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Introduction

Let's face it; the beach that will next blow your mind is more than likely the next one you can get to, regardless of where it is.

We love beaches, despite their many inconveniences. The impolite, pushy and un-shy sand. The temperamental surf. The wind that whips hair, sand and surf into a frenzy. The sun that burns that spot the sun block cream didn't reach. The sharks that stalk us (thankfully, usually, in our minds alone).

Yes, we love them. A beach always feels like the ultimate escape. Why? Is it an evolutionary hangover? Are we returning to our ancient origins as creatures-crawled-out-of-the-ocean? Or did we develop our desire for the beach alongside our need for the food that the ocean provides? Is it the sound of the waves, which science says has a calming effect on our brain activity? Maybe it's the guaranteed hit of vitamin D our exposed skin absorbs.

We could speculate all day. Except that brings us no closer to the beach. And at the beach, there'll be no speculation; we'll be in the moment. So go! Find a beach. Go now. Don't wonder why. You know it's the right thing to do.



Green Island Beach / Green Island, Antigua & Barbuda

THIS IS JUST WHAT A DESERT ISLAND LOOKS LIKE IN MY MIND.

The place is practically deserted, with turquoise water as far as the eye can see and lush greenery flanking the white sand. Green Island Beach comes straight out of tropical island central casting.

IT'S HARD TO BELIEVE WE'LL GET THIS SLICE OF PARADISE ALL TO OURSELVES.

Of the Antiguan islands, Green Island is your best bet for some privacy: it's out of the way and can only be reached by charter boat. Once you're on the island there are a number of

secluded beaches to explore with Green Island Beach being on the even-more out-of-the-way west coast.

WHAT'S ON THE ITINERARY?

It's a packed schedule of sunbathing, snoozing and snorkelling. Not necessarily in that order.

GOOD SNORKELLING TO BE HAD?

Calm and clear, the water stays relatively shallow for a way out to sea so it's perfect for gently bobbing around with your head immersed. The rock formations around the edges of the cove make for some interesting exploring too.



Hot Water Beach / Coromandel Peninsula, New Zealand

ARE WE HOT TUBBING?

DIY style. When you visit this beach, a spade is a required piece of kit. Two subterranean fissures allow hot spring water to bubble up through the sand. Grab your spade and dig yourself (and your friends) a cosy little Jacuzzi and let the warmth surround you.

SERIOUSLY? HOW HOT ARE WE TALKING?

The water reaches around 60°C which, when mixed with a little sand and sea water, is pretty much perfect. The springs bubble into life a couple of hours either side of low tide so make sure you check your tide charts before making the trek to the Coromandel Peninsula. It can get busy: try visiting the Hot

Water Beach on a rainy day for some peace (you're only going to get wet anyway!)

GOTCHA.

That said, this beach is not just about the soft-sand hot tub. There's surf if you go that way, there's art galleries for some indoor highbrow action, and cafes to make your day of pampering complete.

DAY SPA!

Your very own. Just take care out there – the ocean could give you an unexpected full-body massage with waves breaking over your tub.



Charmouth Beach / Dorset, UK

I WANT TO MAKE A CRACK ABOUT THE UK AND BEACHES.

I'm sure it would have been funny. In any case, the only cracks you need to make here are in the rocks you kick around on the beach – this is fossil paradise. The side of the beach west of the river mouth is the best spot – but remember, keep your fossicking to the stones and rocks on the foreshore – no digging into the cliff face. If you can't find yourself a prehistoric relic, then you're not trying hard enough. In fact, you're not trying at all!

I DON'T WANT TO TRY TOO HARD AT THE BEACH.

Fair enough. Then defy the global expectations of English beaches and hit the sand and surf. Yes, surf too! The beach to the east of the river has more sand (fewer rocks and fossils) and is very family friendly. There's a beach cafe off the beach for your ice creams and a nice picnic area with tables as well.

I TAKE BACK THE CRACK.

See, it's not all grey and cold. Except for the fossils. They are definitely grey and cold.

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