



MITCHELL HISTORIC PROPERTIES



LEFT: MARDI GRAS AT THE TREMONT HOUSE; ABOVE: GALVESTON RAILROAD MUSEUM; BELOW: SEAWALL 1900 STORM MEMORIAL

SURGING AHEAD

After dodging last year's Hurricane Harvey, Galveston Island is going strong

BY JEFF HEILMAN

The hurricane that devastated Galveston Island in 1900 remains the deadliest natural disaster in U.S. history. Galveston was slammed again in 2008 by Hurricane Ike, the costliest natural disaster in Texas history. Tidings were ominous for the destination once more last August as Hurricane Harvey approached the Texas coast. Nearby neighbors including Rockport, Port Aransas and Beaumont were hit hardest, along with Houston and much of Harris County.

In what is yet to be the costliest natural disaster in U.S. history, however, Galveston did not pay its customary price.

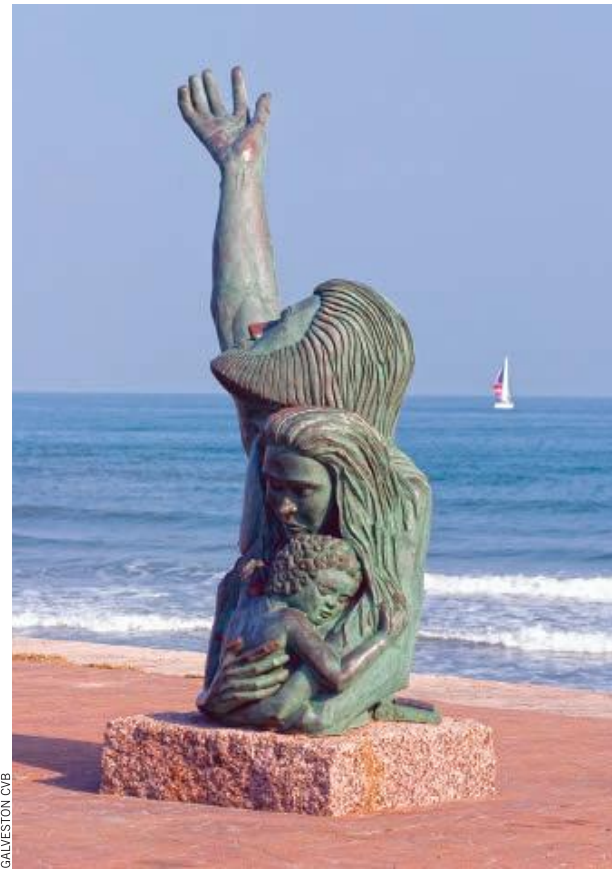
"Galveston was blessed to have been overwhelmingly spared from Hurricane Harvey due to the storm's path initially hitting the coast more than 200 miles away and then taking a direct route inland," said Meg Winchester, director of the Galveston Island CVB. "The island received minimal damage with no hotel or major attraction closures within a week after the storm and we have thankfully experienced business as usual since then. It is busy on the island, and we feel very fortunate."

Overall impact, mostly from water and wind damage, was indeed relatively light.

Flooding in the historic downtown district only temporarily interrupted business. The most seriously affected attraction, the Galveston Railroad Museum, reopened within a week. Hosting private events including dinners aboard the vintage City of Galveston and Southern Diner railcars, the venue, like the island itself, is fully back in gear.

On track, too, is Galveston's group market. Following a robust 2017, which saw the Galveston CVB book nearly \$55 million in future group business, including some 227 events and nearly 80,000 contracted room nights, meetings momentum is strong.

According to Winchester, "2018 is shaping up very well for Galveston Island. Many large conventions are joining us this year,



GALVESTON CVB

while our continuing reach into the corporate market is showing significant growth. Our team continues to show the great value that Galveston offers, especially mid-week, along with our state-of-the-art facilities and appeal as a historic beach destination."

Attracting some 5 million visitors each year, Galveston, with approximately 5,000 hotel rooms, mixes meetings with fun and optimism as only a seaside destination can.

Sunny Skies

Extending 32 miles along the Gulf Coast, Galveston's newly replenished beaches set the stage for sandy, splashy group fun.

At the island's far eastern end, East Beach hosts festivals, concerts and events

such as the hugely popular annual American Institute of Architects (AIA) Sandcastle Competition.

The heart of Galveston's seaside culture is Seawall Urban Park, stretching along beach-lined Seawall Boulevard. Bustling with group venues and attractions, this famed 10-mile thoroughfare claims the nation's longest continuous sidewalk.

Glorious ocean views are part of the package at the 140,000-square-foot Galveston Island Convention Center at The San Luis Resort. Venue highlights include the 43,100-square-foot exhibition hall; 15,500-square-foot grand ballroom; 12,000 square feet of breakout space; and 29,000 square feet of prefunction space.

Set on 32 beachfront acres, the adjacent AAA Four Diamond The San Luis Resort, Spa & Conference Center incorporates 700

guest rooms at three hotels, including the 250-room San Luis Hotel, 10 restaurants and an ultra-modern pool with a swim-up bar. The IACC-certified conference center offers 40,000 square feet of space with additional space at the Hilton Galveston Island Resort and Holiday Inn Galveston-On the Beach boasting space resort-wide to 250,000-plus square feet.

Newly added deck space in the pool area offers expanded lounging and dining options, along with a fire pit, cabanas and VIP area, The Cove.

Another AAA Four Diamond Seawall



PLEASURE PIER
FERRIS WHEEL

gem is the luxurious 224-room Hotel Galvez & Spa, the "Queen of the Gulf." Built in 1911, this Wyndham Grand property offers a full complement of flexible indoor and outdoor venues. Scheduled for completion next month, the

hotel's \$300,000 pool area renovation will include new cabanas and remodeled bar.

The Galvez is a jewel of the Mitchell Historic Properties collection.

Avid preservationists, late billionaire oilman George Mitchell and his wife Cynthia saved many of Galveston's Victorian-era treasures from demolition, vitally contributing to the city's tourism turnaround and transformation. Another Mitchell property is Beach Central, an event venue across from the Galvez.

Fourth-generation family-owned Gaido's Seafood Restaurant, also from 1911, hosts 20 to 200 guests for private events. At the \$60 million Galveston Island Historic Pleasure Pier, rides include the 100-foot-tall Ferris wheel and 200-foot-tall swing tower.

Near the intersection of Seawall Boulevard and Broadway, the Bryan Museum, showcasing the world's largest private collection of Southwestern historical artifacts, offers customized tours and distinctive indoor and outdoor meeting spaces.

On the West End, Galveston Island State Park is for kayak tours, bird walks, nature field trips and one of the island's most fetching pursuits, fishing.

Get Hooked Charters and 4 "Reel" Fishing Charters are among local operators offering fishing and tour excursions ranging from deep-sea adventures 100 miles offshore to local surf, jetty and harbor experiences.

Memorable Times

The Mitchells' preservation efforts also produced the city's Strand National Historic Landmark District. Close to the cruise ship terminal, this nationally acclaimed hub buzzes with group appeal.

Dating to Galveston's founding year of 1839, The Tremont House symbolizes the city's spirit of rebirth. Fire claimed the original incarnation in 1865. Declining in the wake of the Great Hurricane of 1900, the second was demolished in 1928. In 1981, the Mitchells revived the hotel in a former 1879 dry goods store. Sibling to the Galvez,

Local FLAVOR

Craft beer is a big deal on Galveston Island. Events include the popular annual **Brew-Masters Craft Beer Festival** (www.brewmastersbeerfest.com), hosted each Labor Day weekend by Moody Gardens and venues around Galveston. Founded by former tugboat captain Mark Dell'Osso, **Galveston Island Brewing** (www.galvestonislandbrewing.com) is

the largest of several local operators. With a prime location one block from the beach at the island's west end, the brewery features a taproom, free tours on Saturdays and event spaces including the Barrel Room and scenic outdoor area.

Many of the century-old oak trees lining the streets of Galveston's historic East End were damaged or destroyed by Hurricane Ike in 2008. Like the island itself, however, several found a remarkable renaissance as works of art. Via the self-guided or **Tree Sculpture Tour** (www.galveston.com/treesculpture tour), groups can discover nearly two-dozen sculptural animals, birds and figures including *Mermaid Holding Clam Shell*, *Lion King* and *Birds of Galveston*, featuring 17 birds sculpted on the branches and small plants and animals carved around the trunk.

Founded in 2003, **Artist Boat** (www.artistboat.org) is dedicated to "protecting our Gulf Coast through land conservation and fun, educational, inspiring adventures that spark creativity, awareness and action." Groups of 25 can book the

guided interpretive Eco-Art Kayak Adventure, which involves paddling to places of natural significance around Galveston Bay.

Groups booked into Galveston in February 2019 have an opportunity to tie into the 108th edition of **Mardi Gras! Galveston** (www.mardigrasgalveston.com). As the third-largest Mardi Gras celebration in the nation behind St. Louis and front-runner New Orleans, this 12-day end of winter bacchanal attracts some 300,000 revelers with concerts, parades, balcony parties and masked balls. Among the hottest tickets are the Tremont House Mardi Gras Ball and San Luis Salute gala, hosted by Landry's Inc.

—Jeff Heilman



TREE SCULPTURE
TOUR

GALVESTON CVB



ARTIST BOAT



MARDI GRAS! GALVESTON

GALVESTON CVB

HARBOR HOUSE HOTEL AND MARINA



MITCHELL HISTORIC PROPERTIES

this 119-room Wyndham Grand Hotel offers nearly 16,000 square feet of space for up to 800 attendees. Unique features at the property, situated on the route of the city's annual Mardi Gras parade, include the 1888 Toujouse Bar and Rooftop Bar.

Unveiled in February 2018, The Quarters is the Tremont's luxurious new \$1.2 million extended-stay property, with 14 one- and two-bedroom suites in the 1858 Berlocher Building across the street.

Notable Strand attractions include the Grand 1894 Opera House, Galveston Arts Center and Pier 21 waterfront entertainment and dining area. Overlooking the port, the Mitchell-owned 42-room Harbor House Hotel and Marina at Pier 21 is one block from attractions including the Ocean

Star Offshore Drilling Rig & Museum and Texas Seaport Museum.

The Museum is part of the Galveston Historical Foundation and offers the event-capable 1877 tall ship *ELISSA*, harbor



MITCHELL HISTORIC PROPERTIES

THE TREMONT HOUSE

tours, dolphin-watching outings and private charters aboard the 50-foot twin-engine *Seagull II*. This spring, the Foundation unveils its interactive "Galveston Flood" attraction at Depot on Market, a new \$3.5 million mixed-use development featuring dining, education and entertainment. The Museum is expanding to include interactive exhibits focused on Galveston's rich immigration history.

For tours and events, the member-supported Foundation's rental portfolio includes historic properties such as the 1859 Ashton Villa and 1895 Moody Mansion.

West of downtown, Moody Gardens Hotel Spa & Convention Center is an award-winning resort for groups. Set on 242 acres, the property originated in 1986 as a hippotherapy (horse-based) center for head injury rehabilitation.

Today, the complex offers 418 newly modernized accommodations and 103,000 total square feet of convention space, including 60,000 square feet of ballroom exhibit space. Wide-ranging group amenities include golf, a five-tier Sky Trail Ropes Course and the Aquarium Pyramid, which completed a \$37 million renovation in May 2017. 

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- While you're here enjoy the Moody Gardens attractions. Explore the Rainforest, Discovery or Aquarium Pyramids, experience the MG 3D and 4D Special FX theaters. Float the Lazy River and relax on the white sands of Palm Beach, or take a cruise aboard the Colonel Paddlewheel Boat.
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