You're never far from the water in this part of South Carolina—and the barrier islands beyond Charleston's city limits beckon for an afternoon jaunt. Many are just an hour's drive from downtown, but you're likely to find every kind of beach experience, from family days out with plenty of amenities, to secluded spots where it's just you and nature, along with historic lighthouses and wild beaches that look right off the set of Carasap. Grab a towel and a sturdy pair of sandals, and get on the road—here's our list of our favorite Charleston beaches.
ACTIVITY

Isle of Palms

With its seven miles of crystalline shoreline, and tight seaside community, Isle of Palms is one of the area’s most family-friendly beaches. Not only can you expect almost the full gamut of activities (water sports, golfing, boat tours, and fishing charters), plus stunningly white sands, but there’s also an opportunity to watch sea turtles do their thing during egg-laying season. If you’ve managed to score a babysitter, head to Windjammer’s beach bar once the sun goes down; a fruity mixed drink and a round of pool is the choice way to end (or start) the night.

ACTIVITY

Edisto Beach

It’s one of the longer drives out from Charleston, but the calm and relative quiet of the area, along with the family-friendly environs, keep Edisto Beach and its four-and-a-half miles of coastline on the must-visit list. Supposing you want to do something besides lay on the beach, you can head to Jeremy’s Inlet at low tide, and spend a while picking through the treasuries (fossils, seashells, and shark’s teeth that have washed up on the shore. If you get lucky, you might also hit on some historic and archeological finds.

ACTIVITY

Morris Island

Folly Beach may be one of the more popular seaside spots in the region, but just a short boat ride northeast will transport you to one of the most remote-the sands at Morris Island. This is a quiet, windswept stretch of sand, and an ideal destination if you’re looking to shrug off the crowds for an afternoon. To get there, jump on a private boat charter from Mount Pleasant (we like Adventure Harbor Tours), then it’s about a 20-minute boat ride from the harbor. You can also hike there, if you want; it’s about a 20-minute trip on foot from the northernmost points of Folly Beach.

WATCH THIS

Copenhagen by Foot
Kiawah Beachwalker Park

Thanks to its ten miles of pristine coastline, Kiawah Island is generally regarded as one of the country’s most beautiful barrier islands—and you can bet the asking prices reflect the admiration. The majority of the pristine sands are under private ownership, but you sample the scenery at this beach down at the southwestern tip of the island; the sands are soft as anywhere else on this nature-lover’s island, and best of all, you don’t need a homeowner’s deed to enjoy them. Just make sure you bring a little bit of cash with you: the entry fee is $5-$10, depending on the season.

Folly Beach

Known affectionately as “The Edge of America,” Folly Beach is a barrier island on the...
Known colloquially as ‘The Edge of America,’ Folly Beach is a unique island on the front lines of the Atlantic, with nothing but ocean stretching out before it. Despite its popularity, the place has managed to retain its small-town character—you won’t catch too many chains here—though funky restaurants and bars are still well in abundance. Hit up the bait and tackle shop for a few pointers and equipment, and catch your dinner at the pier; otherwise, head to Lost Dog Cafe.

**ACTIVITY**

**Seabrook Island →**

Seabrook is a private, residential beachfront community that’s home to some of the region’s most visible summer houses. It has some four miles of pristine, sandy beachfront, and for the most part, it’s much quieter than similar neighboring spots. There aren’t many flashy amenities, given that it’s more a community beach—but its spectacular North Beach sunset more than makes up for its lack of ice cream stands and changing cabins.

**ACTIVITY**

**Capers Island →**

This undeveloped barrier island is one of the most dramatic spots along the entirety of the South Carolina coast; its narrow stretches of sand are lined with living and petrified palm trees (many damaged by Hurricane Hugo) giving it a surreal, otherworldly look.
**ACTIVITY**

**Bulls Island**

You really feel like you’re adrift on an island in the middle of the Atlantic when you’re here, as opposed to just a few miles off the coast of prim and proper, well-developed Charleston. You can experience the desolation in two ways: there’s North Beach, a Robinson Crusoe-esque stretch of untouched sand, and Boneyard Beach, which, as its name suggests, looks like a ghoulish cemetery of sorts, with splintered tree branches poking out from beneath the sand.

**Sullivan’s Island**

Though it’s pretty quiet in the off-season, the beach at Sullivan’s Island is a hive of activity come spring and summer. Driving out of downtown Charleston across the Ravenel Bridge, marsh and wetlands give way to this lovely barrier island, with its public beach overlooked by the historic lighthouse. Come at low tide, when the sands
are wide enough to accommodate the throngs of day trippers trickling in from the city, and make sure to check out Poe’s Tavern on Middle Street: the poet was stationed here during his military service, from 1827-1828.