

5 Greater New Bedford Area Beaches

We're definitely starting to feel the summer heat as schools have closed their doors and AC units are being put to the test all throughout the Greater New Bedford area. Summer brings many favorite pastimes to mind; cookouts, vacations, outdoor concerts, festivals... and of course, the beach. Living in the South Coast makes us all a bit privileged in that we are never too far from the water. We are just a short drive from two of the east coast's premiere beach destinations; Newport and Cape Cod. However, you don't even have to journey thirty minutes or brave the treacherous summer traffic to cool off since we have a number of fine waterfront options right in the region.

If you grew up in Greater New Bedford then you are probably plenty familiar with the many beaches scattered along the shores. However, if you are a transplant to the area like myself, you may still be seeking new places to soak up the sun on your day off. Or perhaps you are planning on visiting New Bedford this summer and hoping to get in a swim during your trip. For New Bedford beach lovers new and old, I have put together a list of 5 beaches that are in the area that you might consider checking out.



Horseneck Beach in Westport

1. Horseneck Beach

Location: *Route 88 Westport Point, Westport, MA 02790*

Parking Cost: \$8

I'm starting with the obvious here in saying Horseneck is probably the best beach in the South Coast. Located out on the peninsula of Westport, this beach is in a beautiful location that is well removed from the distractions of commercialism. For those of you who haven't been there, I will briefly explain what you can expect.

First, the water temperature at Horseneck is rather nice.

Unlike some of the beaches you encounter as you move north, Horseneck water is rather warm (I was already swimming there in May.) Additionally, this is the beach to go to if you are a fan of waves. Whether you like body surfing, boogie boarding, or real surfing, Horseneck gets some decent swells that make it a fun place for water lovers. Horseneck Beach also has a bath house which makes it more accommodating than some places, and it has a snack shack for those looking to grab a bite to eat.

Horseneck Beach is fully staffed by lifeguards, so it is definitely a family friendly place. Rip tides aren't uncommon for Horseneck though, so know your swimming strength before getting too deep. There are only two small drawbacks to Horseneck that you might like to know. First is that on hot days it can and WILL get packed. While there are good sized parking lots to accommodate numerous beach goers, it is highly recommended you get there early and even still you can expect to be closely surrounded by other sunbathers the whole time.

The second thing about Horseneck is that it's rocky. Not the whole thing, but there is usually a fairly hazardous strip of rocks you'll need to navigate over to get to the water. This isn't to say you'll need hiking shoes but it is a little rough on the bottoms of your feet, so be forewarned. Nevertheless, once you pass that obstacle the rest of the beach is quite soft and sandy.



West Island Beach in Fairhaven

2. Beach on West Island

Location: *36 Bluepoint Road, Fairhaven, MA 02719*

Parking Cost: *\$20 non resident parking, \$10 non resident walk in*

West Island Beach is a natural beauty. Located adjacent to a state reservation, this small beach is very remote, peaceful and relaxing. Being a calm water beach it isn't ideal for playing in ocean swells, but it is a great swimming spot.

Since the lifeguards offer swim lessons for children here it is safe to say that this beach is a good spot for beginning swimmers of all ages. However, even for the more advanced swimmer there are patches of sand bars that are fun to swim out towards.

West Island is more on the pricey side for parking if you aren't a Fairhaven resident (it is a town beach) and it doesn't offer any shower houses or refreshment stands.

However, what it lacks in amenities it makes up for in beautiful views, clear waters and stunning surroundings.

Furthermore, being located in Fairhaven it is a short drive away from typical beach traffic. This is an ideal beach for packing a picnic, getting in some tanning and doing some leisurely swimming in a location you won't soon forget.

3. Onset Beach

Location: *182 Onset Avenue, East Wareham, MA 02538*

Parking Cost: *Some FREE parking, but a reader (Lynne) states:*

"Onset Beach has a \$2/hour parking fee. Parking on the street is restricted to one hour parking only which is strictly enforced."

I have never been to Onset Beach during the summer, but it is definitely a place I hope to check out before this one ends. Located in Wareham this beach has pretty much everything you could hope for including restroom facilities, lifeguards, refreshment stands and lots of nearby places to eat. Having been to Onset Beach during the off season I can say that it a very beautiful area and there were a number of enticing looking restaurants that I wouldn't mind checking out.

Onset is a calm waters beach, so if you are into big waves this isn't the ideal place. However, calm waters are good for families with small children, or people who are just looking to take a dip without being knocked over. The beach is reported as being very well maintained and clean, which is obviously a plus. One downside I have heard about this beach is that when it becomes busy parking can be difficult to find.

You may need to plan on walking a bit if it's a hot day and you arrive late.



Fort Phoenix in Fairhaven

4. Fort Phoenix Beach

Location: *100 Green Street, Fairhaven, MA 02719*

Parking Cost: *FREE*

Fort Phoenix is a state reservation that overlooks Buzzards Bay and is right across the harbor from New Bedford. Originally it was built as a defense station for the harbor during the Revolutionary War. Fort Phoenix park still functions as a historical location with landmarks indicating there the fort walls once stood and cannons still in place.

In addition to being a nice park complete with tennis courts, a volleyball sand pit and numerous picnic spots, Fort Phoenix has a public swimming area.

Unfortunately, Fort Phoenix is not known for being a top swimming spot. This is partly because many people do not like the quality of the water in New Bedford harbor. Having swam in it myself many times, I do not share this concern (I haven't gotten any skin diseases or grown extra limbs).

However, Fort Phoenix is also a calm water beach since it is on the harbor, and it is very rocky and often gets a lot of red tide. Fortunately, there are bathhouses on site, but no refreshment stands. Occasionally there are food or ice cream trucks that will park at Fort Phoenix. Whichever way you look at it, this is a free swimming spot for a hot day, and the surrounding park is very well maintained. Thus, Fort Phoenix is a great place for bringing some lunch, exploring the scenic views, and even hopping in to cool off afterwards.

5. East Beach

Location: *East Rodney French Blvd. New Bedford, MA 02744*

Parking Cost: *FREE*

East Beach in New Bedford is located right across the harbor from Fort Phoenix. It is right down the road from Fort Taber, a 47 acre park that has a military history as it was designed for harbor defense. East Beach and West Beach are both municipal beaches in New Bedford that are located on opposite sides of the peninsula. Sadly they both often get a bad reputation for being dirty due to litter, but East Beach doesn't deserve such a bad rep in my opinion, and it has many

perks as well.

East Beach is mostly calm waters, and it is sandy which makes it more accessible than its counterpart across the water.

Also, it is only just south of Downtown New Bedford, which makes it very accessible for an after work swim for Downtown NB employees. In the past I would sometimes even bring my lunch over to the beach with co workers to eat in the sun since it is so close by. East Beach is staffed by lifeguards during the day and also features a volleyball court in the sand, restrooms and outdoor showers.

East Beach is very close to Fort Taber which is a great place to go for a walk and for taking in the views. Most of the military batteries, such as Fort Rodman, are not accessible, but there is a standing museum where you can learn more about these structures which hopefully await renovations. There is also a playground, bike paths and a nice pier that goes out into the water.