Restorative benefits of beach peak during low tides and cooler days

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(PhysOrg.com) -- People head to the beach to escape the stress of everyday life, but a new study out of the Brown School at Washington University in St. Louis finds that there are peak times to reap the restorative benefit.

“Mild temperature days and low tides offer the most restorative environments when visiting the beach,” says J. Aaron Hipp, PhD, environmental health expert and assistant professor at the Brown School.

“Beachgoers visiting on a day nearly 3 degrees (F) warmer than average were 30 percent less likely to perceive the beach or coastal park as restorative, compared with those visiting on average or cooler than average days,” Hipp says.

Hipp's study is published in the current issue of the *Journal of Environmental Psychology*.

Findings also reveal that beachgoers found the beach less restorative if they perceived the air or water quality to be at- or below-average.

"Studies have shown that natural environments like beaches and waterfront parks offer more restorative benefits to people than gyms, entertainment venues and the built urban environment," Hipp says.

"Natural environments are vulnerable to global climate changes, including changes in air quality, water quality, increases in temperature, extreme weather events and sea level rise.

"Few urban parks have planned for vulnerabilities to potential climate change on existing parks, much less the associated health effects to visitors."

Hipp says that parks can add shaded areas and improved access to water fountains for warm weather days.

"The challenge in urban coastal areas is the parks cannot migrate inland," he says.

"Public health and recreation departments must work together to ensure residents have safe, healthy alternatives for psychological restoration and physical activity on days with dangerous levels of air and water quality and when the tidal level is not conducive to play and relaxation on the sand," Hipp says.

Hipp and study co-author Oladele A. Ogunseitan, PhD, professor of social ecology at the University of California, Irvine, surveyed 1,153 visitors to the beaches in the California State Parks system. They

selected that system in part because the beaches are located in a densely populated urban region.

More information: View “Effect of Environmental Conditions on Perceived Psychological Restorativeness of Coastal Parks.” www.sciencedirect.com/science/ … ii/S0272494411000612

Provided by Washington University in St. Louis