

36 Hours in Galveston

Experience this beachside city before embarking on a tropical cruise.

BY BARBARA AND JIM TWARDOWSKI



Double dipping on the vacation fun is easy when your cruise departs from Galveston, Texas. Just 50 miles southeast of Houston, the port city boasts the fourth busiest cruise terminal in the country. This resilient beachside community with a storied past, an eclectic collection of attractions, one-of-a-kind shopping, and diverse dining options creates a destination worthy of an additional 36-hour stay either before or after a cruise. Our suggested itinerary will help you to see the most of Galveston before you have to say bon voyage.

EARLY AFTERNOON ARRIVAL

Long before you reach Moody Gardens' 242 acres of family-approved fun, you'll see a trio of glass pyramids. Monkeys and birds roam free inside the 10-story Rainforest Pyramid. The lush interior replicates this vanishing ecosystem. In the Aquarium Pyramid, check out a newer habitat for Humboldt penguins and a touch tank filled with stingrays. The Discovery Pyramid offers continually changing movies projected in 3D and 4D theaters. Take in a round of golf, ride a replica 1800s-styled paddle wheel boat, swing on the ropes course, or challenge the zip line.



You can easily spend the weekend here. For convenience, book a guest room at Moody Gardens Hotel, Spa and Convention Center (AAA Four Diamonds). There are also plenty of dining options on site. Or head to dinner at Olympia Grill. The family-owned restaurant is on Pier 21; ask for a table with a harborside view.

End the evening at the Galveston Island Historic Pleasure Pier. Situated over the Gulf of Mexico, the nostalgically themed amusement park contains more than a dozen rides, plus midway games, shopping, and dining options.

FULL DAY ON THE ISLAND

The deadliest natural disaster in U.S. history occurred in Galveston in September 1900. A hurricane dumped 15-foot storm surges on the island, tragically killing more than 6,000 residents. In the wake of the storm, the city raised its level and built a 17-foot seawall. Watch a short documentary film, *The Great Storm*, shown at Pier 21 Theater.

Galveston contains one of the country's largest collections of Victorian architecture. Stroll the East End Historical District past Easter egg-colored homes dating from the mid-1800s to the early 1900s. Wood sculptures seen on some of the lawns were created by carvers from felled trees following Hurricane Ike in 2008.

Stop for a break at Sunflower Bakery and Café that features local ingredients in made-from-scratch recipes. The casual neighborhood spot serves breakfast, lunch, and dinner. While waiting for your meal, check out the collectibles, jewelry, and antiques displayed at Bacon Farm, a small boutique tucked in a corner of the restaurant.

After that second cup of coffee, walk to Bishop's Palace. Built between 1886 and 1892, the opulent three-story stone structure resembles a small castle. The American Institute of Architects



considers this to be one of the 100 most important buildings in America.

If you're a lover of art, Galveston has something for you, too. One of the largest collections of Texas and American West artifacts can be found inside The Bryan Museum. Housed in the 1902 Galveston Orphans Home, the Renaissance Revival building contains some 70,000 items in its collection. Pick out a memorable souvenir from the museum's shop that features art produced by locals, pottery from Mexico, and Texas-themed cookbooks. If you're in town on Thursday afternoon or Sunday morning, check out the outdoor Galveston's Own Farmers Market on the museum's grounds. You can sample Texas-grown olive oils, organic raw pecans, and homemade salsa.

Walk to the Strand Historic District to explore art galleries, peruse the shops, and indulge in a sweet treat. Ship salvage from around the world finds its way to Nautical Antiques & Tropical



The Galveston Island Historic Pleasure Pier juts into the Gulf of Mexico and features more than a dozen rides and midway games.

Top: At Moody Gardens, you'll find an aquarium, ropes course, golf course, rain forest habitat, and more.

Opposite top: Visitors touring the East End Historical District, where many trees damaged by Hurricane Ike were carved into works of art.

Galveston Island Convention and Visitors Bureau photos



Above: In the Strand Historic District, visitors will find a host of art galleries, shops, and restaurants.

Above right: The Galveston Railroad Museum features one of the largest restored railroad collections in the country.

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Decor. The Marketplace at the Peanut Butter Warehouse displays the wares of 35 vendors selling an assortment of art, photos, gourmet treats, and antiques.

Step back in time at LaKing's Confectionary where patrons spoon thick chocolate malts while sitting at a 1920s soda fountain. The store's staff re-creates 50 types of candies using century-old recipes. Nibble on peanut brittle, divinity, pecan pralines, hand-dipped chocolates, and their famous salt water taffy. During the summer months, customers can observe the taffy being pulled, spun out, and packaged.

Fortified with sugar, cross the long pedestrian bridge at the public pier over the Galveston Channel to the Ocean Star Offshore Drilling Rig and Museum. Take a self-guided tour through this retired and refurbished rig. Don't worry, there's an elevator. The museum details the process of extracting

BEFORE YOU GO

For more details, contact the Galveston Island Convention and Visitors Bureau at (888) GAL-ISLE (425-4753) or Galveston.com.

Carnival, Royal Caribbean, and Disney cruise lines depart from the Port of Galveston. Your AAA Travel agent can assist you with planning a cruise vacation. A list of offices to serve you is on page 6.

To visit Galveston, first stop by your nearest AAA service office for maps, lodging reservations, and TourBook® guides.

Fried oysters are one of the specialties at Gaido's Seafood Restaurant. Galveston Island Convention and Visitors Bureau



oil while providing a window into life on board.

Another notable attraction is the Galveston Railroad Museum with one of the largest restored railroad collections in the country. On most Saturdays from 11 a.m. to 1:45 p.m., the Harborside

Express carries passengers approximately a mile down the track, weather permitting.

Located on Seawall Boulevard, Gaido's Seafood Restaurant (AAA Three Diamonds) has been a city staple since 1911. Save room for a piece of pecan pie, the official pie of Texas.

Finish the evening at the rooftop lounge at The Tremont House, a Wyndham Grand Hotel (AAA Three Diamonds). Sit beneath the bright Texas stars, order a cocktail, and enjoy the unobstructed views of historical downtown Galveston.

The next morning, watch the sunrise from the beach or sleep in late. Have breakfast at the Mosquito Café (AAA Two Diamonds) for a cozy casual meal in a restored building from 1870 before gathering your luggage at your hotel and heading to the terminal to board your cruise ship.

WHERE TO STAY

In addition to the hotels already mentioned, here are a few suggestions. Many of Galveston's hotels offer a shuttle service to the port. If you book at least a one-night stay, some hotels — including Moody Gardens Hotel — provide free parking for the duration of your cruise.

For a room near the port and a block from downtown, try Harbor House Hotel & Marina (AAA Three Diamonds) at Pier 21. The hotel offers a complimentary continental breakfast and free Wi-Fi.

On the beachfront, reserve your room at either the luxurious The San Luis Resort Spa & Conference Center (AAA Four Diamonds) or the Hotel Galvez & Spa, a Wyndham Grand Hotel, (AAA Four Diamonds). The San Luis offers its cruising guests free parking.

With a 36-hour stay in Galveston, you'll be relaxed and ready to embark on a cruise to tropical destinations. Set your watch to island time and enjoy the journey. ●

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