

Top 10 | Surf Schools



Where anyone can learn how to ride the waves

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Richard Schmidt Surf School in California

Photograph by Richard Schmidt Surf School

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By Sarah Gold

1 Kauai, Hawaii

Startling beauty, a low-key vibe, and brawny offshore waves have long delighted serious surfers at Hanalei Bay (Laird Hamilton calls it his home break). But the bay's crescent also welcomes newbies with clean swells, a sandy bottom, and warm water; nearby, humpback whales can sometimes be seen spouting. Surf n Sol's multiday programs include private or small-group lessons, beachside digs, yoga, and massages.

2 Nicoya Peninsula, Costa Rica

Miles-long beaches draw tourists to Playa Tamarindo, but thick jungle and unpaved roads keep most travelers from venturing south of the beach town. Surf Diva's resort, set near a traditional Tico village, features a stretch of sand so secluded its location is kept secret from enrollees before they arrive. The camp is for women only; boards are scaled for their narrower shoulders and shorter reach.

3 Montauk, New York

The shore break at Long Island's Ditch Plains can be challenging—it's choppy, cold (just above 70°F at the highest), and edges a mostly rocky beach. But warm, enthusiastic Corey's Wave instructors, including many who've been surfing here their entire lives, reveal how to navigate the rocks and where to find beer and burgers onshore.

4 Santa Cruz, California

For those who crave hands-on help, Richard Schmidt Surf School delivers. The onetime pro surfer paddles alongside beginners, lifting



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them into the pop-up and adjusting their stance for smooth, long rides. At Cowell's Point break, where Schmidt runs classes and camps, a single wave can roll for a quarter mile.

6 Byron Bay, Australia

Wave chasers mingle with New Age crystal healers and astrologers at beaches along the coast's easterly apex. The surf haven is also the longtime home of 1965 U.S. surfing champion Rusty Miller; now nearly 70, he teaches private, early morning lessons at Byron's gentlest shore breaks. For Miller, surfing is a near-spiritual pursuit; he encourages ocean respect and humility.

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1 Itacare, Brazil

This small, laid-back Bahia community draws nature lovers as well as surfers who can take part in Easy Drop's multiday surf school. Not only are the long, beautiful beaches swept by wicked swells; they're also surrounded by a swath of UNESCO-protected rain forest that's filled with waterfalls and vividly colored birds (turquoise tanagers, red-breasted toucans).

2 Surfers Point, Barbados

Still largely unsung (and untouristed) by surfers, Barbados's sandy shore breaks and warm, forgiving waves actually make it an excellent learners' spot. Zed Layson and his instructors at Zed's Surfing Adventures offer everything from private day lessons to weeklong packages, but the three-day "Be a Surfer" program, which includes twice-daily small-group lessons, leaves you enough time to explore the island (and its snorkeling—especially to view the cool shipwrecks and vivid coral reefs off the west coast—kayaking, and rum-punch-fueled nightlife).

3 Sayulita, Mexico

Based in a quiet village on Mexico's Pacific Coast (think donkey carts, not spring breakers), Access Trips Surf Camp's weeklong program teaches you all aspects of the sport—including how to read wave patterns, surfing etiquette, and surfboard care. The instruction progresses during the week from surfing white water in shallow, sheltered coves to riding green-water (unbroken) waves off more challenging point breaks.

4 Tofino, Canada

Parents and kids can both take advantage of the multiday camps offered by the Pacific Surf School, which is located in the small enclave of Tofino on the west coast of Vancouver Island. The camps are only held in July and August, and even then the water is cold

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enough to require wetsuits—but the unspoiled coastal headlands and towering spruce and fir forests here (Tofino is the gateway to the Pacific Rim National Park) make it a perfect place to camp, hike, rock-climb, and bear- and whale-watch as well as surf. A bonus for older beginners: Lessons for students over 60 are free.

Hossegor, France

Surfing is the *raison d'être* for this chic coastal town located just north of Biarritz on the Bay of Biscay; a major ASP surfing tournament (the Quicksilver Pro) takes place here each fall, and the streets are lined with board shops, beach-themed bars, and seafood shacks. Koala Surf's instructional packages—booked for as many days as you like—include daily small-group surf lessons, as well as trips to various learner-friendly breaks for practice.

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