

# North American Island Vacations

By **Judy Koutsky**

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You can travel the world in search of the perfect island vacation, but these North American spots are close to home and perfect for easy getaways.



### Bald Head, North Carolina

[BHI](#), as it's known, is the southernmost barrier island in North Carolina, situated where Cape Fear River meets the Atlantic Ocean. The entire island is only 12,000 acres, with 10,000 of that protected beaches, salt marshes and maritime forest. The primary modes of transportation are golf carts, bikes and, of course, plenty of walking, since passenger cars are not allowed. This is the 200th anniversary of North Carolina's oldest lighthouse, Old Baldy, and there are activities throughout the year celebrating the Cape Fear region's maritime history. Anglers should head to the waters for a chance to catch tuna, wahoo, billfish, tarpon and king mackerel.

**Don't miss:** If you're up for a little workout, climb the steps to the top of Old Baldy for the best views on the island.

**Where to eat and stay:** Delphina's has killer cocktails along with great views. Rent a house with access [The Shoals Club](#) a family-focused beach club that overlooks Cape Fear Point.



### Block Island, Rhode Island

[Block Island](#) has much of the same beach appeal as Martha's Vineyard and Nantucket, with a lower-key vibe. The island is most popular July and August, when the water is warm enough for swimming. The entire perimeter of the three-by-seven-mile island is lined with beaches—17 miles worth, each boasting stunning ocean vistas. If you're into hiking, the 28 miles of trails won't disappoint. Other nature-loving activities include bike riding, horseback riding, bird-watching, fishing, parasailing, kayaking and sailing.

**Don't miss:** Be sure to hit the more than 50 boutique stores, specialty shops and art galleries that dot the island.

**Where to stay:** [The Hotel Manisses](#) is a boutique property with great ocean views and claw-foot deep-soaking tubs. Winfield's has an intimate dining room and French, Italian and American fusion cuisine.



### **Captiva Island, Florida**

There is nothing built higher than a palm tree on this scenic little spot. You can spend your days doing a little yachting, playing golf or shopping (check out the art galleries on Andy Rosse Lane).

**Don't miss:** Seventy-percent of this sleepy island is preserved, making it one of the best places for birdi in the world.

**Where to stay:** For the best views of the sunset and for some fabulous seafood, head to Mucky Duck. / island sunset tradition since 1976, both locals and tourists are drawn to the views and cuisine. [South Se Island Resort](#) sits on two and half acres of beach and includes a 330-acre wildlife preserve.



### **Mackinac Island, Michigan**

Known as the Jewel of the Great Lakes, [Mackinac Island](#)'s main tourist season is May through October. If there's one thing you need to consume while you're here, it's fudge. Arguably the best in the country, the famous recipes date back to the 19th century and there are plenty of fudge stores willing to give samples. But don't worry, since cars are not allowed, you'll work off the extra calories by biking (tandem bikes are especially popular) or walking. Or, take part of the Mackinac tradition and have a horse-drawn carriage take you around (there are also private stables if you want to do the riding yourself).

**Don't miss:** If you're into history or traveling with the kids, Fort Mackinac, which dates back to 1780 is a must (there are reenactments throughout the day).

**Where to stay and eat:** [The Grand Hotel](#) has been owned by the Musser family for three generations and this year it's celebrating its 130th anniversary. The stunning property, which has 14 bars and restaurants, sits high on a bluff overlooking the Straits of Mackinac and the Mackinac Bridge.



*Photo by Chip Henderson*

### **Outer Banks, North Carolina**

A string of four barrier islands, this region has the largest tracts of undeveloped beaches on the East Coast. Drive along NC Highway 12, otherwise known as the [Outer Banks Scenic Byway](#)—it is a coastal drive that threads through villages (with lovely art galleries and shops) and wildlife preserves.

**Don't miss:** Equestrians can take scenic trail rides through Buxton Woods and along uncrowded beaches.

**Where to stay and eat:** [The Sanderling Resort](#), an oceanfront luxury resort recently underwent a renovation; amenities include two dune-side pools, fire pits and a spa. Be sure to hit the resort's restaurant—Kimball's Kitchen—for killer sunsets along with freshly-caught seafood.



Photo by Paul Baglole

### Prince Edward Island, Canada

[PEI](#), as it's known, is a crescent-shape island that resembles a cradle, hence it's moniker the "land cradle on the waves." There are miles of red sandy beaches, quaint lighthouses dotting the shore and enough lobster and mussels to satisfy the biggest seafood lover.

**Don't miss:** Kayak along the scenic Rustico Harbour, or go stand-up paddleboarding in Malpeque Bay's International Migratory Site.

**Where to stay:** Stay at the five-star [Inn at Bay Fortune](#) overlooking the Fortune River. The inn dates back to 1913 and previous owners include Colleen Dewhurst (known for her role as Marilla Cuthbert in *Anne Green Gables*). Eat at their Fireworks restaurant where chefs put together a true local farm-to-flame-to-fork experience.



*Photo by Toccara Best*

### San Juan Islands, Washington

A 30-minute seaplane flight from Seattle (or you can take a scenic ferry ride), the [San Juan Islands](#) don't have a single traffic light. You will, however, find three vineyards, two breweries and a distillery, all with tasting rooms.

**Don't miss:** This is one of the best places in the world to see orca whales; there are also humpbacks, sea lions, harbor seals and porpoises.

**Where to stay:** [The Island Inn at 123 West](#) is a high-end boutique property that is LEED-certified and has great water views. Sushi lovers should make a reservation at Tops'l Seafood and Sushi; the fish is sourced from local fishermen, so the salmon, halibut, crab, clams and mussels are literally fresh from the sea.



Photo by Brandon Barre

### **Vancouver Island, Canada**

Known for its mild temperatures and thriving arts community, [Vancouver Island](#) is home to Victoria, British Columbia's capital. There are great views of the inner harbor as you stroll through the town, plus you can take in the amazing architecture. If you're a shopper, head to the Old City for its art galleries and quaint shops.

**Don't miss:** Tofino, once a sleepy fishing village, is a beach town of 2,000 residents and it's a great outdoor destination for food enthusiasts, photographers and families.

**Where to stay:** [The Fairmont Empress Hotel](#) is a world-renowned luxury five-star property and recently underwent a \$60-million renovation. Be sure to have high tea, dinner (or a drink) at the property—it's quite the event.