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## These New England Beach Towns Are Even Better in the Fall

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Newport, Rhode Island. Photo by Maritza on Unsplash.

If you revel in the pleasures of summer in New England – lobster rolls, boat rides, lakeside getaways – just wait until the fall. There’s no place prettier to take in the season’s cooling temperatures and changing leaves than the American Northeast, when the autumn sun casts a golden glow across the region’s forests and coastlines and the air becomes crisp and clear.

Despite the level of beauty that overtakes the region, summer’s crowds still disperse to head back to school and to work, leaving state beaches blissfully empty and waterfront resorts enticingly affordable. So break out those oversize sweaters and ankle booties. It’s time to head to these charming New England beaches and beach towns, which are even better in the off-season.

## 1. Nantucket, Massachusetts

Together with Martha’s Vineyard, this tiny island off the coast of Cape Cod is one of America’s most beloved summer colonies. From the village of Sconset to its namesake town of Nantucket, this is the very definition of New England – think gray clapboard cottages, cobbled lanes, tiny seaports, and shifting sand dunes that end in picture-perfect beaches. Despite its summer draws, however, some would argue that visiting the island is even better in the fall, when the air-kissing crowds have returned to the mainland, the island’s ubiquitous hydrangeas – a summer bloom –

give way to wildflowers like the eye-catching swamp rose mallow, and residents get their island back.

Though the breeze picks up a bit, the weather is still pleasant here in September and October – a perfect excuse for grabbing a bike to explore town and hunt for lighthouses. Best of all, beaches clear out and reservations at the island's best restaurants like Straight Wharf and The Proprietors are easier to come by. Don't miss Nantucket Restaurant Week (September 28–October 4, 2020), when participating restaurants offer prix fixe meals at discounted rates.

Life House, which opened this past August, is the island's newest gem – an 1830s building turned 14-room bed and breakfast near Jetties Beach that's done up with floral fabrics, beamed ceilings, and wicker furniture and features a courtyard warmed by a fire pit. After dropping your bags, head into the village to peruse art galleries and shops, and don't forget to pay a visit to the Whaling Museum, which does a deep dive into the island's whaling history dating all the way back to the late 1600s.

## 2. Newport, Rhode Island

When it comes to beach destinations in America's smallest state, it's all about quality over quantity. Despite its short shoreline, Rhode Island features some of the prettiest coastal landscapes in New England – none so much as the beaches surrounding Newport. No wonder Gilded Age millionaires chose to build their vacation homes here.

When fall hits, crowds dissipate, opening up rooms in Newport's otherwise booked-out hotels and freeing its beaches once more. Sachuest Beach, also known as Second Beach, is one of those beaches that sees unwavering crowds in the summer but calms down by fall. Here, lingering

vacationers and locals come to surf the waves and hike the trails in the Norman Bird Sanctuary next door. Of course, you can't pay a visit to Rhode Island's capital without stopping by Bellevue Avenue to see those aforementioned mansions, particularly The Breakers – a standout for its Italian Renaissance design.

After all the excitement, wind down at the much more modest but no less chic Wayfinder Hotel, which debuted this summer just a 15-minute drive from the sand.

Bar Harbor, Maine. Photo by Miro Vrlik on Unsplash.

### 3. Bar Harbor, Maine

The allure of Bar Harbor is no secret – this popular beach town on Mount Desert Island in Maine has been one of New England’s most popular fall getaway destinations of choice for decades. Undoubtedly the biggest draw is its proximity to Acadia National Park, a 47,000-acre swath of land and one of the best spots for taking in fall foliage. While driving or biking the 27-mile-long Park Loop Road, you’ll pass numerous attractions, including Thunder Hole and Sand Beach, the park’s only stretch of sand. Alternatively, take a drive down to the island’s southernmost point for an up-close look at Bass Harbor Head Lighthouse.

There’s more to the island than just the park, however. The views of Frenchman Bay are stunning whether you’re on the summit of Cadillac Mountain for sunrise or right in town. If you plan your visit right, you might even arrive in time for the annual Acadia Oktoberfest, which hosts tastings, contests, and live entertainment.

The West Street Hotel is a sophisticated spot to lay your head right in the heart of town, thanks to a heated rooftop pool, spa, and two stellar dining options. (Locals swear by the lobster bake and blueberry pie at Stewman’s Lobster Pound.) From here, you’ll be just a 6-minute drive from Acadia’s Cadillac Mountain entrance and less than a half-hour drive from both Echo Lake Beach and Snuggle Magic Cranberry Farm, where you can pick your own cranberries during the fall harvesting season.

## 4. Old Lyme, Connecticut

You don’t hear a lot about Connecticut’s beachside wonders compared to Maine or Massachusetts, but that’s just part of their charm. Old Lyme, a coastal community situated where the Connecticut River empties into the Long Island Sound, is a historic place to discover the best of local art and

nature. This is the home of the Florence Griswold Museum, a Georgian home turned gallery dedicated to works by the Lyme Art Colony – Old Lyme was the birthplace of American Impressionism – as well as Sculpture Grounds, the home and living studio of American sculptor Gilbert Boro.

Not an art lover? You'll find plenty of other excuses to spend your hours outdoors. Soundview Beach and Rocky Neck State Park are two of the prettiest beaches in the state that face the sound. Further inland, Black Hall Outfitters leads kayaking tours down the Connecticut River Estuary, which is a gorgeous location to take in the fall colors from both sides. When the temperatures really drop and being in or near water becomes too chilly, take a drive upriver to Essex and hop aboard the Essex Steam Train, a historic 1892 locomotive with vintage coach cars, for a scenic journey through the colorful Connecticut River Valley.

Afterward, check into the cozy Bee and Thistle Inn, whose mid-1700s Georgian manor is listed on the National Registry of Historic Places. The inn's 10 antique-filled guest rooms are eclipsed only by the award-winning on-site restaurant.

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## 5. Plum Island, Massachusetts

Let the crowds have Cape Cod and Rockport – this secluded barrier island along Massachusetts' North Shore is as serene as they come. Named for the wild beach plum shrubs that grow here, Plum Island sees increasing crowds during the summer that disappear again come fall.

If you're looking to get away from it all, head to Sandy Point State Reservation in the Parker River National Wildlife Refuge, a 4,662-acre sanctuary for migratory shorebirds. The beach has notoriously limited parking – only about 30 spaces in all – so you can imagine the level of peacefulness you'll find here.

New to the area is Blue - Inn on the Beach, an oceanfront hotel offering unobstructed Atlantic views from guest room balconies and close proximity to the museums and shops of Newburyport and neighboring Newbury. Don't miss the Cushing House Museum, a Federal brick landmark from the early 1800s filled with period furniture and artifacts from 19th-century Newburyport.

## 6. Kennebunkport, Maine

Well-to-do New Englanders have long escaped city life for Kennebunkport, which has become synonymous with upscale restaurants and shops and a bougie art scene. The Bush family famously calls this coastal hamlet home during the summer season, but we'd argue that the town really comes into its own in the fall, when the tourists give way, the leaves begin to change, and the town transforms from beachy to cozy.

There might be no place comfier to snuggle up after a breezy day on Goose Rocks Beach than by the fire at [The Tides Beach Club](#), a classic 21-room boutique facing the sand that stays open through October. When hunger strikes, take a drive down to [Earth at Hidden Pond](#) for seasonal dishes laced with ingredients picked from its own farm, like yellow tomato gazpacho, wood-fired carrots, and local cod. [Mornings in Paris](#) is a great place for breakfast pastries the following morning – or pre-packed beach picnic boxes for the afternoon.

## 7. Block Island, Rhode Island

This summer playground is still glorious come September, when the temperatures cool down and the beaches and hiking and biking trails become far more manageable and relaxed. Most importantly, space on the ferry opens up again, allowing even last-minute visitors to score a car reservation.

Once you arrive, make a beeline (by bike or car) to [The Oar](#) or [Three Sisters](#) for lunch before making your way to the island's southeast point. There, follow the long wooden staircase down to Mohegan Bluffs – a breezy, deserted coastal stretch where clay cliffs make for a dramatic backdrop.

As for where to stay, [Block Island Beach House](#), which took over the island's iconic Surf Hotel, opened last summer and occupies an enviable address above Crescent Beach. Enjoy stellar views of the water from the restaurant and bar, which features a wraparound porch and seafood-centric all-day menu.

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