

10 of the Best U.S. Islands Outside Hawaii

(Courtesy of Fiona Mokry, The Discoverer)

Can't make the long haul to Hawaii for your vacation? Don't worry, these tropical paradises may be the best-known islands in the U.S., but that doesn't mean they're the only ones. From [nature sanctuaries on the East Coast](#) to tropical islands in the Caribbean, here are 10 of the best U.S. islands that aren't Hawaii.

Dry Tortugas, Florida

While Dry Tortugas aren't nearly as popular as the Florida Keys, they're some of the absolute gems of the Caribbean. Located 70 miles west of the Keys, Dry Tortugas National Park encompasses all seven islands. And if you're looking for an untouched place with superb coral, abundant marine life, and crystal-clear waters (all of which are surrounded by pristine, protected waters), this Florida destination is the answer. The only accommodations here are the campsites on Garden Key, so make sure to bring your own food and water.

Assateague Island, Maryland

If you like the sound of wild horses roaming freely on protected National Seashore, then your next trip should be to Assateague Island. This is one of the northeast's best and offers visitors tons of fun outdoor activities. Biking is a popular way to explore the island and allows for many awesome wildlife photo opportunities. Horseback riding, canoeing, and kayaking are other favorite ways to explore Assateague. And if you visit in July you have the chance to see the "saltwater cowboys" lead the feral horses on an epic swim across the Assateague Channel.

San Juan Island, Washington

San Juan Island is about as picturesque as the Pacific Northwest gets, and boasts a wide range of activities and attractions to check out. Strolling around the historic Friday Harbor is enjoyable for those who like to browse bookstores, art galleries, boutiques, and antique shops. And outside the center, rolling farmlands, alpaca farms, and sweeping valleys can be enjoyed during a scenic car ride. San Juan Island even has its own vineyard/tasting room and whale-watching tours are a common excursion in addition to hiking, biking, and kayaking.

Sapelo Island, Georgia

This state-protected barrier island in southeast Georgia is the site of the last Hog Hammock population (an African-American community) with just 47 people. Visit in October and you'll get to participate in the annual festival as they celebrate cultural traditions with gospel choir, basket weaving, and other activities. The Sapelo Island Lighthouse is the second-oldest brick lighthouse in the country dating back

to 1820. If you want to stay the night, you have a variety of options ranging from a state-run campsite to a group rental of an early 19th-century mansion, so make sure to plan ahead.

Cuttyhunk Island, Massachusetts

Cuttyhunk still oozes with European charm more than 420 years after its settlement by the British. Eight miles west of the ever-popular Martha's Vineyard, this quiet island is the perfect weekend getaway for couples who want to enjoy the ocean, landscape, and a whole lot of chilling. There are no bars, malls, or parking lots on Cuttyhunk, but the island provides good times none the less. Expect homemade ice cream, lots of fishing opportunities, a classic harbor, and some beautiful hiking trails.

Block Island, Rhode Island

This Atlantic Isle is a summer East Coast favorite. Known for its rugged beauty, Block Island is a haven for visitors and locals who appreciate the simpler things in life. Block Island brags that you'll never have to ask for directions to the beach, because the entire 17-mile island is surrounded by them. All you have to do is walk in any direction until you hit the end of the island's iconic windswept bluffs. Naturally, there's a lot of outdoor fun to be had in the form of kayaking, sailing, hiking, and biking the 32 miles of trails. Not to mention horse-back riding, bird watching, and snorkeling. Grab a burger or indulge in a romantic candlelit lobster dinner to cap the perfect day on Block Island.

Mackinac Island, Michigan

Situated on Lake Huron, Michigan, sits one of the nation's unique treasures. With no cars, no chain hotels, and 80% of the island designated as a national park, Mackinac Island appeals to travelers who want to leave the modern world behind. Built in 1870, Fort Mackinac is a top attraction along with the historic downtown. Not to be missed, the Arch Rock is the most stunning natural marvel along the coast, and no visit is complete without a trip to [Murdick's Fudge](#). This family-owned business has been producing arguably the best fudge in the country since 1887.

Santa Catalina Island, California

This southern California island is suitable for everyone, for those wanting to be spoiled and pampered to others who just want to relax in nature – campgrounds are available all over the island for stargazers. On the flip side, Catalina also has a generous number of luxury, oceanfront boutique hotels. Adventure seekers can take flight on the island's 1,100-foot-long eco-tour zipline, or go hunting for the island's free-roaming herd of bison. Take a glass bottom boat tour, or if you really want to see what lies beneath, scuba dive to see some of the most impressive underwater kelp forests in the country.

Key West, Florida

Yes, it's popular and everyone knows Key West, but for good reason. Noted as the southernmost city in the continental U.S., this Key is just 90 miles from the coast of Cuba. Key West is more than just a pretty face, though. It's also teeming with history. Did you know Ernest Hemingway shackled up on Key West for 30 years? You can visit his home (now a museum) in the heart of Old Town Key West. In the late afternoon, take a stroll down funky Duval Street on your way to Mallory Square for the nightly sunset celebration. Duval is also your party and shopping center with some notorious bars, unique boutiques, and art galleries.

Kiawah Island, South Carolina

[Another East Coast paradise](#), Kiawah Island is a perfect blend of luxury, adventure, and everything in between. 25 miles off the coast of Charleston, South Carolina, Kiawah Island is praised for its southern hospitality and pristine nature. This island claims 10 gorgeous miles of beach, protected marshlands and forests booming with wildlife, and loads of water sports. Rent a paddleboard, surfboard, kayak, take a guided nature tour, or set off on an independent trek. For visitors who like the finer things in life, there are five epic golf courses at the Kiawah Island Golf Resort and three luxury spas on the island. Bonus: this island's sunrises and sunsets are second to none.