

# GALVESTON, TEXAS

Connected by bridge and ferry to the mainland, this coastal island near Houston earns props for its Victorian character, plethora of family activities and 32 miles of beaches.



Schlitterbahn Galveston Island Waterpark

ALL PHOTOS COURTESY OF GALVESTON CONVENTION & VISITORS BUREAU



Galveston Pleasure Pier



Hotel Galvez and Spa



Rudy and Paco's pecan-crusted snapper

## STAY

You'll have a great view of the Gulf of Mexico from your private balcony at the AAA Four Diamond **San Luis Resort, Spa & Conference Center**, located on always-lively Seawall Boulevard. The historic 1911 **Hotel Galvez and Spa**, another AAA Four Diamond beachfront property, boasts a prime location next to the Galveston Pleasure Pier with its amusement park rides and attractions. Families with young children might want to stay in the **Moody Gardens Hotel** at the center of the Moody Gardens entertainment mecca with its waterpark and iconic pyramids housing an aquarium, a rainforest environment, a science-oriented discovery center and more.

## EAT

If you're heading to lunch or dinner straight from the beach, **The Spot** has a fun vibe and super-casual atmosphere. For a more upscale family meal, try **Gaido's**—also on the seawall—which has been serving up fresh seafood dishes for more than 100 years. **Mama Teresa's Flying Pizza** gets rave reviews from visitors and locals alike. The place to dine on Tex-Mex is **The Original Mexican Café** in the East End Historic District. If you have a night away from the kids, enjoy the view from the rooftop bar at **Tremont House** and follow up happy hour with an intimate dinner at **Rudy and Paco's**, where the snapper dishes are a standout on the menu of South American fare. You'll need a reservation.

## SEE

Galveston Island was a major port of entry for immigrants to the U.S. in the 19th and early 20th centuries. You can learn about this history at the **Texas Seaport Museum** on Pier 21, where you can also tour Texas' official tall ship, *Elissa*, and watch a video about the Great Storm of 1900. Board the *Seagull II* at Pier 22 for a tour of the harbor and likely a few sightings of the area's playful dolphins. Learn about geological exploration and offshore oil drilling on a self-guided tour of the retired *Ocean Star* oil rig at the **Ocean Star Offshore Energy Center and Museum** on Pier 19. Galveston boasts one of the country's largest collections of Victorian architecture in **The Strand Historic District**.

## DO

Kids will love the 26-acre **Schlitterbahn Galveston Island Waterpark**, home to MASSIV, the world's tallest water coaster. For natural waves, head to the beach; Stewart Beach is widely acclaimed as being the most family-friendly on the island, thanks to its food offerings, gear rentals and shower/changing facilities. In a spring-break plus for Galveston, alcohol is forbidden on every beach but East Beach. Standup paddle boarding and surfing are becoming increasingly popular on the island. **Ohana Surf and Skate**, adjacent to Galveston Johnny M. Romano Memorial Skatepark, offers lessons in both water sports. You can horseback ride on East Beach with **Galveston Island Horse & Pony Rides**.



Hard Rock Hotel's eden pool

## STAY

Most resorts in the Dominican Republic are all-inclusive—a great way to control costs. Among them are the AAA Four Diamond **Dreams Punta Cana**, which features a large free-form swimming pool as well as clubs for kids and teens. Fans of Sponge Bob and other Nickelodeon characters will enjoy **Nickelodeon Resort Punta Cana** with its large water play area, Slime Time photo ops and character meet-and-greets. **Memories Splash Punta Cana** boasts a waterpark with seven waterslides bearing names such as Kamikaze and Black Hole. There are slides for kids under age 10, too. AAA Four Diamond **Hard Rock Punta Cana** features 13 pools, including several geared toward kids and one reserved for adults. There's even a Music Lab on the property where those ages 12 and up can shoot a music video or perform in front of a live audience.

## EAT

Your all-inclusive resort will offer multiple dining options, from poolside snacks and burgers to ethnic eats to high-end restaurants. The Dominican Republic's well-developed agricultural sector means you'll enjoy lots of fresh fruits and vegetables while you're on your getaway as well as fresh-squeezed mango, strawberry or passionfruit juice. Taste the local cuisine, too, including *las banderas*, a dish of rice, beans and stewed or fried chicken, or *mangú*, mashed plantains served with vinegar, onions and, if it's breakfast, eggs. Parents on date night should consider the new fine-dining **Casino Restaurant**

at Hard Rock Punta Cana, located in the resort's casino and open to non-hotel guests, too. The décor will have you feeling as if you were in a rock star's plush pad.

## SEE

See the island's mountains, rainforests and sugarcane plantations from above on a hot-air balloon ride with **Dominican Balloons**. Take an excursion to **Saona Island**, most of which comprises the **National Park of the East**, and enjoy a stop along the way to snorkel coral reefs filled with colorful fish. The Dominican Republic has extensive systems of caves, some with cave paintings done by the native Taino people more than 1,000 years ago. You can take a guided cave expedition near Punta Cana at **Scape Park**. Consider taking the Hoya Azul Eco Tour at Scape Park, too; it's a guided hike that brings you to the base of a 75-foot-high cliff for a swim in a natural hole filled with ethereally blue waters.

## DO

Even beyond the beach and the pool, you'll find plenty to do at your all-inclusive resort, from beach volleyball to non-motorized watersports to family-friendly shows. But there's plenty to entice you beyond your resort, too. Wannabe surfer dudes can sign up for half-day lessons at **Macao Surf Camp** at nearby Macao Beach. **Bavaro Adventure Park** lives up to its name with zip lining, mountain biking, horseback riding, paintball, dune bugging and zorbing, an oddball activity that puts participants inside a giant, clear plastic ball and sets them off rolling down a hill.

# PUNTA CANA,

## Dominican Republic

*Soft sandy beaches, all-inclusive hotels and activities galore make Punta Cana in the Dominican Republic the perfect destination for a family trip to remember.*



Hoyo Azul



Dominican Balloons



A roadside fruit stand