

## **GALVESTON NATURE TOURISM ITINERARY**

*Nature tourists exploring Galveston can go birding, dolphin watching, fishing, kayaking, and camping or tour national wildlife refuges and nature parks. An annual event, FeatherFest ([www.galvestonfeatherfest.com](http://www.galvestonfeatherfest.com)), attracts birders from across the country to Galveston each April for birding and nature photography workshops and field trips.*

### **Hit the Beach on Galveston Island**

With 32 miles of beaches for sports and recreation, Galveston Island truly is the outdoor playground of Texas. The warm weather and cool Gulf breezes found on Galveston Island make enjoying the outdoors an amenity you can count on all year round. Many of the island's beach parks offer special amenities, such as free concerts, outdoor showers, restrooms, delicious treats and more. Water sports are a popular draw to Galveston's beaches, where people come to surf, swim, boat, dive, play beach volleyball, fly board, parasail, go horseback riding and more. The island is also home to a variety of annual beach events, including the American Institute of Architects (AIA) Sandcastle Competition held the first weekend in June. Plus, Galveston's famous seawall will be sporting wider, replenished beaches by the summer of 2019. Babe's Beach, located just west of 61<sup>st</sup> Street along the seawall, will receive 800,000 cubic yards of new sand widening the beach to provide for more recreational space for visitors.

### **East End Lagoon Nature Preserve**

If you're a birder, nature enthusiast or just seeking a peaceful experience surrounded by nature, Galveston's East End Lagoon is a must-see. When conditions are right, you can witness a wide variety of birds without even leaving the car. Discover the beauty of the many avian species that call Galveston home including cormorants, egrets, herons, ibises and black skimmers. To take full advantage of the East End Lagoon's serene beauty, plan on spending at least an hour. The preserve is now home to a new nature trail complete with interpretive signage. The trail, which is ADA-compliant allows visitors to better explore the lagoon's 684 acres of coastal prairie. In late 2019, the construction of a new open-air pavilion is expected to begin at the lagoon as well. Plans for the elevated pavilion include tables and benches, restrooms, parking, landscaping, trash/recycling cans and interpretive nature trails.

### **Tour A Sunken Flower Garden off the Galveston Coast**

When you think of Galveston, images of sun and surf or the island's many exciting attractions might come to mind, but you probably never imagined a sunken treasure called the Flower Garden Banks – a spectacular coral reef nestled 100 miles off the coast of Galveston. This untapped undersea wonder received its name when discovered by fishermen in the early 1900s. Today, divers travel from across the world to see this abundant, colorful reef, which contains more coral than what is found off the Florida Keys. Deemed a national marine sanctuary, the Flower Garden Banks is one of the healthiest coral reefs in the western hemisphere. Private dive charters are offered out of Galveston May through October. For more information and details on dive charters, [click here](#).

### **Birding Tours**

Because of Galveston's natural resources and year-round warm weather, the island is one of the top locations for nature and birding enthusiasts in the United States. Located on the trans-Gulf migration route, Galveston is a central location for novice and expert birders, offering more than 300 species of birds that reside and travel through Galveston during fall and spring migrations. Many birds find rest on Galveston Bay, a productive estuarine eco-system with busy harbors and salt marshes. Now, visitors have a new way to explore this fascinating aspect of the island with birding tours offered by the Galveston Island Nature Tourism Council. These tours feature the island's top birding hot spots and take visitors to see, learn about and photograph rare and unique birds up close and personally. [www.birdingforfun.com](http://www.birdingforfun.com)

### **Seaside Golfing on Galveston Island**

For a relaxing golf escape, Galveston offers two unique golf courses complemented by lush scenery and picturesque waterside views. The Galveston Country Club – the oldest country club in Texas – is located between Galveston Bay and the Gulf of Mexico and features an 18-hole course lined with palm trees and beautiful greenery. Off Galveston Bay, you'll find the Moody Gardens Golf Course, an award-winning, links-style, par-72 course offering gorgeous bayside views. In 2010, the Moody Gardens Golf Course was named one of the best golf course remodels in the country by Golf Digest. The course was designed by renowned golf course architects at Jacobsen Hardy Golf Course Design.

### **Moody Gardens New Aquarium After \$37M Renovation**

If you haven't explored Galveston's Moody Gardens recently, you'll want to rediscover its Aquarium Pyramid, which received a \$37 million renovation. It now showcases new exhibits including the addition of jellyfish and tropical penguins. The Moody Gardens aquarium features marine life from four regions of the world including the Gulf of Mexico to South Atlantic, the South and North Pacific and the Caribbean. Moody Gardens is a family entertainment complex featuring a tropical rainforest, aquarium, 3D and 4D theaters, a ropes course and zip line, Palm Beach water park, a golf course, the Moody Gardens Hotel and more. For details, visit [www.moodygardens.org](http://www.moodygardens.org).

### **Artist Boat Kayak Adventure at Settegast Coastal Heritage Preserve**

Get your heart pumping and your creativity flowing while admiring Galveston's natural beauty on a kayak tour offered by Artist Boat. During this tour, Artist Boat will lead you on an adventure through Galveston's Coastal Heritage Preserve — a 364-acre conservation area on the island's west end. You will also learn to paint a watercolor picture of the beauty before you. Artist Boat promotes awareness and preservation of coastal margins and the marine environment through the disciplines of the sciences and the arts. Two- and four-hour kayak tours are offered by Artist Boat.

### **Galveston Island State Park**

While you're on the west end of the island, make a stop at Galveston Island State Park— a great place for kayaking, birding and nature exploration, with access to the Gulf of Mexico and Galveston Bay. This 1,200-acre state park hosts many examples of barrier island habitats explored easily from the beach or by walking trails. The park offers free, regularly scheduled activities, including kayak tours, beach and surf explorations, bird walks, and nature field trips and fishing clinics. Visit the Nature Center on Saturdays and Sundays March through November to see nature displays and videos. Spend the day at the state park or plan a weekend camping trip around its many offerings.

### **Fishing**

For anyone seeking fresh seafood and coastal recreation, Galveston Island is the perfect fishing destination. Cast your line at any of the Seawall's two public fishing piers complete with observation decks and concessions. Or, head to Seawolf Park where you're likely to reel in trout and redfish year-round. If you're feeling ambitious, charters for one-day to three-day deep sea fishing trips are available every season of the year, to reel in bigger fish including Snapper, Tuna and Shark. Head out early to witness a breathtaking island sunrise and spend the morning reeling in your lunch. Many local restaurants on the island will prepare your catch for you!

### **Ferry Ride + Dolphin and Bird Watch**

Galveston's Bolivar Ferry is well known across the Lone Star State. Take a free cruise between Port Bolivar and Galveston for a closer look at marine birds like pelicans, seagulls and roseate spoonbills. During this voyage, you can also get a close look at graceful dolphins as they swim by. A ferry ride is approximately 20 minutes each way, so pack a snack and some binoculars for a quick, relaxing getaway on the water.

### **Discover Turtles About Town**

Who doesn't like turtles? Now, turtle lovers of all ages will have the opportunity to see nearly 20 colorful Kemp's ridley sea turtle statues that have popped up around the island over the last few months. Turtles About Town is a public art project that showcases the conservation efforts of the Turtle Island Restoration Network. Turtle seekers can pick up a brochure and a map of statue locations at the Galveston Island Visitors Center, located behind the Ashton Villa at 2328 Broadway Ave. and at area businesses where turtle statues are found.