

Oahu's Kailua beach is named best in the US by 'Dr. Beach'

May 23 2019, by Caleb Jones



In this May 15, 2019, photo, people stand near the ocean at Kailua Beach Park in Kailua, Hawaii. In Kailua, the sand is soft and white, the water is clear and calm, and the view is exactly what you might expect from a beach in the Hawaiian Islands. Those are among the reasons the beach has been selected as the best stretch of sand on an annual list of top U.S. beaches. Stephen Leatherman, a coastal scientist and professor at Florida International University, has been drafting the list under the alias "Dr. Beach" since 1991. (AP Photo/Caleb Jones)

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Those are among the reasons Oahu's Kailua Beach Park has been selected as the best stretch of sand for an annual list of top U.S. beaches.

Stephen Leatherman, a coastal scientist and professor at Florida International University, has been drafting the list under the alias "Dr. Beach" since 1991.

Leatherman uses 50 criteria to evaluate beaches, with the most important categories being water cleanliness, safety and management of the beach environment and its facilities. Leatherman uses data from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency to grade the beaches on water quality and has been to all the beaches on his list.

Beaches in Hawaii are consistently ranked high, sometimes at the top of his list.

"I love Waikiki Beach. No question about that—a world-famous beach—but Kailua is a lot smaller and quieter," Leatherman said. "It's so much more peaceful. ... You don't have big high-rises and all that. Kailua is on the other side of the mountains. It's like a different world."

In recent years, Leatherman has awarded extra credit to beaches that prohibit smoking, which all Oahu beaches do. He thinks other beaches around the state and country should follow suit.



In this April 5, 2018, file photo, paddleboarders watch a dolphin swim by near Grayton Beach State Park in Florida. Stephen Leatherman, a coastal scientist and professor at Florida International University, has been drafting a list of the best beaches in the U.S. under alias "Dr. Beach" since 1991. This year he has named Grayton Beach State Park the third-best in the country. (Devon Ravine/Northwest Florida Daily News via AP, File)

Leatherman also looks for powdery soft white sand, something Kailua Beach Park has in abundance.

Vari Singh and her family were visiting Oahu from Los Angeles and spent a day in Kailua.

"The color of the sea is something like we've never seen before. The sand is super soft and fun to play with, it makes good sandcastles," she said as her daughter wiped sand from her face. "And the scenery is beautiful, you just come over the hill and it's just this majestic scene of green ocean."

Leatherman acknowledged that not everyone appreciates the publicity his lists give to top beaches.



This May 13, 2010, file photo shows Coopers Beach in Southampton, N.Y. Stephen Leatherman, a coastal scientist and professor at Florida International University, has been drafting a list of the best beaches in the U.S. under alias "Dr. Beach" since 1991. This year he has named Coopers Beach the fourth-best in the country. (AP Photo/Kathy Willens, File)

"I get a lot of people who are very happy about it. They like to know where to go," Leatherman said. But "I always get some pushback. Oh yes, people say, 'Oh no, we already have too many people coming here. What are you doing?' It's almost like they think it's a secret beach or something. (Kailua) is not quite a secret beach. It is a real gem though."

Braden Marquez, 18, who grew up in Kailua, says he is worried about overcrowding but also hopeful about the future of his hometown.

"This beach is pretty special to me just because my family has been coming here for years and years," he said, noting the area has changed a lot since his childhood.

"(My) biggest concern would be losing the locals because of the influx of people," he said during a recent visit to the beach. "But other than that I'm pretty excited about all the new things to come."



In this Sept. 16, 2015, file photo, beachgoers keep an eye on the seals swimming at Coast Guard Beach in North Eastham, Mass. Stephen Leatherman, a coastal scientist and professor at Florida International University, has been drafting a list of the best beaches in the U.S. under alias "Dr. Beach" since 1991. This year he

has named Coast Guard Beach the sixth-best in the country. (Steve Heaslip/The Cape Cod Times via AP, File)



In this June 8, 2007, file photo, Dr. Stephen Leatherman, aka "Dr. Beach," poses on the beach at Ocracoke, N.C., as Mara Chemerinsky, 8, a visitor from Durham, N.C., plays in the sand. Since 1991, Leatherman has compiled an annual list of America's best beaches, making sand and surf a science and earning the nickname "Dr. Beach." His latest list will be released Thursday, May 23, 2019. (AP Photo/Mary Haggerty, File)



In this May 25, 2005, file photo, international beach expert Stephen Leatherman, aka "Dr. Beach," goes barefoot on Fort De Soto's north beach in Tierra Verde, Fla. Leatherman released his 2019 list of the 10 best beaches in the U.S., Thursday, May 23, 2019. (AP Photo/Chris O'Meara, File)



In this May 15, 2019, photo, people stand near the ocean at Kailua Beach Park in Kailua, Hawaii. In Kailua, the sand is soft and white, the water is clear and calm, and the view is exactly what you might expect from a beach in the Hawaiian Islands. Those are among the reasons the beach has been selected as the best stretch of sand on an annual list of top U.S. beaches. Stephen Leatherman, a coastal scientist and professor at Florida International University, has been drafting the list under the alias "Dr. Beach" since 1991. (AP Photo/Caleb Jones)



This Aug. 30, 2006, file photo, shows Hapuna Beach Park on the Big Island of Hawaii. Stephen Leatherman, a coastal scientist and professor at Florida International University, has been drafting a list of the best beaches in the U.S. under alias "Dr. Beach" since 1991. This year he has named Hapuna Beach Park the eighth-best in the country. (Michael Darden/West Hawaii Today via AP, File)



This May 21, 2014, file photo shows Duke Kahanamoku Beach in the Honolulu tourist neighborhood of Waikiki in Hawaii. Stephen Leatherman, a coastal scientist and professor at Florida International University, has been drafting a list of the best beaches in the U.S. under alias "Dr. Beach" since 1991. This year he has named Duke Kahanamoku Beach the fifth-best in the country. (AP Photo/Sam Eifling, File)



In this May 15, 2019, photo, people stand near the ocean at Kailua Beach Park in Kailua, Hawaii. In Kailua, the sand is soft and white, the water is clear and calm, and the view is exactly what you might expect from a beach in the Hawaiian Islands. Those are among the reasons the beach has been selected as the best stretch of sand on an annual list of top U.S. beaches. Stephen Leatherman, a coastal scientist and professor at Florida International University, has been drafting the list under the alias "Dr. Beach" since 1991. (AP Photo/Caleb Jones)



In this May 15, 2019, photo, people paddle away from Kailua Beach Park in Kailua, Hawaii. In Kailua, the sand is soft and white, the water is clear and calm, and the view is exactly what you might expect from a beach in the Hawaiian Islands. Those are among the reasons the beach has been selected as the best stretch of sand on an annual list of top U.S. beaches. Stephen Leatherman, a coastal scientist and professor at Florida International University, has been drafting the list under the alias "Dr. Beach" since 1991. (AP Photo/Caleb Jones)



In this March 25, 2017, file photo, riders and owners prepare their horses before the start of the inaugural Kiawah Cup Island Beach Race at Beachwalker Park on Kiawah Island in South Carolina. Stephen Leatherman, a coastal scientist and professor at Florida International University, has been drafting a list of the best beaches in the U.S. under alias "Dr. Beach" since 1991. This year he has named Beachwalker Park the 10th-best in the country. (Michael Pronzato/The Post And Courier via AP, File)



In this May 15, 2019, photo, a kitesurfer rides off Kailua Beach Park in Kailua, Hawaii. In Kailua, the sand is soft and white, the water is clear and calm, and the view is exactly what you might expect from a beach in the Hawaiian Islands. Those are among the reasons the beach has been selected as the best stretch of sand on an annual list of top U.S. beaches. Stephen Leatherman, a coastal scientist and professor at Florida International University, has been drafting the list under the alias "Dr. Beach" since 1991. (AP Photo/Caleb Jones)



In this May 22, 2012, file photo, a couple sits on the sand on Coronado Beach in Coronado, Calif. Stephen Leatherman, a coastal scientist and professor at Florida International University, has been drafting a list of the best beaches in the U.S. under alias "Dr. Beach" since 1991. This year he has named Coronado Beach the ninth-best in the country. (AP Photo/Lenny Ignelzi, File)



This May 21, 2008, file photo shows the main beach at Caladesi Island State Park, a barrier island along the Gulf of Mexico, on Florida's West Coast in Dunedin, Fla. Stephen Leatherman, a coastal scientist and professor at Florida International University, has been drafting a list of the best beaches in the U.S. under alias "Dr. Beach" since 1991. This year he has named Caladesi Island State Park the seventh-best beach in the country. (AP Photo/Craig Litten, File)



In this June 7, 2007, file photo, beachgoers enjoy the surf on Ocracoke Lifeguarded Beach on Ocracoke Island, N.C. Stephen Leatherman, a coastal scientist and professor at Florida International University, has been drafting a list of the best beaches in the U.S. under alias "Dr. Beach" since 1991. This year he has named Ocracoke the second-best in the country. (Chris Curry/The Virginian-Pilot via AP, File)

For the first 25 years of ranking, any beach that won the top spot on Leatherman's list was ineligible for inclusion in subsequent years. But in 2015, Dr. Beach cleared the slate to allow any beach in the nation to once again be eligible, resetting the clock—and perhaps the relevance—involving his annual contest.

Kailua was named the best beach in 1998, making it a two-time winner.

Leatherman is again retiring new winners and posting them on his website .

The other beaches on this year's list are Ocracoke Lifeguarded Beach on North Carolina's Outer Banks in second place, followed by Grayton Beach State Park in the Florida panhandle; Coopers Beach, Southampton, New York; Duke Kahanamoku Beach on Oahu; Coast Guard Beach, Cape Cod, Massachusetts; Caladesi Island State Park, Dunedin-Clearwater, Florida; Hapuna State Beach Park on Hawaii's Big Island; Coronado Beach, San Diego, California; and Kiawah Beachwalker Park, Kiawah Island, South Carolina.

Leatherman's goal in producing the list each year, he says, is to reward high-quality, safe beaches that balance nature with accessibility and amenities. He hopes beaches that haven't made his list will make changes for a better experience and a healthier coastal ecosystem.

More information: Online: www.drbeach.org

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