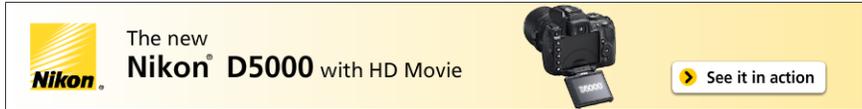


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Oregon's Adventure Coast is filled with sand dunes, beaches, and activities like whale and bird watching.

By Madeline Steege, The World via AP

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By Anne Banas, SmarterTravel.com



Enlarge By Pat Sullivan, AP Photo

Economic woes may continue throughout the summer travel season, but life can still be a beach with all the deals out there waiting for you. If you've been dreaming of sand castles and cresting waves, but haven't firmed up your plans for fear of sticker shock, now is the time to think about booking. Here are six suggestions for budget-friendly beach vacations in the U.S., all for under \$500.

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Galveston, Texas

Galveston might still be recovering from Hurricane Ike, which hit the island hard last September, but hotels are currently open for business and many are offering 20% off room rates. Several properties listed in the sale will fit nicely within the \$500 budget, from the Super 8 for \$50 per night to more luxurious properties like Hotel Galvez starting at \$130. The best rates are available Sunday through Thursday, and the discount is valid through July 4 with the possibility of being extended.

By visiting Galveston and spending precious tourism dollars, you'll help with the rebuilding efforts, which have already come a long way. Many of the main attractions like Moody Gardens amusement park and the Schlitterbahn Galveston Waterpark are now enhanced and open for the summer season. Plus, since Ike, the city has invested \$12 million into a beach nourishment

project, adding new sand to a 2.5-mile stretch of beach at the Seawall, which is free to the public.

Cost breakdown: \$130 x three nights at the Hotel Galvez = \$390 for two, or \$195 per person. You'll have a little over \$300 left in the budget for taxes and fees, as well as for transportation to the island. Or, pick an alternative property with even lower rates to save even more.

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Charleston, South Carolina

While known primarily as a historical destination, Charleston also has plenty of nearby beaches to draw sand lovers from all over the U.S. And to make things more affordable, the Charleston Area Convention & Visitors Bureau has launched a **Family Fun value promotion**, which features discounts at several hotels. Budget-friendly options range from \$89 per night at the budget-class Sleep Inn North Charleston to \$159 at the historic Francis Marion Hotel. Most packages contain extras like breakfast and tickets to the South Carolina Aquarium. Available dates vary, but most offers are good for spring and summer travel.

Cost breakdown: \$159 x three nights at the Francis Marion = \$477 for a family of four, or \$119.25 per person. Taxes and fees are extra.

Santa Barbara, California

Who needs a car at the beach? Especially in Santa Barbara, where you can get discounts and perks for leaving your wheels behind and walking, biking, or even taking the train instead of driving. In an attempt to be more eco-friendly, the city has initiated a **Car Free promotion** that includes a host of savings on **hotels and activities** when you take the train, a **20% discount on Amtrak tickets**, and **special packages** even if you do arrive by car.

For example, anyone can stay at the Old Yacht Club Inn B&B for rates starting at \$99 off-peak/\$139 peak per night (with a three-night stay), and also receive a full gourmet breakfast, a wine social in the evenings, and



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