

RALEIGH, N.C. — Two beaches on North Carolina's [Outer Banks](#) return to the upper reaches of Dr. Beach's annual [Top 10 Beaches](#) list for 2020. With Ocracoke Lifeguarded Beach at No. 2 and Lighthouse Beach in Buxton at No. 5, the list was released this week along with [tips on social distancing](#) from Dr. Stephen Leatherman, the Florida International University professor who has published the national rankings since 1991.

[Ocracoke](#) "is my favorite getaway beach," writes Leatherman, who awarded the island's lifeguarded beach the top spot on his 2007 list. He commends [Lighthouse Beach](#), where the Cape Hatteras Lighthouse stood for 129 years before it was moved inland, as the No. 1 surfing spot on the U.S. Atlantic coastline. Both beaches are part of the [Cape Hatteras National Seashore](#).

For 2020, Grayton Beach State Park in Santa Rosa, Fla., topped the list, followed by Ocracoke Lifeguarded Beach; Coopers Beach, Southampton, N.Y.; Duke Kahanamoku Beach, Oahu, Hawaii; Lighthouse Beach, Buxton; Caladesi Island State Park, Dunedin, Fla.; Hapuna Beach State Park, Big Island, Hawaii; Coast Guard Beach, Cape Cod, Mass.; Coronado Beach, San Diego, Calif; and Beachwalker Park, Kiawah Island, S.C.

While celebrating the beaches on Leatherman's 2020 list, [DrBeach.org](#) urges travelers to exercise personal responsibility and follow local guidelines for minimizing risks for spreading the COVID-19 virus. He advises maintaining a safe social distance from others, having a mask ready to use as warranted, and having options if beaches are crowded.

"There may be capacity limits on some beaches during reopening," Leatherman says. "And it's inevitable that there may be days when spots fill up quickly so check the beach website. The good news is the beach will still be there tomorrow. When setting out on a beach visit, make sure to have a backup plan, like a picnic at a park."

Leatherman, an N.C. State University alumnus, evaluates beaches based on [50 criteria](#) that value natural qualities, safety and cleanliness. The lifeguarded beaches at Ocracoke and Cape Hatteras regularly meet the Dr. Beach standards. One or both has made the list every year since Ocracoke topped it in 2007.

For travelers planning trips to North Carolina during the COVID-19 pandemic, the [advisory page](#) on VisitNC.com offers statewide status reports and links to destinations for local guidelines. Visitors are also encouraged to learn about the new [Count on Me NC](#) initiative, a voluntary certification program for restaurants, hotels and attractions who complete health and safety training for reducing COVID-19 risk.

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