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Charleston Beaches

A Day Tripper's Guide to Charleston's Beaches

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The surrounding barrier islands and beaches of **Charleston** have their own Southern charm, and give adventuresome travelers a chance to escape the city.

Edge of America: **Folly Beach**

Free-spirited **Folly Beach**, with its mix of beachcombers and bohemians, is the most laidback of the local island scene. Spend the day watching surfers line up in the Washout, an area on the east side of Folly considered one of the best spots on the East Coast, then take a surfing lesson at **Shaka Surf School**. Hour-long semi-private and private lessons are available. Or try the weekend "Wemoon" camps for women. Weeklong vacationers and their kids also sign up for Shaka's surf camps each morning from 9 a.m. to 12 p.m.

Folly is also ideal for dolphin watching by boat or kayak with **Flipper Finders tours**. Head into the river to watch families of dolphins strand feed (a phenomenon where the mammals herd schools of fish onto shore), then launch onto the sand to dine before sliding back into the waves. There are also sunset tours of Folly River to see stingrays and bonnethead sharks, and moonlight tours of the creeks.

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Dive into Alabama's Gulf Coast.



Poe and Paddle: [Sullivan's Island](#)

With its expansive island homes and well-manicured lawns, [Sullivan's Island](#) is a posh residential barrier island 15 minutes north of downtown Charleston. Sullivan's Island is ideal for stand up paddleboarding (SUP), with an inlet right off the beach that, in low to medium tide, makes it easier to balance on the board without fighting the ocean waves. Learn how to SUP with 1-hour classes from [Air & Earth shop](#).

Visitors to the western end can also walk in the footsteps of one of the island's most famous residents, poet and author Edgar Allan Poe, on a tour of [Fort Moultrie](#). Poe wrote his short story "The Gold Bug" while a US Army private stationed here in 1827. The fort is also famous for the 9-day battle that held off the British during the American Revolution in 1776.

Go Fish: [Isle of Palms](#)

Adjacent to Sullivan's Island is the Isle of Palms, a popular family vacation home rental destination. [The Isle of Palms Marina](#) offers private charters for would-be anglers who want to fish the creeks off Charleston Harbor. Groups of up to 6 can head into the saltwaters off the island to catch red fish trout and flounder. Plus, kids will enjoy the shark hole at nearby Dewees Island for shark fishing.

Nature's Paradise: [Bull Island](#)

To see an untouched natural habitat, take the Garris Landing ferry and spend the day on [Bull Island](#) at the Cape Romain National Wildlife Refuge. Perfect for hiking, this wilderness habitat houses one of the largest bird populations in the area (nearly 300 species), 7 miles of nearly untouched beach for shell gathering, and the magnificent and haunting Boneyard Beach, filled with downed trees bleached by the sun. For a more structured adventure, Coastal Expeditions provides a number of tours and field trips of the island as well as kayak rentals.

Tea Time: [Wadmalaw Island](#)

Southwest of Charleston, visitors to Wadmalaw Island can learn the history of tea then taste the hottest tea cocktail sensation in the South. Start the day at the [Charleston Tea Plantation](#), the only working tea plantation in the United States, and the home of American Classic Tea. Admission to the plantation is free, as is the tour of the factory where visitors can learn about the process of harvesting the camellia sinensis plant from raw leaf to finished tea. Narrated trolley tours of the grounds provide more history of this plant, which takes 4 to 5 years to harvest.

True tea connoisseurs will want to make arrangements for a private tour with the plantation's founder Bill Hall who now oversees production of American Classic teas for [Bigelow brands](#). The plantation grounds are ideal for a picnic lunch before heading 8 miles over to the Firefly distillery. Drive down a scenic road lined with muscadine grape vines to the tasting room, where visitors are introduced to 6 of [Firefly's flavored sweet tea vodkas](#), bourbons and lemonades, infused with tea from local farms including the Charleston Tea Plantation, as well as their selection of Sea Island Rums made with local sugar cane.

Resort Ritz: [Kiawah Island](#)

For a day of resort-style relaxation, locals head to Beachwalker Park, the only public beach at Kiawah Island. Year-round, visitors can rent a beach chair and umbrella and let the day drift away on 11 miles of pristine sand. At the height of the season, Beachwalker is one of the few uncrowded local beaches, mainly because parking is limited to control the congestion. This is also one of the few year-round dog-friendly spots; other local beaches restrict dog access to early morning or late evening during the summer. After soaking up the sun, visitors stop by at nearby [Freshfields Village](#) to shop the clothing boutiques like [Pink Boulevard](#), which offers the always sunny Lilly Pulitzer clothing line, or to buy a scoop of ice cream at the [Marble Slab Creamery](#).



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