



Bowling Ball Beach Bildagentur Geduldig/Alamy

Hidden Beaches

Your California beach fantasy: an isolated cove far from sun-seeking crowds, where tumbling waves and a Pacific breeze erase your solo footprints in the sand. To realize that dream, bypass the beaten path. It takes extra effort—a meandering back-road drive or a short hike—to reach these lesser-known shorelines, but your payoff is seaside tranquility. Treasure-hop these hidden beaches, starting in the Redwood Coast and continuing south to Big Sur.



1 Gold Bluffs Beach

A dirt-road drive through Prairie Creek Redwoods State Park leads to this driftwood-laden beach in Orick, its brayed-tan sands backed by wetlands and meadows where Roosevelt elk graze. *Distance to next stop: 24 miles*

2 Agate Beach

At Patrick's Point State Park in Trinidad, a steep but short tromp leads to the coast where semiprecious agates are tumbled smooth by white-crested waves. *Next stop: 84 miles*

3 Mattole River Beach

A long and winding drive from U.S. 101, this Petrolia beach sits at the northern part of California's remote and ruggedly beautiful Lost Coast. The river's sandy mouth is prime beachcombing terrain. *Next stop: 167 miles*



Pull over north of Fort Bragg for photos of gem-covered Glass Beach.

4 Bowling Ball Beach

Walk to Schooner Gulch Beach from Highway 1 in Point Arena, then head north to see this assemblage of perfectly round rocks, visible only at the lowest tides. *Next stop: 8 miles*

5 Cooks Beach

From County Road 526 in Gualala, the Bonham Trail leads through Bishop pines to this hidden gem. At low tide, you'll find a sea cave. *Next stop: 110 miles*

6 Kirby Cove

Driving twisty Conzelman Road and hiking one mile downhill rewards you with access to this Marin Headlands cove, where San Francisco's skyline dazzles and the Golden Gate Bridge gleams. Reserve a campsite and spend the night. *Next stop: 78 miles*

7 Fern Grotto Beach

In Santa Cruz, a 1.2-mile seaside stroll along Wilder Ranch State Park's bluffs—passing crashing waves and diving seabirds—leads you here, where a hidden, fern-draped cave is fed by an underground spring. *Next stop: 80 miles*

8 Pfeiffer Beach

Two winding miles off Highway 1, this Big Sur seafont is framed by offshore rock formations riddled with caves, blowholes, and a massive arch. Soft white sand is streaked with purple from manganese deposits.