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Dr. Beach Announces 2016 Top 10 Beaches

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PHOTO: According to Dr. Beach, Hanauma Bay, Oahu, is the best beach in the U.S.



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Dr. Beach has once again revealed his list of America's best beaches and, this year, Hawaii's Hanauma Bay Nature Preserve tops the list. Dr. Beach is actually coastal scientist Dr. Stephen P. Leatherman, a professor at Florida International University who has been choosing the annual top 10 beaches since 1991, following his passion and a childhood love of sand and surf.

"I always knew that I wanted to be a scientist, but it wasn't until I got a job surveying beaches at Cape Hatteras after storms that I knew which kind," said Leatherman. "I definitely wanted to work outdoors and what better workplace than a beach? Little did I know that I would later appear on 'The Oprah Winfrey Show' for having one of the best jobs in America."

His research has taken him to beaches around the country and to many parts of the world. During the past 20 years, his principal focus has been studying beach erosion and storm impacts. Leatherman has also found himself on a variety of research projects, including locating the best sandy beach for a solar-powered car race, dropping dye packets out of a helicopter so that television producers could film a rip current in action, deciphering 200 years of channel changes from old maps to find Revolutionary War artifacts and helping billionaires select island properties.

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Currently, he uses 50 criteria to evaluate beaches. These include water and sand quality as well as safety and beach management. This year, bonus points went to beaches that prohibited smoking — this proved to be a winning “strategy” for Oahu, where smoking on all beaches is banned.

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When all was said and done, these were the best beaches in the country, according to Dr. Beach.

1. Hanauma Bay Nature Preserve, Oahu, Hawaii

This is a remote beach on the eastern end of Oahu. Its stunning white sand and location in a breached volcano are some of the aesthetic reasons why this is the best beach in the country — but its protected status adds to the allure. The area has some of the best accessible snorkeling in Hawaii and is even closed every Tuesday to give fish a chance to take a break from the frequent visitors.

Where to stay: The Kahala Hotel & Resort is one of Hawaii’s iconic properties, offering a luxurious hideaway that is close to energetic Waikiki and tucked away on a quiet Oahu seaside.

2. Siesta Beach, Sarasota, Florida

Sand collectors are attracted to this beach, where they find some of the finest sand in the world. Add to that clear, warm waters and a beach that is hundreds of yards wide and you have a coastline ideal for swimming, volleyball, fitness and more.

Where to stay: At the Ringling Beach House, pack your bags for one of the top beaches and a stay just steps from the powdery sand at the Ringling Beach House, which provides fully stocked two- to three-bedroom suites.

3. Kapalua Bay Beach, Maui, Hawaii

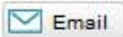
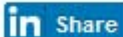
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5 Which Theme Parks Saw The Most Visitors Last Year?

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3. Kapalua Bay Beach, Maui, Hawaii

Kapalua Bay Beach is a crescent of sand tucked away between two protected headlands, formed by lava long ago. These rocky anchors protect the bay and the beach making it a beautiful spot for snorkeling.

Where to stay: The luxurious Montage Kapalua Bay is a 24-acre resort that overlooks the water and offers guests authentic cultural experiences, all-suite accommodation, golf, watersports and more in a picturesque setting.

4. Ocracoke Lifeguarded Beach, Outer Banks of North Carolina

Reachable by a free state ferry, this was once the home of Blackbeard the pirate and still feels wild to this day. Visitors will mainly go for swimming and shelling and, perhaps, a stroll through the cemetery on a foggy night.

Where to stay: The Anchorage Inn & Marina is said to have the best views on the island, perched on the banks of the scenic harbor. The 35-room, four-story hotel also has two fifth-floor suites.

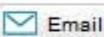
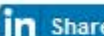
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5. Coast Guard Beach, Cape Cod, Massachusetts

Cool waters and good surf are what drive visitors to this picturesque spot. The beach is accessible by bicycle or shuttle from the Salt Pond Visitor's Center and the Old Coast Guard Station still sits atop the bluffs.

Where to stay: The area is surrounded by small inns and motor lodges. The Ship's Knees Inn is a historic property located on a grassy knoll and five minutes walk to nearby Nauset Beach.

6. Grayton Beach State Park, Florida panhandle



Emerald-green waters and large sand dunes make this beach unique as do its tidal lakes and freshwater ponds located in the surrounding state park.

Where to stay: The Water Color Inn & Resort is right on Florida's Gulf Coast and offers a variety of accommodations from beach house rentals and vacation homes to a gorgeous inn with ocean views.

7. Coronado Beach, San Diego, California

Sparkling sand, a warm, Mediterranean climate and mild surf make this one of California's most iconic beach destinations, anchored by a landmark hotel and visited by Hollywood's elite.

Where to stay: Hotel Del is an iconic American beach hotel, offering luxurious accommodations, stunning architecture and a classic aesthetic.

8. Coopers Beach, Southampton, New York

It was the first "Gold Coast" in the country and Coopers Beach offers some of the best beach access in the Hamptons. Stroll along white quartz sand, play atop large dunes covered in American beach grass and dream of one of the extravagant mansions that line the shore.

Where to stay: A gorgeous location calls for a gorgeous hotel and the Southampton Inn is ready to welcome visitors looking to enjoy the Long Island's East End.

9. Caladesi Island State Park, Dunedin/Clearwater, Florida

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This is a beach that was built for exploring. There are kayak and canoe trails as well as boardwalk trails through the mangroves where you can spot blue heron. Afterward, enjoy a dip in the sparkling water.

Where to stay: Clearwater is one of the closest destinations to the tip of the island where the park is located. A good option is the Hyatt Regency Clearwater Beach Resort and Spa located right on the shore.

10. Beachwalker Park, Kiawah Island, South Carolina

Another bird-lovers and explorers paradise, this beach South of Charleston serves up tidal inlets perfect for paddling through. Captain Sam's Inlet is a short walk or cycle and where visitors can see thousands of birds.

Where to stay: Kick back at the luxurious Sanctuary Hotel at Kiawah Island Golf Resort and experience a seaside mansion and southern hospitality.

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