



beach nana travels

slow-paced travel for fast-paced lives

Beach House Vacation Planner and Packing Lists



A Beach House Vacation!

Our favorite time of the year is when we head for the beach. And, after twenty years, renting a beach house for family vacations has become an annual tradition. Along the way, we have learned a few things to make the process easier and more enjoyable. Just as planning a resort vacation requires research, cost comparisons and packing lists, a beach house vacation requires the same planning with a bit more attention to the packing details.

Since you have the option of being self-contained in a beach house, you will need to determine how you want to handle meals, activities, and the company you bring along. You can keep it simple or you can go all-out and make it an experience to remember.

For our family, coordinating the meals, planning the trip and deciding on how many travel partners will share our vacation launches our planning process. We often begin talking about a summer beach house vacation at Thanksgiving when the family is all together. We decide where we want to go, how many bedrooms we need and what the budget will be. From there, we agree on how many additional guests will travel with the family.

The more people on the trip, the more detailed the planning will be. We have enjoyed some beach house vacations with just our own family and others with half a dozen friends along for the week. The planning scales with the number of people attending as does the fun!

Once the house size is determined the hunt begins for the right house. We try to keep options open and consider several areas, though our favorite by far is the white sand beaches of the Gulf coast. Someone becomes the lead “house hunter”, bringing the options to the group, making the arrangements, determining a price per person, and coordinating the dates and payment for the beach house.

The second order of planning is meals. We love to cook at the beach house, so we focus a lot of our planning around food. We know of many other beach house vacationers who eat out every day and, if that is your pleasure, you can skip a big chunk of the meal planning. But, even if you eat out most of the time, you will probably need to do a bit of grocery shopping and the checklists in this planner can help with that task.

We have found that meals are a great time to connect around the table. Laughter and lively conversation are always part of sharing a meal together. So, it makes sense that we plan for meals to be enjoyable from grocery shopping to prep and clean up.

As a family, we split up cooking duties and all the food costs. If we bring friends along we fold them into the cooking schedule. We develop a master grocery list to cover all the typical house needs like paper products, dish soap, cleaning products, and the like as well as foods for breakfasts and lunches. This total cost is split among the families and friends.

For dinners, we plan by theme, each person choosing Mexican, Italian, Asian, or whatever their taste. Then, each couple plans a menu for dinner around that theme and purchases all the ingredients for that meal. This keeps mom from being trapped in the kitchen all week and lets the other chefs in the family have a little creative time in the kitchen.

We also look for the closest full-service grocery store near the beach house so that we don't have to grocery shop until we get near to the beach house. That way, everything is fresh and we can manage all the grocery bags in the cars for the short trip to the beach house.

The third task is the actual prep and packing for the trip. We like to take a few steps to secure our home before we leave for vacation. Using a house-sitter is our preferred option but if that is not practical, we have included a few tips on preparing your home for your absence.

Packing is a personal matter and there are the typical travel items you will want to pack as well as items you normally expect to find in a hotel. Most rental homes will provide a "starter" set of soaps and paper products, but items like shampoo, body wash and hair dryers are not usually provided.

You will want to check with your rental company about linens and towels as well as beach towels. They are often provided in the rental cost or can be rented separately. While you are talking with your rental company, ask what beach equipment is available at the rental house. Many houses have beach chairs, umbrellas, and pool floats as part of your rental price. It doesn't hurt to ask and it can save quite a bit of space in the car!

Then it is time for the big day! Plan to arrive at your destination by check-in time but keep the late check-in instructions at hand in case the trip takes longer than expected. On arrival day, keep meal prep simple. You can fix sandwiches and salads, order pizza, or arrange for one person to prepare dinner while everyone else unpacks the car. After that it's time to kick back and enjoy the week!

We hope the checklists and tips that follow are helpful to your planning.

Happy Beach House Vacation!

Robin North
Beach Nana Travels

Beach House Vacation Planner

Let's begin with finding a Beach House

Choosing the right beach house is a matter of matching your space needs, budget, and vacation location with available vacation houses. Working with a reputable beach house vacation rental company makes the job easier. Not all are the same, and there are a few items you need to find out to compare one to another.

The first, is to decide where you want to rent a beach house. Some companies rent houses in multiple areas so you may be comparing both local and regional rental companies. The second is to find out what the rental fee includes. Are linens and towels included in the rental fee? Is the vacation insurance included or do you need to purchase it separately? Take a few minutes to review each rental company's policies and what they include.

A brief word about travel insurance. During the summer the coast is most vulnerable to hurricanes. Travel insurance is a good option to protect your vacation investment. If your beach area is evacuated or closed, travel insurance can be a big help. Some also cover cancellation due to illness or other complications of travel. Many beach house vacation rental companies include cancellation insurance in the house rental fees but if they don't, we recommend purchasing a policy. Be sure to read the policy to understand what is covered - and keep a copy of the policy with you and at home.

Beach House Search Checklist:

Choose the area you want for vacation.

Find the beach house vacation rental companies in the area.

Research reviews for each of the rental companies. Ask for recommendations from friends and family as well. Then, choose one or two for maximum house choices.

Check the policies and procedures for each company. For instance, some include vacation insurance as well as linens and towels in the rental fee. Some do not include anything in the rental price.

If they do not include vacation insurance, check on the price to purchase the insurance. This is one of those items that has proven its value for us. When a hurricane looms large near your vacation house, vacation insurance can save the day. Be sure to read and understand the parameters of any policy you are considering – including the ones that are part of the house rental price.

Research the homes on the rental company website that fit your needs (i.e., number of bedrooms and baths, proximity to the beach, amenities and equipment provided in the house rental, and if the house has a washer and dryer)

Check availability for each of your house choices for your preferred time period.

Make your reservation and pay the required deposit. Most rental companies allow reservations and deposits to be completed on their websites. Make sure you print and save the confirmation and make note of when the balance is due.

Let's Plan Your Vacation!

What to do before you leave home

__ Arrange vacation time!

__ Print information for your rental house, send dates and information to any other travel partners (i.e., We often rent a beach house with three or four couples and split the cost.)

__ If you are splitting the cost with friends, make arrangements for payment for each share along with due dates.

__ Arrange for pet care, plant watering, mail pick up, and house-sitter if needed

__ Write out emergency information [*see below*] for your house sitter and keep a copy with you.

__ Create a rental house information folder. You can do this on your mobile phone, but I have found cell service to be a bit spotty in some remote beach areas so I keep a paper copy of the rental house information folder in my bag. Your folder should include:

- phone number and address of the rental company
- rental house name, address, and phone number (if any)
- a map of island with the location of the beach house marked on it
- rental contract and copy of your trip insurance policy
- check-in time and check-out time as well as instructions for late arrival or late departure

__ Prepare music playlists for beach, travel, relaxing – don't forget music for the kids too!

__ On your work email, make sure you put a vacation message in place. Do not put a vacation message on your home phone or email and do not advertise your vacation date on Facebook or other social media. You can post photos when you return.

__ Prepare your home before you leave:

- Clean house and do laundry before you leave home. It is much less stressful to return to a well-organized and clean home.
- Leave a plastic laundry basket in the laundry room for your return with wet towels and clothing
- Pay all bills or schedule auto pay if any are due during your vacation.

Departure day checklist

__ Fuel up the car, check fluids, oil, tire pressure, stock with tissues, trash bag, snacks, bottled water, and a road atlas. Put Rental House folder in the door pocket (easy to reach but out of the way) or in an "up front" travel bag near the driver.

__ Pack luggage, beach stuff, toys, and electronics. Groceries are easier to purchase as you get closer to the beach house.

__ Water house plants.

Ask Post Office to hold your mail until you return.

Take pets to a boarding kennel or reconfirm your pet sitter. Check on pet's food and water supplies, if left at home with pet sitter.

Take out all trash and return trash barrels to their proper place.

Lock all windows and doors

A few optional items we think are worth mentioning:

Turn off water to washer, adjust air conditioner thermostat, turn off water heater or adjust thermostat

Organize and set light and radio timers to turn on and off at different intervals for security

Leave a car in the driveway, if possible, so it appears someone is at home

Unplug TV, computers, modems, and small appliances (toaster, coffeemaker, microwave, etc.)

Emergency Information

This is a list of contacts and phone numbers to leave with your house sitter, pet sitter, and a trusted neighbor or a relative, in case anything happens while you are gone. Keep a copy of all this information with you as well.

- Neighbor or relative who lives close by who can act on your behalf (name, address, phone, cell, email) Make sure this trusted person also has the pet sitter's/house sitter's contact information.
- Insurance agent (name, address, phone, email)
- Your cell phone number, number at the beach house, rental agency phone number
- Vet's number and pet's information (name, age, history, shots record, etc.)
- Pet sitter/house sitter (name, phone, address, email) Make sure your pet sitter/house sitter has the trusted neighbor or relative's contact information.)
- Travel dates and times

NOTE: If you will be gone more than a week, it's a good idea to have someone check on the house, bring in the mail, and water the plants. You can also let your local police department know when you will be out of town.

Leave this information with your house/pet sitter, a trusted neighbor, and relative. (Think along the lines of who needs to be contacted if a tree limb fell on the roof?)

Other Notes:

And now for the food!

___ Plan menus for the week

We often travel with multiple families, so each couple cooks dinner and cleans up the kitchen at least one night during the vacation. Sometimes we have competitions between families, kids, wives and husbands- all in fun. The idea is to help out so one person does not spend the whole vacation in the kitchen!

When we publish the dates of the vacation, we also begin talking about menus with everyone and assign who will cook and clean up each night of the vacation. This is a good time to identify any dietary restrictions so no one feels left out. We also create a “drink of the day” as part of the menu – with or without alcohol, it is always a fun way to kick off each evening.

- **Menus:** Choose the menus for dinner by talking with your travel partners.
- **Grocery lists:** We found it works best to make a master grocery list for house needs (like paper products, hand and dish soap, etc.), as well as basic items for breakfasts and lunches. The cost of all these items is split among the travel partners.
- Since each couple chooses dishes for their assigned dinners, each will be responsible for purchasing all the ingredients for that meal to serve the whole group.
- **ALSO:** don't forget to plan a “leftover buffet night”. There is always food left over from night to night, so we designate the last night for leftovers to help empty the fridge.
- If you are traveling with just your own family, modify menus so that the kids can help with the cooking and the kitchen clean up.
- Print out recipes so anyone can be the cook!

___ Find a grocery store near the beach house and plan on doing your grocery shopping when you get there. *We stop at a grocery store that is about an hour from our beach house. We buy the groceries, pack the perishables in a cooler, and continue on to the beach house. When we arrive, the groceries are unloaded first.*

___ Assign daily cooking and clean up duties to family/travel partners and confirm their dinner menus to prevent duplicate meals.

Sample Menus (from our previous trip)

Southwest

Chicken enchiladas
Southwest Salad
Yellow Rice with vegetables
Key Lime pie

Tacos (chicken, beef, pork or veggie)
Refried Beans w/ queso topping
Spicy Rice
Raw veggies and ranch dip
Flan and Cinnamon tortilla chips

Asian

Stir fry veggies w/chicken or fish
Fried or steamed rice
Tropical fruit salad

Sweet and Sour chicken/pork or shrimp
Steamed rice
Steamed peapods w/ pearl onions
Vanilla ice cream with Ginger-Lemon syrup

American

Chicken casserole w/rice

Green beans w/french fried onions
Pound cake w/Frozen blueberries and lemon sauce

Baked fish w/lemon and capers
Skillet Potatoes
Steamed asparagus
Citrus cake w/orange glaze

Italian

Spaghetti w/meatballs, sausage, and/or mushrooms
Salad w/olives, artichoke hearts sun dried tomatoes
Garlic bread
Tiramisu

Seafood fettucine
Kale w/garlic and pepperoncini
Bread sticks
Lemon-Coconut Pie

Eggplant Parmesan Stacks
Mixed greens w/mushrooms, scallions
Bruchetta
Chocolate cupcakes

American Grill

Grilled burgers, hot dogs, and/or fish
Red potato salad
Three bean salad
Banana Pudding

Skewered shrimp & scallops on the grill
Dad's potatoes (Recipe on beachnana.com)
Grilled fresh veggies (corn, asparagus, peppers, etc)
Lemon Pudding Cake

Other Notes:

Beach House Vacation Planner Packing Lists

So many things you can bring on a beach house vacation! Since most people drive to their beach house, it is a good idea to keep your packing organized, bringing only what you really will use and enjoy. Most beach vacations are about playing and resting so pack items with that in mind.

Music and electronics packing list:

- iPod, charger, headphones (create a travel playlist, a beach playlist, relax playlist and a party playlist)
- iPod speakers (if needed)
- Some houses have media systems; take along an adapter to use your iPod or phone with the house system.
- Musical instruments (*I highly recommend at least one ukulele!*)
- Laptop and/or tablet with power cords, chargers and cases
- Cell phone and chargers, Bluetooth headset or hands-free system for car

Toys, games, sports equipment, beach gear List:

- Beach towels and a beach blanket
- Beach chairs, umbrella and/or canopy [check to see if your rental house provides these items]
- Cooler (for the beach and for transporting groceries)
- Fishing rods, tackle box, bait bucket, fish cooler, fishing hat
- Beach balls, sand toys, boogie board, rafts, tubes, noodles, stand up paddle boards, kayaks
- Lawn darts, volleyball and net, or horseshoes, corn hole boards
- Kids toys, inflatable beach toys and baby pool (set it up in the shade to keep little ones out of the sun)
- Craft supplies and puzzles for kids and adults (for a rainy day)

First Aid Kit:

- Medications, vitamins
- Ibuprofen or aspirin, band aids, antibacterial cream, gauze pads and wrap
- Ace bandage and fasteners
- Four, quart-sized zip lock freezer bags for ice (*playing hard can overwork muscles*)
- Q tips, cotton balls, tweezers
- Peroxide, rubbing alcohol
- Matches and needle for splinters [weathered board walks and sand spurs]

Household Basics:

- Hand soap for kitchen, powder room and bathrooms
- Dish detergent and dish soap, scouring pads, sponge, dish brush, dish towels
- Laundry soap
- Sanitizing wipes for countertops
- Trash bags, napkins, paper towels, tissues, toilet paper
- Foil, plastic wrap, zip top bags, wax paper and/or parchment paper
- Duct tape, masking tape

Toiletries Packing List:

- Shampoo, conditioner, hair gel, hair spray
- Body wash, bar soap, scrubbie, face cloths
- Razor, shave cream, electric razor, nail scissors, nail file, nail clippers
- Aloe gel for sunburn, sunscreen lotion, skin moisturizing lotion
- Toothpaste, mouthwash, floss, toothbrushes
- Makeup and beauty supplies
- Antiperspirant, perfume, aftershave

Clothing Packing List:

- Swimsuits (at least two for each person)
 - Beach cover up or jacket
 - Flip flops and sandals
 - Shorts, capris, summer-weight pants
 - Casual shirts and t-shirts
 - Sundress, shawl
 - Slacks and sweater for the cool nights
 - Pajamas, robe and slippers
 - Underwear
 - Bras, camisoles
 - Sneakers/running shoes and socks
 - Running clothes [ok, so they may not see the light of day, bring them for good intentions!]
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Other Notes:

Food and Prep Packing List:

Since we like to share the cooking and clean up duties, each person chooses a night to prepare a meal and clean up after it. Plan this in advance and let each person choose their menu for their “chef” night. When you shop, consider which meals can share ingredients [maybe you don’t need a whole onion for your dish, and someone needs a half onion for theirs].

Remember to shop your pantry at home first. We bring all of our spices and any dry or canned goods we have on hand that fit the menu. Your shopping list will depend on your menu, but here’s a basic set to get you started.

Basic Pantry:

- Salt, pepper, sugar, sweetener
- Spices and mixes
- Tea, coffee, filters, creamer, honey
- Olive oil, cooking spray oil, coconut oil
- Flour and cornstarch
- Peanut butter and jelly
- Crackers, chips, cookies
- Bread, rolls, bagels
- Cereals
- Canned goods and jarred goods
- Dried fruit and nuts
- Pasta

Basic Fridge/Freezer:

- Milk, soy milk
 - Cheese
 - Butter/margarine
 - Eggs
 - Fresh veggies
 - Fresh fruit
 - Condiments [ketchup, mustard, mayo, relish, maple syrup, A1, hot sauce, salsa, soy sauce, etc.]
 - Frozen foods [fish, chicken, beef, ice cream, pie, etc.]
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Other Notes:

Kitchen Equipment basics:

Check your rental house listing to see how the kitchen is equipped - most have a coffee maker, blender, can openers, a toaster, pots and pans, cooking utensils, basic dishes, glassware and flatware. Cooking equipment varies so we typically bring along a sharp set of knives and a few conveniences like a crock pot, Dutch Oven and an iron skillet. Some houses we have rented have well equipped kitchens but others lacked some of our favorite tools. If it is something we need for a special dish, we take it along.

- Food processor
 - Sharp knives for food prep
 - Vegetable peeler, wine cork screw, bottle opener
 - Bar equipment (shaker, jigger, stirrers, umbrellas)
 - Crock pot or InstaPot, dutch oven, iron skillet
 - Consider purchasing disposable baking dishes if cooking for a crowd
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Other Notes:

Arrival Day at the Beach House:

You're finally here! Just a few more steps and you will be on the back porch with a cool beverage in your hand, the salt breeze ruffling your hair and the sun on your face.

- Check in at the rental agency, pick up house keys, and linens (if not already in house).
- Open the house and take in the groceries first.
- Arrival day "chefs" start putting away groceries and preparing dinner, drinks while others continue to unpack the car.
- Make one person the "house Mom" to assign bedrooms, make sure the beds are made, do a towel check in each bathroom for correct number of towels for the number of guests.
- Assign babysitters to take the children to the beach or play area and entertain children until dinner is ready.
- When unpacking is finished, enjoy dinner and time on the deck or patio!

Last Day at the Beach:

Boy, what a fast week! It's time to head home. Just do a little set up this afternoon to make departure day easier.

At the end of the day, take all the beach gear back to the house and rinse off the sand; let it air dry in the carport.

- Beach chairs, umbrella and canopy should be rinsed of sand and salt water and air dried.
- Shake out the sand from beach towels and blankets, wash, dry and fold, or stow in "wet bag".
- Rinse swimsuits in fresh water and air dry on deck. Put in the "wet bag" in the morning if still damp.
- Regular laundry can be done the night before departure (many beach houses have a washer and dryer). If not, simply put it in a laundry bag for packing.
- Pack remaining clothing, toiletries.
- Refer to your packing checklists for repacking all items.
- After dinner and cleanup, pack any kitchen equipment you brought as well as any leftover pantry items (Leave breakfast necessities for departure day breakfast).
- Review fridge contents and decide what to toss, what to keep, how much cooler space you'll need. (You can pick up an inexpensive cooler at most grocery stores or big box stores near the beach).
- Replace any furniture that was moved from its original rooms
- Empty trash from all rooms.
- Go take a walk on the beach, enjoy the evening on the deck, count the stars!

Departure Day: *check your rental company policies about check out "to do"*

- After breakfast, clean up and put away all dishes, flatware, glasses, pots and pans.
- Pack dry beach gear, swimsuits
- Pack clothing and toiletries
- Pack games, toys, electronics, sports equipment
- Pack any kitchen equipment you may have brought
- Pack left over pantry items

- Pack a cooler with remaining fridge items and fill with ice (this item is packed last and unpacked first)
- Conduct a walk through the house and check all closets, dressers and cabinets for stray items
- Gather rental house towels and linens as directed by the rental company policies
- Take trash out to curb containers
- Lock up all windows and doors
- Say "*goodbye*" to the beach
- Return keys to rental agency. Let them know of any problems or repairs needed.

And now, the drive home. Hopefully the kids will sleep and your conversations will be filled with recounting happy moments from the week's activities. Post photos on social media, make notes for next year's vacation. This is a good time to consider your rental for next year!

We hope you found this planner and checklists helpful. You can read more about vacation destinations, beaches, and weekend getaways on our blog, Beach Nana Travels at beachnana.com