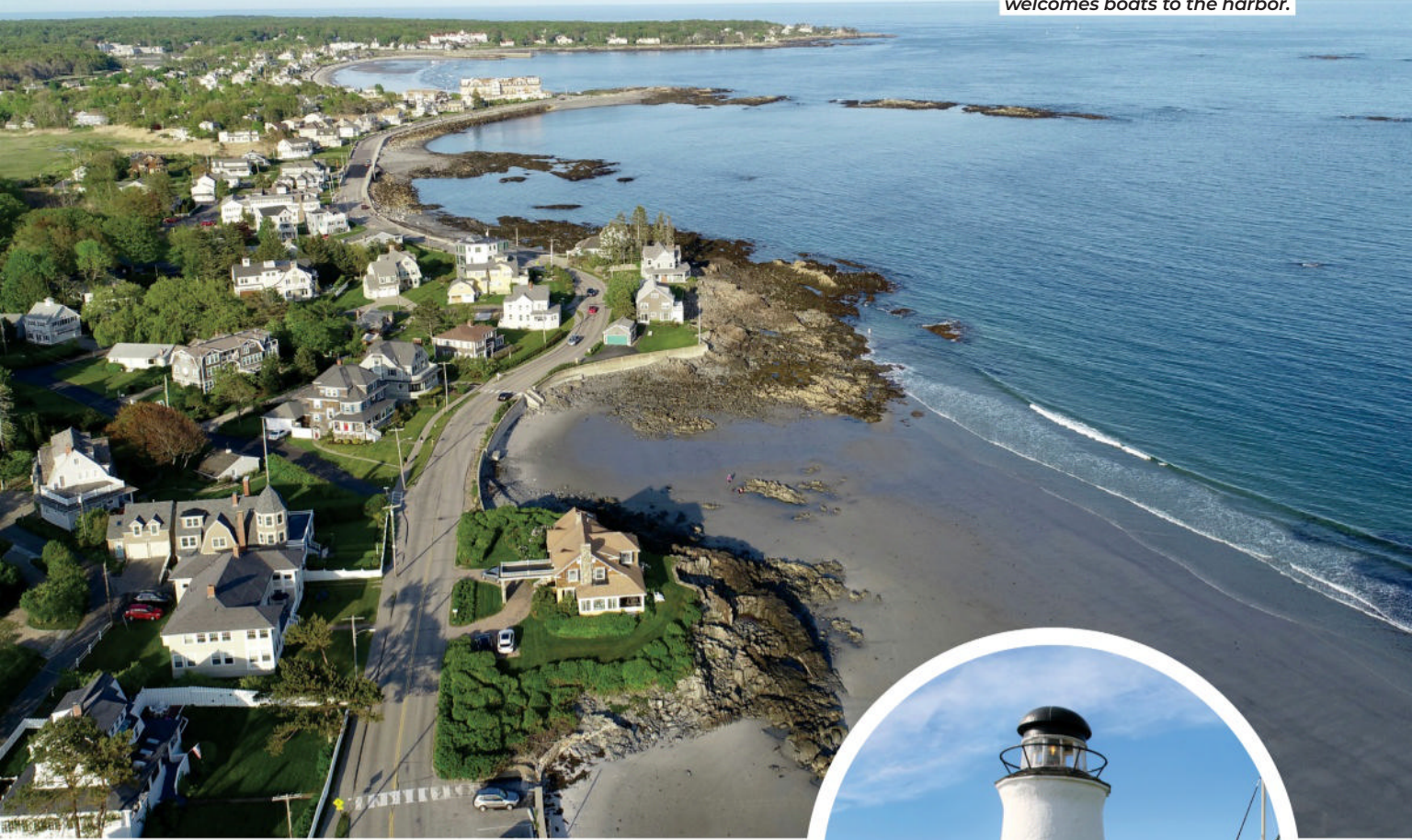
So sit back, relax, and take it all in. Then get to planning your next lake or beach vacation!

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*Many luxury homes are situated on the rocky coastline. Inset: A decorative lighthouse welcomes boats to the harbor.*



# Maine

## 📍 Kennebunkport

THE PLACE TO BE ALL YEAR

■ [kennebunkport.org](http://kennebunkport.org)

Nestled on the southern coast of Maine, Kennebunkport is one of the oldest European-settled towns in the U.S. It has a small-town feel, and is, in fact, a small town of about 3,600 residents. While it may be diminutive in size and self-described as “The Place to Be All Year,” it is big on culture, beauty, and fun.

Since we’re on the Atlantic, let’s start with the shoreline. Take a walk or drive along scenic Ocean Drive that winds along the rocky coast all the way to Walker’s Point (the Bush family summer compound) to feel the saltwater breeze and listen to the waves crash ashore. Kennebunk Beach (which is actually three public beaches in one) is a prime spot to walk along the soft sand, watch surfers, peer in tidepools, and hunt for sand dollars.

Then head to town to lunch on fresh local seafood. The getting is good—there are many waterfront eateries, so plan to indulge on the gifts of the sea. If you like to hunt that oh-so-perfect gift or souvenir, you’ll find something (likely many things) in boutiques and galleries around Dock Square, which are located in charming former homes and warehouses not far from the shore.

If history is your thing, take a guided walking tour, explore local art and culture at the Brick Store Museum, or visit the world’s largest electric railway museum, the Seashore Trolley Museum. Bonus: You can hitch a ride on a trolley! And if picturesque New England lighthouses give you the warm fuzzies, venture to the Goat Island Light near Cape Porpoise. It’s simply lovely.

## 📍 Moosehead Lake

GO BIG IN THE PINE TREE STATE

■ [destinationmooseheadlake.com](https://www.destinationmooseheadlake.com)

You might think that this lake got its name from the moose who live in the expansive lands that surround it, but it's said that the real origin for the name comes from how the many bays and inlets look, from way up, like moose antlers. And like its namesake, it is big. Moosehead is the second-largest lake in New England—its area covers 118 square miles, with 400 miles of mostly undeveloped shoreline and over 80 islands to take in.

Getting there is a treat in itself. It's about 2 hours (give or take) from the Bangor International Airport, so flying in and exploring lovely Bangor is a great start to a road trip through the gorgeous Maine Highlands. (Don't forget to grab a lobster roll before you head inland.) Greenville, the largest town on the lake, caters to tourists and has numerous lodging and dining options.

A favorite activity for Moosehead newcomers is taking a tour of the waters on the steamship *Katahdin* (aka *Kate*) to learn about the natural features, creatures, and history of the area while taking in breathtaking sights—one option will take you all the way to majestic Mount Kineo. After you sail, check out the nautical treasures at the Moosehead Marine Museum.

Lily Bay State Park, located on Moosehead's southeast shore, hosts outdoor activities year-round. When the weather's warm, sprawl out on the swimming beach, book a guided fishing trip, rent a boat and float, hike the trails, paddle in Prong Pond, and camp at one of the 90 lakeside sites. When color is at its peak, taking a leaf-peeping seaplane tour is an absolute must.



### More to Explore

Elephant Mountain ■  
St. Ann's Episcopal Church,  
Kennebunkport ■ Rachel  
Carson National Wildlife  
Refuge, Wells

**Top:** A paddler makes his way toward Mount Kineo on a cool day.  
**Below:** Kineo's rocky cliffs rise nearly straight up from the lake.



*Charming cottages add to the beauty of the autumn landscape.*

  
**More to Explore**

Wright Museum of WWII, Wolfeboro ■ The Libby Museum of Natural History, Wolfeboro ■ Ellacoya State Park, Gilford

# New Hampshire

 **Lake Winnepesaukee**  
 A PERFECT FAMILY DESTINATION  
 ■ [lakewinnepesaukee.net](http://lakewinnepesaukee.net)

Covering just about 70 square miles at the foot of White Mountain, Lake Winnepesaukee is the largest lake in the Granite State's Lakes Region. It has over 288 miles of shoreline that consists of many peninsulas, bays, and inlets. And it's home to over 250 islands. The lake's natural beauty and bustling tourist towns make it a very popular year-round tourist

destination. As one would guess, summers here are especially busy (and loads of fun), but the fall foliage is also incredible.

First-time Lake Winni summer vacationers will want to head to Meredith and board the old-timey Winnepesaukee Scenic Railroad for a 2-hour, round-trip ride along the shores of the lake. Or head to Weirs Beach in Laconia and board the *MS Mount Washington* for a narrated tour of the lake and its lovely sights.

Laconia is a good home base if you are traveling with kids. The soft sand at Weirs

Beach is a great place to put a blanket down, have a picnic, and enjoy the sun while the littles splash away. The town has eateries, shops, and kid-friendly activities, including a charming drive-in theater.

If you're visiting in fall, the Castle in the Clouds estate is the spot. Tour the 16-room Arts and Crafts mansion that was built on an outcropping of Lee Mountain at the turn of the 20th century, grab a bite at its eatery, then explore the estate's 28 miles of trails that overlook Lake Winni and the Ossipee Mountains for breathtaking views at every turn.

# Rhode Island

NEW ENGLAND

## 📍 Trustom Pond National Wildlife Refuge

WHERE CREATURES ABOUND

■ [fws.gov](https://fws.gov)

Trustom Pond, located on the south coast of Rhode Island, is one of nine coastal salt ponds in the state and the only one that is undeveloped, making it a prime day-use spot for wildlife viewing of all kinds. The 800 acres of varied habitats to explore include fields, shrublands, woodlands, fresh and saltwater ponds, and sandy beaches and dunes. Best of all, entry is free.

Pack your camera, binoculars, and bug spray before you hit the trails. There are four to choose from, all of which are well-tended and relatively easy to traverse. The half-mile Otter Point Trail takes you through grasslands and upland forests, and it includes a viewing platform and telescope that overlooks the

pond. The longer Osprey Point Trail (a favorite) covers grassland and upland forest and leads to a viewing platform on shore of Trustom Pond, where you can linger with nature. Red Maple Swamp Trail features shrublands, grasslands, and red maple swamp, and the short Farm Field Loop Trail that (as you may have guessed) winds around a farm field has two platforms that overlook the farm pond where you can see snapping turtles laying eggs in late spring and witness the incredible dragonfly migration in early fall.

The pond supports more than 300 bird species, including the piping plover, osprey, least tern, and many songbirds and shore birds. And it's home to 40 mammal and 20 reptile and amphibian species, including the Fowler's toad.

Hotel lodging and camping is available in nearby Charlestown—if you like to rough it, camping on East Beach is gorgeous.

### More to Explore

South East Lighthouse, New Shoreham ■ Napatree Point Conservation Area, Westerly ■ Wickford Village, North Kingstown



#### GREAT WATER-VIEW HIKING IN AMERICA

**Emerald Lake, Rocky Mountain National Park**  
Colorado

**Walden Pond**  
Massachusetts

**Gaylor Lakes, Yosemite National Park**  
California

**Acadia National Park**  
Maine

**Grinnell Glacier Lake, Glacier National Park**  
Montana

*Daybreak over the lagoon at Trustom Pond is a feast for the eyes.*

# Massachusetts

## 📍 **Boston Harbor Islands**

A BIT OF EVERYTHING

■ [bostonharborislands.org](http://bostonharborislands.org)

Boston Harbor Islands is managed via a unique partnership between the state of Massachusetts and the federal government to create a recreational and historical oasis just a short ferry ride from downtown Beantown. A trip here is a great add-on to a visit to the historic city.

One way to take it all in is to book a family-friendly narrated sightseeing cruise that includes seeing the *USS Constitution* (the oldest commissioned ship in the U.S. Navy), Boston Light (America's first lighthouse), the Boston Tea Party ships, the Boston skyline, and more. The lighthouse hosts tours—if you get a chance, do it.

In spring, summer, and fall, outdoor enthusiasts can catch a public ferry to 114-acre Spectacle Island

for a day. Stop in the visitor center to learn about the history of the island, then go on a hike or relax on the beach and enjoy the view of Boston Harbor. On summer weekends, you can also take a public ferry to Thompson Island and go on a guided tour to learn about the beaches, salt marshes, scrub-shrub wetlands, meadows, and forest lands there.

History enthusiasts and ghost hunters would enjoy a day on Georges Island, home to the Civil War-era Fort Warren and the Lady in Black, a ghost who is said to haunt the grounds. The ins and outs of the massive stone and granite structure are fun (and a little creepy) to survey. Note: Bring snacks or a picnic lunch as there are few food options here. Peddocks Island, one of the largest and most biodiverse islands in Boston Harbor, is also accessible by public ferry in summer. Stroll the scenic walking paths, see Fort Andrews and a restored WWII-era chapel, and camp for the night.



Visitors can admire the Boston skyline from Spectacle Island.

## 📍 Provincetown

WELCOME TO ALL

■ [ptowntourism.com](http://ptowntourism.com)

In the off-season, the population of P-Town, as Provincetown is affectionately known, hovers at around 3,000 residents. In summer, though, there can be as many as 60,000 visiting the artsy mecca located at the very tip of Cape Cod. The vibe is casual, eclectic, and open-minded, thanks in part to the many LGBTQ residents and tourists who flock here.

Stop in the Province Lands Visitors Center—the panoramic views are amazing (you might see a whale!), and the friendly staff can help you plan the perfect getaway. Then head to nearby Race Point Beach to explore the dunes. Or try dog-friendly Herring Cove Beach to get some sun and stay for its gorgeous sunsets. Lighthouse lovers will find three in the area: Wood End, Long Point, and Race Point.

Biking is a popular way to get around the area and take it all in—well-tended trails wind through the dunes, forests, and seashore. Walking Commercial Street is also a top tourist activity: You'll find shops, art galleries, delicious food, clubs, and some of the best people-watching on the planet. P-Town sponsors a variety of theme weeks during the year, making Commercial Street even more of a kick. Don't miss Pilgrim Monument and MacMillan Wharf as you stroll.

And since the area is surrounded by water on three sides, you have to get on a boat. Fishing charters, sunset cruises, seal- and whale-watching excursions, schooner adventures—whatever your interest, there's something for you. And, as you might expect in a town that LOVES its tourists, food and lodging options are plentiful and excellent.



## More to Explore

- The Freedom Trail, Boston
- Walden Pond, Concord
- Great Pond, Eastham

**Top:** Race Point Light is on the National Register of Historic Places.

**Below:** The lovely coastline glows during the blue hour.



# Connecticut

## 📍 Lake Waramaug State Park

FEAST FOR THE EYES

■ [portal.ct.gov](http://portal.ct.gov)

Named for the chief of the Wyantnock tribe who spent summers here, 95-acre Lake Waramaug State Park is a photographer's dream, especially in the fall when the foliage reflects on the serene waters. But people flock there year-round to enjoy all the lovely lake has to offer.

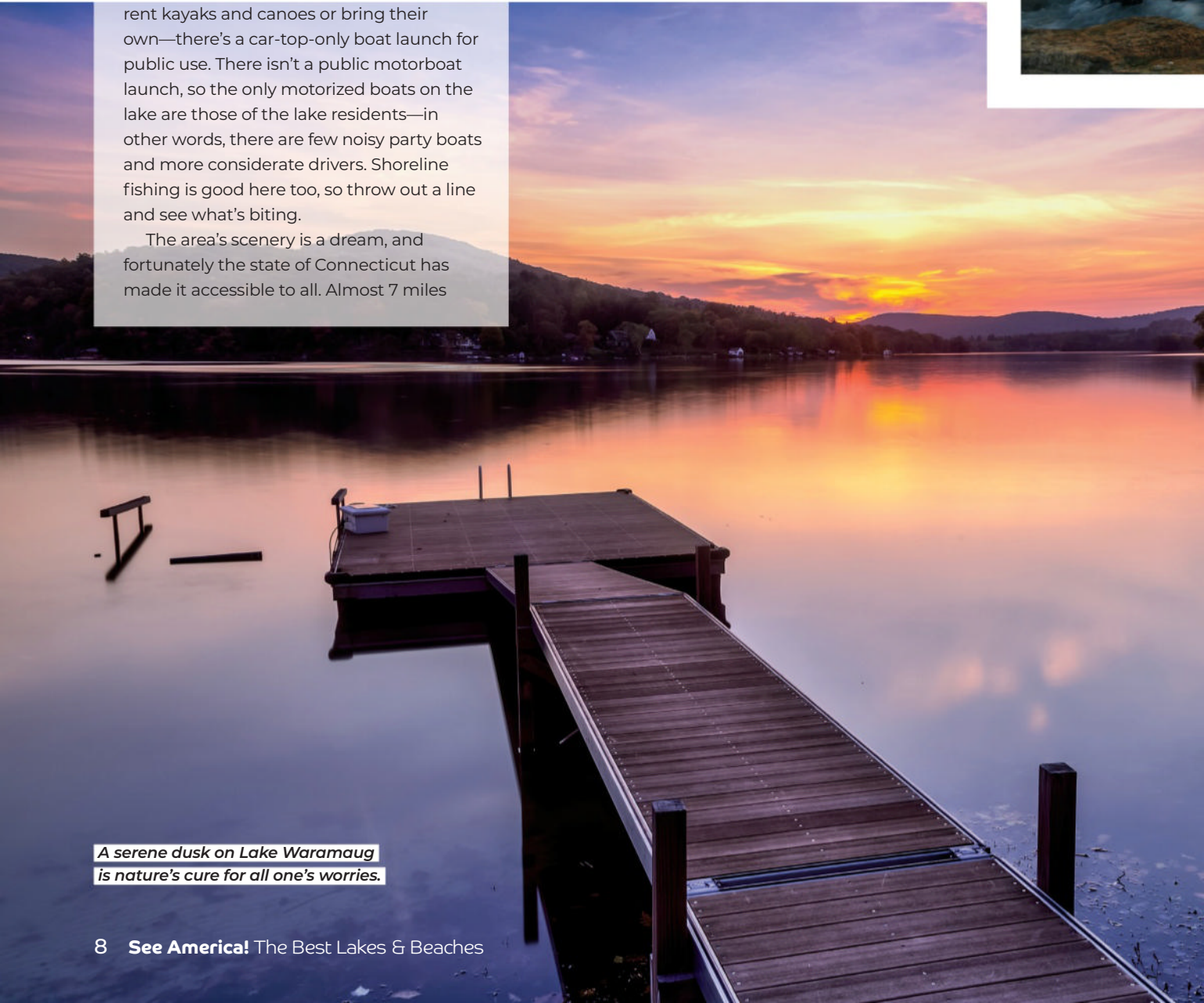
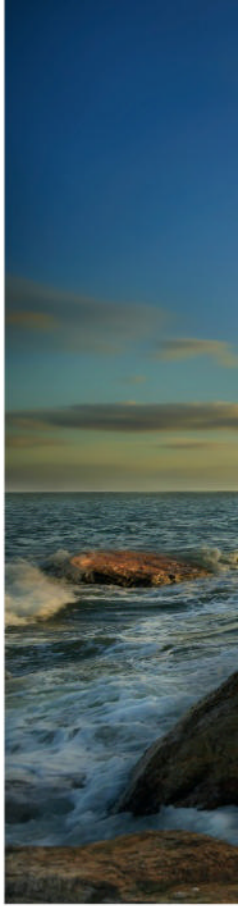
Spend a summer day lounging and splashing at the park's beach—pack a picnic or take advantage of the seasonal concession stand for lunch. Paddlers can rent kayaks and canoes or bring their own—there's a car-top-only boat launch for public use. There isn't a public motorboat launch, so the only motorized boats on the lake are those of the lake residents—in other words, there are few noisy party boats and more considerate drivers. Shoreline fishing is good here too, so throw out a line and see what's biting.

The area's scenery is a dream, and fortunately the state of Connecticut has made it accessible to all. Almost 7 miles

of the roads surrounding the lake are designated state scenic roads, so building or maintenance that blights the views is limited. Take a drive, walk, or bike ride and revel in the natural beauty.

Camping here is probably the best way to really take in the outdoors. There are over 70 spacious campsites in the park, ranging from tent to big RV. Visitors say the cell service is spotty at the campground—take that as a sign it's time to unwind.

Happy fact: The lake was once very polluted. It's clear and clean today thanks to over 40 years of innovative efforts to restore it to its original state.



*A serene dusk on Lake Waramaug  
is nature's cure for all one's worries.*

The twilight sights and sounds at Hammonasset State Park are sublime.

NEW ENGLAND

## More to Explore

Shoreline Greenway Trail, Madison ■ West Cornwall Covered Bridge, Cornwall ■ Hopkins Vineyard, Warren

who like to paddle along the lovely shoreline.

Meigs Point Nature Center, located on the south side of the park adjacent to the Hammonasset Natural Area Preserve, is a must-stop for nature-lovers. It's exhibits include "In the Air" (live birds, butterflies and moths, and an osprey platform), "In the Woods" (small mammals, reptiles, and amphibians), "In the Water" (touch tanks, freshwater and saltwater tanks), and "On the Beach" (the area's history and marine life). Meigs Point also hosts The Gardens, a beautiful space where UConn Master Gardeners and volunteers maintain 10 themed native plant areas that attract local insects, birds, and other critters. There are nature trails all around as well, so bring your binoculars.

Many visitors enjoy camping in the park—there are over 550 grassy campsites and some rustic cabins for respite after a long day in the park. Nearby Madison has many options (hotels, inns, B&B's, cottage rentals) with all the charm you'd expect from coastal Connecticut. Make sure you hit a seafood joint too.

## 📍 Hammonasset Beach State Park

A BEACH HAVEN

■ [portal.ct.gov](http://portal.ct.gov)

The word "hammonasset" means "where we dig holes in the ground," referring to a settlement where Eastern woodland Indigenous people farmed along the Hammonasset River. This park has been a favorite of Connecticut residents since it opened in 1920 for good reason. It has over 2 miles of unspoiled beach for locals and visitors to spread out and enjoy a day on the splendid Atlantic Coast. Tip: Bring water shoes—there are lots of shells in some beach areas.

The expansive (and very clean and well-appointed) beach is a big attraction here. Visitors can swim, picnic, stroll along the boardwalk, or just relax in the sun and surf. There's a car-top boat launch for those

# Vermont

## 📍 Lake Willoughby

THE LUCERNE OF AMERICA

■ [vermontvacation.com](http://vermontvacation.com)

A National Natural Landmark, Lake Willoughby is nestled between Mount Pisgah and Mount Hor in the Northeast Kingdom area of Vermont. It's a deep, cold, and crystal-clear alpine lake that was formed by glaciers over 10,000 years ago and is fed mainly by underground springs. The serene setting that borders mountains and forests make it a stunningly beautiful, almost magical place.

The main attraction here is enjoying the natural surroundings. There are two public beaches to stretch out and relax after taking a refreshing dip in the water. Paddling around the lake is a feast for the senses—tranquil waters, sheer cliffs, and the chatter of the more than 100 species of birds will make you forget you're living in the 21st century. In summer, anglers can expect to catch rainbow trout, lake trout, and landlocked salmon.

The hiking trails here are a major draw too. There are over 20 miles of trails in and around the Willoughby State Forest. Mount Pisgah's Pulpit Rock is a known nesting site for once endangered peregrine falcons, and it features a scenic overlook 200 feet above the lake. Mount Hor also has a great network of trails that offer stunning views.

Visitors here can choose from cottage lodging, camping, home rentals, or rustic resorts to suit their comfort and budgets. When in town, be sure to ask a local about the legend of Willy the sea monster.

Poetry lovers: Robert Frost visited Lake Willoughby and mentioned its beauty in the poem "A Servant to Servants."

*Mount Hor rises above Lake Willoughby in verdant glory.*



Fall mornings on Lake Elmore  
are postcard-perfect.

NEW ENGLAND



## More to Explore

Kingdom Trails, East Burke ■ Moss Glen Falls, Stowe ■ Ben & Jerry's Factory, Waterbury



### Lake Elmore

“THE BEAUTY SPOT OF VERMONT”

■ [vtstateparks.com](http://vtstateparks.com)

Lake Elmore is located in Elmore State Park, about 15 miles northeast of the ski resort town Stowe. The park was founded in the 1930s via Civilian Conservation Corps efforts after generous local citizens donated the land. It was added to the National Register of Historic Places in 2002. The rural town of Elmore's motto, “The Beauty Spot of Vermont,” is apt: This is a gorgeous place to unwind.

The shallow, warm 219-acre lake is the main summer attraction. Visitors can swim and sunbathe at the large beach, paddle the

waters (non-motorized rentals are available), and fish for yellow perch, northern pike, smallmouth bass, bullhead, and panfish. A beach house structure, which can be rented for gatherings, also houses a small snack bar if you don't feel like packing lunch.

Hikers flock here, particularly to climb Elmore Mountain. The Elmore Mountain Fire Tower Trail winds a 1½-mile trek to the 2,608-foot peak. The prize for climbing up the peak's fire tower: breathtaking panoramic views of the lake, the Green Mountains to the west, and the Presidential Range to the east. Consider an autumn trip—the fall color is out of this world.

The night sky here is top-notch due to its rural location, so consider camping in the park. RVs and tent campers are welcome, and there are a number of lean-tos available. Or stay in a cottage rental or at one of the many cushier options in Stowe.

*Fall color in Skaneateles is a feast for the senses. Inset: The downtown area is lined with charming shops.*



# New York

## **Skaneateles Lake**

**CARIBBEAN BLUE WATER  
IN NEW YORK STATE**

■ [skaneateles.com](http://skaneateles.com)

One of the 11 glacier-formed lakes in New York's Finger Lakes Region, 16-mile-long Skaneateles Lake may not be the biggest, but it is the cleanest and arguably the most beautiful. The lake's cold, clear, blue-green water is so clean that the city of Syracuse uses it as its water source.

The town of Skaneateles on the northwest corner of the lake is a great place to make a home base and start your adventure, especially if you're a first-timer. The best way to get around here is by boat,

paddling, or kayak (available at area marinas), or you can take a narrated tour of the lake to see all the beautiful scenery and hear the stories of those who live and have lived on these waters. Fun fact: A mail boat delivers mail to the lake homes in the warmer months and welcomes passengers. Book early!

Sailing is the floating of choice among the locals. You'll see majestic crafts going to and fro. Fishing is also good; consider taking a guided charter to find the hot spots. Cold-water species include landlocked salmon, rainbow, and lake trout, and yellow perch, chain pickerel, and largemouth and smallmouth bass in abundance.



Skaneateles is home to Clift Park, an idyllic town park on the lakeshore with a swimming beach, gardens, a stone sitting area, and a gazebo. When it's time to stretch your legs, hike at the forested Bahar Nature Preserve to immerse yourself in greenery and take in the dramatic view of the 100-foot deep Bear Swamp Creek Ravine.

Like any upscale tourist destination, lovely hotels are abundant on and around Skaneateles Lake, as is good food, culture, and shopping. And make sure you tour an area winery..

## 📍 Robert Moses State Park

AN ATLANTIC DAY GETAWAY

▀ [parks.ny.gov](https://parks.ny.gov)

Robert Moses State Park is a beach area that spans 5 miles of Atlantic Ocean shoreline, east of Fire Island National Seashore. It was named after the influential, but controversial, mid-century city planner and former president of the Long Island State Park Commission. The park attracts 3.8 million visitors annually and has been an official park for over 100 years.

Its densely populated surroundings mean that it does get crowded here at peak times, but it's known to be quieter and less crowded than Jones Beach or Long Beach, so singles, couples, and families seeking respite flock to the soft sandy beaches here. There are four lifeguard-staffed beach areas (or fields) for swimming, boogie boarding, paddling, and other light water sports, and each is appointed with all one needs: concessions, beach

shops, bathrooms, and private outdoor showers.

For the more active, Field 2 has an 18-hole pitch-and-putt golf course and expansive volleyball courts. This area is not far from Democrat Point, which is a favorite spot of surfers and anglers. Field 3 has a day-use boat basin for personal watercraft and piers for fishing and crabbing. Stop in the park office here to get your permits.

Field 5 has a large playground for the kids and serves as the gateway to Fire Island. Walk the  $\frac{3}{4}$ -mile nature trail to the 1858 Fire Island Lighthouse and take the 182-step tour to the top for the panoramic views (you can see the NYC skyline on a clear day). Then hike the surrounding trails to spot birds and wildlife.

If you'd like to stay on the beach, Fire Island and nearby Kismet offer hotels, vacation rentals, and eateries with welcoming, laid-back beach vibes. For more mainland-ish lodging, stay on Long Island and take the Robert Moses Causeway across Great South Bay to the park.

**Top:** Fire Island Lighthouse is a symbol of the area's rich nautical traditions.

**Below:** The waves here attract surfers and boogie-boarders.

### 📍 More to Explore

Charlie Major Nature Trail, Skaneateles ▀ Sunken Forest, Fire Island ▀ Long Island Maritime Museum, West Sayville

# New Jersey

## 📍 **Sandy Hook National Recreation Area**

**GATEWAY TO NEW YORK HARBOR**

■ [nps.gov/gate](https://nps.gov/gate)

The Sandy Hook Unit of Gateway National Recreation Area is a thin peninsula that juts into New York Harbor. Fortunately, the government purchased the entire peninsula in 1814, sparing it from the commercial development that dominates the coasts in this area. Sandy Hook draws more than 2 million visitors annually to enjoy its historical significance and recreational opportunities on its unspoiled beaches.

First-time visitors should make the 1764 Sandy Hook Lighthouse, the oldest working lighthouse in the U.S., their first stop. The visitor center is located in the Keeper's Quarters, which was restored in 2006. Talk to rangers, get brochures, immerse yourself in lighthouse history, and climb the tower (seasonally).


The light is located on Fort Hancock, a former U.S. Army coastal artillery base that was built in the late 1800s to protect New York Harbor from enemy attacks at sea. It is now part of Gateway rec area. Its mission changed through time, evolving into an aircraft missile site that eventually closed in 1974. Today, curious visitors can tour Fort Hancock, the History House, Battery Gunnison, and the Nike guided missile site that protected the U.S. during the Cold War.

Seven miles of soft, sandy beaches offer swimming, sunbathing, fishing, surfing, and other traditional beach activities with New York City's skyline on the horizon. Numerous beaches with all the fixings dot the peninsula, ranging from calm bay beaches (good for families with small kids) to clothing-optional Gunnison Beach. Hikers, cyclists, and bird-watchers also find lots to do here.

Lodging options are many, including park camping and options to rent a historic home on Fort Hancock Officers Row. Seasonal ferries operate from New York City, making a day at this park a restful add-on to a Big Apple adventure.



*A sunset over Sandy Hook Bay may be the cure for urban blues.*



Visitors fly-fish near the historic stone Speedwell Dam on a fall day.



MID-ATLANTIC



More to Explore

New York City ■ Ford Mansion & Museum, Morristown ■ Acorn Hall, Morristown



 **Historic Speedwell**

BIRTHPLACE OF THE TELEGRAPH  
■ [morrisparks.net](http://morrisparks.net)

In contrast to Sandy Hook's pristine shores, Historic Speedwell is an inland National Historic Landmark because of the contributions its residents made to industry and technology. It is the site of Speedwell Ironworks, where, in the 1830s, Alfred Vail worked with Samuel Morse to develop the Morse code telegraph that could be used for telecommunication. Speedwell Ironworks also provided most of the machinery for the 1818 *SS Savannah*, the first steamship to cross the Atlantic.

To operate the factory, they needed waterpower, so they situated the property accordingly. Today, the Speedwell Dam Waterfall is one of the most photographed spots in Historic Speedwell. The park grounds also offer fishing on Speedwell Lake and trails for biking, walking, and general relaxation away from the surrounding urban bustle.

Other buildings on the site include the L'Hommedieu House Visitors Center, where you can learn the story of the *SS Savannah*, from the planning and pattern-making phase to the strife the crew and passengers endured on its first voyage. Visitors can also tour the Factory Building where the infamous first Morse code message was sent, and see a restored 24-foot waterwheel, the restored Vail House, and more.

Historic Speedwell is open April through October. Several chain hotels and vacation rentals are located here, and there's are numerous eateries in town. If you want to stay in the big city, NYC to Morristown is about 40 minutes by car or an hour by train.

# Pennsylvania

## 📍 Presque Isle State Park

PENNSYLVANIA'S ONLY "SEASHORE"

■ [dcnr.pa.gov/stateparks](https://dcnr.pa.gov/stateparks)

Presque Isle State Park is located on an arching peninsula on the southeastern shore of Lake Erie. The neck of its peninsula meets the mainland 4 miles west of the city of Erie, a major shipping port. It's a 32,000-acre daytime-use park that has something to offer for everyone. And it's free to all.

Warm-weather activities are plentiful here—visitors enjoy picnicking, swimming on its 11 beaches, boating, waterskiing, paddling, hiking the 21 miles of

trails, cycling, fishing, and more. Lake Erie offers anglers the opportunity to catch perch, trout, walleye, bass, and steelhead, while Presque Isle Bay offers musky, crappie, and northern pike. The park is considered one of the best bird-watching sites in the Keystone State—there are over 320 species of birds.

Presque Isle sunsets are legendary, so don't miss the opportunity. Climb aboard the *Lady Kate*, a tour boat that's located in the park, for a sunset cruise. She's also available for daytime narrated cruises—they are a great way to see the gorgeous landscape, two lighthouses, Perry Monument, and the Erie skyline.

Must stop: Tom Ridge Environmental Center, where you can learn about the history of the Erie area and the many different plants and fauna that live on the peninsula. Kids (and adults) will love the interactive exhibits and climbing the 75-foot tower. Admission is free.

There is no lodging within the park, but there are many options around the Erie area that suit all tastes and budgets. And of course, a park this far north has a lot of cold-weather activities, too, so consider a winter visit.

Fun fact: Presque Isle State Park will be in the path of the 2024 total solar eclipse in April 2024, with almost 4 minutes of totality anticipated.

**Walking the beaches to explore the views is a must-do here.**



### More to Explore

Erie Maritime Museum, Erie ■ Hawley Silk Mill, Hawley ■ Promised Land State Park, Greentown

## 📍 Lake Wallenpaupack

THE POCONOS' BLUE JEWEL

■ [poconomountains.com](https://www.poconomountains.com)

Lake Wallenpaupack is located in the Pocono Mountains Region in northeastern Pennsylvania. The 13-mile-long reservoir covers 5,700 acres. It's a top getaway destination for residents of the tri-state area.

If you are new to the scene, stop in Lake Wallenpaupack Visitors Center in Hawley to chat with a local expert about activities suited just for you. And anglers, you can borrow fishing tackle here. (Think of it as a fishermen's library.)

There's lots to do on the sprawling lake, and of course, swimming and sunning are two. Family-friendly Palmyra Township Public Beach is open to the public all summer and has all the amenities: lifeguards, concessions, picnic areas, bathrooms, and grills. If you prefer to float, there are several

outfitters along the shores that offer scenic tours and boat, kayak, and paddleboard rentals. The lake is also water ski, wakeboard, and jet-ski friendly.

Outdoorsy-types will love the scenery on the Wallenpaupack Lake Trail. It's an easy, gravel-packed 3-mile trail that wanders along the shore of the lake. Take a sunset stroll—it's simply gorgeous. Or try Lacawac Sanctuary, a 500-acre living laboratory and biological field station. Stop in the visitor center to grab a map, hit the trails, and scan the QR codes along the way to learn about local flora and fauna.

For lodging, we recommend an area waterfront resort or house rental for the best lake access, as lots of the beaches are privately owned. Options range from family-friendly to romantic to just plain luxurious. Hawley is a great for dining and shopping, as are other the other lake towns of Tafton, Paupack, Greentown, and Lakeville.

**Top: The lake as seen from the shore of Wilsonville Recreation Area. Below: The cozy fire pit at Silver Birches Resort.**





## More to Explore

U.S. Naval Academy Museum, Annapolis ■ Annapolis Historic District ■ William Paca House & Garden, Annapolis



*The Bay Bridge as seen from one of the park's beaches.*

## GREAT LAKE GETAWAYS IN AMERICA

**Lake Tahoe**  
California

**Finger Lakes**  
New York

**Traverse City**  
Michigan

**Moosehead Lake**  
Maine

**Lake Santeetlah**  
North Carolina

# Maryland

## 📍 **Sandy Point State Park**

**BEACH BY THE BRIDGE**

■ [dnr.maryland.gov](http://dnr.maryland.gov)

Situated on the northwestern end of Chesapeake Bay, Sandy Point State Park is a popular public beach destination that welcomes over a million visitors per year. Families and folks on a budget will appreciate its modest \$5 per-person entrance fee along with the stunning views of the Chesapeake Bay.

If you are a STEM enthusiast, you'll enjoy admiring the incredible Bay Bridge, a true engineering marvel, from your sunbathing, splashing, or crabbing spot. It's hard to believe the original 4.3-mile span (the world's longest continuous over-water steel structure at the time) was completed with 1952 tools and technology. You can even launch your boat at the park's marina to take a closer look and maybe catch a few fish along the way.

The beach can get crowded on summer weekends—consider a weekday visit instead (you'll also save a dollar on admission). And if you visit in May through September, you'll have to leave Fido at

behind. (They allow dogs during the off-season.) The park has a concession stand that's open in-season, but it's fun to grill out at one of the picnic table areas and take a hike or bike on one of the trails afterward. Kids (and parents) will love the updated playground too.

Other key sites include the Sandy Point Farmhouse Mansion, which was built in the early 1800s, that stands to remind us that this was once tobacco country. It is not open for tours, but you can admire the sprawling abode that is being restored to its original condition. Lighthouse hunters can also catch a glimpse of the 1853 bright red, eight-sided Sandy Point Shoal Lighthouse from the beach.

The park is located in Annapolis, and it's a great place to stay. As Maryland's capital and the home to the U.S. Naval Academy, it's a touristy spot so there are countless options for lodging. While in town, be sure to take a boat or historic district walking tour and eat at one of the many local restaurants that serve seafood and other signature coastal cuisine.

# Delaware

## 📍 Cape Henlopen State Park

SOMETHING FOR EVERYONE

■ [destateparks.com](http://destateparks.com)

Ever since William Penn declared the beaches of Cape Henlopen public land in 1682, people have been flocking here for rest and adventure. It's a stop on Delaware's Coastal Heritage Greenway, so make a day of it or stay a little longer—there's plenty to do in this 5,000-acre park.

Cape Henlopen's Seaside Nature Center is a popular attraction for families, specifically its 495-gallon, two-level touch tank that houses stingrays, horseshoe crabs, and other species; five aquariums that feature local fish; and exhibits that explain the different habitats within the park.

Fort Miles State Historic Area also lies within the park boundaries. The fort was situated there to defend the vital trade centers on the Eastern Seaboard during WWII, as at the time a German invasion seemed highly likely. It stood guard there until the 1970s. Stop in and learn more about "the greatest generation."

There are two beaches open for ocean swimming, kayaking, clamming, paddling, and windsurfing here, but don't spend all

your time in the sand and sea. Birding here is sublime: Endangered black skimmer, least tern, and piping plover are abundant, so get a look. Hike or bike the park's trails through the maritime forest to see the many other species of plants and animals. Don't miss the Point Overlook's sweeping views. The fishing pier is open all day and night for those who like to cast lines or take in gorgeous sunsets.

The park has campsites and cabins for rent if you'd like to immerse yourself in nature 24/7. Otherwise, there are accommodations that meet all taste and budget levels in nearby Lewes. Make sure to grab dinner at a seafood joint while in town.

### More to Explore

Lightship *Overfalls* National Historic Landmark, Lewes ■  
Air Mobility Command Museum, Dover ■ Cape May, New Jersey

*The sun setting over Breakwater East End Light creates a dramatic scene.*

Climbers come for the quartzite rock formations and stay for the amazing views.

MIDWEST

 **Devil's Lake**  
A HIKER'S PARADISE  
[dnr.wisconsin.gov](http://dnr.wisconsin.gov)

Devil's Lake, part of Devil's Lake State Park, is located about 35 miles northwest of Madison. Part of the Ice Age National Trail, the area's natural beauty and unique geology draws almost 3 million visitors each year. In the land of over 15,000 lakes, Devil's Lake might be the best one.

The 360-acre spring-fed lake has two large sandy swimming beaches. (Some say the sand in the lake came from the Wisconsin Glacier.) Each beach has a bathhouse, a picnic area, and a concession shop nearby for carefree fun. But one simply must get on the water to see the gorgeous quartzite bluffs that surround much of the lake. Take advantage of the no-fee boat launch—only electric and non-motorized crafts are allowed. Fishing is good here too—brown trout, walleye, northern pike, bass, and panfish swim the pristine waters.

Stop in the nature center on the north side of the lake to talk to area experts about how to tailor your trip specifically for you. It has a 3D model of the park to help you plan your hikes, live native Wisconsin reptile and amphibian terrariums, wildlife displays, geological and human history exhibits, and hands-on activities for the kids.

# Wisconsin

Then hit the 29 miles of trails. They range from easy to challenging (including 1½ miles that are accessible to people with disabilities). Don't miss Prospect Point, the 500-foot bluff that offers magnificent views of the lake. Rock-climbing is tempting, but remember, it is done at your own risk. There are several effigy mounds in the park to explore as well. Cyclists will enjoy eight miles of scenic off-road double-track bike trails.

Camping is really the best way to immerse yourself in this amazing place. The park has over 400 campsites in different areas of the park to choose from.

## 📍 Sturgeon Bay

### THE GATEWAY TO DOOR COUNTY

■ [doorcounty.com](http://doorcounty.com)

Sturgeon Bay, the largest city in Wisconsin's Door County, is located on the south end of the Badger State's Door Peninsula about 45 miles north of Green Bay. Lake Michigan is central to life here—whether it's tourism or shipbuilding, many of its residents live on and for “the big lake.”

History buffs must stop at the Door County Maritime Museum to learn about the area's rich roots, see the exhibits, and hear stories about the brave fishermen and ship captains, skilled craftsmen, daring inventors, and reclusive lighthouse keepers who made this amazing place what it is. Then climb to the top of the 10-story tower and see sweeping views of the historic waterfront.

And don't miss getting out on the water. The lake offers world-class fishing—book a guided excursion and expect to net various whitefish and salmon. If you are brave, visit in winter and go ice-fishing. You won't forget the experience.

Cave Point County Park and Whitefish Dunes State Park offer fantastic hiking and biking trails—views from high bluffs and the sounds of the waves crashing ashore are a sensory delight. It is also a popular spot for kayakers and scuba divers—Whitefish Dunes has a lovely dog-friendly beach to stop and have a little lunch after the trek. Tip: The foliage is amazing in fall.

Three lighthouses dot the shoreline: The brick Sherwood Point Lighthouse is located at the bayside entrance, and the tall white Sturgeon Bay Canal Station Lighthouse and the red-colored North Pierhead Light mark the entrance to the

Sturgeon Bay ship canal. Boat tours operate seasonally for up-close waterfront views.

A trip here is not complete without dining at a supper club and going to a fish boil. Brandy old-fashioned, meat, potatoes, and ice cream drinks are the main draw to the area's unique supper clubs, and the communal-style fish boils are a great place to make new friends and partake in delicious Lake Michigan whitefish.

Shopping and wineries are also big hits in The Door. Sturgeon Bay has three shopping districts loaded with boutiques and elegant lunch spots, and there are several winery tasting rooms and breweries to sip the afternoon away. Don't turn down a slice of pie made from locally-grown cherries.

As in any touristy town, lodging options are varied and plentiful. It's busy and expensive in summer, so consider an off-season trip (there's still plenty to do).



## More to Explore

- Schoolhouse Beach, Washington Island
- Lambeau Field, Green Bay
- The Circus World Museum, Baraboo



*North Pierhead Light, as seen from the edge of the breakwater.*

Cave Point's wave-worn limestone ledges are a treat to explore.

# Illinois

## North Avenue Beach

WINDY CITY OASIS

■ [chicagoparkdistrict.com](http://chicagoparkdistrict.com)

You'd never guess this idyllic spot was once the site of a cemetery, but it was! North Avenue Beach is located in Chicago's Lincoln Park on the coast of breezy Lake Michigan. It's home to a unique 22,000-square-foot beach house that was designed to look like an ocean liner. The house has upper decks and portholes so visitors can gaze out to the horizon or down to the bustling lakefront trail.

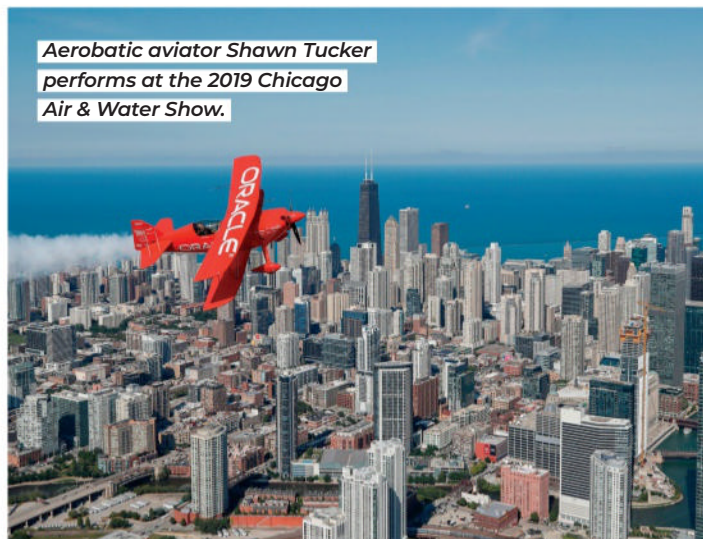
North Avenue Beach activities abound, including swimming and sunbathing (of course) and so much more. There's an open-air facility that hosts hockey and dodgeball tournaments as well as fitness classes; and there are yoga classes, volleyball courts, and kayak, wakeboard, paddleboard, and jet-ski rentals here too.

Sundry and souvenir shops dot the area, and there's an ice cream shop, a cotton candy vendor, and several eateries, ranging from hot dogs and burgers to salads and apps, so you can truly spend an entire day enjoying the outdoors.

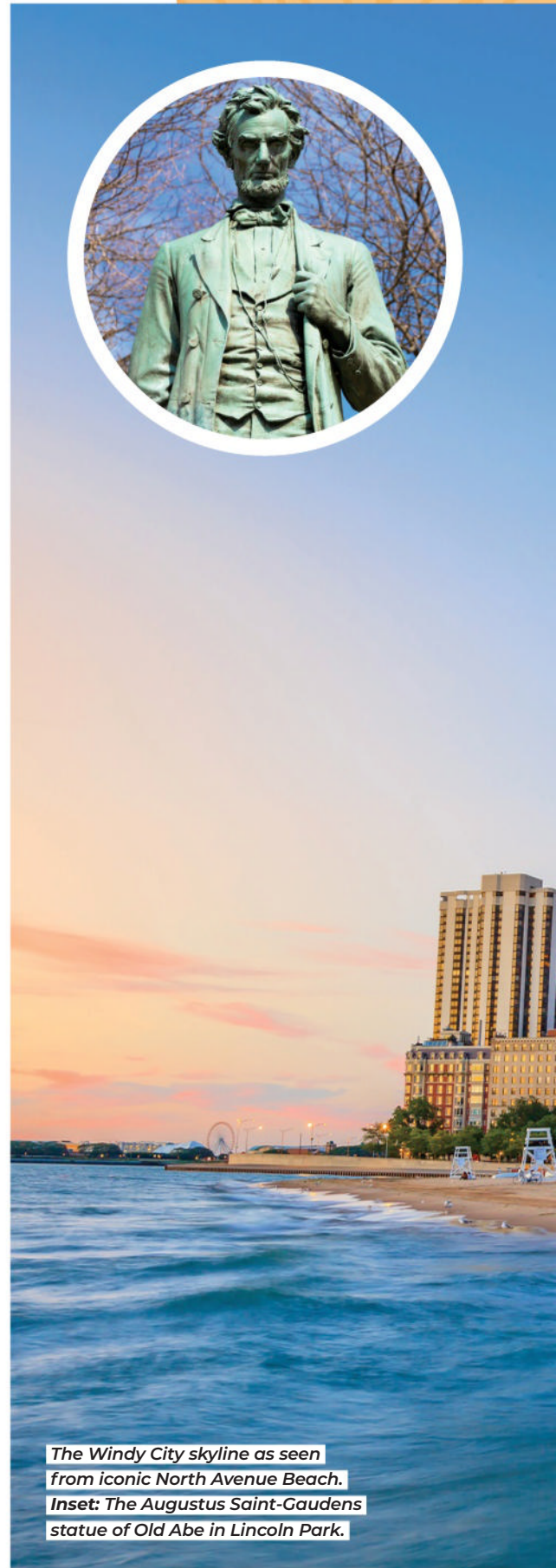
Other attractions in Lincoln Park include a zoo, conservatory, a rowing canal, the Chicago History Museum, the Peggy Notebaert Nature Museum, the Alfred Caldwell Lily Pool, the North Pond Nature Sanctuary, and statues of Ulysses S. Grant and Abraham Lincoln.

North Avenue Beach is the prime viewing spot for the annual Chicago Air & Water Show, the country's largest free show of its kind. Attendees can see daredevil pilots, parachute teams, and formation jet flyers, and water-skiing and boat-jumping.

Note that parking in this area is frustrating and expensive—consider public transit or rideshare.



**Aerobatic aviator Shawn Tucker performs at the 2019 Chicago Air & Water Show.**



**The Windy City skyline as seen from iconic North Avenue Beach. Inset: The Augustus Saint-Gaudens statue of Old Abe in Lincoln Park.**



## More to Explore

The Art Institute of Chicago ■ Millennium Park, Chicago ■ Wrigley Field, Chicago

An aerial view of the channel that connects Lake Macatawa to Lake Michigan. Inset: Spring tulips bloom aside an authentic Dutch windmill.



# Michigan

## 📍 **Holland State Park Beach** WOLVERINE STATE CHARM ■ [holland.org](http://holland.org)

The lovely (and huge) Holland State Park Beach is on a sandy-bottomed area of Lake Michigan, making it a great place for families to enjoy some R&R together. And one of the best ways to enjoy Holland State Park is to book a beachside campsite. The charming 1932 Holland Harbor Light, known as Big Red, can be seen from the beach. Catch the sunset and see the light go on—it's breathtaking.

The 142-acre surrounding park has trails, dunes to explore, picnicking, bird- and wildlife-spotting ops, and a playground for the kids.

You simply must take a trip to the nearby city of Holland, an outpost of Dutch culture smack-dab in the Midwest. See Nelis' Dutch Village and Windmill Island Gardens, walk the cobblestone streets, do some shopping, and stop at New Holland Brewery for a pint. Holland scenery is exceptional in spring, when the city's hundreds of thousands of tulips are in full bloom, and it's also a treat



during the holiday season, when the downtown is fully decorated and the *Kerstmarkt* (Dutch for "Christmas market") is open.

If you aren't a camper, there are more than enough options for overnight accommodations in the area that suit all tastes and budgets.

## 📍 Silver Beach County Park

RIVIERA OF THE MIDWEST

■ [swmichigan.org](http://swmichigan.org)

St. Joseph has a number of great beaches, but Silver Beach tops them all. It's located at the mouth of the St. Joseph River where it empties into Lake Michigan. Although it is a very popular destination for tourists and locals, it doesn't really feel crowded because of its size—it's set on 2,450 feet of lake frontage that provides enough space to spread out and enjoy.

The park is located on land that was once an amusement park, and remnants of that era remain. Generous sponsors and carousel enthusiasts built a new carousel and visitor center in 2010—it's a top attraction for good reason. Of course, kids love it, and the intricately painted animals and history-

inspired rounding boards are a treat for the young at heart. It's just a short walk from the beach. Afterward, stop in the Curious Kids' Discovery Zone for more family fun.

Take a walk on North Pier if weather permits (the wind and waves in the off-season can be treacherous). A pair of lighthouses serve as beacons here, St. Joseph North Pier Inner and Outer Lights, which were constructed in 1906 and 1907. The picturesque inner light is a popular photo op, and tours of it are available for a small fee. And the sunsets here are beautiful.

The best way to admire Silver Beach is to view it from the high bluff in downtown St. Joe. And be sure to enjoy the quintessential tourist-town shops and eateries while you're there—ice cream, pizza, and burgers are on hand to fuel the family getaway.

**Top:** Colorful skies over Lake Michigan and the St. Joseph North Pier lighthouses. **Below:** A closer view of the historic lights.

### More to Explore

Butler Street, Saugatuck  
 ■ Krasl Art Center, St. Joseph  
 ■ Jean Klock Park, Benton Harbor

# Ohio

## 📍 Fairport Harbor

LIFE IS BETTER HERE

■ [fairportharbortourism.com](http://fairportharbortourism.com)

Fairport Harbor is located in northeast Ohio on Lake Erie at the mouth of the Grand River, just a little over a 30-minute drive from Cleveland. It's home to two stately lighthouses, the 1925 Fairport Harbor West Breakwater Light and the 1871 Grand River Light, which houses a museum and offers tours. Visitors can climb the spiral staircase to the top of the Grand River Light tower, but beware: There have been claims that a ghost cat roams the structure.

The beach is big and well-appointed.

Lounge in the sun, swim, play volleyball, or stroll on the shoreline boardwalk. Paddling is great here—the harbor is sheltered by a breakwater, so the waters are fairly calm. Book a guided charter to fish the Lake Erie waters; if you're lucky, the abundant walleye, yellow perch, steelhead, or smallmouth bass will be biting.

If you need a break from the sun, stop in the Finnish Heritage Museum, housed in a 100-year-old building, to learn about the area's rich cultural history and rest in the Finnish Cultural Garden among busts of notable Finns who lived here. Then grab a scoop at the charming locally-owned Fairport Harbor Creamery (they have boozy options for the grown-ups).

There are a few home and cottage rentals in the village, but you need to book early if you want to nab one. Other options include camping, cottages, the lodge at nearby Geneva State Park, or staying in nearby Cleveland.

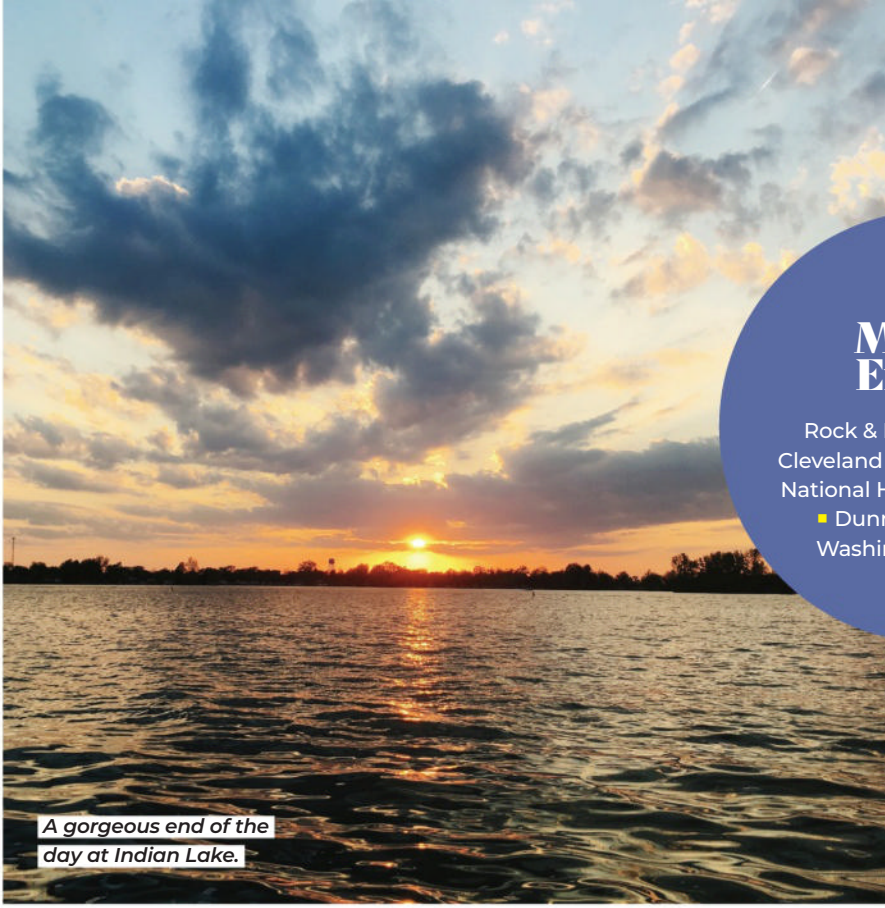
*Lake Erie waves crash upon Fairport Harbor West Breakwater Light.*





## More to Explore

Rock & Roll Hall of Fame, Cleveland ■ James A. Garfield National Historic Site, Mentor ■ Dunns Pond Mound, Washington Township



*A gorgeous end of the day at Indian Lake.*

bass, crappie, bluegill, walleye, yellow perch, and catfish are plentiful, and the wetlands are a prime resting stop for migratory birds, such as Canada geese, ducks, grebes, swans, egrets, and herons. Pack your binoculars. And bring your boat or rent one—there are plenty of marinas to choose from. The state park's large campground has a boat ramp and docks, hiking trails, a beach, and some campsites that are right on the waterfront.

Besides the park, there are many other area camping options available. Or you can make a home away from home in one of the area's charming waterfront rentals that dot the area. Plan ahead—Midwest summers are short, so the best nests book up quickly.

You may not equate western Ohio with a swim-up bar, but Froggy's in Lakeview will change your mind. Pull your boat up and enjoy some pub grub and your beverage of choice—in the pool—at this one-of-a-kind place. Make a weekend party of it—the resort has rooms to rent.



## 📍 Indian Lake

MILES OF SHORELINE

■ [indianlake.com](http://indianlake.com)

With over 30 miles of shoreline, Indian Lake has lots to offer. It's located in western Ohio, about 20 miles southeast of Lima. In the 1920s, a developer built the Sandy Beach Amusement Park here and billed it as "Midwest's Million Dollar Playground" and the "Atlantic City of the Midwest." Crowds flocked here, but a series of area riots in the 1960s led families to find their good clean fun elsewhere. Today, people come to peaceful Indian Lake to boat, fish, and float around the many small islands, inlets, and bays.

Indian Lake State Park is a big attraction for outdoor enthusiasts. Saugeye, largemouth bass, white



## More to Explore

The Beverly Shores Depot Museum & Art Gallery ■ The House of Tomorrow, Beverly Shores ■ Brauer Museum of Art, Valparaiso

*The pathway to Kemil Beach on a crisp fall morning.*

# Indiana

## GREAT STARGAZING SHORES IN AMERICA

**Jackson Lake State Park**  
Colorado

**Merritt Reservoir**  
Nebraska

**Big Pine Key**  
Florida

**Big Bend National Park**  
Texas

**Lassen Volcanic National Park**  
California

## 📍 Kemil Beach

MORE THAN JUST ANOTHER BEACH

■ [nps.gov/indu](https://nps.gov/indu)

Kemil Beach is one of several beaches on the 15 miles of sandy shoreline in Indiana Dunes National Park, which is located on the southern shore of Lake Michigan less than an hour's drive from Chicago. Summer activities here are obvious: swimming, building sandcastles, and lounging in the sun, but that's not all this place has to offer. Visiting here any time of year is a treat.

The unique community of Beverly Shores, which is surrounded by the park, is an International Dark-Sky Community, and Kemil Beach is the prime spot for stargazers to gather. Park rangers and astronomical groups host events throughout the year where visitors can learn about planets, moons, stars, and galaxies, and revel in the beauty.

In 1927 the Frederick H. Bartlett Company, one of

Chicago's biggest real estate investors, purchased 3,600 acres to develop Beverly Shores as a planned resort community, but it didn't pan out as expected. To attract buyers, the company purchased a dozen Century of Progress buildings from the 1933 Chicago World's Fair and relocated them here. Today, visitors can tour The Century of Progress Architectural District and see the Florida Tropical, Rostone, Armco-Ferro, and Cypress houses.

The park has over 50 miles of trails that lead through shifting sand dunes, quiet woodlands, sunny prairies, and lush wetlands. It's also home to the 1885 brick Chellburg Farmhouse that tells the story of a hardworking Swedish immigrant family who lived and worked here for three generations. History enthusiasts can tour the home and its artifacts during the annual fall Chellburg Farm Fun Celebration and via ranger-guided tours.

*The Florida Tropical House in Beverly Shores.*



*A hiker gazes over Lake Superior, the largest freshwater lake in the world. Inset: Seeing a Cascade River waterfall is a bucket-list event.*

# Minnesota

## 📍 Cascade River State Park

### LAND OF WATERFALLS

■ [dnr.state.mn.us](http://dnr.state.mn.us)

Cascade River State Park, so named for the five spectacular waterfalls that flow from the Cascade River into Lake Superior, is located on the northeaster tip of Minnesota—it's way up there, but well worth the trip. The relatively remote park lands have been undisturbed since the 1950s, making it the perfect place to enjoy serene time in nature. The nearest sundry store is about 10 miles away, so there are no tourist traps here.

Hiking along the picturesque Lake Superior shoreline is excellent in spring, summer, and fall. It's also worth exploring on snowshoes, cross-country skis, or via snowmobile in winter when the falls are frozen in breathtaking, almost otherworldly shapes. If you need a little respite from the cold, there's a winter warming house located in one of the picnic shelters.

Over 100 species of birds live here, from buntings to bald eagles and geese to goldfinches. Be sure to download a birding checklist, listen, and look to the skies. You'll also run into mammal life,



such as bear, deer, wolves, and coyotes, on the many miles of trails.

There are drive-in campsites available at the park, and backcountry camping is permitted. Note that the campsites are rather narrow, so some larger RVs may not fit. Measure before you go. Other lodging options are available in Lutsen, a ski resort town that's about 10 miles away.

## 📍 Lake Pepin

### THE BIRTHPLACE OF WATER SKIING

■ [visitlakecity.org](http://visitlakecity.org)

Covering 40 square miles, Lake Pepin is the largest lake on the Mississippi River, covering over 29,000 acres, and home to the only working lighthouse on Old Man River. The lake is located on the Minnesota-Wisconsin border, just a little over an hour southeast of St. Paul. Minnesota's Lake City serves as the lake's unofficial hub.

One of the best ways to discover Lake Pepin beauty is by hiking the lakeside trails at Minnesota's Frontenac State Park. Those on two feet (or cross-country skis in winter) are rewarded with sweeping views from the bluffs. The diverse habitats here—bluffs, prairie, floodplain forest, and upland hardwood forest—attract birds of

all kinds. Bring your binoculars for the best chance to spot warblers, hawks, waterfowl, shorebirds, and more. Make sure you look down too. Beautiful wildflowers dot the landscape in spring and summer.

If you're looking for a less strenuous, but fact-filled adventure, take a narrated tour on the *Pearl of the Lake* paddleboat—you might spot and eagle or two along the way. Or spend the day at Lake City's Ohuta Park Beach. The park has everything you need to enjoy a fun-filled day.

Fun fact: In 1922, Sam Donaldson invented water skiing here using a pair of boards as skis and a length of clothesline as a towrope. Every summer on the last full weekend in June, Lake City hosts Water Ski Days to celebrate Donaldson's innovative (and wildly fun) idea.

**Top:** Invasive purple loosestrife grows on the shore; efforts to contain it have been mixed. **Below:** A birds-eye view of serene Lake Pepin.



## More to Explore

Lutsen Mountains, Cook County ■ Barn Bluff, Red Wing ■ Laura Ingalls Wilder Museum, Pepin, Wisconsin

# Missouri

## 📍 Truman Lake

THE SHOW-ME STATE'S LARGEST LAKE

■ [mostateparks.com](http://mostateparks.com)


Truman Lake, also known as the Harry S. Truman Reservoir, was created by the Army Corps of Engineers as a way to control flooding in the area. Engineering the 55,000-acre lake was a huge undertaking—it was authorized in 1954, construction started in 1964, and it was finally completed in 1979. The first stop here should be the visitor center that sits atop Kaysinger Bluff, where you can discover the rich history of the Osage Arm of Lake of the Ozarks Valley, learn about the dam project, and see a life-size painting of the famous Missouri Leviathan. Afterward, walk along the Kaysinger Trail and take in the spectacular beauty.

Campers love to stay nearby Harry S. Truman State Park, which is located on a peninsula overlooking Truman Lake. The hiking trails here wind through oak woodlands, natural grasslands, and dramatic lakeside bluffs, and provide


ample wildlife viewing opportunities—keep an eye out for armadillos, deer, eagles, orioles, buntings, and more.

The park also houses a full-service marina where you can rent a boat for fishing, touring, or watersports, or you can chill landside and enjoy its beach. Fishing is great here—anglers can expect to net crappie, largemouth and white bass, catfish, and hybrid striped bass.

For those who don't like to rough it, the centrally-located Osage Bluff Motel in Warsaw overlooks Truman Lake and has a variety of room options, a pool, and a play area for the kids.



*Sundown at Truman Lake, where the Sac River and the Osage River meet.*



*The Dripping Springs waterfall is mesmerizing after heavy rains.*

MIDWEST



**More to Explore**

Lost Valley Fish Hatchery, Warsaw ■ Historic Aircraft Restoration Museum, Maryland Heights ■ City Museum, St. Louis



**Creve Coeur Lake Memorial Park**

**THE BROKEN HEART**  
■ [stlouiscountymo.gov](http://stlouiscountymo.gov)

Located in the St. Louis suburb of Maryland Heights, Creve Coeur Lake Memorial Park receives over 1 million visitors per year. Missouri's human-made Truman Lake may be Missouri's largest (by far), but this 320-acre gem is the largest natural one in the state. It was formed thousands of years ago when a meandering loop of the Missouri River was cut off. *Creve coeur* means "broken heart" in French; legends abound, but no one really knows why French settlers gave this lovely place such a somber name.

The area became a popular family resort destination in the 1880s, but during the 1920s Prohibition era, it was the home to many saloons and speakeasies, drawing a gangster clientele and the violence that came with it. Fortunately, other than the park's Bootleggers Run Trail, very little evidence of those dark days remains in the area.

Water fun abounds here—visitors can sail, kayak, paddle, or take rowing lessons at the St. Louis Rowing Club. Gasoline-powered motors are not allowed on these waters, so there's more opportunity to relax in the natural surroundings. Make a point to see the Dripping Springs Waterfall on the southeast shore (it's fantastic in winter too). Cyclists, joggers, and walkers will also enjoy the scenic paved trail that borders the lake.

The lake's location makes it a great respite from the busy St. Louis metro area, but don't miss a trip to Gateway Arch National Park and the St. Louis Zoo. The urban location also offers numerous dining and lodging options to suit all preferences and budgets.

# Iowa

## 📍 West Lake Okoboji

A GLACIER-MADE PLAYGROUND

■ [vacationokoboji.com](http://vacationokoboji.com)

Located in the northwest corner of Iowa, West Lake Okoboji is part of the Iowa Great Lakes, a chain of natural lakes that were formed centuries ago by the Wisconsin Glacier. West Lake is a popular summer destination for Iowans because of its beautiful blue spring-fed water and all the fun family activities that go along with it.

West Lake Okoboji has 3,847 surface acres of water to enjoy. The large lake makes it perfect for sailing and water-skiing—hop on a boat if you get the chance. The cool, clear waters are home to significant populations of yellow perch, bluegill, walleye, bass, northern pike, muskie, and crappie, so bring your fishing pole. Out-of-towners can rent

watercraft or take a narrated tour on the *Queen II*, aka “The Flagship of the Iowa Navy” and learn about the area’s history.

Spend a fun day on land at the historic Arnolds Park Amusement Park that’s located along the lakeshore. There are rides for all ages and thrill tolerance, bumper cars, a funhouse and maritime museum, games, fair food, and more here, and the park’s sandy beach is free to all.

If you are more of a nature-lover, Gull Point and Pike’s Point state parks are located on West Lake Okoboji as well. Gull Point offers water activities, hiking, and camping, and Pike’s Point beach is a great spot for picnics and swimming.

Lodging is plentiful here, but book early as the short Iowa summers make this place a top tourist destination. If you want a quiet getaway, consider an off-peak or midweek trip.



Don't miss a thrill ride on the wooden roller-coaster at historic Arnolds Park.



## GREAT LAKESHORE CAMPING IN AMERICA

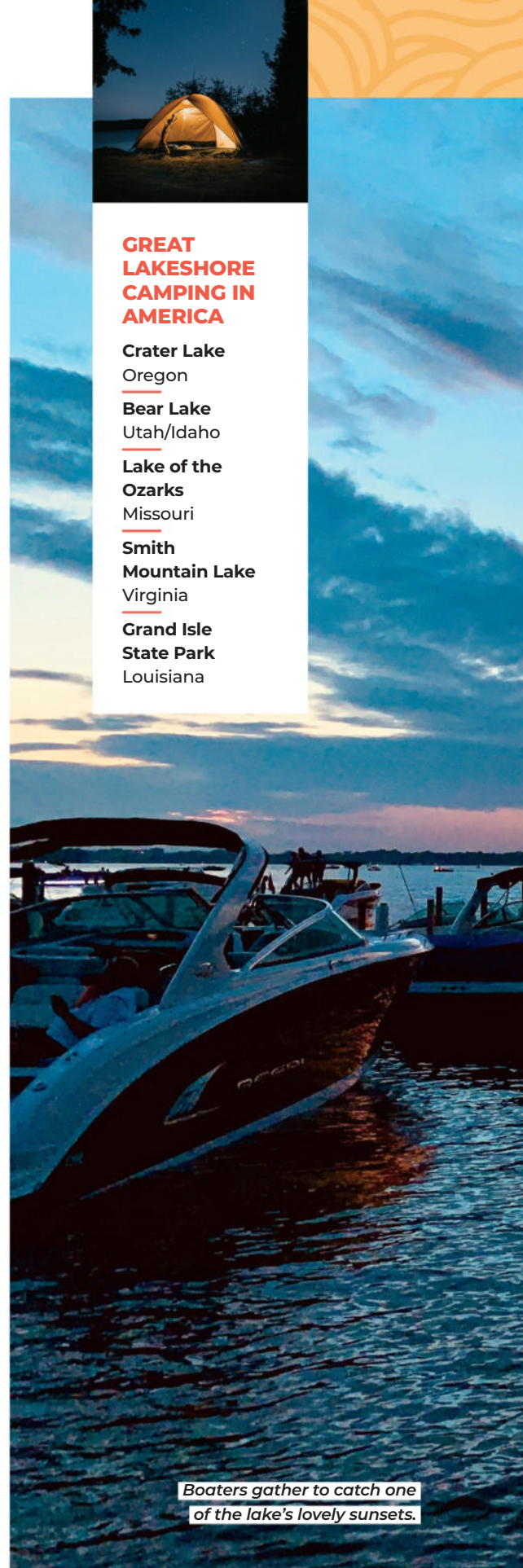
**Crater Lake**  
Oregon

**Bear Lake**  
Utah/Idaho

**Lake of the Ozarks**  
Missouri

**Smith Mountain Lake**  
Virginia

**Grand Isle State Park**  
Louisiana



Boaters gather to catch one of the lake's lovely sunsets.



## More to Explore

Okoboji Classic Cars, West Okoboji ■ Iowa Rock 'n Roll Hall of Fame Museum, Arnolds Park ■ Abbie Gardner Cabin, Arnolds Park

*Flathead Lake is one of the cleanest lakes in the populated world for its type and size.*



# Montana

## 📍 Flathead Lake

THIS LAKE DOESN'T LIVE UP TO ITS NAME

■ [fwp.mt.gov](http://fwp.mt.gov)

Formed by glacial ice melt and subsequent flooding in northwestern Montana 12,000 years ago, Flathead Lake came by its name in regrettable fashion. A few indigenous tribes in the area carried infants on their backs with their heads strapped in to flatten them; the Salish people who lived near this lake did not. Nevertheless, European settlers used the term to identify all the region's native inhabitants. Hence, this lake's name.

Now, in the early decades of the 21st century, the lake is a most popular scenic stopover from the state's largest city, Billings, on the way to Glacier National Park. It's claimed to be the largest natural freshwater lake in the western U.S. by surface area, and its waters are among the purest.

The Swan Range and the Flathead National Forest rise to the east; the Mission range is to the west. These shield the valley from incoming storms, creating a mild climate for this latitude. Orchards and vineyards thrive in the nearby Salish Valley. You can see why the Salish people treasured this special parcel of the planet.

The state operates six campgrounds around the lake; details regarding site amenities can be found on the park website. The Big Arm unit is known for its pebble beach. It's also close to the lake's largest island, Wild Horse, where, as you might guess, wild horses flourish, as well as bald eagles and bighorn sheep.

Visitors enjoy every type of outdoor fun—boating, paddling, fishing, hiking, cycling—you get the picture. There are hotels on the lake's north and south shores.

## 📍 Lake McDonald

### A POSTCARD-PERFECT PLACE

■ [nps.gov/glac](https://nps.gov/glac)

Once monopolized by the gigantic ancient glaciers that carved it, Lake McDonald Valley today is filled with unforgettable alpine scenery, abundant wildlife, numerous trails for hiking, horseback riding, and cross-country skiing, spectacular waterfalls, and the largest lake in Glacier National Park. Lake McDonald itself is well-situated just inside the park's west entrance. If you did not navigate the reservation onslaught 12 months in advance to snag a room at the grand Lake McDonald Lodge or elsewhere inside the park, fear not. From the moment the ranger hands you your receipt and map, you're just minutes from the lakeshore.

That said, if you're unfamiliar with the national park experience, understand: Places like Glacier, Yellowstone, and

Yosemite attract visitors from around the planet. In peak summer months, thousands upon thousands arrive daily, in every manner of conveyance, to wonder at these awesome, sacred places.

A solid plan is paramount to having the experience you seek. A handful of hotels sit just outside the park entrance, while the nearby towns of Columbia Falls, Whitefish, and Kalispell have substantial inventory. Consider visiting in shoulder seasons rather than the peak months, July and August, when rooms book months in advance and cars queue hours before park entrances open.

Demand has prompted the park service to begin requiring reservations for individual vehicles driving through the park, from May to October. Brief yourself on the resources available on the NPS website; when it comes to maximum enjoyment here, preparation is everything.

**Top:** Find quiet solitude on Lake MacDonal'd's calm waters.  
**Below:** The stately hills of Dunigan Mountain at sunset.



## More to Explore

Whitefish Lake, Whitefish

- Black Sandy State Park, Helena
- Bozeman Beach, Bozeman

# Wyoming

## 📍 String Lake

GRAND TETONS PLAYGROUND

■ [nps.gov/grte](https://nps.gov/grte)

String Lake in Grand Teton National Park is less famous than its neighbors but no less loved.

Sitting between the largest, more-developed Jackson Lake to the north and much-photographed Jenny Lake south, the park service endorses String Lake as “less freezing than the park’s other lakes.” Cold! In truth, the lake’s warmer shallow waters make it one of the park’s most popular for a dip. Still not enthused? Try floating in a kayak or canoe, although you may need to bring one. String Lake does not have a rental concession; Jackson Lake and Jenny Lake do. Check with concessionaires about where you can use them.

Wetlands surround the lake and may offer a better payoff than a frigid swim. Moose and elk are known to favor the marshy area. Watching a 1,400-pound

mature bull moose, 6 feet at the shoulder, with massive antlers, is exhilarating, humbling, and unnerving in turns.

However you decide to experience String Lake, pack a lunch. Nearby hiking trails take you to Jenny Lake or into the magnificent Teton Range.

The park offers six lodging properties and eight campgrounds. The historic Jackson Lake Lodge, a grand, Modernist hotel, is the premier option. The luxury cabins at Jenny Lake Lodge offer privacy; Colter Village, Headwaters, and Signal Mountain are fine alternatives. Backpackers can wilderness-camp off trails in the Teton Range. Obtain permits online or at an NPS ranger station.

***String Lake is only 10 feet deep, so you can see all the way to the bottom.***

More to Explore

Bighorn Lake, Lovell ■ Keyhole State Park, Moorcroft ■ Guernsey State Park, Guernsey

*Fishing Cone is a hot spring that's located in Yellowstone's West Thumb Geyser Basin.*

shoreline. The Bridge Bay Marina, just three miles from the hotel, offers a ramp and rental slips. You could spend your summer on the lake should you be interested.

The park is open year-round. Consider a fall, winter, or spring arrival. On a winter visit, you'll need to bundle up: Midwinter temperatures go subzero and some roads close. But fewer humans mean shy wildlife venture out in daylight. Keep your eyes peeled for grizzly and black bear, wolves, coyotes, foxes, lynx, mountain lions, and wolverines, who prey on moose, deer, elk, bighorn sheep, bison, mule deer, black-tailed deer, and pronghorn.

Did you know that Yellowstone sits atop a vast caldera and super volcano? The park's burbling mud pits and superheated geysers shooting skyward presage, according to geologists, a cataclysm beyond comprehension. Until then, savor this historic splendor.

**Yellowstone Lake**

**A LAKE OF HISTORICAL PROPORTION**

■ [nps.gov/yell](https://nps.gov/yell)

America's oldest national park is also, arguably, its flagship. Millions visit Yellowstone annually from all over the world, so this lake is rather celebrated. Historic Lake Yellowstone Hotel, opened in 1891, is a registered historic landmark and the lake's defining feature. Here, you are removed from where visitors congregate around Old Faithful. Your stay is tranquil, which is why its 400 rooms plus cabins get snapped up quickly.

The park concession offers guided cruises and boat rentals. Traveling with your own craft? Put-ins for kayaks, canoes, and paddleboards dot the



# Colorado

## **Ridgway Reservoir** "BACKYARD" FOR A CONSERVATIONIST COWBOY

■ [cpw.state.co.us](http://cpw.state.co.us)

State Highway 50 angles through western Colorado, beneath 13,000-foot peaks so picturesque the landscape has been called "Switzerland in America." In fact, this stunning landscape captivated one of American television's brightest stars at the height of his fame.

Ridgway Reservoir and the surrounding state park is an ideal stopover on a western Colorado excursion between Grand Junction and Durango. By air, Grand Junction is closest, about 90 minutes northwest. Durango is 2½ hours south. Inbound flights connect through Phoenix, Salt Lake, or Denver.

Campers choose from 258 lakeside sites (May to October) clustered in three campgrounds. The park also offers 25 walk-in tent sites. Three yurts are available year-round. Cyclists and walkers weave through 14 miles of trails. Bring binoculars and a field guide: Some 140 migratory and

resident bird species visit the park annually.

A boat ramp provides lake access in season. Anglers pursue native chub, pikeminnow, and razorback suckers. Smallmouth bass, a voracious introduced predator, is devouring the natives. Catch all you want, and keep 'em.

The flesh of fish nor fowl touched the lips of the area's adopted vegetarian celebrity: Dennis Weaver who portrayed Chester Goode in the TV series *Gunsmoke*, and later starred in *Gentle Ben* and *McCloud*. He built a remarkable home on land outside Ridgway, where he lived until his death in 2006, at age 82. The structure's massively thick walls are built of tires and cans encased in stucco. The home required neither heating nor cooling; solar panels provided electricity. His wife of 63 years, Gerry Stowell, remained on the property until she died 10 years later.

Weaver's legacy—ardent, generous conservationist—was such that the town created Dennis Weaver Memorial Park. This 80-acre wildlife reserve sits on the bank of the Uncompahgre River, just north of town, and is well worth a visit.

## GREAT LAKE GETAWAYS IN AMERICA

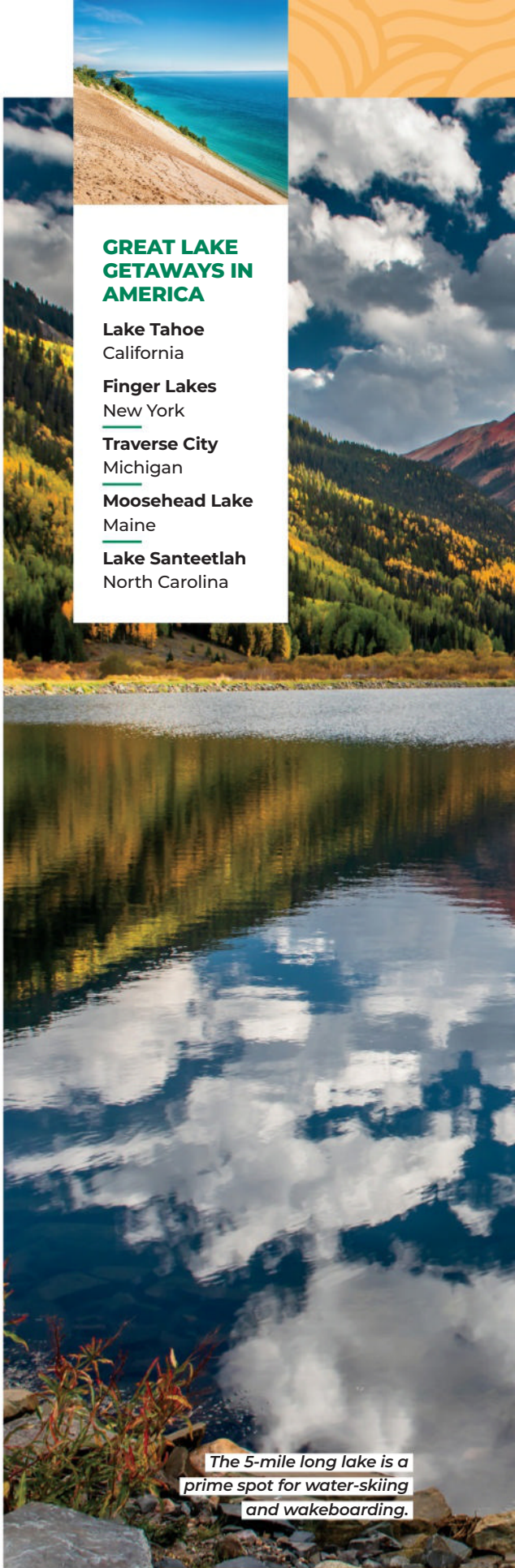
**Lake Tahoe**  
California

**Finger Lakes**  
New York

**Traverse City**  
Michigan

**Moosehead Lake**  
Maine

**Lake Santeetlah**  
North Carolina



The 5-mile long lake is a prime spot for water-skiing and wakeboarding.



## More to Explore

Grand Lake, Town of Grand  
Lake ■ Jackson Lake State  
Park, Orchard ■ South Bay,  
Horsetooth Reservoir

# Utah

## 📍 Lake Powell

**MIGHTY LAKE IN DISTRESS**

■ [lakepowell.com](http://lakepowell.com)

The Colorado River supplies water to 40 million Americans and irrigates 15 percent of the agricultural land in the U.S. Construction of Glen Canyon Dam was completed in 1963; it took 18 years for Lake Powell to fill. Fast forward: Two decades of below-average precipitation in the western U.S. has left the lake at just 34 percent of capacity. Yet it still holds an immense amount of water.

Should you go? Absolutely. Being on this reduced but still mighty lake takes you back to the time before the dam. The once-covered canyons' river-sculpted red sandstone walls curve and swirl like a Dali canvas. Rainbow Bridge National Monument, best accessed by boat, protects the largest natural bridge in America.

At capacity, its 1,960 miles of shoreline (more than California's Pacific shores) support a \$300 million annual tourism trade. The lake covers 86 major canyons. It extends nearly 200 miles northwest through the Glen Canyon National Recreation Area into the southeast quadrant of Utah.

The dam is an attraction in its own right. That such a project will never happen again in the U.S. is a certainty. The call for free-flowing rivers grows across the country, as does debate over how to distribute their waters.

Page, Arizona, population 7,375, has abundant lodging. Lake Powell Resort on the west shore is one of the lake's prime properties. From Phoenix, Page is just over four road hours. From Salt Lake City, six. Lodging is sparse on the Utah shore, but if solitude amid splendor fills your cup, you will leave here enriched.




**Water temps on Lake Powell can reach a comfy 80 degrees in the summer.**



## More to Explore

Utah Lake State Park, Provo ■  
 Fish Lake, Sevier County ■  
 Joes Valley Reservoir, Emery County



*Antelope Island's bison population fluctuates between 500 and 700, depending on the time of year.*

of 11 islands in Great Salt Lake. In this state-protected park, you'll find antelope, too—though despite how they're identified here, they're actually pronghorns, the second-fastest land mammals in North America.

And if you're there certain times of year, there are birds—gazillions of them, roughly, who take a rest stop here on their epic annual journeys along the Central Flyway. Whimbrel. Avocet. Snipe (the real kind, not the play-a-mean-trick kind). Curlew. Plover. There's also some great hiking, and spectacular sunsets. Book the 5-hour tour that picks you up at your downtown hotel and takes you there; find it on [tripadvisor.com](https://www.tripadvisor.com). Simple.

Yes, this is a lot of ink on one attraction. It's Great Salt Lake, one of the most iconic places in North America next to one of the country's major cities. It's like telling you one thing you should do in Chicago. But there you have it: a kernel of a notion of something maybe you didn't expect, but that we expect you'll remember for many moons.



## Great Salt Lake's Antelope Island

WHERE THE BISON & ANTELOPE PLAY  
 ■ [stateparks.utah.gov](https://stateparks.utah.gov)

Great Salt Lake is likely the only place in America where you can see wild bison 20 minutes from the downtown heart of a major metro area. Not in a zoo. Out, roaming about. Yes, bison: those horned brown, woolly, scary-because-they're-huge, can-be-ornery critters. The species most emblematic of the American West, its history, its landscapes, its cultures, its people. Not tucked away in a national park—right there, just minutes from the Mormon Tabernacle.

These Utah-based bison live on Antelope Island, one



*The lake's lovely Boardwalk  
Marina has one of the world's  
longest floating boardwalks.*



## More to Explore

Priest Lake State Park,  
Coolin ■ Lake Pend Oreille,  
Sandpoint ■ Bear Lake,  
Fish Haven

# Idaho

## 📍 Lake Coeur d'Alene

JEWEL OF THE PANHANDLE

■ [visitnorthidaho.com](http://visitnorthidaho.com)

French trappers in the late 18th century came to what is now the Idaho panhandle to harvest fur pelts on the lands of native Northwesterners. Often, they left exchanges with locals feeling they'd given more than they'd received. The trappers came to call the region's inhabitants "Heart of the Awl" (in French: Coeur d'Alene). Hard to spell, lovely to visit.

Lake Coeur d'Alene sprawls over 50 square miles, stretching 25 miles south of the city. Its

waters gather flows from the Coeur d'Alene and St. Joe rivers. Outflow sources the Spokane River, arriving at the Columbia 111 miles downstream.

Geologists say a smaller lake formed 12,000 years ago; over time, settlers built a series of dams, raising the waters and joining several smaller water bodies into the single lake tens of thousands of people enjoy year-round.

Proximity to the city of Coeur d'Alene means discriminating visitors can experience all they crave, from sumptuous meals, casino excitement, and cultural enrichment to camping, boating, fishing, hiking, skiing—

the list is endless. Do your lodging quarters have wheels or close with a zipper? Choose from campsites at several spots along 180 miles of shoreline. If walls and elevators suit you better, rooms are available at every price point.

A lake cruise should highlight every visit. A modern, five-boat fleet of 50-passenger craft sails year-round; the operator offers experiences from mac and cheese nights and wine tasting cruises to yoga and mimosa mornings and hot cocoa stargazing excursions. C'est bon, oui?

Most of the nine lakes here are completely surrounded by cliffs.

SOUTHWEST



## More to Explore

Caballo Lake, Truth or Consequences ■ Navajo Lake, Navajo Dam ■ Elephant Butte Lake, Elephant Butte

### 📍 **Bottomless Lakes State Park**

BEAUTY & THE ALIENS

■ [emnrd.nm.gov](http://emnrd.nm.gov)

Things are about to get weird. Good weird, but still...weird. If the name "Bottomless Lakes" doesn't flick your curiosity needle, the fact it's 16 miles from Roswell, New Mexico, should send your quirk-o-meter a-hopping like a New Mexican jackrabbit.

Roswell's legend stems from a military balloon crash in 1947, 75 miles away, closer to Corona, New Mexico. Years later,

enterprising humans began circulating theories about UFOs and alien bodies. Today, the town boasts 50,000 Earthlings who are loud and proud about their town's legacy; its annual UFO Festival drew 40,000 fans in 2022.

About the lakes: Contrary to multiple legends—including giant monster turtles and mega-undercurrents that swept hapless swimmers from sight—they do have bottoms. The minerals in the water are what give them their beautiful, blue-green, perhaps scarily opaque hues. Swimming is only permitted in Lea Lake, as well as scuba diving for braver souls.

Legends getting the best of you? Stay above water and paddle human-powered watercraft, fish, hike, and enjoy the

# New Mexico

spectacular desert landscapes while casting a wary eye heavenward. Many enjoy searching for avian species native to our planet. Others come for the dark night skies, excellent for stargazing and spotting otherworldly spacecraft.

Roswell's existence owes to visitors. Hotels, motels, and RV resorts abound. The state park offers 32 campsites with partial RV hookups and six with full-service hookups. For those arriving from celestial points, coordinates are 33°23'14" North, 104°31'41" West. Terrestrial Homo sapiens can head toward the southeast corner of the state, closer to Lubbock, Texas, than Albuquerque.

*The reward for camping on the shores of Lake Texoma: stunningly colorful sunsets and sunrises.*

# Oklahoma

## 📍 Lake Texoma

FLORA, FAUNA... & THE FOSSIL FUEL INDUSTRY

■ [laketexoma.com](http://laketexoma.com)

If your Spidey-sense suggests Lake Texoma sits on the Texas-Oklahoma border, gold star for you. Its proximity to Oklahoma City and Dallas makes it popular with both metro area residents. Texoma is among the largest human-made lakes in the country, supporting diverse recreation and tourism opportunities. As many as 9 million people visit the lake annually to boat, swim, fish, and relax. Lodging options range from hotels in a half dozen

nearby towns to tent camping and RV sites on private and public properties.

Texoma's ecosystem also supports the Hagerman National Wildlife Refuge, where at last count watchers have spotted 338 species of waterfowl and other birds. The refuge, oddly, has producing oil and natural gas deposits; extraction companies and federal regulators managed to craft solutions that allow these two seemingly opposing interests to coexist.

Eisenhower State Park occupies a prime hunk of lakeshore. Its Off-Highway Vehicle area attracts dirt bikers and ATVers. Hikers enjoy

an extensive trail network.

The private yacht harbor rents kayaks, paddleboards, and canoes. Rentable slips are available if you tow your own boat. Other attractions include the Harber Wildlife Museum, Grayson Frontier Village, and the Perrin Air Force Base Historical Museum. Munson Park includes an 18-hole par 62 golf course.

Samuel Taliaferro Rayburn—at 24 years, the longest serving speaker in the history of the U.S. House of Representatives—was instrumental in shepherding support for the dam that formed the lake in 1944. With his cohort in the Senate, Lyndon Johnson, he also championed civil rights.

## 📍 Great Salt Plains Lake

A WILD, OTHERWORLDLY EXPERIENCE

■ [fws.gov/refuge](https://fws.gov/refuge)

The young son of a travel blogger visiting the Okie State's Great Salt Plains Lake remarked, "Mom, it's like we're not even in Oklahoma." The desolation of a salt flat is straight out of sci-fi cinema. You half expect an AT-AT (that's all-terrain armored transport, for the non-*Star Wars* fans) to appear on the horizon shooting proton pulses.

Role-playing futuristic battle scenes not your thing? Then head over to the adjacent Salt Plains National Wildlife Refuge. This verdant reserve attracts both resident and migratory bird species. Sandhill cranes and several shorebird species stop here on their journeys, while others stay to raise their broods. It's also the prime spot

in Oklahoma to behold our national bird, the bald eagle, in the wild. At least one pair nest here; more tend to arrive in early winter.

If you plan to stay overnight, figure on reserving a campsite near the lake. Salt Plains State Park has tent sites and RV sites with hookups. There also are several private RV parks nearby. You can also reserve cabins that sleep four to six. Supply for all lodging is limited, so plan ahead.

Great Salt Plains Lake formed when the Army Corps of Engineers completed construction of a flood-control dam on the Salt Fork Arkansas River in 1941. The salt plain's geologic history makes it a prime repository for hourglass selenite crystals. This otherworldly, translucent mineral is a type of gypsum. Collectors covet it; locals bring shovels and sieves. It's the stuff you might expect to find while visiting another planet, maybe.



## More to Explore

Lake Murray Marina Beach,  
Ardmore ■ Arcadia Lake,  
Edmond ■ Broken Bow  
Lake, McCurtain County

**Top:** Visitors can dig for selenite crystals on the lake's shore. **Below:** When the water evaporates, a layer of salt remains on the surface.



# Texas

## 📍 Corpus Christi

SPRING BREAK FOR GROW-UPS

■ [visitcorpuschristi.com](http://visitcorpuschristi.com)

While college kids on Spring Break flock to its neighbor to the south, the eighth largest city in Texas offers lovely beaches on warm Gulf of Mexico waters without throngs of loud revelers. Situated on the Gulf Coast roughly halfway between Houston and the southern tip of South Padre Island, beaches here get a G-rating. Well, PG—it's the beach after all.

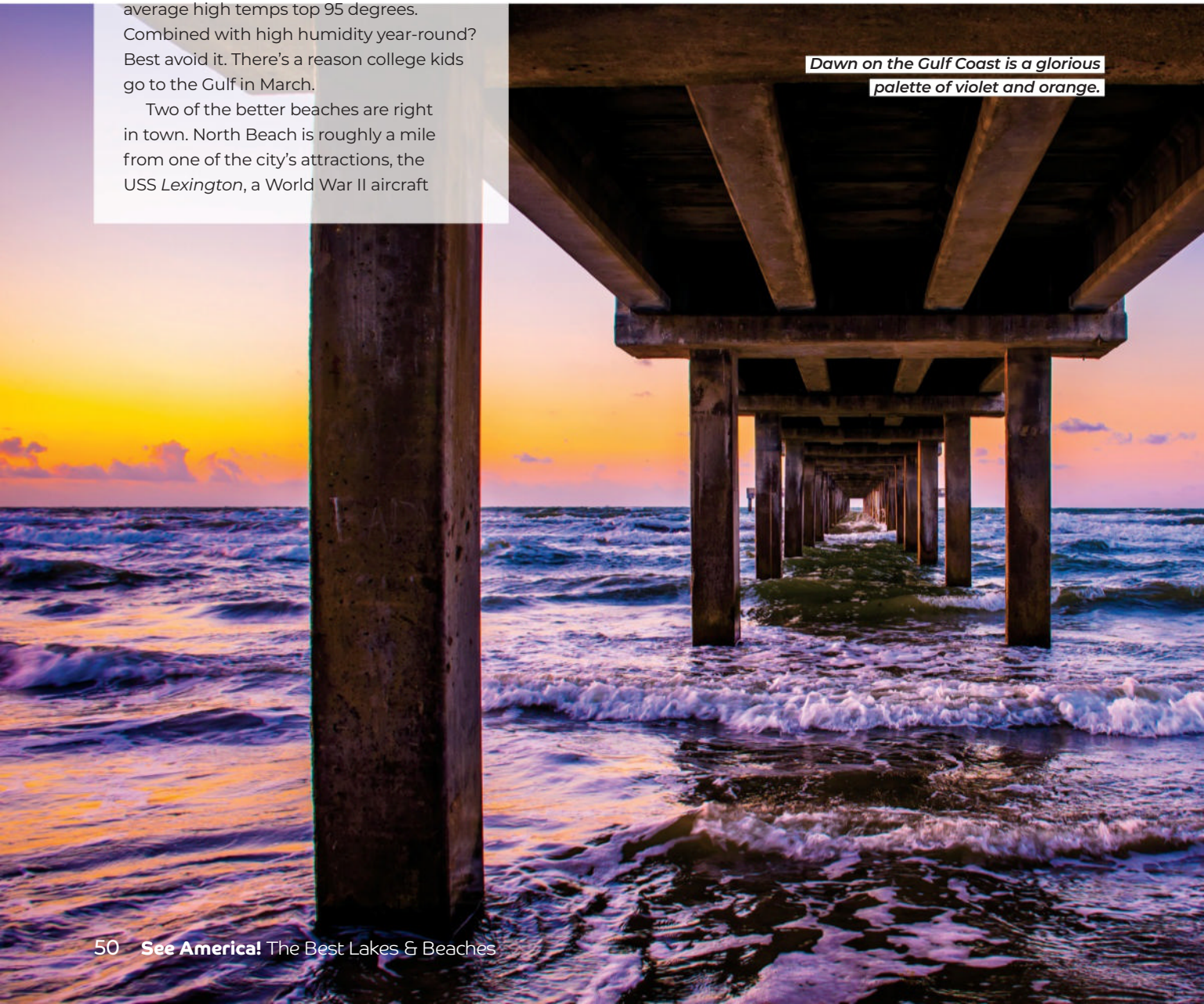
You do, however, want to pay attention to the time of year you come. Rooms are affordable in any season, but midsummer average high temps top 95 degrees. Combined with high humidity year-round? Best avoid it. There's a reason college kids go to the Gulf in March.

Two of the better beaches are right in town. North Beach is roughly a mile from one of the city's attractions, the USS *Lexington*, a World War II aircraft

carrier whose crews saw action in key Pacific Theater battles. It's now a floating history museum. Magee Beach is a few miles south. Both offer parking and neither charges a fee to visit. Both also have lots of nearby lodging options and restaurants featuring the fresh bounty of the Gulf.

You are in a major city, loaded with cultural amenities. The Art Museum of South Texas, the Texas State Aquarium, and the Concrete Street Amphitheater are three to check out. Oh, and don't forget your binoculars: The Audubon Society named Corpus Christi "The Birdiest City in North America."

*Dawn on the Gulf Coast is a glorious palette of violet and orange.*





*A great egret passes the time under a bald cypress tree.*

## More to Explore

Mustang Island State Park, Port Aransas ■ Boca Chica Wildlife Refuge, Brownsville ■ Matagorda Bay Nature Park, Matagorda

### **Caddo Lake** YEAR-ROUND REST 'N' RELAXATION STOP

■ [tpwd.texas.gov](http://tpwd.texas.gov)

Caddo Lake straddles the Texas-Louisiana border, its eastern arm less than 30 minutes from Shreveport. The lake and surrounding wetlands comprise one of the most important stopovers along North America's Mississippi Flyway, a route migratory birds rely upon as they journey thousands of miles every year. Birders from far and wide come to plump up their life lists.

The area is part of an international agreement that protects nearly 2,500 wetlands in 170 countries. The U.S. has designated 42 sites. The lake, shoreline, and wetlands knit an intricate web of backwaters, bays, lagoons, and bays

that extend roughly 25 miles east to west, with an arm reaching roughly the same distance north.

Caddo Lake State Park is on the west shore, adjacent to Caddo Lake National Wildlife Refuge. Visitors seeking overnight stays can choose from 10 cabins accommodating between two and six adults. Seven screened shelters accommodate up to eight and have RV hookups.

The area's mild climate attracts visitors year-round. Hunting and fishing are two of the most popular attractions. Waterways through the refuge are open for human-powered craft, kayaks, canoes, and paddleboards. For a genuine flavor of the area's identity, take a swamp tour and keep your eyes peeled for the region's iconic resident, the American alligator.

Another noteworthy critter, the paddlefish, inhabits these waters. Paleontologists trace the species back 300 million years, making it the longest surviving animal species in North America. Then there's The Great Raft. Intrigued? Google it. We won't spoil it for you.

A sweeping view of Theodore Roosevelt Lake as seen from Tonto National Monument. Inset: The London Bridge in Lake Havasu City.



# Arizona

## 📍 Theodore Roosevelt Lake

A MIRAGE IN THE DESERT

■ [fs.usda.gov](https://fs.usda.gov)

*"There are no words that can tell the hidden spirit of the wilderness, that can reveal its mystery, its melancholy, its charm."—Theodore Roosevelt*

The lake that bears the name of our 26th president bears witness to how Teddy used the bully pulpit to forever shape and preserve the nation's relationship with its wild places. Two hours from Phoenix's Sky Harbor Airport, Roosevelt Lake, a reservoir on the Salt River, sits like a mirage in the unforgiving desert. Few

places close to a major metropolis offer such a chance to leave civilization behind.

Hotel rooms are in Globe, 30 miles south. For a more "Teddy-like" experience, choose instead a site at one of six campgrounds along the shore. Operated by the U.S. Forest Service; RV and tent sites are available first-come, first-served. Most require a permit and a "Tonto Pass." Find details at the park website.

There are a few cabins as well as a two-bedroom floating hotel at the Roosevelt Lake Marina. Roosevelt Resort Park, 15 minutes from the marina, also rents cabins and RV sites. The

marina concession rents ski boats, pontoons, kayaks, paddleboards, and jet skis, as well as wakeboards, skis, and assorted water toys.

Anglers pursue largemouth and smallmouth bass, carp, two species of catfish, bluegill, crappie, and sunfish; be sure to carry your Arizona fishing license. With the lake as base camp, visitors can venture out to explore cave dwellings in Tonto National Monument. Hikers and mountain bikers head to several trails nearby.

Bully, indeed!

## 📍 Lake Havasu

### SONORAN DESERT OASIS

■ [golakehasvu.com](http://golakehasvu.com)

If you drew a triangle connecting Las Vegas, Phoenix, and Los Angeles, Lake Havasu would be near the center. Consequently, it draws millions of visitors annually from all three metro areas who enjoy being on, in, or around water.

In the late 20th century, Las Vegas and Phoenix were two of the fastest growing cities in America. This explosion would not have occurred without the precious water Lake Havasu and other Colorado River diversion projects deliver.

Located in the lowlands of the Sonoran Desert, Havasu's west shore is in California, its east in Arizona. Lake Havasu City has 60,000 residents and abundant hotel lodging. Interestingly, the California side is sparsely populated and has only two hotels.

Because the average daytime high temperature is over 100 degrees June through September, Havasu is popular with RV owners and renters more so than tent campers; *rvshare.com* lists its top 10 RV parks and campgrounds on or near the lakeshore. As folks spend most of their time in and on the water anyway, houseboating is hugely popular, if a bit pricey. A typical rental craft is \$300 a night per person during peak season.

If you're feeling the urge to wager, Laughlin, Nevada, 90 minutes north of Lake Havasu City, boasts more than a dozen casinos.

Lake Havasu City also boasts an attraction you would not expect to find in the desert Southwest: London Bridge. Not a replica—the actual London Bridge. To learn why, you could Google it. But why not go and see it for yourself?



## More to Explore

Tonto National Monument, Roosevelt ■ Lake Havasu Replica Lighthouses ■ Crack in the Mountain Trail, Lake Havasu City

**Top:** Copper Canyon is a popular spot for cliff jumping. **Below:** Lake Havasu is a haven for those who like to chill on the water.

# Nevada

## 📍 Pyramid Lake SACRED HOME OF “THE PEOPLE” ■ [pyramidlake.us](http://pyramidlake.us)

Pyramid Lake sits within the sovereign homeland of the Pyramid Lake band of the Paiute Nation, in Nevada. Its waters cover 125,000 acres, receiving and holding the Truckee River that flows from Lake Tahoe.

The Paiute will always welcome you. They invite you to camp, to boat on their beautiful waters, and to catch the fish that have sustained them for centuries. In fact, a term they use for themselves loosely translates in English to “fish eaters.” The

People invite you to walk on their piece of Earth and view ancient petroglyphs and other sacred places in their homeland.

Paiute refer to themselves as “The People.” This illustrates the intrinsic bond they have with their surroundings. Before you go, you must, in a legally binding fashion, visit the lake’s website. Read, learn, appreciate, comply. Behave with dignity and respect for your host. Oh, and it’s the law. Preachy? Necessarily so.

Travel blurbs often refer to the human beings present before white settlers displaced them from their homes. At Pyramid Lake, you have the honor of visiting the home of people living on THEIR land, where their ancestors lived for generations innumerable. The lake and land are roughly 30 miles northeast of Reno, which bills itself The Biggest Little City in America; its major attraction is its concentration of casinos (in case you’re feeling lucky).

Pyramid Lake holds special appeal for anglers. The record Lahontan cutthroat trout, 41 pounds, was caught here in 1925. These native salmonids routinely exceed 10 pounds. The People wish you good luck.



***Pyramid Lake is the only habitat in the world for the endangered cui-ui fish.***

*The shore at Sand Harbor State Park, where the water is crystal clear and the rock formations stand in greeting.*



## More to Explore

Lake Mohave, Clark County  
 ■ Overland Lake, Elko County  
 ■ Topaz Lake, Douglas County

But people visit Tahoe from the far reaches of Earth—read: immensely popular place. Here's the gist: Entrance gates open at 8 a.m. Vehicles queue before sunrise. From Memorial Day to Labor Day, the lot fills before 9 a.m. Gates close. That's it. Come back at 5 p.m. for a chance to catch sunset or try tomorrow. No overnight stays, but lodging and campsites are close by.

In 2022, the two boat ramps closed as Tahoe's waters sank to a level never before seen. Intense winter storms hold the promise that ramps will open in summer 2023. Don't be deterred. Swim, snorkel, scuba, paddle, fish, sit in a comfy chair, and soak in the magnificence.

Reason and sheer magnificence suggest spending as much time here as possible. A week is long enough to experience a tiny fraction of what's possible.

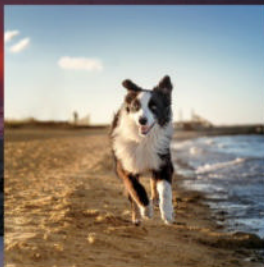
## 📍 Lake Tahoe

**SPLendor IN THE RANGE OF LIGHT**

■ [parks.nv.gov](https://parks.nv.gov)

Warning: Lake Tahoe instills a fervent desire to sell your possessions and spend the rest of your life in its thrall. At 6,200 feet, the crystalline waters of the largest alpine lake in North America shimmer amid peaks of the Sierra Nevada. Their pale granite inspired John Muir to dub it "The Range of Light."

Sand Harbor State Park occupies a peninsula along State Highway 28 on the lake's pitched Nevada shore. Several carriers serve nearby Reno International Airport. This makes a visit to paradise a short flight from anywhere in the continental U.S.



### **GREAT DOG BEACHES IN AMERICA**

**Rosie's Dog Beach**  
California

**Jupiter Beach**  
Florida

**Wildwood Dog Park & Beach**  
New Jersey

**Lake George**  
New York

**Union Reservoir**  
Colorado



## More to Explore

Kiptopeke State Park, Cape Charles ■ Roanoke Pinball Museum, Roanoke ■ Old City Cemetery, Lynchburg



# Virginia

Families play on the beach at Smith Mountain Lake State Park.

 **Smith Mountain Lake**  
A REFRESHINGLY DIFFERENT DESTINATION  
■ [smith-mountain-lake.com](http://smith-mountain-lake.com)

Scenes from the 1991 comedy film *What About Bob?* were shot here, and the area serves as the setting for the 2012 bootlegger film *Lawless* (but the *Lawless* scenes were actually shot in Georgia). OK, now that we have that out there, let's explore this gorgeous lake in Virginia's Roanoke region.

When a lake meets the mountains, it's always a magical sight. Smith Mountain Lake is

no exception. There are two public beaches on the lake, one of them is in Smith Mountain Lake State Park. It has a 500-foot swimming beach, a seasonal snack bar, and canoes, kayaks, hydrobikes, paddleboats, pontoon boats, ski boats, and jet skis are available for rent. If you'd like to relax a little more, book a sightseeing, lunch, or dinner cruise on the *Virginia Dare*.

You could spend an entire day boating or paddling on the lake—there are numerous waterfront restaurants to stop in for meals and refreshments. There's even an ice cream boat! But there are a lot of full- and

part-time residences on the shoreline, so the summer weekends can get a little hectic. If you want peace and quiet, consider a midweek or off-season trip.

When you're waterlogged, there are plenty of area attractions to experience. Pop in to an area vineyard, shop in the boutiques, or ride horses at Spring Valley Farm.

Opt to stay in a cabin or camp right at Smith Mountain Lake State Park, or choose from numerous private vacation rentals on and off the water for quality R&R.

## 📍 Cape Charles

NOT YOUR AVERAGE BEACH TOWN

■ [capecharlesvirginiascape.com](http://capecharlesvirginiascape.com)

Cape Charles is located on Virginia's eastern shore on a small peninsula that's bordered by the Chesapeake Bay to the west, King's Creek to the north, and Old Plantation Creek to the southeast. The city was founded as a planned community by ferry and railroad companies. When you arrive, make a point to stop in the Cape Charles Museum & Welcome Center to learn about the town's unique history.

Cape Charles Town Beach, located at the edge of downtown, is the only public beach on the Virginia's eastern shore that doesn't charge for use or parking. Families with small children will appreciate the calm, shallow water and the opportunity to spot shells, hermit crabs, and other aquatic life. Visitors can spend the morning at the beach and walk to one of the many nearby restaurants for lunch. But make sure you stay long enough to catch a sunset from the beach—they're epic.

It's also free to fish from the cape's long pier, which is conveniently lit in the evenings for night fishing, and there are several benches with shaded areas for day anglers. (Make sure you take a selfie with the "LOVE" art installation located nearby.) If you want to wander a bit, book a boat tour to the barrier islands, which are prime spots for bird-watching and beachcombing.

If you are visiting in fall, don't miss a stop at Eastern Shore of Virginia National Wildlife Refuge to witness the dramatic migration of millions of monarch butterflies, songbirds, and raptors. Since the town has such a rich story, rent a historic home or book at a quaint B&B—there are plenty available.

**Cape Charles Bay is home to many sailboats—try to get on one if you can. Inset: King Neptune guards the public beach.**



# West Virginia

## 📍 Stonewall Jackson Lake

MOUNTAIN STATE LUXURY

■ [stonewallresort.com](http://stonewallresort.com)

Named for the West Virginia native who was one of the most gifted tactical commanders in U.S. history, 2,600-acre Stonewall Jackson Lake is set in the lovely West Virginia mountains in Appalachia country, not far from Roanoke. Part of Stonewall Jackson State Park (aka Stonewall Jackson Resort), it's a popular vacation area for couples and families.

Rent a pontoon or bring your boat to play on the water, or paddle through the lake's many scenic inlets. The marina also rents CraigCat compact boats if you prefer a more thrilling ride. Guests can also enjoy a leisure excursion on the resort's tour boat, *Little Sorrel*.

Anglers also find plenty to do here, as the lake is among the top-rated muskie, crappie, and bass lakes in West Virginia, and there's also

a plethora of trout near the dam. Go on your own or book a guided tour to discover the hottest spots.

There are 20-plus trails that meander through the park's 18,000-acre Stonewall Jackson Wildlife Management Area for those who like to explore the woodlands on two feet or two wheels. Animal spotting includes turkey, deer, squirrel, and various other small mammals and birds. If you are fan of the links, bring your clubs and golf the Arnold Palmer signature course.

A lovely Adirondack-style lodge is set on the lake, which is an ideal place to rest and restore. Facilities include restaurants, an indoor/outdoor pool, a fitness center, and a spa. At night, the fire pit area is a great place to make new friends and enjoy some s'mores. If you prefer more nature, camping is also available in the park.



## More to Explore

Appalachian Trail Visitors Center, Harpers Ferry ■ West Virginia State Museum, Charleston ■ West Virginia Waterfall Trail

**The Stonewall Jackson Dam project was completed in 1990 as a way to help control area flooding.**





SOUTH

**GREAT  
PADDLING  
LAKES IN  
AMERICA**

**Lake Tahoe**  
California

**Lady Bird Lake**  
Texas

**Chesapeake Bay**  
Virginia

**Boundary Waters  
Canoe Area  
Wilderness**  
Minnesota

**Prince William  
Sound**  
Alaska

*Stonewall Resort's Little Sorrel tour boat waits for passengers to board.*

# Kentucky

**📍 Dale Hollow  
Lake State  
Resort Park**  
A YEAR-ROUND OASIS  
■ [parks.ky.gov](http://parks.ky.gov)

Located in south-central Kentucky near the Tennessee border, this park offers adventure on the water and lush greenery on land, making it a wonderful place to take the family for an active vacation. Overnight visitors can either camp, stay in a well-appointed cottage, or book a room at The Mary Ray Oaken Lodge, which has an on-site restaurant.

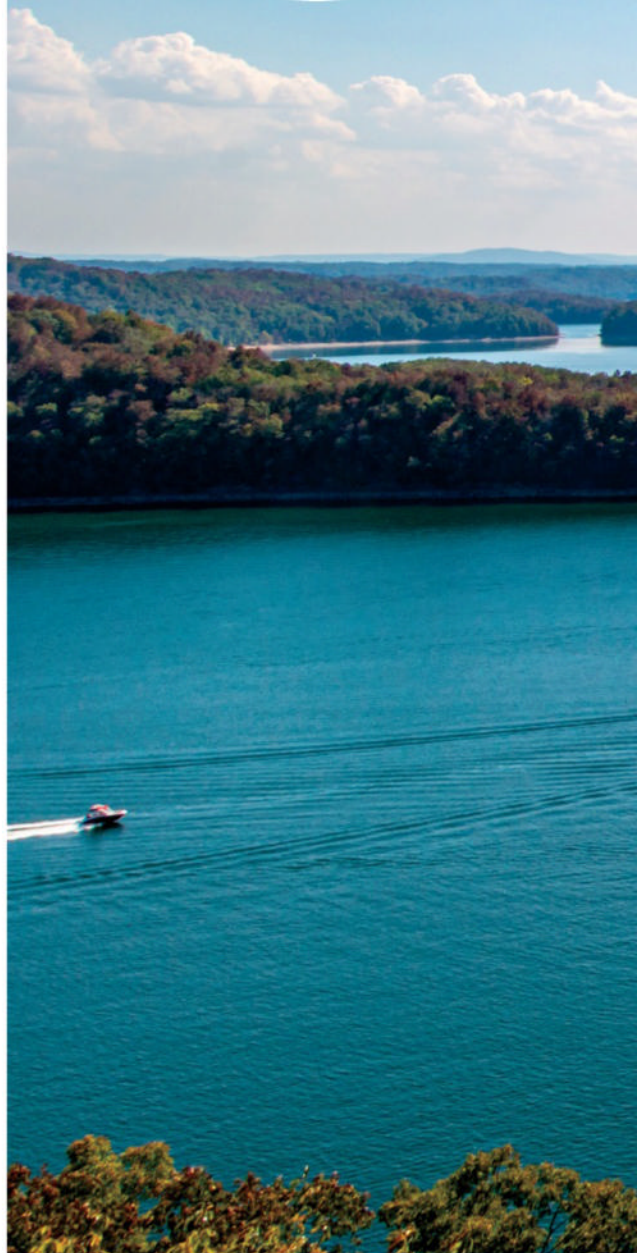
Rent a boat at the marina or take a canoe to explore the coves and shorelines of the lake. Bring your bait and tackle—it's fishing season all year long here. Lucky anglers can catch crappie, bream, muskie, walleye, trout, catfish, and five species of bass in the clean, clear waters. If you are looking to chill, there are many beaches within the park to lay out your blanket and watch the kids splash around.

When it's time to stretch your legs, there are over 15 miles of non-motorized

trails to explore. Bring your binoculars—the birding is excellent, especially on Eagle Point Trail where you might encounter indigo buntings and scarlet tanagers in the summer and spot Cooper's hawks, northern bobwhites, and wild turkeys throughout the year. Eagle watching is especially good from December through February. If hiking is not your thing, the trails welcome bikes and horses too. Brave souls can take a tour of Cindy Cave to explore its subterranean nooks and crannies.

The park also boasts an 18-hole golf course—it's hilly, so it's somewhat of a challenge, but the scenery is worth it. The rock outcroppings, small caves, springs, gorges, ponds, and mountain views make it one of the most beautiful courses in the country.

Plenty of fun, kid-oriented offerings (mini golf, playgrounds, and a pool) make this a top spot for spring school breaks and summer vacationing, but don't dismiss visiting in the fall. It's a leaf-peepers' paradise.



*An 11-lb. 15-oz. smallmouth bass was caught here in 1955—the world record. Inset: The Mary Ray Oaken Lodge, as seen from Eagle Point.*



## More to Explore

- Kentucky Music Hall of Fame, Mt. Vernon
- Cumberland County Playhouse, Crossville, TN
- Cordell Hull Birthplace and Museum, Byrdstown, TN

Fall is a postcard-perfect season on Lake Lure. Inset: Chimney Rock offers magnificent views.



# North Carolina

**📍 Lake Lure**  
**WHERE JOHNNY AND BABY DANCED**  
■ [townoflakelure.com](http://townoflakelure.com)

Set in the foothills of North Carolina's Blue Ridge Mountains about 30 minutes from Asheville, picturesque Lake Lure is surrounded by mountains and granite cliffs, making it a gorgeous destination to unwind. The area is probably best-known as the setting for many scenes in the 1987 film *Dirty Dancing*, but the views alone garner A-list status.

It's not just a place to sit back and soak up some rays, but you are certainly encouraged to do so.

Family-friendly activities include splashing in the lakefront waterpark, taking guided boat tours, and walking the scenic Flowering Bridge, a former highway that was converted into a 155-foot botanical walkway filled with flowers and butterflies. Local volunteers maintain the plants here, so it's free to all.

The area is a hiker's dream—there are plenty of trails in nearby Chimney Rock State Park that range from easy to strenuous. If you're up for it, the reward for a climb to the top of 315-foot Chimney Rock is a 75-mile panoramic view of Lake Lure and Hickory Nut Gorge.



(If you aren't up to the task, there's an elevator that takes you almost to the top.) The Great Woodlands Adventure Trail is great for kids, and the Hickory Nut Falls trail features, yes, a stunning waterfall.

Although the water sports make this area an ideal summer vacation spot, consider visiting in fall—the foliage is breathtaking. There are plenty of cozy accommodations in the area ranging from rustic to luxurious.

## 📍 Kure Beach

READY. SET. UNWIND.

■ [carolinabeach.com](http://carolinabeach.com)

Home to the oldest fishing pier on the Atlantic, this coastal retreat has small-town feel reminiscent of days gone by. First stop: Ocean Front Park and Pavilion to walk the paths, let the loose on the playground, fish for a spell on the newly renovated 711-foot pier, and maybe catch some of the park's free kid-friendly events. Then kick back and relax on the beach.

Kure's North Carolina Aquarium at Fort Fisher is a fun, educational destination for the whole family. Spend the day exploring marine life of all kinds, including Asian otters at play, an albino alligator, loggerhead sea turtles, sharks, eels, and a rescued bald eagle. Then head outside to the

Adventure Reef interactive playground for more adventure.

Kure Beach is also a spot for history-lovers. Take the scenic 2-mile Basin Trail in Fort Fisher State Recreation Area and see a WWII bunker that was once home to the "Fort Fisher Hermit." Then head over to Fort Fisher State Historic Site to see where the largest land-sea battle of the Civil War was fought. There's a shipwreck here too—scuba divers can see the lower hull, engines, paddle wheels, and boilers of the Civil War blockade runner *Condor* at North Carolina's first Heritage Dive Site.

There are a number of vintage (but comfortable), family-owned hotels near the beach that will make you feel like you are 10 years old again, so just do it. And be sure to grab a beer at Bud & Joe's Sandbar—just don't get stranded.

**Top:** Sunrises at the pier are worth the early call time. **Below:** The sandy, unspoiled beach is a big draw.

### 📍 More to Explore

Biltmore, Asheville ■  
Wrightsville Beach Museum of History, Wrightsville Beach ■  
Carolina Beach Lake Park,  
Carolina Beach, SC

# Tennessee

## 📍 Radnor Lake State Park

A WILDLIFE HAVEN

■ [tnstateparks.com](http://tnstateparks.com)

Nature lovers looking to escape the Music City madness will find this gem only 30 minutes away. The lake was created in 1914 by the L&N Railroad company as a water source. Today it's a 1,300-acre nature preserve where you can take in the natural beauty and really recharge.

Make the Walter Criley Visitor Center your first stop. Learn about the history of the area, see historical artifacts and wildlife displays, and get expert advice on where to go and what to look for. Then head on the almost 8 miles of trails to see some beautiful things. Note: Radnor Lake isn't a great spot for water sports, but the plants and animals make it worth a trip.

Bring your binoculars and a camera. Owls, herons, and waterfowl, many species of amphibians and reptiles, and mammals such as mink and otter call this ecologically diverse park home. The wildflowers here

are lovely, as are the ferns, fungi, mosses, shrubs, trees, and vines that provide habitat for the animal life. Park rangers lead wildflower walks, astronomy hikes, canoe floats, and more.

At The Barbara J. Mapp Aviary Education Center, where they care for injured birds of prey that can't be released safely, you can get "up close" to a great horned owl, a red-tailed hawk, a vulture, and bald eagles. Then stand on the 550-foot boardwalk and admire the surrounding hillside.

Radnor Lake State Park is day-use only, so plan to stay elsewhere. The Nashville metro area has countless options.



*A stunning daybreak scene is the reward for rising with the birds.*



Old Hickory Lake has over 440 miles of scenic shoreline to explore.



## More to Explore

Jack Daniel Distillery, Lynchburg ■ Grand Ole Opry, Nashville ■ The Johnny Cash Museum, Nashville



## 📍 Old Hickory Lake

IN THE LAND OF COUNTRY MUSIC

■ [old-hickory-lake.org](http://old-hickory-lake.org)

Old Hickory Lake was named after Andrew Jackson, a Tennessee-native whose peers called him “Old Hickory” because of his tough personality. Due to its proximity to Nashville, country music stars are drawn here; Johnny Cash and Roy Orbison were next-door neighbors. And Taylor Swift lived on the lake when she was a teen.

The public beach offers plenty of room to spread out, splash around, and take in the rays. If you are looking for a scenic day on the water, there are several marinas that rent out boats. The 22,500-acre reservoir is a big place to

explore. Old Hickory Lake fishing is world class—bass, catfish, and crappie thrive here.

Mountain bikers can head to Shutes Branch to navigate rough terrain, ledges, and turns. But make sure you stop and take in the sights: The area is known for its migratory songbirds, blue herons, snowy egrets, white-tailed deer, rabbits, and turkeys.

In season, architecture enthusiasts can tour the oldest building in middle Tennessee, Historic Rock Castle. The former home of General Daniel Smith is in extraordinary condition considering it’s been there for over two centuries.

Lodging at Old Hickory Lake runs the gamut of creature comforts, from lakeside camping to luxury vacation home rentals.



## More to Explore

Garvan Woodland Gardens,  
Hot Springs ■ Fordyce  
Bathhouse, Hot Springs ■  
Lake Catherine State Park,  
Hot Springs

*Tiny islands dot the coastline of Lake  
Ouachita—a kayaker's dream.*

## GREAT FISHING LAKES IN AMERICA

**Green Lake**  
Wisconsin

**Toledo Bend Reservoir**  
Texas

**Lake Dora**  
Florida

**Lake Champlain**  
New York

**Strawberry Reservoir**  
Utah

# Arkansas

## **Lake Ouachita** THE NATURAL STATE'S LARGEST LAKE [arkansasstateparks.com](http://arkansasstateparks.com)

Lake Ouachita (pronounced WASH-ah-taw) is human-made and the largest lake that lies completely within the state of Arkansas. It's home to 40,000 acres of crystal-clear water surrounded by the lush Ouachita National Forest. Its cleanliness is due partly to the building restrictions in place—it is designated as a pristine public Corps of Engineers Lake and residences cannot be constructed on the shoreline. This is good news for recreational tourists, as the waters are perfect for quiet relaxation and adventure.

Visitors can camp or stay in Lake Ouachita State Park cabins or choose more comfortable quarters and culture in nearby Hot Springs (just a short 10-minute drive).

In addition to the numerous water activities here, the fishing is exceptional. Bream, crappie, catfish, striped bass, and largemouth bass live in its teeming waters. When the

Blakely Mountain Dam was created in 1953, it created Lake Ouachita and two other surrounding lakes. The area was not clear-cut first, so there are still trees under the surface that provide habitat for fish and other creatures to thrive. Slips and motorized and nonmotorized boat rentals are available in the park marina for those who want to cruise its waters or take a self-guided aquatic tour of the Ouachita Geo-Float Trail and marvel at the unique rock formations.

Two trails within the lake's surrounding terrain accommodate all fitness levels. On Dogwood Trail, novices can take a short half-mile stroll to see the wildlife (markers are included on the paths). For hikers who crave more adventure, the 4-mile Caddo Bend Trail features wildflowers, boulder gardens, quartz, scenic views, and a towering observation deck that overlooks the lake. After the hike, relax at Three Sisters Springs and marvel at the unforgettable sunset over the nearby beach.

*This region is a temperate rainforest—it gets over 100 inches of rain per year. Inset: There are dozens of waterfalls to see around the lake.*

# South Carolina

## **Lake Jocassee** PLACE OF THE LOST ONE ■ [southcarolinaparks.com](http://southcarolinaparks.com)

The name Jocassee comes from a Cherokee lost-love legend about a maiden of that name. It means “place of the lost one.” The 7,500-acre reservoir is only accessible from inside Oconee County’s Devils Fork State Park, so the shores are largely undeveloped, making it a great scenic getaway for couples, friends, and families.

Four mountain streams and several gorgeous waterfalls feed into the lake, so the water is cool and clean. Guided boat tours are available, or you can rent kayaks, paddleboards,

canoes, or pontoons to explore the lake’s beauty on your own. Scuba divers are attracted to the water here, as it is clearer than any other lake in the area. Although there’s plenty of splashy fun to be had, Lake Jocassee’s main attraction is the trout fishing.

The deep water (it can be up to 300 feet deep in some spots) provides excellent habitat for trophy trout and smallmouth bass. It’s the only lake in South Carolina that contains both. Other lake residents include brown trout, rainbow trout, white bass, largemouth bass, bluegill, and black crappie, so pack your bait and tackle.



For those who want to make a getaway of it, Devils Fork State Park offers a few lodging options. Campers can reserve sites on the two campgrounds near the lake’s shore. Those who seek more creature comforts can rent one of the park’s 20 well-appointed villas. There’s complimentary Wi-Fi at the ranger station if you need to check in on the outside world. But why?

## **Hunting Island State Park**

THE PALMETTO STATE'S GEM

■ [southcarolinaparks.com](http://southcarolinaparks.com)

Hunting Island, located a short 25-minute drive from Beaufort, is South Carolina's most popular state park for good reason. The 5,000-acre lowland setting is a feast for outdoor enthusiasts, unspoiled beach lovers, and all the migratory and full-time wildlife residents. Make sure you book a dolphin cruise during your stay—bottlenose dolphin pods love to frolic in the saltwater estuary.

Eight miles of intertwining trails of varying intensity provide opportunities to see nature on foot or bike, including a boardwalk trail where you can observe marsh life. Or pass the day fishing: There are various spots on the island dedicated to angling, including the 950-foot pier at the south end of the park. Wanna go crabbing? The park offers classes on how best

to catch them during certain times of the year.

The island is home to Hunting Island Light, which was rebuilt in 1875 after it was destroyed during the Civil War. The structure has a unique feature—due to the amount of erosion these barrier islands endure, it was constructed of interchangeable cast-iron sections so it could be dismantled should it ever need to be moved.

Nature enthusiasts will also enjoy a trip to neighboring St. Phillips Island, which is accessible only by boat. Businessman and conservationist Ted Turner once owned the island and made sure the unique, unspoiled land be left as-is for generations. Take it all in.

If you want to stay at the park, camping is the only option, so bring your RV or tent. It's fun—the camp areas are located on the north end near the ocean.



### **More to Explore**

The Point Neighborhood, Beaufort ■ Kazoo Museum & Factory, Beaufort ■ Bertha Lee Strickland Cultural Museum, Seneca

**Top: Hunting Island Light is on the National Register of Historic Places.**

**Below: Pelicans soar over the park's salt marsh boardwalk.**



# Georgia

## 📍 **Cumberland Island National Seashore**

**THE LARGEST GOLDEN ISLE**

■ [nps.gov/cuis](https://www.nps.gov/cuis)

The largest and southernmost of Georgia's barrier islands, The Cumberland Island National Seashore contains over 36,000 acres of ecological diversity, including beaches, dunes, marshes, and freshwater lakes. If you're going just for the day, it's a good idea to book a guided walking tour to learn about the area's fascinating historical residents, including Native Americans, missionaries, enslaved African-Americans, and wealthy industrialists, and to see the gorgeous sights.

One of the island's top attractions is the Gilded-Age Dungeness Mansion, built by Thomas Carnegie in 1884. Over the years, Carnegie's widow made so many extensive additions that it was over 35,000 square feet by 1916. It caught fire in 1959, so only the brick and stone walls

remain, but it's still an impressive place. Don't miss the Ice House Museum here, a structure built with 2-foot-thick sawdust-lined walls used to store large quantities of ice that were shipped in for the estate dwellers to use. George Carnegie's mansion, Plum Orchard, is still intact and offers free tours. Pop in to see incredible architecture and posh furniture the incredibly rich chose for their home away from home.

Hiking or biking the 50-plus miles of trails is a feast for flora and fauna lovers. Live oaks, palmetto, and stately pines all thrive here. Wild horses roam and loggerhead sea turtles nest on the 17 miles of undeveloped beaches, and many species of birds inhabit the diverse landscape.

The island is only accessible by boat, so plan accordingly. For those who intend to rough it, campsites can be booked through the park's website. If you like it a little more luxurious, consider the all-inclusive Greyfield Inn—even a short stay there is an unforgettable experience.



*The Dungeness Mansion ruins offer a glimpse of the luxurious Carnegie life.*

*Non-native feral horses have been freely roaming the park since the mid-1900s.*





## More to Explore

St. Marys Submarine Museum,  
St. Marys ■ Fort Frederica  
National Monument,  
St. Simons Island ■ Timucuan  
Ecological & Historic Preserve,  
Jacksonville, FL



# Alabama

## Dauphin Island

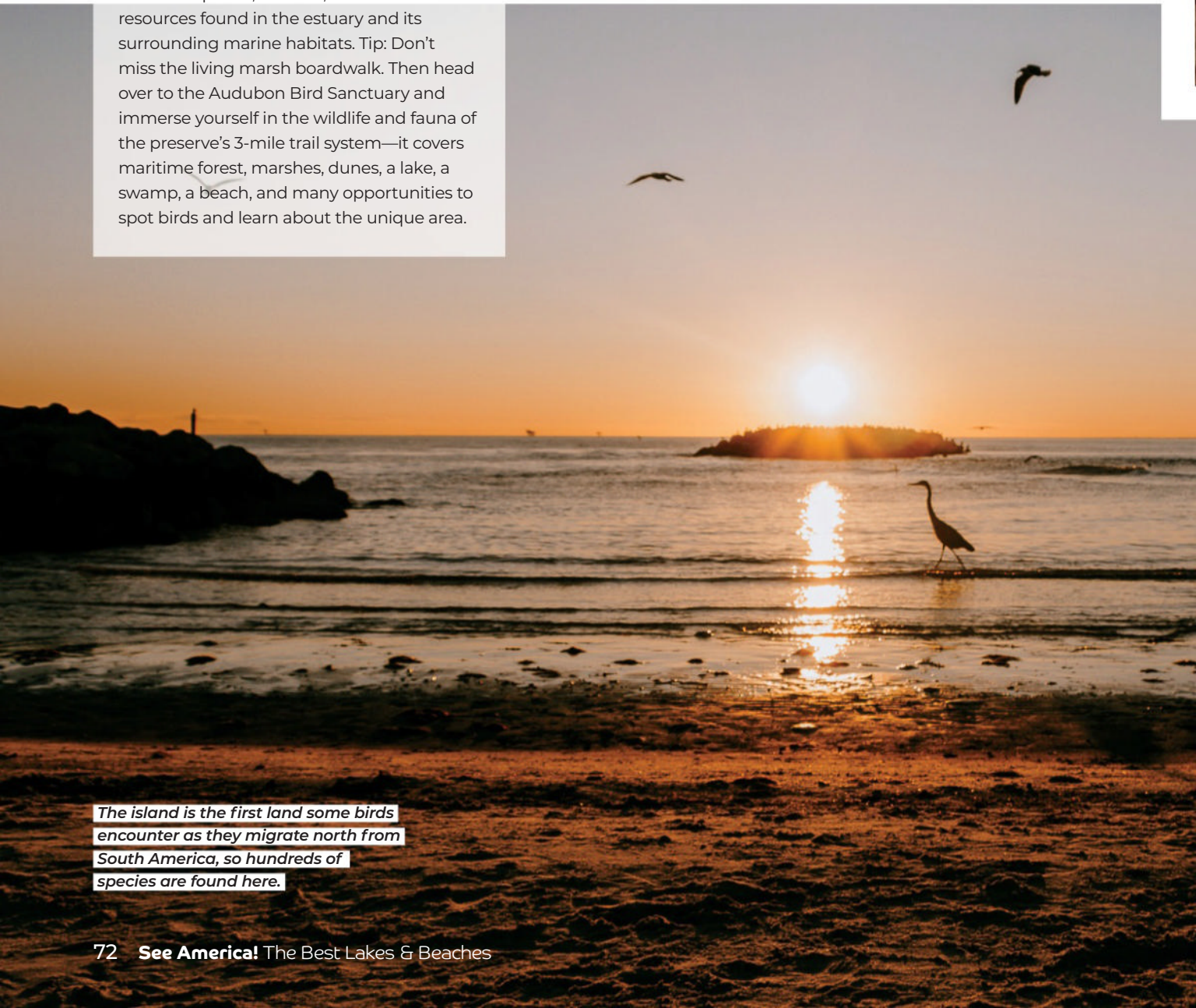
THE SOUTHERNMOST  
POINT OF ALABAMA

■ [townofdauphinisland.org](http://townofdauphinisland.org)

This barrier island in the Gulf of Mexico is accessible via ferry or the 3½-mile bridge from the mouth of Mobile Bay. Besides the pristine public (and bonus: dog-friendly) beaches, there are numerous family-friendly activities that make Dauphin Island an ideal destination to get away from it all.

Discover hands-on exhibits (including a stingray pool) at the Alabama Aquarium at the Dauphin Island Sea Lab. You'll learn all about the plants, animals, and other natural resources found in the estuary and its surrounding marine habitats. Tip: Don't miss the living marsh boardwalk. Then head over to the Audubon Bird Sanctuary and immerse yourself in the wildlife and fauna of the preserve's 3-mile trail system—it covers maritime forest, marshes, dunes, a lake, a swamp, a beach, and many opportunities to spot birds and learn about the unique area.

History buffs will revel in the fort that once protected the easternmost entrance to Mobile Bay. Fort Gaines, which has stood for over 150 years and played a role in the Battle of Mobile Bay during the Civil War, offers stunning views of the bay and the Gulf of Mexico and houses original cannons, a blacksmith shop, kitchens, tunnels, and a museum. Or hop on the Mobile Bay Ferry to visit Fort Morgan, located on the opposite side of the channel, which also served as a key spot in the Battle of Mobile Bay. In addition to history it offers, the beaches here are less touristy and simply gorgeous.



*The island is the first land some birds encounter as they migrate north from South America, so hundreds of species are found here.*

Morning fog sets in over Lake Guntersville, Alabama's largest lake.

SOUTH

More to Explore

Lewis Smith Lake, northern Alabama ■ Gulf Shores Beach, Gulf Shores ■ Sand Island Lighthouse, Mobile Bay

Lake Guntersville State Park

FUN IN THE SOUTHERN SUN  
■ [alapark.com](http://alapark.com)

When President Franklin Roosevelt signed the Tennessee Valley Authority Act in 1933 during the Great Depression, recreation was not foremost in his mind. Good-paying jobs were. CCC workers began dam construction on the Tennessee River two years later and wrapped up in 1939, forming Lake Guntersville. Fast-forward 80-odd years, and leisure opportunities abound in and around what is now Lake Guntersville State Park.

Ninety minutes north-northeast from the Birmingham Shuttlesworth International Airport, lakeshore lodging options

run the gamut from luxury hotels to campgrounds for tenters and hookups for recreational vehicles. Active folks can boat, paddle, swim, fish, hike, cycle, and horseback-ride, while adrenaline junkies can juice their BPMs on the park zipline. For golfers, there's The Eagle's Nest, the park's 18-hole championship layout. After all that exertion, head to the beach to hydrate in a comfy chair in the sun. (Speaking of eagles, the park service runs a midwinter Eagle Awareness program to showcase recovery of bald eagle populations in the region—reservations required; check the park website for more info.)

Pulse-pounding isn't your thing? Then peruse the collections at the Guntersville Museum and Cultural Center. The museum occupies a former armory, a restored native stone edifice filled with artifacts that highlight the area's culture and history reaching back to pre-colonial times.



## **GREAT FAMILY BEACHES IN AMERICA**

**Silver Beach**  
Michigan

**Santa Cruz**  
California

**Old Orchard  
Beach**  
Maine

**Myrtle Beach**  
South Carolina

**Ocean City**  
Maryland

**Seaside Beach**  
Oregon



## **More to Explore**

- USS *Alabama* Battleship Memorial Park, Mobile, AL
- Buccaneer State Park, Waveland
- Bellingrath Gardens and Home, Theodore, AL

*Mississippi has 26 miles  
of coastal beaches to enjoy.*

# Mississippi

## 📍 Ocean Springs' Front Beach

THE CITY OF DISCOVERY

■ [gulfcoast.org](http://gulfcoast.org)

Family-oriented Front Beach in Ocean Springs is located on the lovely Mississippi Gulf Coast on the eastern shore of Biloxi Bay. The city is surrounded by bayous and is near the Gulf Islands National Seashore, so it's a perfect scenic spot for a family getaway. The beach itself is a 2.2-mile stretch covered in pristine white sand with fire pits, volleyball nets, and an oversized chess board. Anglers can fish from the Chester M. McPhearson Pier that stretches out to the bay or book a charter to fish in the Gulf.

Culturally rich downtown Ocean Springs is only a few blocks from the beach. Spend a morning perusing the art galleries, museums, and independent boutiques, and grab a seafood lunch before heading out to sunbathe. Must sees: the Walter

Anderson Museum of Art, the Mississippi Vietnam Veteran's Memorial, and the Charnley-Norwood House, which is said to have been an early Frank Lloyd Wright-inspired design.

Get your steps in on the Fontainebleau Nature Trail, located in the nearby Mississippi Sandhill Crane National Wildlife Refuge, where endangered sandhill cranes reside in the wet pine savannah habitat. The trail is an easy one (just over 1.5 miles), so even the littles can get a taste of nature. Be sure to stop at the overlooks, especially the one that towers over Davis Bayou—the scenery is gorgeous.

Summers are sweltering in the Magnolia State, so if you like to be active, plan your trip in early spring or fall. Lodging in and around Biloxi Bay is plentiful—take your pick from full-on resorts, chain and eclectic boutique hotels, B&Bs, and private rentals.



**A new fishing pier was built after Hurricane Katrina ravaged the area.**

*The sun goes down over the pier at Fontainebleau State Park.*  
*Inset: A night heron at Lake Martin's Cypress Island Nature Preserve.*

# Louisiana

## 📍 Fontainebleau State Park

FROM SUGAR MILL TO PARADISE

■ [lstateparks.com](http://lstateparks.com)

Located across from New Orleans on Lake Pontchartrain, this quiet scenic park is just an hour's drive from the Crescent City. It was once the site of a sugar mill plantation named Fontainebleau (after the forest in France) that was built in 1829—visitors can tour what remains of it. The plantation is interesting, but the real attraction here is the nature.

The 2,800-acre park is bordered by three waterways:

Lake Pontchartrain, Bayou Cane, and Bayou Castine, and the converging waters have created an ideal habitat for many bird species, such as the red-cockaded woodpecker, brown-headed nuthatch, and Bachman's sparrow. An old railroad track that runs through the park has been converted as part of the Tammany Trace, so hikers, bikers, and in-line skaters are in for a treat. For those who want to brush up on their botany, trail markers point out the different tree and shrub species along the way

Sunbathers will revel on the sandy beach, and park visitors are often treated to the sight of



sailboats dotting Lake Pontchartrain's stretching waters. Sunsets here are unforgettable; the pier located just outside the visitor center is a prime spot to catch one.

Area lodging includes impressive lakeside homes, but one of the best ways to enjoy the scenery and quiet is by booking a glamping site on the park's website.

## 📍 Lake Martin

### SWAMPLAND BEAUTY

■ [louisianatravel.com](https://louisianatravel.com)

Lake Martin is the main feature of the Cypress Island Preserve, an area in south-central Louisiana where The Nature Conservancy is restoring almost 10,000 acres of natural cypress-tupelo swamp and bottomland hardwood forest. If you are just passing through, stop in the visitor center to learn about the history of the area and the wildlife that thrives here, then head out to the boardwalk and levee trail to see it for yourself.

Lake Martin is home to a diverse array of indigenous plant and animal life, specifically moss-covered cypress, waterfowl, reptiles, and amphibians. In season, expect

to see large numbers of nesting water birds, including great blue heron, great egret, snowy egret, white ibis, roseate spoonbill, and many more.

If you want to make a day of it, the best way to bird-watch here is by kayak—experienced guides are available to lead the way. Listen for the frog cacophony—the clicks and snorts complement the birdsong concert all day long. American alligators make their home here too, so be aware that what looks to be a floating log could be alive and hungry.

The sunsets, coupled with the Spanish moss-covered cypress trees, are epic—don't miss out. Stay in nearby Lafayette, a center of Cajun and Creole culture, to wholly immerse yourself in authentic Louisiana vibes.

**Top: A paddler winds through the serene waters. Below: Dusk at Lake Martin is a stunning scene.**



## More to Explore

Global Wildlife Center, Folsom  
 ■ INFINITY Science Center, Pearllington ■ Chalmette Battlefield, Chalmette

# Florida

## 📍 St. George Island

THE FORGOTTEN COAST

■ [floridastateparks.org](http://floridastateparks.org)

No high-rises or chain stores here—just unspoiled sugar-white beaches and a chill vibe. This barrier island is connected to the mainland by a 4-mile bridge by way of Apalachicola on Florida's panhandle, making it better for a quiet romantic getaway or family vacation than the state's more accessible (and crowded) beaches.

Immerse yourself in the beauty of the island by day: The tranquil waters are ideal for paddling and swimming, and the beaches are prime for shelling and sand castle-building. Pack your binoculars: There are miles of bike paths throughout the island where you can stop and spot the many birds who call St. George either full- or part-time home.

Then head to the St. George State Park and explore the sand dunes, forests, and marshes, and the wildlife that goes with them. Fishing is also great here;

there are boat rentals available as well as guided charters if you are into the big stuff. Don't miss climbing the 92 stairs in the reconstructed St. George Light and learn the story of the beacon that was first built in 1833.

Sunrises, sunsets, and stargazing are world-class here, so one of the best ways to take in the night sights on the island is to camp. The state park offers 60 campsites with electrical hookups, hot showers, a playground, and trails.

*Daybreak at St. George Island is a photographer's paradise.*



### More to Explore

Clewiston Museum, Clewiston  
■ East Pelican Reef, St. George Island  
■ Orman House Historic State Park, Apalachicola

*Okeechobee means "big water"  
in the Seminole language. It sure is.*

SOUTH

 **Lake Okeechobee**  
FLORIDA'S INLAND SEA  
■ [visitflorida.com](https://www.visitflorida.com)

Lake Okeechobee, aka "Big O" to the locals, is the largest freshwater lake in Florida. It covers over 700 square miles, making it impossible to see across in some areas. For a lake of its size, it's surprisingly shallow, with an average depth of only nine feet.

The best place to vacation on Big O is on the southern shore in Clewiston. It is a hot spot for anglers intent on catching the legendary largemouth bass and speckled perch. There are several top-notch big bass fishing guides in the area; book ahead to ensure a spot. Or trek the Lake

Okeechobee Scenic Trail to enjoy the scenery and climb to the top of the Herbert Hoover Dike to marvel at the beautiful views. Families often take walking tours of Clewiston to see historic buildings, spot birds, and stop for afternoon picnics on the shores of Big O. Free maps are available at City Hall or the Chamber of Commerce.

Clewiston is known as "America's Sweetest Town" for good reason—it's home to sugar cane farms including top-rated Sugarland Tours, where you can learn all about the sugar industry in the Clewiston area. Then head over to the Ah-Tah-Thi-Ki Museum to learn all about the rich culture and history of the Seminole people who thrive here.



## More to Explore

Creel Bay Golf Course, Devils Lake ■ Lake Region Heritage Center, Devils Lake ■ Fort Totten State Historic Site, Fort Totten

*It's easy to see why waterfowl hunting enthusiasts and their prey flock here.*

# North Dakota

## 📍 Devils Lake

“THE PERCH CAPITAL OF THE WORLD”

■ [devilslakend.com](http://devilslakend.com)

Devils Lake, located in northeastern North Dakota, is the largest natural body of water in The Peace Garden State. The Dakota name for this lake is *Minnewaukan*, which means “Spirit Lake.” When European-American settlers arrived, they misinterpreted the meaning as “Bad Spirit,” which led to the anglicized name Devils Lake, which is used today. The Dakota people consider the waters sacred, and the Spirit Lake Reservation is located on its southern shores.

The lake is an angler’s delight—hire a local guide to help you find the best spots to catch perch, walleye, pike, and white bass. If you’re brave, head here in the winter to ice fish—you’re just about guaranteed to net some perch, as the lake’s nickname suggests. Friendly local outfitters are happy to rent you an ice house—a heated tiny cabin shelter to protect you from the cold. Consider a family trip here in winter to ice skate or go tubing, showshoeing, or cross-country skiing.

Fall waterfowl hunting is also a top activity on this Central Flyway stop. Few places have better bird-hunting—period.

Snow and blue geese, Canada geese, ducks, and sandhill cranes pass through each season. The full-service Woodland Resort on Creel Bay is a great place to set up shop on either a hunting or fishing trip.

If you’re visiting on summer break, you can launch your own boat at one of the many sites along the shore, or rent a boat or kayak from a local purveyor. Then head out for a scenic hike or bike in Grahams Island State Park’s woodlands (camping is available too). Or go on the 4-mile wildlife spotting drive in nearby White Horse Hill National Game Preserve to see bison, elk, deer, prairie dogs, and more.

# South Dakota

GREAT  
PLAINS

## 📍 Sylvan Lake CUSTER'S "CROWN JEWEL"

■ [blackhillsbadlands.com](http://blackhillsbadlands.com)

If you have seen the 2007 film *National Treasure 2: Book of Secrets*, you are probably already familiar with Sylvan Lake. The 17-acre lake, located in the Black Hills' Custer State Park, isn't huge size-wise, but it is definitely big on gorgeous scenery. Truth be told—it's postcard-perfect.

Start your visit with a leisurely hike around the lake to see the spellbinding rock formations and the serene blue waters. Then stop in the general store for picnic provisions and rent a kayak, paddleboard, or canoe (only nonmotorized watercrafts are allowed). After lunch, explore the stunning geologic formations on the water—you can get around the lake in less than an hour.

Refresh in the cool waters at the swimming hole and maybe do a little fishing on the shore. Tip: The natural beauty here attracts a lot of folks, so consider going during the week or off-peak season to avoid the crowds.

Most visitors to Sylvan Lake arrive by way of the Needles Highway, a 14-mile stretch of eroded granite pillars, towers, and spires that attract hundreds of thousands of rock climbers and sightseers each year. If it's not on your list already, a road trip through this area is definitely worth adding to the agenda.

The lodging of choice here is the picturesque Sylvan Lake Lodge, which is set on a site recommended by the architect Frank Lloyd Wright. Its lodge rooms and cabins are suitable for couples, families, and large groups, and many have views of the lake. Meals at the Lodge are made from fresh, locally-sourced ingredients and are served in a luxurious dining room or on the outdoor stone veranda with fabulous views.

### More to Explore

Jewel Cave National Monument, Custer ■ Peter Norbeck Outdoor Education Center, Custer ■ Mount Rushmore, Keystone

Granite hills and green pine forests surround Sylvan Lake.

*Branched Oak Lake is the largest  
lake in eastern Nebraska—  
there's room for all.*



# Nebraska

## **Branched Oak Lake**

**CAMP WITH HORSES**

■ [outdoornebraska.gov](http://outdoornebraska.gov)

Branched Oak Lake, part of Branched Oak State Recreation Area in eastern Nebraska, is an 1,800-acre body of water that's part of the Salt Valley Lakes system. Because of its proximity to the Lincoln metro area, it's a popular spot for those wanting to get away from the city, but it's also a destination for visitors from far and wide.

The equestrian campsites are one of the park's unique characteristics. There are 15 pull-through campsites for RVs and 8 primitive sites so campers can ride their horses on the 3 miles of scenic equestrian trails. There are also 7 miles of hiking trails and 6 miles of mountain bike trails for those

who like to explore on two feet or two wheels. Keep an eye out—bald eagles love it here in the spring.

Rent a boat or launch your own—the fishing here is great. Blue catfish, bluegill, common carp, catfish, crappie, freshwater drum, largemouth bass, striped bass, walleye, white perch, and wiper are all common catches. Then stop in the marina for a bite to eat. There are also two swimming beaches to stretch out, have a picnic, and enjoy the lake landside. Other park activities include horseshoe pits, archery, and Fido-friendly trails. There are a couple of wineries with tasting rooms in the area if you'd like to spend an afternoon imbibing.

The park welcomes campers of all sorts—from big RVers to primitive types. If you crave a little more civilization, nearby Lincoln has options to fit all budgets.

## 📍 Lake McConaughy

THE CORNHUSKERS' BIG MAC

■ [i LovelakeMac.com](http://i LovelakeMac.com)

Formed by the Kingsley Dam that was completed in 1941 as part of the New Deal, Lake McConaughy is the largest reservoir in Nebraska, covering 30,000 surface acres. It's located about 9 miles north of the "Cowboy Capital" city of Ogallala, the county seat of Keith County. This big lake is a popular destination for water recreation of all sorts, camping, and hunting.

The Lake McConaughy Visitor and Water Interpretive Center is a great place to start the adventure. Learn about the construction of the Kingsley Dam and the history, hydrology, and geology of the lake and the North Platte River Valley, immerse yourself in interactive exhibits, see its two aquariums, and look out onto the beautiful blue lake. You can also pick up permits, camping registrations, licenses, and more info about how to make your trip unforgettable.

Several white-sand beaches dot the shoreline. Many beach day-use areas cater to those who are looking for a few hours of fun. Beach camping is also available—these areas also have swimming beaches to enjoy. Because of the size of the lake, water sports here abound. Waterskiing, tubing, parasailing, and sail boating are popular activities. You can put in your own boat at one of the many launches or rent one at one of the local marinas. The cool, deep waters also attract anglers. Expect walleye, channel catfish, Northern pike, wiper, smallmouth and white bass, and more to be biting on any given day.

The best way to enjoy an overnight stay in this area is to camp at one of the many sites (from primitive, to beach, to RV) in Lake McConaughy State Recreation Area. Nearby Ogallala also offers budget-friendly hotels, and there are many area cabin and home rentals available.

### More to Explore


Ash Hollow State Historical Park, Lewellen ■ Museum of American Speed, Lincoln ■ Pawnee State Recreation Area, Lincoln

*The expansive lake is an oasis set in the Great Plains flatlands.*



More to  
Explore

C.L. Hoover Opera House,  
Junction City ■ Kansas State  
University Gardens, Manhattan  
■ Flint Hills Discovery Center,  
Manhattan



*As all expert anglers know,  
the biting is best at first light.*



## GREAT BIRD-WATCHING BEACHES

**Cape May**  
New Jersey

**Acadia National Park**  
Maine

**Everglades National Park**  
Florida

**Tule Lake**  
California

**Platte River Valley**  
Nebraska

# Kansas

## 📍 **Milford Lake** THE FISHING CAPITAL OF KANSAS

■ [junctioncity.org](http://junctioncity.org)

Located 65 miles west of Topeka, Milford Lake is the largest human-made lake in Kansas. There are over 15,000 surface acres of water surrounded by 30,000 acres of land—it's a prime spot for visitors seeking recreation of all kinds.

First, the fishing. Oh, the fishing! Stop in the Milford Hatchery (located near the dam), where Kansas' rivers and lakes' future stocks are raised. Call ahead to arrange a visit during feeding time—the splashing frenzy of fish vying for bits of food is a sight to see. Later, anglers can hit the lake and catch walleye, crappie, largemouth and smallmouth bass, white bass, and catfish.

Then learn about Kansas' natural communities in the adjacent Nature Center. Kids and adults will enjoy the dioramas and hands-on exhibits of creatures that live in the Sunflower State's lakes, rivers, marshes, prairies, and woods. You'll see live snakes, amphibians, turtles, lizards, prairie dogs, and eagles. (Tip: Bald eagles flock here in winter to dine on fish in the unfrozen waters.) Bring your binoculars and take a walk on the Center's bird-watching trail, and check out the outdoor habitat area to learn

how to attract birds and butterflies to your own backyard. Admission is free.

Beach-lovers will find several opportunities for sun and fun on the big lake's shores. Nudie Beach, located on the lake's north side, is one of the most popular. Proper swimwear is required here—don't let the name fool you. This beach is only accessible by boat, and there are 14 public ramps to launch your craft on the lake. If you don't have your own vessel, Acorns Resort offers pontoons and non-motorized options. Other swimming beaches are located in East Rolling Hills Park, Outlet Park, and Thunderbird Hills Marina. Sailboats are welcome at Sailboat Cove, and there's a dedicated jet-ski beach for those who enjoy burning a little more gas.

Numerous trails surround the lake that appeal to sight-seeing hikers, cyclists, and even horseback riders. And for the adrenaline junkies, School Creek ORV (Off-Road Vehicles) in the Rock Quarry Area has 300 acres of public riding land with trails for all skill levels. Entry is free.

Where to stay? It depends on your need for creature comforts. Nearby Junction City has hotel-style lodging, but there are many more nature-immersive options along the lake too.

*The mirror-like water on a cool December day. Inset: The pier on Clear Lake.*

# California

## 📍 Clear Lake State Park

NORTHERN CALIFORNIA  
FLAVOR AND FUN

■ [lakecounty.com](http://lakecounty.com)

The drive to Clear Lake from San Francisco International Airport winds through places on most Northern California travel bucket lists. Plan for a full day—you'll want to make stops.

Highway 101 traverses San Francisco to the Bay Bridge; stop for supplies at the Ferry Building. (GPS cites this the most direct route, but follow signs for Golden Gate Bridge and Marin County for a worthy option.) Beyond the bridge, you'll pass through Berkeley, the epicenter of 1960s counterculture. Along Telegraph Avenue, breathe the hippie vibe scented with coffeehouse beatnik poetry.

Up Interstate 80, take Highway 29 through the Napa Valley. A cross-section of those hippies and beatniks landed here to create wines of international acclaim; a chap named Coppola flirted with filmmaking before coming to his senses. At the valley's north end is Calistoga, famed for its natural sparkling water springs. You're almost there. Go slow now, the road gets twisty.

Clear Lake is the second-largest freshwater lake in California (after Tahoe). Lodging is available at historic bed-and-breakfasts, hotels, motels, campsites, and on houseboats. Recreation focuses on watersport May through September. Purveyors offer world-class bass fishing, waterskiing, paddling, and speedboating. Most operate seasonally; check ahead.



Historic towns dot the shoreline, making Clear Lake a year-round destination. Only have time to visit one? Charming Kelseyville, nestled near the state park's entrance, won't disappoint. For wine-lovers, Lake County boasts its own appellation with 30 labels and counting. Wine tasting is more casual here—choosing is the challenge.

Bay Area residents favor the late spring and early fall seasons, as mid-summer temps often hit triple digits. Best book early.

## 📍 Pismo Beach

### THE ROAD LESS TRAVELED

■ [visitcalifornia.com](http://visitcalifornia.com)

For those of us who grew up on Looney Tunes, Pismo Beach is the place Bugs Bunny missed “cuz I shoulda made that left toin at Albuquerque.” Just “Pismo” to natives, this is the rough midpoint of the 238-mile stretch of California’s central coast between the Monterey Peninsula and Santa Barbara. Absent the glitz of famed Ventura Highway and its proximity to Tinseltown, this rugged coastline offers much more and much less. More scenery, fewer crowds. More wine country, less smog. More serenity, less phony.

The best way to arrive in Pismo is to cruise down Highway 1 after a stay in Carmel-by-the-Sea. Start early with a walk through the Point Lobos State Natural Preserve. Continue through majestic Big

Sur, past San Simeon and the Hearst Castle, with a pit stop in eclectic Morro Bay. Heck, take two or three days. There’s plenty worth experiencing to stretch your trip at least that long. Or try the inland route: State Highway 101 from San Jose to Paso Robles. “Paso” is the heart of the Central Coast wine region featured in the cult hit movie, *Sideways*. About an hour down the road, stop in at The Farmstand Bakery in the tiny hamlet of Los Olivos—a hidden gem.

In Pismo, enjoy lots of sandy beach, a walking promenade, pedestrian pier, and...outlets! Eateries are plentiful. The best serve fresh local seafood and regional Mexican specialties. Lodging ranges from upscale to campsites at nearby Montana de Oro State Park. Be sure to save time for the Monarch Butterfly Grove, where these gorgeous creatures gather on their seasonal migration.

**Top: The north end of Pismo at low tide. Below: A palette of pastels closes the day.**

## More to Explore

Main Beach, Santa Cruz ■  
Oceanside ■ Point Reyes  
National Seashore

# Oregon

## 📍 Fort Stevens State Park Beach

RUGGED WESTERN BEAUTY

■ [stateparks.oregon.gov](http://stateparks.oregon.gov)

If multitudes of buttered-up, valley-speak sun-worshippers in swimsuits ain't your fancy, Fort Stevens State Park Beach is so totally not that. Totally. It lies at the northwestern tip of the cool, romantic, windswept Oregon coast, at the mouth of the Columbia River, on a spit of land that looks across to neighboring Washington state.

From the Civil War to World War II, the Fort Stevens complex served as an active military installation. The site includes concrete gunnery bunkers and visitors can book tours of tunnels used to move artillery and personnel undetected. Today the beach and park offer wildlife-viewing for elk and shorebirds, beachcombing, and 15 miles of hiking and biking trails. Anglers might try for salmon, halibut, or rockfish.

The park is a 90-minute drive from Portland International Airport. Snagging one of the 174 campsites, 15 yurts, or 11 cabins is the way to go, so these tend to

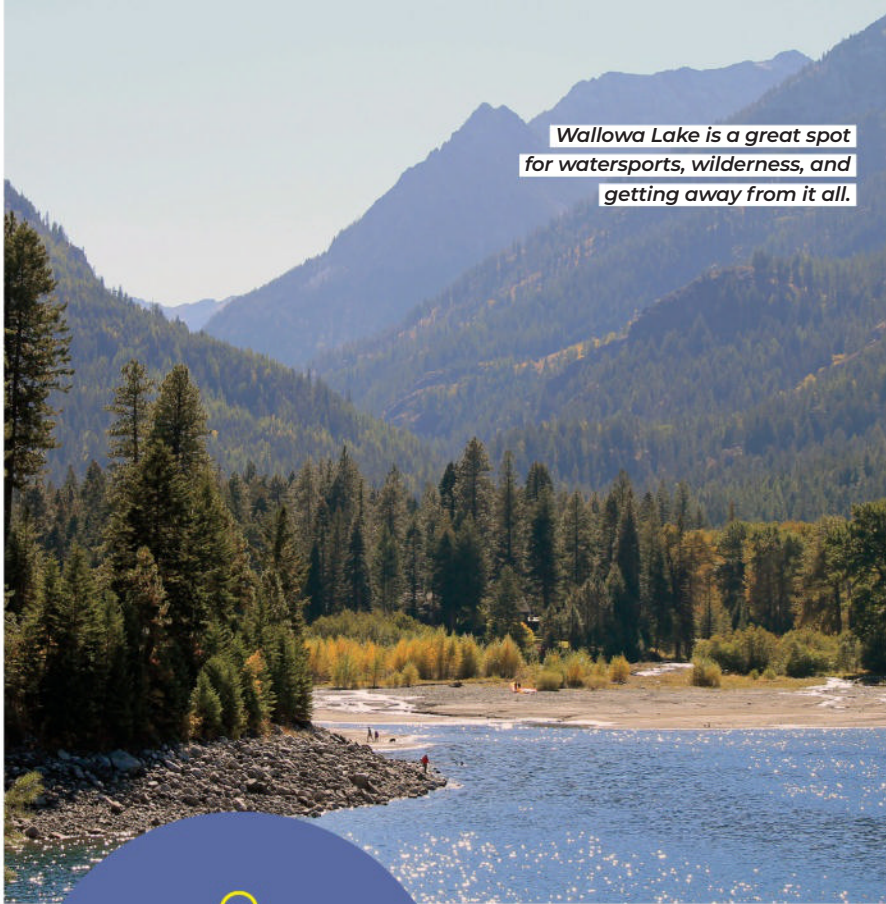
book quickly. If you miss out, fear not—nearby Astoria has ample lodging. Restaurants in town feature ocean bounty often caught and served the same day.

Huge swells batter the Pacific coast in storm season, and Fort Stevens Beach is in these giants' direct path. If you visit between November and late March, you may experience waves towering 15 feet or more. Be sure to check forecasts and heed beach-access restrictions and warnings.

The Pacific Coast is foggy in summer. Labor Day to late October typically offers the fairest weather—fair, but it's likely the swim trunks will stay in the trunk.

*The ghostly wreck of the iron-framed Peter Iredale that ran ashore in 1906.*





**Wallowa Lake is a great spot for watersports, wilderness, and getting away from it all.**



  
**More to Explore**  
Upper Klamath Lake, Klamath Falls ■ The Cove Palisades State Park, Jefferson County ■ Paulina Lake, Deschutes County

## **Wallowa Lake**

### **SECLUDED MOUNTAIN RETREAT**

■ [stateparks.oregon.gov](https://stateparks.oregon.gov)

Wallowa Lake is straight-up remote. Enjoy the journey—the windshield time is worth it. Consider making it one destination on a road trip, or set up base camp for a multi-day exploration.

Boise is the closest airport, four hours southeast. Spokane is just over four hours due north, and Portland is just under six due west. The path northwest from Boise touches the Snake River twice, and the high desert is wide and lonely along Interstate 84 toward La Grande. Finally at lakeside, you'll marvel at the glacier-shrouded, 10,000-foot peaks of the Wallowa range reflected on the

lake's clear, 1,500-acre surface. You are at 4,300 feet, and the air is crisp.

Choose from two sets of campgrounds, at the lake and just upstream on the Wallowa River. The lake site has 121 full RV hookups and 88 tent sites, plus two yurts. There's a marina and ramp for boating. Hikers can access several nearby trails that climb into the surrounding Eagle Cap Wilderness. Adrenaline fiends should head to Hells Canyon (deepest gorge in North America) on the Snake River for jetboat tours. For quiet contemplation, Hat Point overlook offers stellar views into the canyon.

This is Nez Perce homeland. The Iwetemlaykin State Heritage site and the Nez Perce National Historic Park are less than an hour's drive. If you're here for a few days, take time to immerse yourself in the area's rich, often embittered history.

Temperatures reach triple digits in July and August. The threat of wildfires is ever-present traveling in the West. Be sure to check ahead. Faraway fires can create unhealthy air over several states.



*Dusk at Lake Chelan is lovely, even in winter. Inset: The vineyards at Benson Winery overlook the lake.*



# Washington

**📍 Lake Chelan**  
A CAMPER'S NIRVANA  
■ [parks.wa.gov](http://parks.wa.gov)

In Eastern Washington—arguably, in all of Washington State—beautiful Lake Chelan State Park is THE camping destination. Since the park opened in 1943, generations of Washingtonians have celebrated their personal traditions at park campsites in this mountain nirvana, although newcomers are always welcome at “the blue lake,” the state’s largest by any measure.

A three-hour drive from the Seattle-Tacoma metro area, this glacier-fed marine playground attracts thousands to its shores every year, and no wonder: There’s nothing not to like about

Lake Chelan’s sandy beaches, access to hiking trails, paddling, fishing, and boating. Here, visitors unplug, check out, and tune in to a mellow, off-the-grid vibe. A range of lodging options dots the lakeshore, but to truly appreciate Lake Chelan, secure a campsite. The experience is about waking up, walking outside, feeling the chill mountain air, and connecting with lake, mountain, and sky.

Adrenaline junkies can take their pick of whitewater rafting, hang gliding, and skydiving nearby. Fishing enthusiasts can select from a cornucopia of options; the steelhead fishing on the nearby Columbia River is legendary. The area features a growing wine industry, and



epicureans can look forward to local wine and cheese tasting.

Looking for something more out of the ordinary? Take the *Lady of the Lake* ferry north to the roadless community of Stehekin. This remote village counts just 90 full-time residents but it’s large on the kind of scenic splendor and peace that reward a full-on escape into nature.

## 📍 Ruby Beach

### RAINFOREST OF THE NORTHWEST

■ [nps.gov/olym](https://nps.gov/olym)

The founder of a billion-dollar outdoor clothing brand once said: "There's no such thing as bad weather, only inappropriate clothing." The weather bit may well have been inspired by Ruby Beach in Olympic National Park. It rains here—a lot. Be not deterred, just appropriately clad.

In the contiguous states' far northwest corner lies a unique combination of climate and geography in a protected wilderness ecosystem—mountains, rivers, rainforest, coastline, and ocean habitats unseen anywhere else. At Ruby Beach, you will find unforgettable scenery and sheer solitude. You will leave awestruck, your spirit fortified, your sneakers soaked.

Inspired? Then it's time to plan, and the best way to start is with a visit to the National Park Service website. A two-

hour-and-20-minute drive from Seattle-Tacoma International will get you to the visitor center in Port Angeles; double that if you're using public transit. Another hour and 45 minutes and you'll arrive at Ruby Beach.

Overnight lodging is available in Forks, about 30 minutes from the beach. Lodging in the park, including hotels, campgrounds, and wilderness camping, books six months in advance, minimum. If you can swing it, beautiful and rustic Kalaloch Lodge is on the coast, in Olympic National Park, and just minutes from Ruby Beach. If your journey proceeds from points south, access the beach from state highways 101 and 109, along which you will find lodging in a wide price range.

June through September see the greatest number of visitors, though autumn is often fairest of the seasons. Rain falls 12 months a year; the annual average exceeds 130 inches. Roads close often in winter. Pack appropriately.

**Top: The rough reddish sand almost glows at nightfall. Below: Driftwood and tidepools dot the shoreline.**

## More to Explore

Watmough Head, San Juan Islands ■ Golden Gardens Park, Seattle ■ Pearygin Lake, Winthrop

# Alaska

## Homer

COSMIC HAMLET BY THE SEA

■ [alaska.org](http://alaska.org)

When thinking about Alaska, you think of wildlife. Bear, moose, caribou, wolves, and eagles still thrive here. The Frontier State attracts anglers from around the globe seeking its abundant salmon and halibut. Climbers and hikers come for the glacier-shrouded slopes of Denali, the tallest peak in North America. Alaska is synonymous with aurora borealis, *Ice Road Truckers*, and *Deadliest Catch*. Few relate it with writers workshops and gallery exhibits.

It might be time to adjust your expectations. Homer, roughly a 2½-hour drive south from Anchorage, is home to a thriving arts community, with a vibe sure to get your right brain engaged. Situated on the southern tip of the Kenai Peninsula, Homer offers most everything travelers associate with America's least (human) populated state, with scenic splendor and abundant fishing, hiking, boating, and wildlife-viewing opportunities. Then things head in a different direction: The focal point for visitors looking for something extraordinary is The Spit, a narrow strip of

land jutting into Kachemak Bay that's dotted with galleries, restaurants, and attractions not involving large, fearsome fauna.

A stroll on Pioneer Avenue will take you past studios and galleries with exhibits that tell of Alaska's majesty and rich heritage. Come to Alaska for its grandeur, then come to Homer to see that grandeur captured in the kitchens and through the tools and lenses of its artists. Alaska's vastness and changeable weather can make transportation a challenge, so skip the stress: Buy a tour package, let someone else drive, kick back, and enjoy.

*The many hiking trails here offer scenic views for all fitness levels, from novice to expert.*

Mount Denali, the highest peak in North America, is reflected in the calm waters of Wonder Lake.

WEST



## More to Explore

Lake Clark National Park, Alaska Peninsula ■ Kenai Lake, Seward ■ Chugach State Park, Anchorage

## Wonder Lake

WILD, WONDROUS, AND WORTH EVERY PENNY

■ [nps.gov/dena](https://nps.gov/dena)

Seeing Alaska's Brooks Range reflected in Wonder Lake's pristine waters for the first time stirs the call of the wild in our fur-trapper DNA. Deep in Denali National Park and Preserve's interior, this view stirs the soul. Not cliché awesome—actual. Getting there requires a trapper's resourcefulness and a financial commitment, but this only enhances that moment. And, oh, the things you will see on your journey there.

From Anchorage, book passage on the Alaska Railroad's *Denali Star*. Driving is an option, but take the train! The four-

hour rail journey features stunning vistas and wildlife viewing along the Knik Arm shore and the Susitna and the Talkeetna Rivers. You hold a beverage, not a steering wheel.

Spend at least two nights at any of several hotels near the park entrance. Visitors reach Denali's interior via park-operated tour buses only, so the wise traveler makes reservations. Choose from several tours highlighting Denali's varied majesty; not all include Wonder Lake, so make sure to read tour details. For an immersive, multi-day experience, stay at one of the park's inholdings. These private properties offer lodging, guided tours, and delicious cuisine, at a price. Visitors typically book four nights. Check the [discoverdenali.org](https://discoverdenali.org) website, operated by the chamber of commerce, for details. A few campsites dot the lakeshore, but they fill months ahead, so check the park's website to learn how to reserve a coveted spot. Again, park buses provide the only access; think backpacking, not RVing.

The park's half a million annual visitors arrive from May through October; Demand peaks in July to August, during the days of midnight sun. Hate crowds? Book a wintertime dogsled tour—brrrr!

Lanikai Beach and the Mokulua Islands, as seen from the Lanikai Pillbox Trail.



# Hawaii

## 📍 Lanikai Beach

FAR FROM THE MADDING CROWD

■ [loveoahu.org](http://loveoahu.org)

If you're looking for quick decompression away from the glitz of Honolulu, Lanikai Beach will serve it up for you.

Hop in the rental and bear northeast to the Windward Coast and Kailua town. Just 30 minutes from Honolulu International, you'll be spreading your beach towel on the warm sand and sipping a frosty beverage in no time.

Have energy to burn after your flight? The Pillboxes

trailhead is close by. Don't move the car. Pace yourself. This three-mile out-and-back trail climbs steeply in spots, but you're rewarded with stunning views of Kailua town and Lanikai village, the Pacific, and the rocks offshore known to locals as "The Mokes."

There's plenty of lodging in Kailua if you plan to stay, so do it. Swimming, paddling, waterfalls, fishing, adventure touring, delicious dining—you can experience it all here without the Waikiki Beach crowds. Once the mainland wears off and the "aloha" kicks in, venture out. On a Sunday, that means hitting the Kailua

town Farmer's Market for coffee and fresh local flavors. Find liquid essentials every day at the Lanikai Brewing Company and Grace in Growlers. Wine lovers can steer to Oeno, Oahu's only winemaker, for tasting island-style.

If the Pillboxes whet your appetite for more trail time, the Olomana Three Peaks will set your heart humming. This six-mile out-and-back trail climbs 1,600 feet to the knife-edge ridges high above Kailua and Lanikai. Overachievers knock it out for sunrise. But it's gorgeous all day, so hang loose—you're on island time.

## 📍 Poipu Beach

KAUAI'S AWARD-WINNING GEM

■ [poipubeach.org](http://poipubeach.org)

A leading travel site recently voted Poipu “Best Beach in America,” deservedly. Located on the Garden Island’s dryer, less-populated south shore, Poipu’s double-crescent shape is ideal for swimming, surfing, snorkeling, sunbathing, and paddling. If those aren’t your jam, nearby attractions include wildlife refuges, cultural sites, scenic hiking trails and... a blowhole!

The drive to Poipu from Lihue Airport takes just 30 minutes. Don’t rush. There’s lots to see along the way. Lihue is the largest commercial center on the south side, a good place to shop for provisions. If you arrive on Saturday, the Kauai Community Market operates rain or shine from 8:30 a.m. to 1 p.m., offering fresh-grown and raised local fare. Birders will want to detour to Hule’ia National Wildlife Refuge; several

species unique to the Hawaiian Islands reside here, including the namesake duck, goose (the state’s official bird), gallinule, coot, and stilt.

When you turn from Kaunualii Highway onto Maluhia Road toward Poipu, you’ll pass through The Tunnel of Trees, 500 eucalyptus that Scottish sugar magnate Duncan McBryde gifted to the community in the early 1920s. The 100-foot-high canopy serves as the “Gateway to Kauai’s South Shore.”

Old Koloa town is site of the island’s first successful sugar mill and part of the Koloa Heritage Trail. Shops and restaurants now fill refurbished buildings. Once in Poipu, recognize that “Best” accolades draw crowds. If that beach is jammed, try Salt Pond, Shipwreck, or Kipu Kai, all worthy alternatives. Or visit Spouting Horn (the aforementioned blowhole) just west. After all, it’s all the same unforgettably beautiful ocean.



### More to Explore

Hanauma Bay State Park, Oahu ■ Kauna’oa Beach, Hawaii ■ Kapalua Bay, Maui

**Top:** Try not to miss one of Poipu’s epic sunsets. **Below:** The gentle waves make this an ideal spot for families.

 See America!

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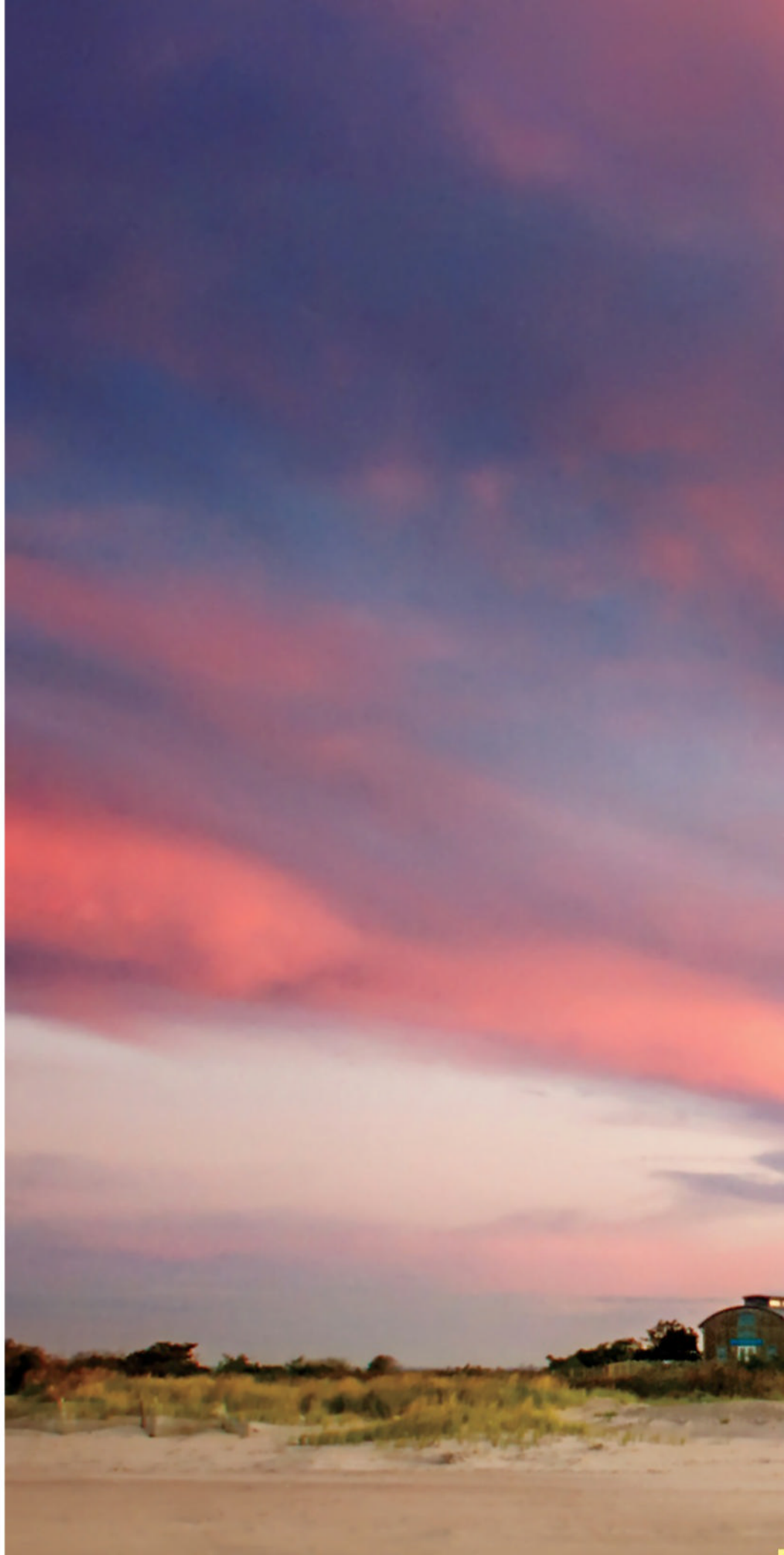
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