



50 Affordable Beach Resorts

Coliena Rentmeeste

From Hawaii to Zanzibar, we've searched the globe for stylish getaways just steps from the sand. The best part: almost all are under \$200 a night.

FROM MAR 2004

It can be as smooth as glass, or as wild as a white-capped Alpine range. Yet even at its most powerful, the ocean is soothing. On the sand, the stress of modern existence drifts away. You return to your senses—feeling the warmth of sun on bare skin, savoring the salty air, listening to your internal engine slow down to match the rhythm of the surf. You regain enough perspective about life to ask the truly important questions of the day: Snorkel, swim, or ride on that silly banana boat? Isn't it time for a nap?

Of all the pleasures guilty by association—the trendy bags, designer blankets, plush towels, and mindless best sellers—none is sweeter than finding a place in the sun that doesn't burn a hole in the pocket. The 50 we've chosen cover the waterfront, from rustic cabins by the sea to lavish beachfront resorts at great values.

But these suggestions can cause a bit of inner conflict. Returning home, color in your cheeks and clarity in your eyes, you're likely to be asked where you've just been. Keep it a secret or share the wealth? You decide.

Prices listed reflect the lowest rates for a double room in high season (excluding holidays). Be aware that the cost can drop dramatically because of seasonal fluctuations or special offers. The symbol * indicates that rates drop by 20 percent or more in low season.

UNITED STATES

Hawaii

\$153 After a massive \$30 million renovation last year, the **Aston Waikiki Beach Hotel** traded its concrete-cool image for a tropically chic vibe. Kitschy Hawaiiana touches have struck a chord among the young travel set: a color scheme Don Ho would love, beaded curtains in lieu of closet doors. Downstairs, Tiki's Bar & Grill draws a raucous crowd for pu pu and fruit-filled cocktails. For a little moonlight cinema, hit the beach, where free alfresco movies are shown every Saturday and Sunday night. 2570 KALAKAUA AVE., OAHU; 800/922-7866 OR 808/922-2511; <http://www.astonhotels.com/>

California

\$135 If you want to camp without pitching a tent, **El Capitan Canyon**, 15 miles north of downtown Santa Barbara, has 26 canvas-walled rooms on wooden decks, with handcrafted twig furniture. Need your own bathroom? The 96 tin-roofed cedar cabins provide that and more: a kitchenette, Jacuzzi tub, sleeping loft, and fire pit. After exploring tidal pools on the stony Pacific shore, unwind during an in-room Barefoot Deep Massage. 11560 CALLE REAL, SANTA BARBARA; 866/352-2729 OR 805/685-3887; <http://www.elcapitancanyon.com/>

\$139 It's no Hearst Castle—that's three miles to the north—but for a Best Western, the 12-acre **Cavalier Oceanfront Resort** can't be beat. This Big Sur property was carved out of a 1960's motel set above the roaring Pacific. Most of the accommodations are done up in Mission-meets-lodge style, with wood-burning fireplaces and sturdy furniture. The year-round temperature here averages 60 degrees, so the beach and tide pools are mostly for walks, whale- and elephant seal-watching, and sunset bonfires. 9415 HEARST DR., SAN SIMEON; 800/826-8168 OR 805/927-4688; <http://www.cavalierresort.com/>

New York

\$195 Hotelier André Balazs transformed an old motel into a sophisticated, retro jewel overlooking Shelter Island Sound and Crescent Beach. It's known as **Sunset Beach** for its incredible sunsets. The 20 rooms have funky paper lamps and lounge chair-bedecked terraces. The atmosphere is not too "Hamptons," although at times it feels dangerously close, particularly when mainlanders boat in to visit the open-air restaurant. For the best deals, come midweek. 35 SHORE RD., SHELTER ISLAND; 631/749-2001; <http://www.sunsetbeachli.com/>; open Memorial Day-Labor Day

Maryland

\$175 Far down Maryland's Eastern Shore, the 20-room **Tilghman Island Inn** commands a marshy spit off Chesapeake Bay. On a remote isle favored by gruff oystermen, two fashion-forward innkeepers cater to Beltway gentry with leopard-print throws and wildly eclectic watercolors. Upstairs, the white-on-white room No. 12 has fabulous east and north water views. Poke around Knapp's Narrows in an outboard runabout; at night, take a bite of the chef's Pernod-laced oysters wrapped in puff pastry. 21384 COOPERTOWN RD, TILGHMAN ISLAND; 800/866-2141 OR 410/886-2141; <http://www.tilghmanislandinn.com/> *

South Carolina

\$180 Southern comfort means flip-flops and fried chicken at the carefree **Sea View Inn**, just a dune away from the surf on a laid-back barrier island 70 miles north of Charleston. The 20 pine-paneled rooms are beach-rental basic: hand-stitched quilts, ceiling fans, half baths. (Rinse sea salt off in a shower down the hall.) Guests can whistle "Dixie" while dangling a fishing pole from the tidal-marsh dock. 414 MYRTLE AVE., PAWLEYS ISLAND; 843/237-4253; <http://www.seaviewinn.com/>; all meals included