

10 OFF-THE-BEATEN-PATH PLACES TO LEARN TO SURF

Surfing isn't the easiest sport to master, and if you want to learn away from the crowds, there are some wild, beautiful places to get started, with quiet beaches and empty waves

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PREVIOUS PAGE & TOP, ABOVE Magheraroarty Strand in Donegal – the county is well known as a fabulous surfing destination in Ireland ABOVE LEFT & RIGHT The Whittling House in Alnmouth makes for a comfortable base while you check out the surf school at Seaton Sluice in Northumberland

Surfing is more popular than ever, which means lessons in big groups and well-known spots packed with beginners tackling their first waves. But there are still many out-of-the-way places with space on sand and sea. Scotland's far north coast and islands are remarkably quiet, despite world-class waves. And away from the surf scene in Portrush, Northern Ireland has many huge, flat strands with ideal waves for beginners. Explore distant corners of Wales or the far reaches of

Cornwall, or head to Ireland – one of the best places in the world for surfing off the beaten path – for stunning rural beaches.

1 MAGHERAROARTY STRAND, COUNTY DONEGAL, IRELAND

The rural tip of northwest Donegal has beaches with real wow factor, like crescent-shaped Magheraroarty Strand, which faces the ancient islands of the Donegal archipelago and is backed by a tidal lagoon, creating an incredible

landscape of sand and sea. Local surf brand Narosa has made Magheraroarty its second base and is offering a wide variety of lessons, surfing weekends, experience weeks and kids' camps. **How to book classes:** Call +353 749 100565 or go to narosalife.com. **Where to stay:** Narosa's chic two-bed apartment or microhouse next door to their surf shop in Dunfanaghy is well appointed. From £200pp for a two-night stay, narosalife.com.

2 SEATON SLUICE, NORTHUMBERLAND

On the Northumbrian coast, Seaton Sluice has a little-known surf beach with plenty of quiet sand. Around five miles up the coast from Tynemouth, you're more likely to share the water here with seals than surfers. Locals Jasmine Spokes and Matthew Dunn opened a surf school here last May, offering lessons for adults and kids aged 6 to 16. The old salt-making village has a few pubs and a tiny harbour full of fishing boats. A footpath through the dunes runs all the way to the town of Blyth.

How to book classes: Call on 07823 756511 or go to seatonsluicesurf.com.

Where to stay: Drive north to Alnmouth to The Whittling House, which has cosy, dog-friendly rooms and a restaurant championing local produce and seafood. From £170 per night for a two-night stay. Find out more at thewhittlinghouse.co.uk.



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3 KENNAK SANDS, THE LIZARD, CORNWALL
 Despite the crowds flocking to Cornwall to surf, the Lizard's wave-worn, shipwreck-strewn coastline still feels remote, and its beaches tend to attract fewer surfers than those further west or north. Sheltered between Lizard Point and the Carrick Luz headland, Kennack Sands' twin bays can produce good, small waves when it's too windy elsewhere. Lessons are with Kennack Sands Surf School, which also owns the Mora beach cafe, for post-surf burgers, cakes and Cornish pasties.

How to book classes: Call 01326 290871 or go to kennacksurfschool.co.uk.

Where to stay: Trevellack Farmhouse is a newly-renovated Welsh stone property with three bedrooms, garden, patio, barbecue and outdoor space for drying wetsuits. From £820 per week, sleeps eight. Browse cadgwithcovecottages.co.uk.



TOP Learn to surf in glorious surroundings on the Isle of Harris in the Outer Hebrides – you might even have a beach to yourself ABOVE LEFT Stay in a wooden cabin at the Hebridean Huts coastal site on the Isle of Lewis ABOVE RIGHT Long Line Surf school is based at Benone Strand on Northern Ireland's Causeway Coast

4 ISLE OF LEWIS AND HARRIS, OUTER HEBRIDES

With whales, dolphins, wild weather and rugged land and seascapes, Lewis and Harris is a mystical place to surf waves for the first time. Surf Lewis & Harris will select the best location for a surf lesson from a variety of beautiful beaches, including Nisabost and Seilebost on the Isle of Harris, and Garry Beach on the Isle of Lewis, and you'll often have the place all to yourself. On non-surf days, why not explore the islands' wild side or warm up with a whisky or a gin from the local distillery.

How to book classes: Call 07920 427194 or go to surflewis.com.

Where to stay: Hebridean Huts offers luxury wooden cabins on the northeast coast of Lewis, with a cosy bed, en suite bathroom and uninterrupted sea views. Prices start from £90 per cabin per night, with a two-night minimum stay. See hebrideanhuts.co.uk for more.

5 BENONE STRAND, CAUSEWAY COAST, NORTHERN IRELAND

There is ample space and empty peaks for everyone at seven-mile-long Benone Strand, on the Causeway Coast in County Derry. The scenery is spectacular, with tall cliffs, a vast dune system and views of Binevenagh Mountain. Long Line Surf

School offers a variety of lessons on the strand, as well as surf camps for children and weekend retreats. Start your day with some sustainable coffee and sea views in the timber-clad coffee shop in the sand dunes, and warm up after your lesson in the beach's very own mobile wood-fired sauna.

How to book classes: Book online at longlinesurfschool.co.uk.

Where to stay: Swann's Bridge Glamping has heated bell tents, yurts and a cabin on the banks of the nearby River Roe. Paddleboards and kayaks can also be hired if you fancy a break from surfing. Go to swannsbridge.com for more information.



PHOTOGRAPH © AERIAL CORNWALL

HARRIS BEACH PHOTOGRAPH © WEST COAST WATERS
 BENONE PHOTOGRAPH LONG LINE SURF SCHOOL

6 FRASERBURGH BEACH, ABERDEENSHIRE, SCOTLAND

Fraserburgh is the home of many Scottish surf pioneers. The town's sandy beach extends for miles from the edge of the docks to a wildlife-rich estuary and nature reserve at the other. It's a gem of a surf beach for beginners – spacious, flat and smooth, with a beach café at the town end. Former Scottish champion surfer George Watt offers lessons for a range of abilities from beginner to advanced.

How to book classes: Call 07566 249639 or go online at georgewattsurfschool.com.

Where to stay: Down on the Farm is a glampsite in 200 acres of farmland stretching to the sea at Rosehearty, with a choice of glamping pods, shepherd's hut, converted railway carriage or cottage. From £60 per night for two. Find out more at downonthefarm.net.



TOP Wales' Gower Peninsula has had a surf school offering lessons for all ages and abilities since the early 1980s ABOVE LEFT Down on the Farm offers fun glamping options in a rural location near Fraserburgh ABOVE RIGHT Carrownisky Strand in Mayo is blessed with small, consistent Atlantic waves that are ideal for beginners

7 LLANGENNITH, GOWER, WALES

Llangennith Beach on Gower is a truly magnificent setting for a surf lesson – a huge, Atlantic-facing stretch of sand, backed by steep hills worth scaling for their views over the beach and out to sea. The Welsh Surfing Federation Surf School has been based at the north end of the beach since 1981 and supports the development of surfing in Wales. As well as nurturing young champions, its expert team of instructors also offers lessons to complete beginners and improvers.

How to book classes: Call 07702 568398 or go to surfschool.wsf.wales.

Where to stay: Stay in one of two barn conversions at Tankey Lake Farm which have stylish decor, wood-burning stoves and storage for bikes. From £415 for a three-night stay. Browse tankeylake.farm.

8 CARROWNISKY STRAND, COUNTY MAYO, IRELAND

If you want to surf where there's nothing but fields, spectacular mountains and miles of Atlantic Ocean waves rolling in, Carrownisky Strand in the heart of rural

County Mayo is the beach for you. The waves are small, consistent and ideal for beginners. The only surf school here, Surf Mayo, has been here for 23 years and provides lessons all year round.

How to book classes: Call +353 87 7786821 or go to surfmayo.com.

Where to stay: Delphi Resort in neighbouring County Galway has full Irish breakfasts to set you up for the day, and sauna, steam room and seaweed baths for post-surf relaxing. From £119 per night for a standard room. Book at delphiadventureresort.com. ➔

GOWER PHOTOGRAPH THE WELSH SURFING FEDERATION SURF SCHOOL MAYO PHOTOGRAPH SURF MAYO



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TOP Dunnet Beach is a two-mile stretch of good surfing beach on the Caithness coast ABOVE LEFT Take a lesson with Hell's Mouth Surf School on windswept Welsh beach Porth Neigwl on the Llŷn Peninsula ABOVE RIGHT Porth Tocyn Hotel in Abersoch also offers a shepherd's hut – a cosy place to wind down after surfing

9 DUNNET BEACH, CAITHNESS, SCOTLAND

Even on busy days, you'll rarely see more than 30 people on Dunnet Beach, a gorgeous two-mile stretch of sand ending at astonishing cliffs where puffins nest in crevices between layers of overgrown, ancient rock. Surfing here, in the clear waters of the North Atlantic, is exhilarating. North Coast Watersports, the only surf school here, offers lessons, weekend surf retreats and paddleboarding year round. The town of Thurso is a 12-minute drive away.

How to book classes: Call 07982 649635 or browse online at northcoastwatersports.com.

Where to stay: Windhaven Campsite and B&B is perched on a cliff overlooking Brough Bay with sea views and the opportunity to spot orcas nearby. A two-person tent costs £17 per night, B&B from £77 per night. See windhaven.co.uk.

10 PORTH NEIGWL (HELL'S MOUTH), LLŷN PENINSULA, WALES

The Llŷn Peninsula, a wild, long strip of land stretching into the Irish Sea, feels like a forgotten corner of Wales. Just before you reach the headland is Porth Neigwl, a windswept four-mile stretch of sand that is uncrowded in summer and deserted in winter. Exposed to the powerful Atlantic

swell, there are almost always small waves here although beginners should be aware there are also no lifeguards and unpracticable weather can blow in at a moment's notice any time. Hell's Mouth Surf School has provided lessons for more than 20 years now; and offers boards and wetsuits for hire from its Abersoch surf shop.

How to book classes: Call 01758 713067 or go to westcoastsurf.co.uk.

Where to stay: Cosy up in a wood-panelled shepherd's hut with double bed, log burner and sea views in the grounds of Porth Tocyn Hotel. From £150 per night for a two-night stay. Go to porthtocynhotel.co.uk to find out more.