



# Life's

Summer is the time when everyone wants to head to the water, and these destinations offer awesome accessible beaches.

by Barbara & Jim  
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## Spending a summer

vacation taking in glorious sunsets, playing in sparkling waves and lazing on beautiful beaches has often been problematic for people who use wheelchairs.

Trying to navigate a traditional wheelchair through sand is next to impossible, and most chairs aren't suited for water.

However, communities from coast to coast have been busy implementing new services and building amenities so their shores are welcoming to people of all abilities.

These are the accessible features you'll want to be looking for on your next trip to the beach and several great beaches across the country that offer them and more.

## Chairs & Mats

Accessible features such as ramps that allow easier access to the beach and/or synthetic mats

that provide a stable surface to roll over the sand can be found at many beaches.

When it comes time to dive into those sparkling waves, many communities also offer beach wheelchairs. These lightweight chairs are specifically designed to operate at the beach and in the water with big, oversized tires and seats made to handle the water. Some are even made to float. Beach wheelchairs are much easier to find these days, too.

Karen Deming founded DeBug Mobility Products along with her husband, Mike, in the mid-1990s.

"At that time, there were only three companies making beach wheelchairs," says Deming. "I can't even count how many manufacturers there are today."

What was previously a niche market has skyrocketed, and the Pensacola, Fla.-based company ships its products to vendors around the world.

Anyone borrowing a beach wheelchair should ask for detailed instructions on how



# A Beach

COURTESY OF DESCHAMPS SAS & DESCHAMPS MATS SYSTEMS INC.



Beach mats, like this one at Hermosa Beach just south of the Los Angeles International Airport, provide a more solid and stable surface for people who use wheelchairs to roll out over the sand and enjoy the beach with everyone else.

to properly use it. Some are only made for use on land and will be ruined if taken into the water. Other models roll on the sand and convert to a floating lounge chair when immersed in the waves. Some can be self-propelled, while others require another person to do the pushing. Be sure to confirm when and where a beach wheelchair needs to be returned. After reviewing all the operating instructions, ask for the phone number of someone who can assist you if there are any additional questions.

Beach wheelchairs vary in design and not every one has a seat belt. Users might want to bring a long piece of Velcro to loop around their waist for added safety. Some people also prefer to use their own cushion. Most beach wheelchairs are low to the ground, and transferring from a personal wheelchair can be difficult, which might necessitate additional assistance.

Now that you know about the accessible features to look for at the beach, these are some great, wheelchair-friendly destinations to enjoy some fun in the sand and surf this summer.







COURTESY OF BEACH OPERATIONS, DIVISION OF PARKS & RECREATION, CITY OF CORPUS CHRISTI

Five beaches in the Corpus Christi, Texas, area offer free beach wheelchairs that easily maneuver the soft sand and also float.

## Corpus Christi, Texas

Cruising the shore along the Gulf of Mexico is a breeze in Corpus Christi, Texas, where five beaches offer free, all-terrain beach wheelchairs that easily maneuver the soft sand.

The bright yellow balloon tires, high backs and padded armrests provide a comfortable ride and transform into floating lounge chairs when taken into the water. The chairs can also be used on the Oso Bay Wetlands Preserve trails.

Beach wheelchairs are available from the lifeguard stands at Packery Channel, Michael J. Ellis Beach & Seawall, Whitecap Beach and McGee Beach.

A photo ID is required to take beach wheelchairs, and they're available from noon to 6 p.m. (local time). For more information, visit [cctexas.com/beaches](http://cctexas.com/beaches) or call 361-826-3469.

## Daytona Beach, Fla.

Home to the iconic Daytona 500 and known as the Festival Capital of Florida, Daytona Beach is world famous for its shoreline along the Atlantic Ocean.

Daytona Beach features 23 miles of white-sand beaches with much of it hard-packed enough that cars are allowed to drive on it for a \$20 fee.

At low tide, many of the beaches offer an expansive 500-foot wide shoreline to play on and explore.

Volusia County loans all-terrain beach wheelchairs on a first-come, first-served basis for free.

Chairs are borrowed for a few hours at a time, and names are put on a waiting list.

Chairs can be picked up from the lifeguard stations at Flagler Avenue at New Smyrna Beach, Dunlawton Avenue at Daytona Beach Shores, Beach Headquarters at Daytona Beach and Cardinal Avenue at Daytona Beach.

For information, visit [daytonabeach.com/things-to-do/beaches](http://daytonabeach.com/things-to-do/beaches).

## Gulf Shores & Orange Beach, Ala.

A popular family-friendly destination, the Gulf Shores, Ala., area features 32 miles of white quartz sand beaches along the blue-green waters of the Gulf of Mexico.

The area's main beach at Gulf Place has three beach mats stretching out into the sand



COURTESY OF GULF SHORES & ORANGE BEACH TOURISM

One of three beach access mats in Gulf Shores, Ala.

Free beach wheelchairs at Daytona Beach, Fla., make it easy to explore the area's 23 miles of beaches that can reach up to 500 feet wide at low tide.



COURTESY OF VOLUSIA COUNTY BEACH SAFETY





from the parking lots and a large park and picnic area. A fourth mat can be found at East Gulf Place, which has parking and beach access for local residents only.

There are no free, public beach wheelchairs available, but these companies rent them: Beach'N Buggy's (251-978-8051), Ike's Beach Service (251-948-3757), Beach Power Rentals (251-978-2953) and Medical Equipment Solutions (251-200-1311).

For more information on the area's beaches, visit [gulfshoresal.gov/1133/Beaches](http://gulfshoresal.gov/1133/Beaches).

## Pensacola, Fla.

Just over the border from Alabama is another area with beautiful beaches that underwent accessibility upgrades over the last several years.

Pensacola, Fla., is home to the famed Blue Angels, dozens of fun attractions and 18 miles of alluring beaches and nature preserves. Five Mobi-mats were installed in 2019 at Baby Beach, Boardwalk Beach, Casino Beach, Park West and Moms Beach (Quietwater Beach).

Electric and manual beach wheelchairs are available for rent from several vendors, including Lazy Days Beach Service (850-698-



COURTESY OF HUNTINGTON BEACH POLICE DEPARTMENT

0928), Scooter Hut (850-530-7342) and The Fun Store (850-916-4386).

Additionally, beach wheelchairs are available at Johnson Beach in the Gulf Islands National Seashore designated recreational area ([nps.gov/guis](http://nps.gov/guis)). Ask a park ranger at the entrance for assistance.

For more information on Pensacola beaches, visit [visitpensacola.com](http://visitpensacola.com).

## Huntington Beach, Calif.

Located about 35 miles southeast of downtown Los Angeles and nicknamed "Surf City USA," Huntington Beach, Calif., has plenty to offer people with disabilities.

The Huntington City Beach stretches 3.5 miles along the Pacific Ocean. Wheelchair access is available via a Mobi-mat installed last year near the 6th Street and Pacific Coast Highway parking lot at Huntington Beach.

Huntington Beach, Calif., in the Los Angeles area installed two 5-foot wide Mobi-mats at its beaches in May 2021.

COURTESY OF VISIT PENSACOLA



Pensacola, Fla., features 18 miles of beaches and nature preserves along the Gulf of Mexico, with Mobi-mats available at five locations and beach wheelchair rentals available from several vendors.







COURTESY OF MILWAUKEE COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF PARKS, RECREATION & CULTURE

**Bradford Beach along Lake Michigan, just 10 minutes north of downtown Milwaukee, features a beach mat that stretches to the water's edge and free beach wheelchairs.**

The mat stretches all the way to the water's edge at high tide.

The area also features a 10-mile paved walkway, an adaptive surfing program from McKinnon Surf & SUP Lessons ([mckinnonsurfandsuplessons.com](http://mckinnonsurfandsuplessons.com)), an all-inclusive playground and a therapeutic horseback riding center ([trchb.org/trchb](http://trchb.org/trchb)).

Beach wheelchair rentals are available for free from Zack's By The Beach ([zacksbythebeach.com](http://zacksbythebeach.com)) located by the pier.

For more information on the beaches, visit [surfcityusa.com](http://surfcityusa.com).

## Myrtle Beach, S.C.

Known as the Grand Strand, the Myrtle Beach, S.C., area spans 60 miles along the Atlantic Ocean and is one of the most wheelchair-friendly destinations in the country.

Myrtle Beach has 114 public beach access points, and more than 40 of those locations are listed as accessible. Best of all, the city offers free beach wheelchairs with balloon tires and seat belts at multiple locations. The chairs can be delivered and picked up between 9 a.m. and 5 p.m. from your location by calling 843-918-1488.

Visitors with a valid handicapped, Purple Heart, Disabled American Veterans or Medal of Honor vehicle license tag may park for free at any publicly operated meter.

For more information on the area's beaches, go to [visitmyrtlebeach.com](http://visitmyrtlebeach.com).

## Milwaukee

Most of the beaches on this list are oceanside, but don't forget about the Great Lakes.

Bradford Beach along Lake Michigan is less than 10 minutes north of downtown Milwaukee and completed a five-year accessibility plan last year to make the beach usable for people with a range of disabilities.

Called "the most accessible beach in America" by local leaders, it features a 100-foot long, 8-foot wide smooth concrete ramp that runs from the street to the beach. From there, a beach mat seasonally runs to the water's edge.

Beach wheelchairs are available for free from Memorial Day to Labor Day from The Dock's concession stand (414-530-3251).

For more information on Bradford Beach, visit [county.milwaukee.gov/EN/Parks/Explore/Lakefront](http://county.milwaukee.gov/EN/Parks/Explore/Lakefront).

## San Diego

One of the most popular vacation destinations in the country also boasts some impressive accessibility at its world-famous beaches.

Sunny San Diego features accessibility mats and free manual and powered beach wheelchairs at several beaches along its more than 70 miles of coastline on the Pacific Ocean. The San Diego Tourism Authority says the powered beach wheelchairs are a hybrid of a regular powered wheelchair and a dune buggy.





Accessibility mats, free manual and powered beach wheelchairs can be found at several beaches along San Diego's more than 70 miles of coastline on the Pacific Ocean.

COURTESY OF SUNSET EMPIRE PARKS + RECREATION DISTRICT

Most wheelchairs are offered on a first come, first served basis at the following beaches:

- Mission Bay, Mission Beach, Ocean Beach and La Jolla Shores (619-525-8247)
- Coronado Beach (619-522-7346, ext. 3)
- Silver Strand State Beach (manual beach wheelchairs only, 619-435-0126)
- Imperial Beach (619-685-7972)
- Oceanside Harbor Beach and Pier Beach (manual beach wheelchairs only, 760-435-4018)

Beach mats are found from May through September at nine area beaches, including La Jolla Shores, Mission Beach, Ocean Beach, Mission Bay and South Mission Beach.

For more information, visit [sandiego.gov/adacompliance/other](http://sandiego.gov/adacompliance/other).

## Seaside, Ore.

The Pacific Northwest may not be the first area you think of when it comes to a beach vacation, but Oregon has a beautiful place to check out that offers plenty of accessibility.

Located about 80 miles northwest of Portland, Ore., Seaside is a charming community with a great beach and fun Promenade known as "The Prom." The 1½-mile Prom has multiple attractions and stunning views of the Pacific Ocean, rocky bluffs and sandy dunes.

When you want to head down to the roughly 3-mile long beach, you can borrow a free beach wheelchair for up to four hours from the Sunset Empire Parks + Recreation District (503-738-3311). One nice part of this



program is the beach wheelchairs are conveniently stored in lockers at the city's parking lot near the beach. After obtaining a key to the lock, you can get the beach wheelchair and store your regular one in the locker while you hit the beach.

For more information, visit [seasideor.com](http://seasideor.com).

## Call Ahead

Planning a wheelchair-accessible beach vacation requires intensive research.

Some places may have restrictions or no accessible services available because of the ongoing novel coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. Contacting a destination's official tourism office for information can help plan things out in advance to ensure everyone has a fun trip.

*The Twardowskis write about travel, disability and Boomer topics. Jim is a RN, and Barbara uses a wheelchair.* ■

For about the last four years, Seaside, Ore., has been offering free beach wheelchairs that are stored in a locker in the city's parking lot. Your regular chair can be kept in the locker while you hit the beach.

