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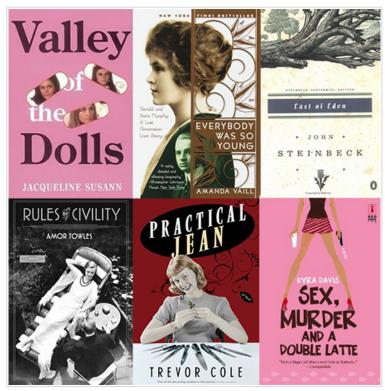
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## Great books for your beach bag

By redlipslonglashes on July 2, 2013



By: Danielle Todd

For most of us, once we leave school, summer is no longer a season of freedom and relaxation. It's business as usual, all year long. Despite this, the warm weather and longer days usually lends itself to a more leisurely pace. We tend to tend to put off larger projects until fall, stay up later, and spend more time chilling out. For me, it also means more time to read, and the books I choose though the summer months tend to be a lighter in subject matter, also known as beach reads.

It can be challenging to find good books for the summer. A beach read should be a well-written page-turner, but not to heavy. This is important. I once read Khaled Hosseini's *The Kite Runner* and *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, back to back, while on a holiday. It was a huge error in judgement. They're both incredible stories, but so terribly sad. There were a lot of tears, and that's no way to spend a vacation. Therefore, it's crucial that your summer reading should be quality books that won't leave you bored, or crying into your gin and tonic.

To help you in your search for the perfect books to read this summer, I've complied a list of what I consider the top six quintessential beach reads ever:

#### Valley of the Dolls, Jacqueline Susann

This is the ultimate beach read, to the extent that every copy should be sold with a tube of sun block. It has the air of a trashy novel, but it's remarkably well written, and the story will keep you



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hooked until the sun goes down and beyond. Loosely based on real lives of the rich and famous, the story is centered around three women and their interconnecting lives over two decades, as they find success in their careers, and eventually self-destruct.

Published in 1966, you might think it's a bit dated, but trust me; this is a true classic you don't want to miss.

#### Everybody Was So Young, Amanda Vaill

Originally from the Hampton's, Sarah and Gerald Murphy moved to Paris in the early 1920s, where they were well known socialites. They hosted parties where their guests included notable ex-pats like Ernest Hemmingway, and Scott and Zelda Fitzgerald. Eventually they abandoned Paris for the French Riviera where they were responsible for making the region a trendy summer destination, rather than just a winter retreat for the elite.

At their home at Cap d'Antibes they entertained famous visitors like Dorothy Parker, Pablo Picasso, Cole Porter, and Rudolph Valentino. They were well known for their fabulous beach parties and picnics. Sarah Murphy has even been credited for making sunbathing fashionable.

Although they're not a household name anymore, the couple left a lasting impression though the work of their artistic pals. Hemmingway, Fitzgerald and Archibald MacLeish are among their literary friends who modeled fictional characters after them in their work. As well, Léger and Picasso produced several paintings of Sarah's likeness. *Everybody is so Young* tells the story of this charismatic couple that seemed to inspire so many during the jazz age. Through this biography, you can't help but get lost in the glamorous, but sometimes tragic, world of the Murphy's, as they pursued their bohemian lifestyle with their old family money.

#### Practical Jean, Trevor Cole

Jean had put her life on hold to care for her terminally ill mother. After her mother's death, she returned to her old life with a fresh outlook and sets out on a mission to help her friends. She soon finds her so-called favours have left her in a heap of trouble.

Both bittersweet and macabre, it's a story you won't soon forget.

#### East of Eden, John Steinbeck

I know my recommendation of this old, 750 page novel seems more like a cruel high school English assignment, rather than a relaxing summer read, but this one actually falls squarely into beach book territory. Steinbeck himself considered it his greatest novel, and it really offers something for everyone.

The narrative follows the intertwined lives of two families in central California over several generations, and is based on the biblical premise of Cain and Abel. It also explores the mysteries of the human condition, including love, and the conflict between good and evil. It's beautifully written, and it's setting was so vividly detailed, when I finally got to see this part of California for myself, I felt as though I'd already been.

If you haven't experienced this novel, be sure to pick it up this summer. I'll be waiting for your ten page, double spaced, book report by the end of August.

#### Sex, Murder and A Double Latte, Kyra Davis

Sex, Murder and A Double Latte is the first in a series of five books featuring the character of Sophie Katz, a writer who's always finding herself in precarious situations, often involving murder.

Part chick-lit and part mystery; this book, as well as the other books in this series, are pure fun, and perfect for summer reading.

#### The Rules of Civility, Amor Towles

This book could be easily described as a fish out of water story, but it's so much more. The narrative begins in the late 1930s, when the heroine, a sharp, young ambitious New Yorker, befriends a wealthy banker at a New Year's Eve celebration. The novel takes place during the year that followed, as she's introduced to the upper echelons of society.

It's a brilliantly written novel, full of characters so rich, it's almost impossible to put down once you begin.



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