

22 Best Beach Reads Of Summer 2023

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Books

From laugh-out-loud memoirs to charming romances, these new books are sure to suck you in.

by [Arianna Rebolini](#)



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There is much debate about what constitutes [a “beach read.”](#) Need it match the vibe of the afternoon — relaxing, sunny, breezy? Wouldn't any book you read at the beach qualify as a “beach read”? As a mom of a toddler, I have one main requirement: It must maintain my

interest despite many (*many*) interruptions, letting me dip in and out seamlessly. Beach reads are books with immersive worlds that pull you right back in, mysteries that live in the back of your mind, characters that feel like friends you can pick up with right where you left off. They're also short story collections, the bite-size nature of which is perfect for consuming in bits and pieces. Here are [this summer's books](#) that hold up against distractions — whether or not those involve making sure a 3-year-old isn't getting sand on your neighbors.

1

We Are Too Many: A Memoir (Kind Of) by Hannah Pittard

As you might expect from the title, Hannah Pittard defies genre in her latest, telling the story of her divorce through real and imagined dialogues that read like plays without stage direction. The conversations circle around the inciting event — Pittard's discovery that her husband was having an affair with her best friend — revealing complicated histories of trust, betrayal, love, and pride, which point to cracks in both the friendship and the marriage. It feels wrong to call such a devastating story juicy, but it is, and that's kind of the point. *We Are Too Many* asks: What happens to our relationships when we package them for public consumption?

2

Gone to the Wolves by John Wray

It's the late '80s and misfit metalheads Leslie, Kip, and Kira decide to escape their homes on the super-conservative Gulf Coast of Florida and start over in LA. Life in California isn't quite a dream come true for the trio, though—Kip makes a name for himself as a music journalist, but Leslie develops a heroin addiction and Kira becomes involved in the death metal scene, ultimately moving to Norway under the influence of a cult. Wray's novel is an ode to chosen families, an examination of the long-felt aftermath of abuse, and a vivid depiction of heavy- and glam-metal subcultures at their peak.

3

Barbara Isn't Dying by Alina Bronsky, translated by Tim Mohr

One morning, retiree Walter Schmidt wakes up in his Berlin apartment and makes two disastrous discoveries: his wife, Barbara, has fallen in the bathroom and will have to spend the day in bed, and he's going to have to figure out how to make coffee. When Barbara refuses to get up the next day, and the next, the chores — along with Walter's resentments and worries — build up. What follows is a remarkably endearing story of a man who realizes he's taken his loved ones for granted, finds the flaws in his worldview, and works, in this last stage of his life, to change.

4

Dances by Nicole Cuffy

You don't have to know anything about ballet to start reading Nicole Cuffy's lyrical debut about a Black principal ballerina with the New York City Ballet, but you'll have a deep appreciation of it by the time you finish. Jumping back and forth in time, Cuffy juxtaposes Cece's grueling, lonely pursuit of her dream against her at the top of her career. Cece is disappointed to discover her achievements all feels a bit hollow, and she suspects she knows the reason — she won't be satisfied until she finds out what happened to her missing older brother, the only person in her family who supported her dancing but who fell deeper into addiction all the while. It's a profound and captivating examination of family, ambition, power, and sacrifice.

5

Quietly Hostile by Samantha Irby

Every book from Samantha Irby is a gift, and her latest essay collection — a defense for owning your joy, celebrating your idiosyncrasies, and forgiving your missteps — is as hilarious, insightful, and comforting as those that precede it. It's nearly impossible to finish without feeling seen.

6

Yellowface by R.F. Kuang

When June Hayward's friend Athena Liu — a bestselling literary darling whose career and life June covets — dies in front of her, she can't stop herself from leaving the apartment with Athena's latest manuscript. After she decides to sell it under her own name, June gets a taste of the literary stardom she'd always dreamed of. But it isn't meant to last: the book is about Chinese laborers during World War I — a history some critics are dubious June, a white woman, should tell — and soon accusations of appropriation give way to suggestions of plagiarism. Told in a captivating first person, *Yellowface* is both a brilliant interrogation of appropriation, "cancel culture," and entitlement, and a wild ride from start to finish.

7

Wild Things by Laura Kay

Londoner El has vowed to get out of her comfort zone by doing one "wild thing" each month for a year, but by month three she's still in a rut. So when she's given an opportunity to move to a house in a coastal village with three of her closest friends, she decides to take the leap, with grand plans of creating a queer haven. But this plan has its own hurdles — most

significantly, it pushes El to finally face her feelings for her best friend. *Wild Things* is a cheeky, queer love story — both platonic and romantic — that explores those years when you feel the openness of your future shrinking, and the relationships that help you survive them.

8

Bad Summer People by Emma Rosenblum

In the exclusive, [ultrawealthy Fire Island town of Salcombe](#), Jen and Lauren wield significant social power. Their husbands, Sam and Jason, are childhood friends and the reason their families summer there rather than the more fashionable Hamptons. But behind the tennis matches, beach days, swanky soirees, and general opulence, infidelity, betrayal, and — for the first time in the town's history — a murder are hiding. These characters are so fun to hate, and their drama is engrossing. It's impossible to put [Bad Summer People](#) down.

9

The Light at the End of the World by Siddhartha Deb

In near-future Delhi, while a dangerous “superweapon” threatens countrywide collapse, ex-journalist Bibi is tasked with finding a former colleague who is suspected of possessing dangerous government secrets. With this mission at its center, *The Light at the End of the World* spans two centuries of India's history, alternating between Bibi's perspective and four key moments of victory and loss. Mixing fact and fiction, realism and mythology, Deb offers an unrestrained, inventive, and utterly absorbing re-imagining of India's history and present day.

10

Good Night, Irene by Luis Alberto Urea

Inspired by Urea's mother's service during World War II, *Good Night, Irene* tells the story of Irene Woodward, a rebellious New Yorker who, without telling anyone, leaves her life with an abusive fiancé behind and enlists with the so-called Donut Dollies — a group of women who deliver donuts, coffee, and most importantly morale to the troops on the front line. Through her eyes, as well as the perspective of her newfound friend Dorothy, we see the best and worst of humanity — the violence and resilience, fear and bravery, despair and love — against the backdrop of the war, lucidly depicted and panoramic in scope

11

All the Sinners Bleed by S.A. Cosby

In award-winning S.A. Cosby's latest — which Publishers Weekly rightfully calls “easily his strongest work to date” — Titus Crown leaves his job at the FBI to return to his rural hometown in Charon County as its first Black sheriff. While having to both protect the county's flagrant white supremacists and deal with the racist attacks coming his way, he's faced with a string of crimes that shock and destabilize the community: a serial killer is on the loose. This Southern noir balances ghastly violence against multi-layered interpersonal dynamics to create an affecting page-turner.

12

The Memory of Animals by Claire Fuller

Amidst a surging pandemic, recently disgraced marine biologist Neffy has volunteered as a guinea pig in an experimental vaccine trial in London. When she comes to after a grueling and near-fatal reaction, she finds the facility abandoned by everyone except four other participants who explain the city has fallen into chaos amid the rise of a dangerous new strain. While the four wait for help — with decreasing hope it'll come and increasing suspicion of each other — they share the events that led them to put their lives at risk. It's a fascinating and suspenseful story of shame, penance, and survival.

13

Happy Stories, Mostly by Norman Erikson Pasaribu, translated by Tiffany Tsao

If you like your books with an undercurrent of melancholy, *Happy Stories, Mostly* is for you. The slim story collection from Indonesian writer Norman Erikson Pasaribu is an impressive fiction debut, following characters who live in the margins, navigating misfortune both big and small. It's an inquiry into happiness itself, and what it's like to live just shy of it. A perfect mix of surreal micro-fiction and thought-provoking narratives, *Happy Stories, Mostly* will stick with you for a long time.

14

Leg: The Story of a Limb and the Boy Who Grew From It by Greg Marshall

At almost 30 years old, Greg Marshall finds out his parents have kept his cerebral palsy diagnosis from him his whole life, and suddenly that life comes into a clearer picture. Marshall reaches back to his 90s childhood, when lived with his four riotous siblings, a mother who refused to be hindered by bouts of chemotherapy, and a father living with ALS. Throughout, his leg was the center of his existence — his impossible-to-ignore limp, the surgeries that attempted to fix it — and in this big-hearted, (literally) laugh-out-loud memoir, Marshall explores how it touched every other aspect of his life, from dealing with grief, to dating as a gay man, to making sense of it all through writing.

15

Maddalena and the Dark by Julia Fine

In 18th century Venice, 15-year-old orphan Luisa leads a modest life at the all-girls music conservatory where she's been raised. Her small world is cracked open when she forms a quick and intimate friendship with new girl Maddalena, who promises to make Luisa's dream of becoming a great violinist come true. She succeeds, but as Luisa's celebrity grows, the pair must contend with Maddalena's own wish: to have Luisa all to herself. *Maddalena and the Dark* is a feast of a book — rich in setting, steeped in desire, and haunted by a growing obsession.

16

Much Ado About Nada by Uzma Jalaluddin

Everyone is concerned about Nada Syed's lack of a husband. When her best friend Haleema convinces her to attend Toronto's annual Muslim conference, she has an ulterior motive — to play matchmaker between Nada and Haleema's soon-to-be brother-in-law, Baz. What she doesn't realize is Baz and Nada have a history that dates back to elementary school, and they are not exactly thrilled to be reunited. With her signature charm, Uzma Jalaluddin explores what happens when we're forced to face a past we'd rather forget — and open up to a future we're scared to believe in.

17

Little Monsters by Adrienne Brodeur

As famous oceanographer Adam Gardner nears his 70th birthday, he decides to stop taking the medication that's managed his bipolar for decades — just as his two adult children, knee-deep in party planning, find themselves confronting repressed memories about their childhood and how it shifted after the tragic death of their young mother. All the while, an outsider, Steph, works her way into their lives because she has a secret of her own — she's just discovered she's their half-sister. Written with a palpable love for this family and their Cape Cod home, *Little Monsters* tackles family trauma, forgiveness, and toxic masculinity.

18

Speech Team by Tim Murphy

When 40-something writer Tip Murray learns the tragic news that his former high school friend has died by suicide, he's shocked to discover his social media goodbye letter included a damning jab at their former speech team coach, Mr. Gold. Reeling from the news and feeling sentimental, Tip and his best friend Nat decide to reunite with two other friends from

the team — and they quickly realize they'd each been hiding abuse from Mr. Gold. Bittersweet, witty, and rife with '80s nostalgia, *Speech Team* tells the story of old friends on a mission for accountability and closure.

19

Mobility by Lydia Kiesling

The opening of *Mobility* — the first release from Zando's Crooked Media imprint — takes us to Azerbaijan in 1998, where teen Bunny Glenn lives a life of consumption with her US State Department family against the backdrop of a rapidly changing geopolitical landscape: the race for oil dominance, the growing climate crisis, the lead-up to the American war on terror. Through Bunny's journey across continents and into middle age, when she eventually makes a name for herself in the oil industry, Kiesling breaks down the barrier between the personal and political, ingeniously exposing the ways in which a person can be both ruled by and complicit in capitalism.

20

Family Lore by Elizabeth Acevedo

[\\$27.90](#)

National Book Award–winning author Elizabeth Acevedo makes her highly anticipated adult fiction debut in this enchanting, multigenerational story about the Dominican-American Marte family. At the core is Flor, a seer with the ability to predict when a person will die, who, using this information, decides to throw herself a living wake. Set over the course of the three days leading up to the wake, and interspersed with sojourns to the past, *Family Lore* dives into the perspectives of the many Marte women to beautifully explore themes of sister- and motherhood, family secrets, and the power of defining your life's purpose and meaning.

21

Time's Mouth by Edan Lepucki

In 1950s California, right after her abusive father's death, Ursa discovers she has the ability to travel to her past. At first it's a gift, and in just a few years she builds a commune of single mothers in a remote mansion that amplifies her powers. When the haven shifts into a cult, though, with deadly ramifications for the children in the group, Ursa's son Ray and his pregnant girlfriend, Cherry, flee to raise their child in freedom. Still, even away from Ursa, something strange happens to their baby — and Cherry abandons this new life too, leaving her daughter to later try to piece together the long-held secrets of her family history. Spanning decades and tracking the evolution of, and recovery from, intergenerational trauma, *Time's Mouth* is a dreamy, heartfelt tearjerker.

Tomb Sweeping by Alexandra Chang

Following her phenomenal debut novel, *Days of Distraction*, Chang returns with *Tomb Sweeping*, a collection of inventive, affecting, and delightfully strange stories featuring humble characters across China and the US who navigate daily disappointments, work mundanities, and unlikely encounters. Whether set in rundown homes or an illegal gambling den, these stories reveal the high stakes of even the smallest personal dramas, and the ways we seek out comfort as we go through them.