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Most Beautiful Coastal Towns

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Zoom in on picture-perfect coastal destinations, from pastel Caribbean towns to European fishing villages.

From October 2014
By Heather Eng

On Greenland's western coast, north of the Arctic Circle, craggy mountains loom above deep blue waters, and icebergs are still common. Yet with few trees or flowers brightening the scene, the color palette can feel monotonous, especially during the long winter.

So it's especially uplifting when you come upon Ilulissat, a collection of low-slung buildings painted in vibrant hues of red, blue, and yellow. It's one of many beautiful towns that have sprung up on coastlines around the world—and that are welcoming an influx of travelers.



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"When I grew up there, tourism was not a very big thing in Ilulissat, but it is now, luckily without the town losing its soul or changing its core identity as an important fishing town in Greenland," says Malik Milfeldt from Visit Greenland.

Being by the coast can conjure up memories of carefree days and a feeling of possibility. In our ever-connected world, it's a relief to look up from those screens and out onto a soothing expanse of blue.

The allure of a coastal getaway drew about 250 million visitors to the Mediterranean alone in 2008 (the most recent data available), according to the UN World Tourism Organization. They come to towns like Manarola, Italy, whose cliff-side homes practically tumble into the sea. Yet on the other side of the Mediterranean await lesser-known charmers like Sidi Bou Said in Tunisia, where blue-and-white buildings line the stone streets.

In the U.S., coastal states reap the most tourism dollars, not just because of urban powerhouses like New York and San Francisco, but also thanks to quaint small towns such as Camden, ME. Like all the places that we've featured, it has fewer than 15,000 residents.

Our coast-to-coast tour includes a stop to the east of Camden, across the Bay of Fundy in Lunenburg, Nova Scotia. "There's a feeling of enchantment and mystique here," says Shelan Allen, founder of Lunenburg Walking Tours. "It's the seafaring culture and the ocean and all the mysteries about it."

Her description could apply to many of the world's beautiful coastal towns. See which one calls out to you.

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Rovinj, Croatia

This Istrian town traces its history back to the third century, on what was the island of Mons Albanus. In 1763, the channel between the island and mainland was filled, permanently connecting the two. Rovinj's old town is now completely contained within the peninsula. Buildings are tall, narrow, and close set, with red tiled roofs. Towering above it all is St. Euphemia, a stately Baroque church and Rovinj's main landmark.



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