

The Ultimate Travel Guide

Gulf Shores, AL



@stayfortheadventure



STAY FOR THE ADVENTURE
VACATION HOMES

Welcome to Gulf Shores

Each year, over 6 million people visit Gulf Shores for the beaches, seafood, and family fun—but many miss the best experiences simply because they don't know where to look. That's why we created The Gulf Shores Ultimate Travel Guide—a straightforward resource to help you skip the guesswork and get straight to the good stuff. We've focused on what matters most: the best beaches, top attractions, amazing food, and unforgettable outdoor adventures. Our goal is to give you the confidence to make every moment of your trip count.



Beaches



Outdoors



Shopping



Restaurants



Day Trips



Packing



Attractions



Local Events

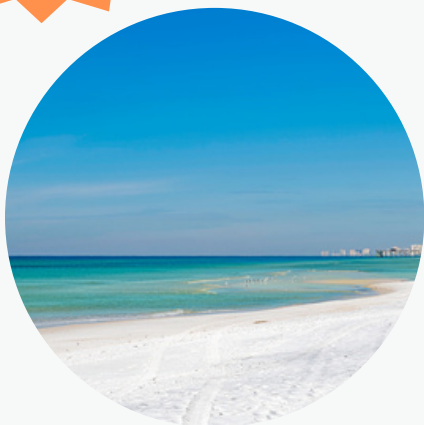


Where to Stay



Beaches of Gulf Shores

OUR
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Gulf Place Beach



Located in the heart of Gulf Shores, Gulf Place Beach is the crown jewel of the Alabama coast. Its wide, well-maintained shoreline and soft white sand make it perfect for families with kids in tow. There's plenty of space to spread out, and public amenities like restrooms, showers, and nearby food vendors make beach days easy and comfortable. With lifeguards on duty during peak seasons, it's also one of the safest spots for swimming.

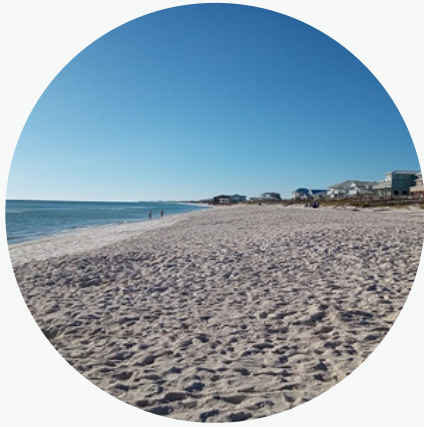
Parking: Ample paid parking is available via metered kiosks and ParkMobile. Arrive early on weekends—this beach is popular!

West Beach

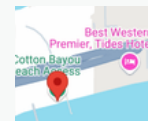


If you're looking to escape the crowds without sacrificing the beauty, West Beach is your spot. Stretching along the quieter western edge of Gulf Shores, this beach offers a more relaxed and peaceful experience. It's ideal for long walks, especially around sunset when the sky lights up in vibrant orange and pink hues. With fewer tourists and less foot traffic, it's a local favorite for romantic evenings and photo-worthy moments.

Parking: Limited public parking is available at access points along West Beach Blvd. Plan ahead, as it can fill up quickly during high season.



Cotton Bayou Beach



Tucked between Orange Beach and Gulf Shores, Cotton Bayou Beach is a hidden gem with easy public access. It's known for its clean facilities, including restrooms, outdoor showers, and a convenient parking lot just steps from the sand. The vibe here is relaxed and welcoming, making it perfect for couples, solo travelers, and families alike. It's a great spot to enjoy the ocean without venturing too far from town.

Parking: Free public parking is available, but spaces are limited. Arrive early or visit in the late afternoon for better availability.



Bon Secour Beaches



For those seeking peace, solitude, and natural beauty, the beaches within Bon Secour National Wildlife Refuge are unmatched. These undeveloped stretches of coastline offer a chance to reconnect with nature, with soft dunes, quiet waters, and plenty of wildlife to spot along the way. You won't find any commercial distractions here—just the wind, waves, and perhaps the tracks of a nesting sea turtle.

Parking: Free parking is available at trailheads and access points like Pine Beach Trail. A short hike may be required to reach the beach.



Shell Beach

As the name suggests, Shell Beach is a favorite for young explorers and seashell hunters. This small, lesser-known beach often rewards visitors with beautiful shells and unique finds washed ashore. It's especially great for families with curious kids, as the gentle surf and shallow waters make it safe and fun to wade and search for treasures.

Parking: Very limited free parking is available nearby. It's best accessed by bike or on foot from adjacent neighborhoods or nearby trails.



Restaurants

Most Popular Destinations



The Hangout

A beachfront party spot for all ages. Live music, foam parties, outdoor family games, and a souvenir shop make this more than just dinner—it's a memory.

Must Try: Shrimp Po' Boy, Friend Pickles, Hangout Punch



LuLu's Gulf Shores

Owned by Lucy Buffett, this waterside spot is a family-favorite thanks to its ropes course, live music, and vibrant tropical vibe.

Must-Try: Crazy Sista Crab Melt, Fresh Gulf Fish Sandwich, Key Lime Pie.



The Original Oyster House

A Gulf Shores legend with consistently great food, views of the lagoon, and a solid gift shop for kids to explore.

Must-Try: Fire-Grilled Oysters, Cajun Crawfish Pasta, Bread Pudding.

Best Family-Friendly Restaurants

Tacky Jack's

Bright, loud, and lively with crayons, funny signs, and great views. Kids can write their name on a wood shingle and leave it behind.

Must-Try: Breakfast Burrito, Mexican Garbage Nachos.



LuLu's Gulf Shores (also in Most Popular)

Perfect for families thanks to a giant sandbox, arcade, and safe space to roam.



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Lambert's Cafe

A fun, kitschy experience where servers toss hot rolls across the room to your table. Great food, big portions, and a one-of-a-kind atmosphere.

Must-Try: Chicken Fried Steak, Country Ham with Red-Eye Gravy — and of course, the thrown rolls!



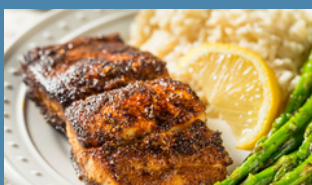
Best Restaurants on the Water



The Gulf – Orange Beach

Made from shipping containers, this modern outdoor restaurant has unbeatable sunset views and a hip, upscale-casual vibe.

Must-Try: Grouper Sandwich, House-Cut Fries, Local Brews.



Cobalt, The Restaurant

Right under the Perdido Bay bridge, with panoramic waterfront views and a touch of elegance. Boat-accessible too!

Must-Try: Blackened Tuna, Shrimp and Grits.



Tacky Jack's (yes, again!)

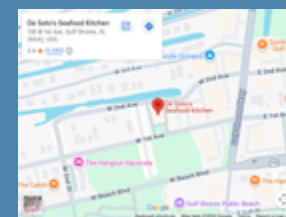
You'll see it on several lists—it's that good. Bayfront views and a casual open-air feel.

Best Restaurants on a Budget

De Soto's Seafood Kitchen

Quality seafood at friendly prices, tucked off the main drag. A true local favorite.

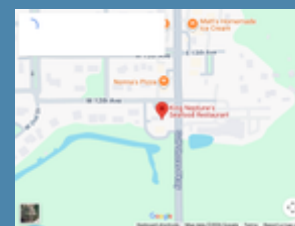
Must-Try: Seafood Platter, Blackened Grouper.



King Neptune's Seafood Restaurant

Small, casual, and affordable with generous portions.

Must-Try: Shrimp Basket, Crab Claws.



Doc's Seafood Shack & Oyster Bar

Good old-school seafood in a plastic-basket kind of way. Delicious and simple.

Must-Try: Fried Shrimp, Gumbo, Hush Puppies.



Best Hidden Gems

Fish River Grill

A quirky, flavorful, off-the-beaten-path spot serving “swamp soup” and gator bites.

Must-Try: Catfish Po’ Boy, Swamp Soup.



Niki’s Seafood & Thai

Surprisingly good seafood + Thai food combo. A humble spot with a loyal following.

Must-Try: Pad Thai with Shrimp, Thai Red Curry.



Flying Harpoon

Tiny and tucked away, with a dive-bar-meets-seafood-joint vibe. Great drinks and gumbo.

Must-Try: Crawfish Po’ Boy, Bloody Mary.



Best Seafood Restaurants



The Steamer Baked Oyster Bar

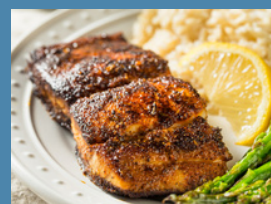
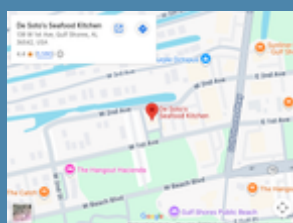
No fried food, just steamed and grilled perfection. Simple, fresh, and so good.

Must-Try: Royal Reds, Crab Legs, Steamed Oysters.



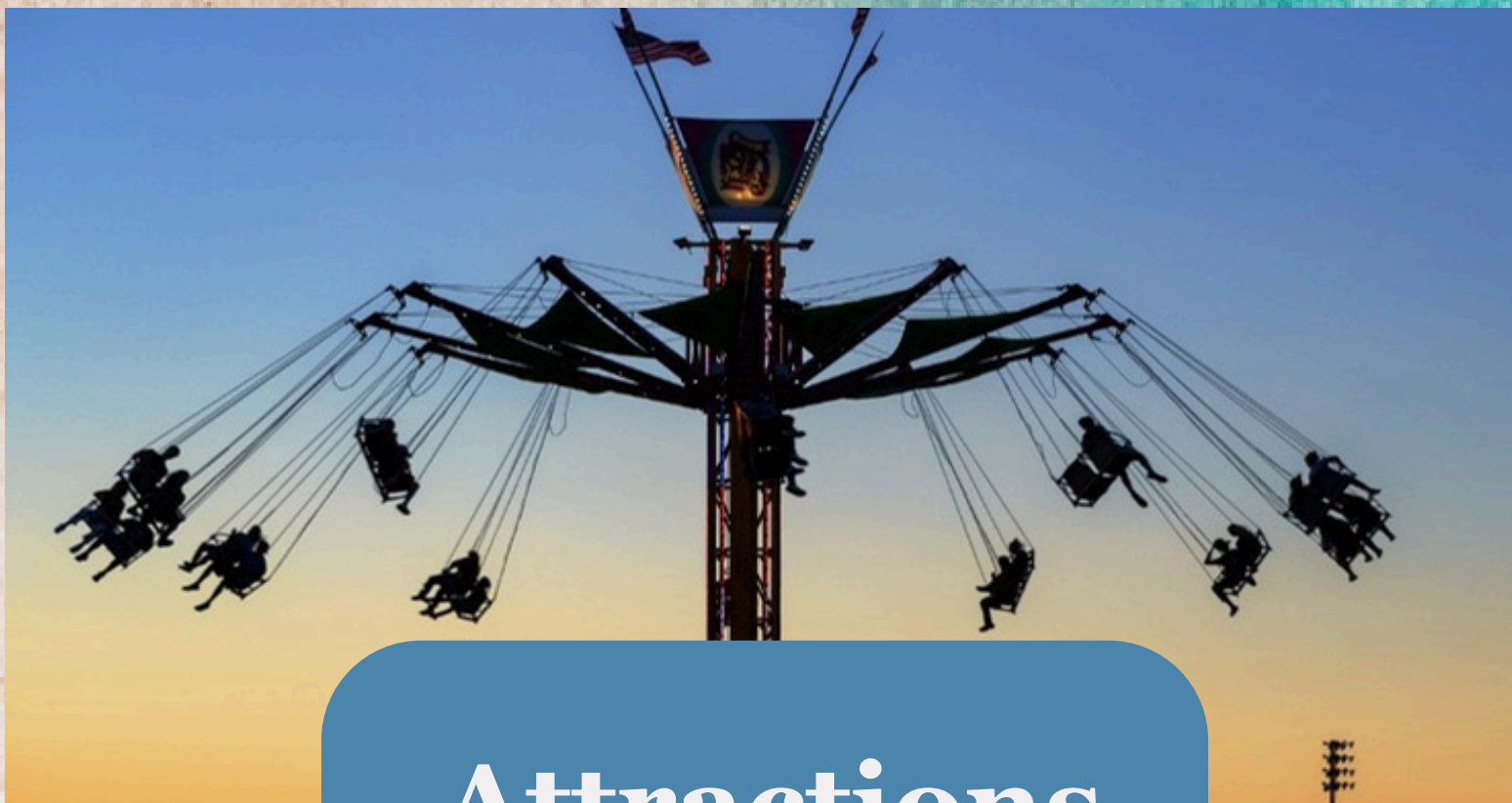
Original Oyster House (also in Most Popular)

Still one of the top seafood destinations for a reason.



De Soto’s Seafood Kitchen (also in Budget-Friendly)

A well-rounded spot with expertly seasoned seafood in a homey setting.



Attractions

Outdoor Attractions

Gulf State Park



This massive park spans over 6,000 acres with hiking and biking trails, a fishing pier, kayak rentals, and a pristine beach. It's a go-to for nature lovers and families who want to explore Alabama's coastal ecosystem. Keep an eye out for wildlife like gators, turtles, and migratory birds.



Alabama Gulf Coast Zoo



A charming, walkable zoo with over 300 animals including lions, lemurs, and kangaroos. Kids love the interactive exhibits and animal encounters. The zoo is clean, easy to navigate, and perfect for a half-day visit.



Waterville USA

Part waterpark, part amusement park, this spot is packed with slides, lazy rivers, and roller coasters. There's a mini golf course, go-karts, and an arcade too—ideal for families who want variety in one place.



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OWA Parks and Resort

A hidden gem for families staying nearby or looking for a casual day of fun. The park includes kid-friendly rides, outdoor games, and shaded picnic spots. It's small-scale, but packed with charm and perfect for younger kids.



Indoor Attractions

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The Factory

A huge indoor play complex with trampolines, foam pits, climbing walls, dodgeball, and arcade games. It's a perfect rainy-day option or an evening energy burn for kids and teens. There's even a Ninja Warrior-style course for more adventurous guests.



Gulf Shores Museum

This quaint local museum offers a look into the area's history, hurricanes, and culture. It's free to enter and often has rotating exhibits, making it a nice quick stop on an overcast day.



Escape House Waterville

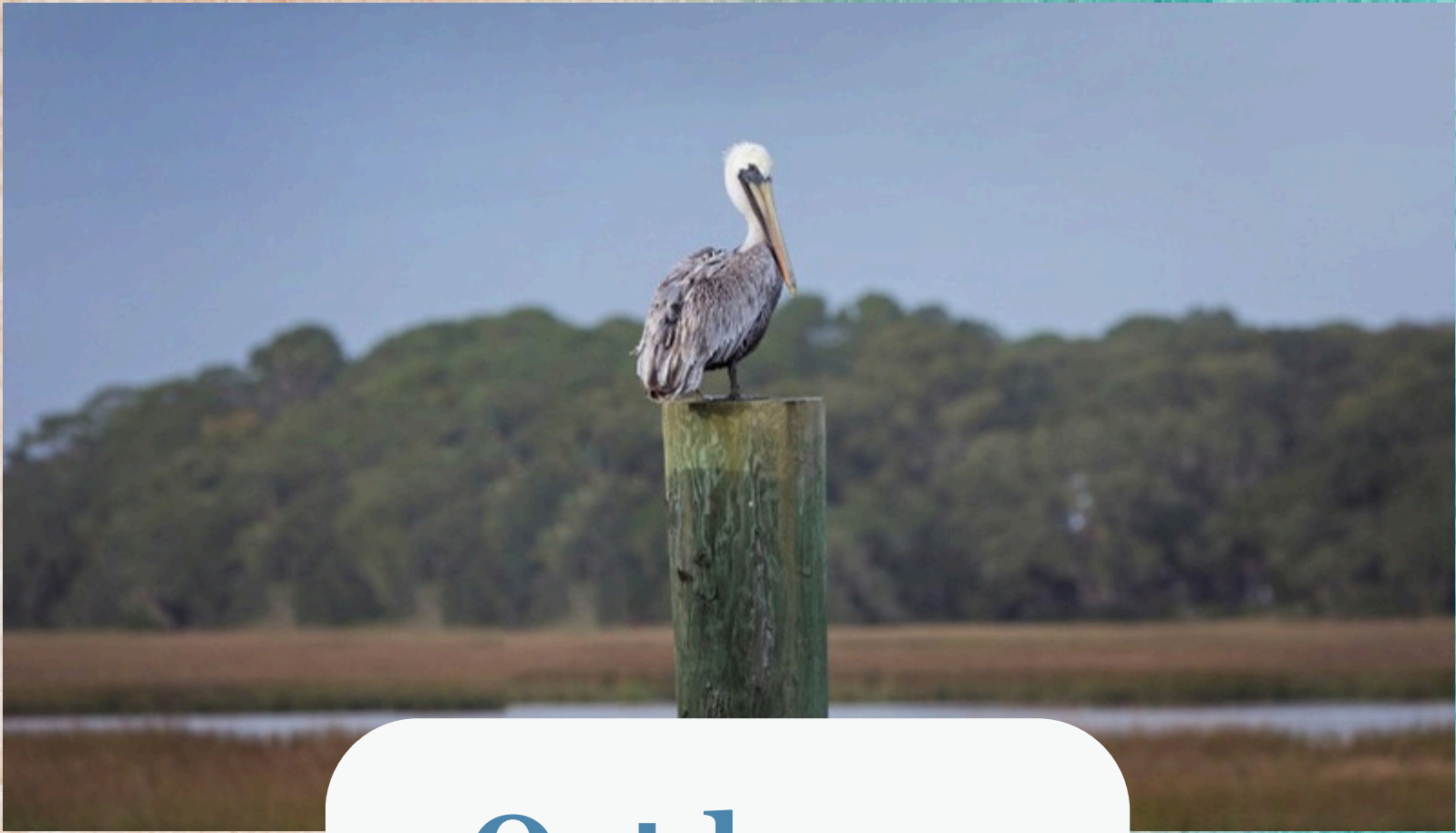
This escape room experience offers a great way to challenge your brain with themed puzzles and teamwork. Ideal for older kids, teens, and adults.



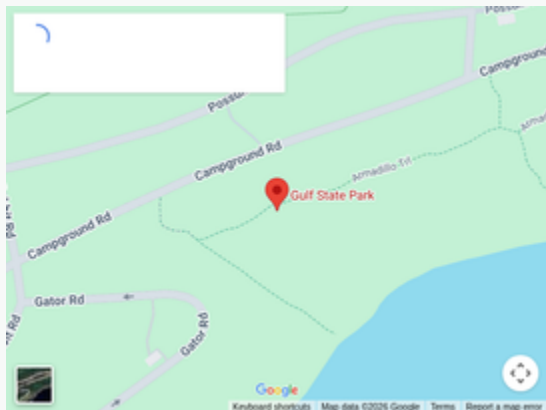
OWA Tropical Falls Indoor Waterpark

One of the newest indoor additions, this compact waterpark features heated pools, splash zones, and small slides all under one roof. It's a convenient and fun option for families staying in the area or those wanting to avoid sunburns or rainy days.





Outdoors



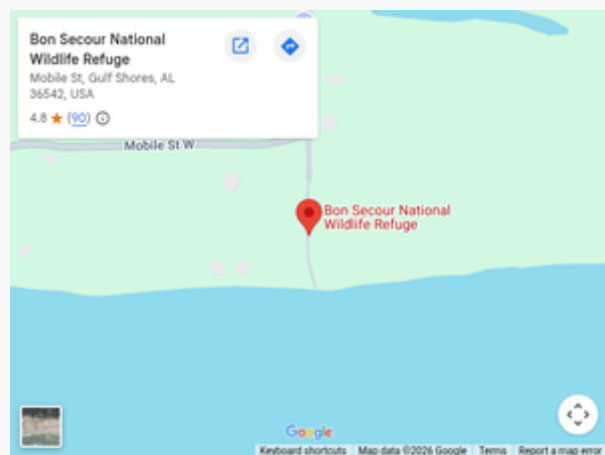
Gulf State Park Trails

This park features over 28 miles of paved and natural trails, perfect for biking, jogging, or walking. The paths wind through marshes, coastal pine forests, and around scenic lakes. You'll find shaded rest stops, wildlife viewing platforms, and even a butterfly garden. Rentals for bikes are available at multiple stations, and the terrain is flat, making it easy for all fitness levels.



Bon Secour National Wildlife Refuge

A peaceful retreat into nature, Bon Secour offers miles of secluded trails ideal for hiking and birdwatching. You'll likely spot herons, egrets, and even the endangered Alabama beach mouse. The refuge has both short and long trail options, ranging from sandy beach strolls to boardwalks over marshland. It's a great option if you're looking for a quiet, reflective experience or want to teach kids about Gulf Coast ecosystems.



Fort Morgan Historic Site

Step back in time at this well-preserved Civil War-era fort, located at the tip of the peninsula. Visitors can walk through original brick corridors, climb the ramparts for views of Mobile Bay, and explore small museum exhibits. Guided tours are available and bring the history to life with tales of battles, ghost stories, and maritime strategy. It's educational and scenic—perfect for history buffs and families alike.

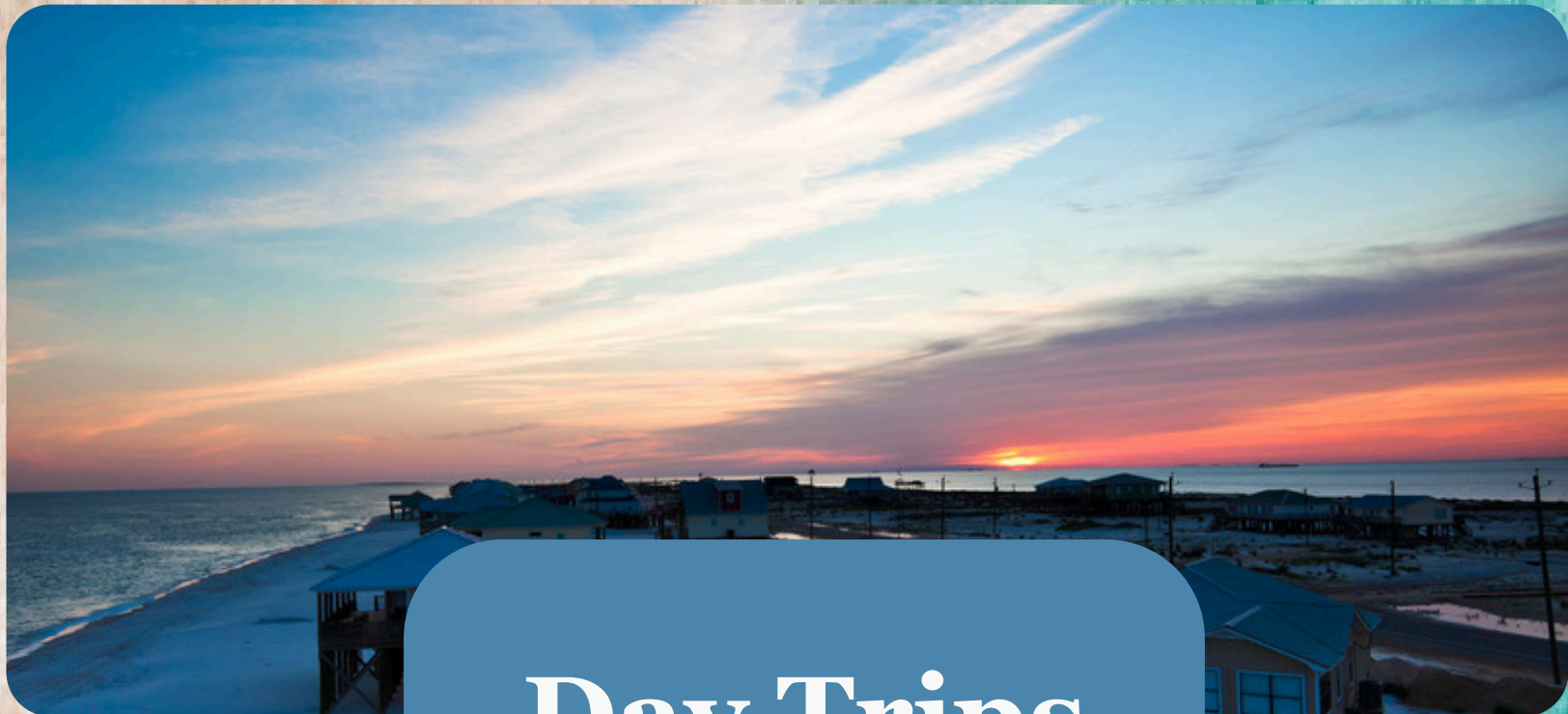
Little Lagoon

Tucked behind the main beach stretch, Little Lagoon is a tranquil waterway ideal for kayaking, paddleboarding, and fishing. Its calm waters make it beginner-friendly, and you'll often see dolphins, pelicans, and fish jumping out of the water. There are several launch points with rental shops nearby, and it's especially beautiful at sunrise or sunset.



Charter Fishing Trips

Gulf Shores is a prime destination for deep-sea and inshore fishing, and local outfitters like Zeke's Landing Marina and Reel Surprise Charters offer everything from half-day excursions to full-day trips. Whether you're after red snapper, grouper, or even a chance at shark fishing, these charters provide all the gear and guidance you need. It's a thrilling way to enjoy the Gulf—and maybe even catch dinner.



Day Trips

Orange Beach



Just a short drive east, Orange Beach offers even more opportunities for waterfront dining, shopping, and adventure. Take a dolphin cruise, rent a pontoon boat, or explore The Wharf—a hub for entertainment, shops, and dining. It's a perfect day trip for families or couples looking to expand their coastal exploration.

Dauphin Island



Accessible by ferry from Fort Morgan, Dauphin Island offers a peaceful, natural setting with fewer crowds and incredible wildlife. Visit the Estuarium at the Dauphin Island Sea Lab, explore Fort Gaines, or enjoy the island's laid-back beaches and bike trails. It's a scenic escape with educational and relaxing experiences.

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Bon Secour



While it's technically in Gulf Shores, Bon Secour is often overlooked as a full-day outing. Bring a picnic and explore its quiet beaches, nature trails, and birdwatching spots. The refuge provides a serene contrast to the more commercial areas, making it a perfect mini escape into nature.



Local Events

National Shrimp Fest



Held annually in October, this massive beachfront celebration draws over 300,000 visitors. Enjoy live music on two stages, fresh Gulf seafood, arts and crafts booths, a sand sculpture contest, and more. It's family-friendly, walkable, and packed with flavor and fun.

Sand in My Boots



This newer country music festival brings top national acts to Gulf Shores for a beachside concert weekend packed with sunshine, good vibes, and great tunes. With a strong focus on country music and coastal charm, it's perfect for laid-back travelers who love live music and sand between their toes.

Mardi Gras Parades



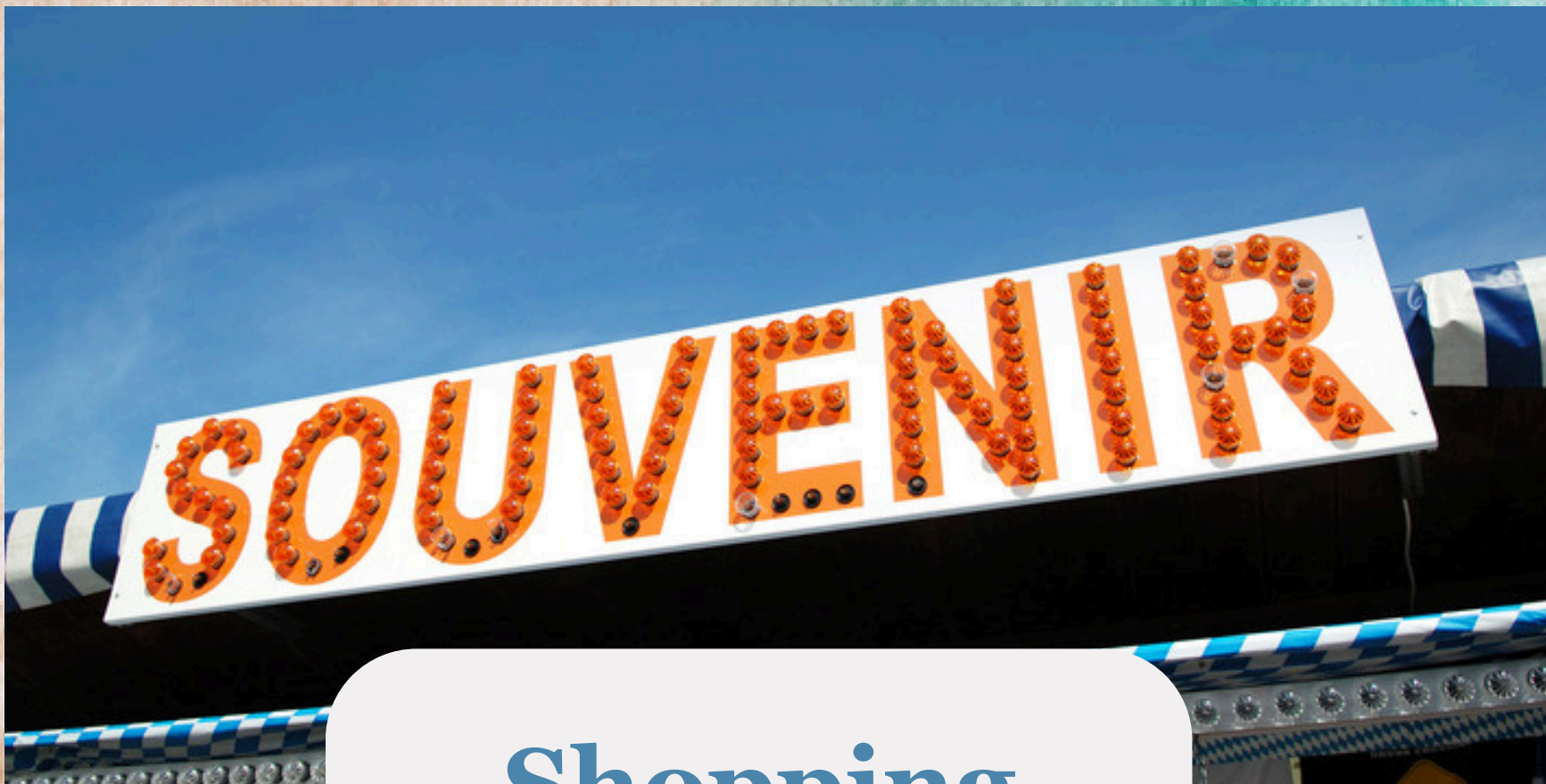
While New Orleans gets the spotlight, Gulf Shores has its own charming version of Mardi Gras! The city hosts fun and family-friendly parades with floats, beads, and festive music. It's a great way to enjoy Southern tradition in a more relaxed, beachy setting.

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Christmas at OWA



OWA Parks & Resort transforms into a winter wonderland with lights, holiday shows, ice skating, and visits from Santa. Great for families staying during the holiday season, this event offers a festive experience not far from Gulf Shores.



Shopping

The Wharf

Just a short drive from Gulf Shores, The Wharf is an open-air shopping and entertainment district offering boutique stores, souvenir shops, and beachwear retailers. You'll find everything from upscale fashion to artisan-made jewelry.



Souvenir City

A Gulf Shores classic! Known for its giant shark mouth entrance, this colorful shop is packed with t-shirts, toys, mugs, magnets, and everything you'd expect from a beach-town souvenir stop. It's kitschy, fun, and perfect for quick gifts.

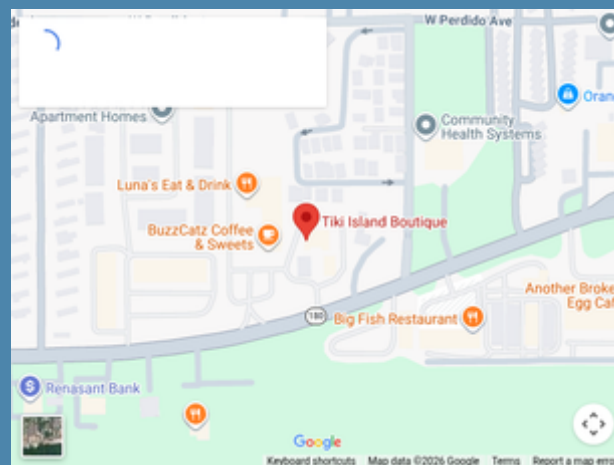
SanRoc Cay Marina

Located in Orange Beach, this small but charming shopping area offers a mix of fashion, gifts, and fine dining in a waterfront setting. Great for a more upscale shopping break with a view.



Tiki Island Boutique

Located right in Gulf Shores, this locally owned shop specializes in stylish beachwear, casual resort clothing, and cute accessories. It's a hidden gem for those who want a fresh look for their vacation photos.



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Alvin's Island

Located at 100 W. Beach Blvd, just steps from the shoreline, this colorful shop is a go-to destination for vacationers seeking beachwear, swimwear, and unique souvenirs. Inside, you'll find a wide selection of items, from resort and casual apparel to beach toys, towels, and accessories, all designed to enhance your coastal experience.



Packing

Seasonal Weather

Spring (March–May): Mild temperatures in the 70s–80s. Perfect for beach days, but bring a light sweater for breezy evenings.

Summer (June–August): Hot and humid, with temps in the high 80s–90s. Sunscreen, sunglasses, and breathable clothing are must-haves.

Fall (September–November): Warm and pleasant, especially in early fall. Great beach weather with fewer crowds.

Winter (December–February): Cooler with highs in the 50s–60s. Still sunny but bring layers for chilly mornings and nights.

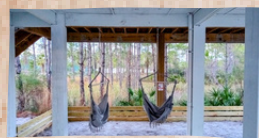
Packing Checklist

- **Swimsuits + cover-ups**
- **Flip flops + sandals**
- **Sunglasses + sunscreen (reef-safe recommended)**
- **Hat or visor**
- **Light, breathable clothing**
- **Evening layers (sweater or light jacket)**
- **Beach towels and tote bag**
- **Reusable water bottle**
- **Bug spray (for hikes or sunset beach time)**
- **Camera or phone charger**
- **Books, games, or download playlists for downtime**
- **Travel umbrella or light rain jacket (just in case)**



Where to Stay

Make your trip extra special by staying just 3 minutes from the beach in our thoughtfully designed vacation home, The Blue Mermaid. This charming 5-bedroom, 3-bathroom beach house in the Morgantown community of Gulf Shores has everything you need to relax, recharge, and reconnect.



Enjoy your morning coffee on one of the decks, rinse off the salt and sand in the outdoor shower, and gather with family or friends around the firepit as the stars come out. The home is fully stocked with all the comforts of home, including a full kitchen, laundry room, smart TVs, and fast Wi-Fi. The outdoor living space and grill area are perfect for al fresco meals and laid-back evenings after your Gulf Coast adventures.

Booking directly means you'll save on fees and get insider local tips from your hosts!

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