



*Galveston:*

# THE UNLIKELY TEXAN TROPICS

BY LIZ FLEMING



Galveston Island Convention & Visitors Bureau

**T**HE LITTLE ISLAND ON which the small city of Galveston sits – just 80 kilometers from the overwhelming urban craziness of Houston – are so unlike the rest of Texas that you might think little chunks of Florida floated north. No cowboy boots, no cowboys and no cows; Galveston is all about the beach, baby.

This is where Texans and all their northern visitors hit the waves and kick back. Whether you're a 'born on the island' (BOI) or an 'islander by choice' (IBC), this is your Texan sun and fun capital.

For a tiny place, Galveston has a huge history, beginning with its birth as a hideout for the infamous pirate Jean Lafitte. After he attacked an American ship, the U.S. government evicted the cocky Lafitte – lucky for him! He missed the 1900 Galveston Hurricane, one of the

worst in southern U.S. history, which wiped out most of the island and at least 6,000 people – 20 per cent of the population. The story of that day and the frantic meteorologist whose warnings were ignored by thrill-seeking vacationers who splashed and waded as waves covered the sidewalks and the tempest barreled down on them is the focus of a multi-media presentation at the 1900 Great Storm Theater. It's a fascinating, shocking and ultimately inspiring celebration of destruction and rebirth that's well worth an hour of your holiday.

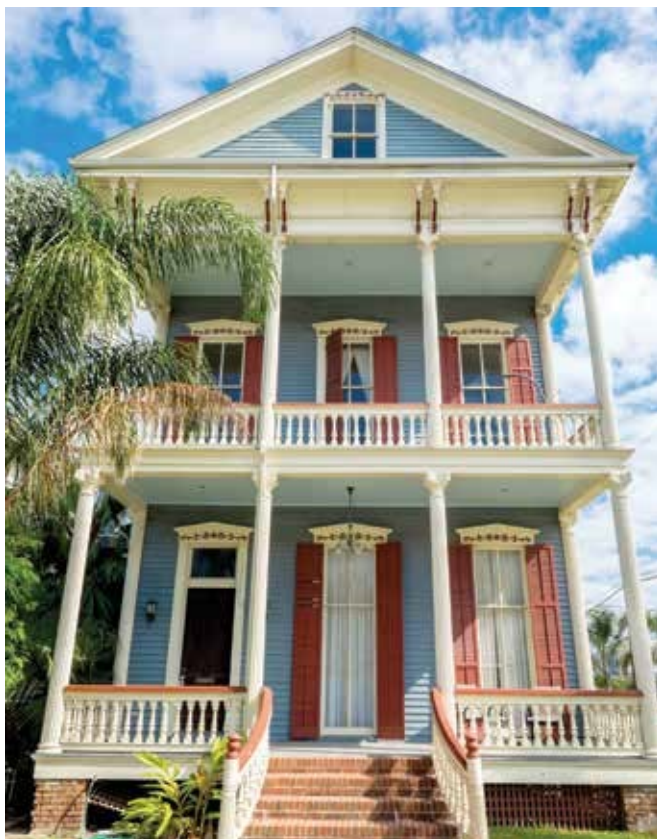
Moody Gardens is another Galveston must-see. The steamy Rainforest Pavilion is a great place to get up close and personal with monkeys, Giant Amazon sea otters and fluttering flocks of Blue Morpho butterflies while the freshly renovated Aquarium Pavilion offers a creepily cool new jellyfish exhibit, as well as a toddling flock of tropical penguins. Grab a seat in the



#### DID YOU KNOW

Galveston is still home to one of America's largest collections of meticulously restored Victorian houses.

3D theatre to see the world's first "4K 3D giant screen with 6-primary laser projection." The technology is a mouthful, but the effects are incredibly cool. Given that Moody Gardens also features a paddleboat ride, a ropes course, zipline and Palm Beach – its own sunny stretch of satiny sand – you might be tempted to stay right there...but resist. Galveston has more in store. ➤

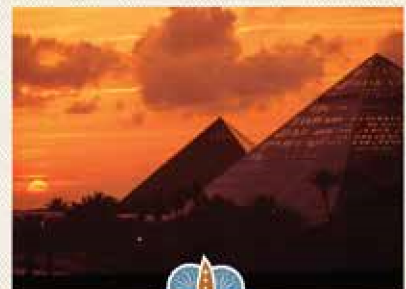


Galveston restored vintage home



Moody Gardens' Aquarium





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Pleasure Pier

When the sun goes down, head for the Pleasure Pier – you can't miss the twinkly lights on the Ferris wheel. Like a carnival that never moves on to the next town, the Pleasure Pier has all the popcorn, cotton candy, rides and games your inner child's heart desires, minus the usual theme park crowds and prices. It's a great night out and a reasonable walk from the downtown core.

Now that your inner child is satisfied, it might be time for a grown-up experience at the stately Hotel Galvez, built in 1911 as a sign of the town's resurrection. Overlooking the beaches and known for its welcoming bar area, this gracious hotel's lobby bar rocks with live jazz most nights as happy diners dig into the seafood specialties in the Galvez Bar and Grill.

Whacked by monster hurricanes not once but twice – first in 1900, then again by Hurricane Ike in 2008 – it's remarkable that Galveston is still home to one of America's largest collections of meticulously restored Victorian houses. Even if you're not an architecture vulture, a stroll through the old streets makes a great early morning wander. If birds are your passion, continue your hike at Appel Park, where a mad variety of sea birds wheel and screech overhead.

Sandy beaches, an old-school amusement pier, a state-of-the-art multi-



Galveston Beach horseback riding

media theatre, wildlife, an adventure centre, historic buildings and a hot holiday vibe...with all this to offer, Galveston had no trouble coming up with a compelling new slogan that speaks to BOIs, IBCs and IERs (Islanders EnRoute): "It's beach time." ☺

## When You Go

**WHAT TO DO:** Dedicate some time to enjoying **The Bryan Museum**, an ode to everything that makes Texas great (including The Bryan Collection, one of the world's largest collections of historical artifacts, documents, and artwork relating to Texas and the American West). Be sure to check out the 1877 Tall Ship ELISSA at the **Texas Seaport Museum**, or shop on **The Strand** and **Postoffice Street**. The **Galveston Island Historic Pleasure Pier** and **Moody Gardens** are especially notable excursions for family visitors.

**WHERE TO STAY:** For great value, whether travelling with a group or your significant other, **Casa Del Mar** offers beachfront suites that include a studio kitchen and living area, so you can really make yourself at home. Other options include **Hotel Galvez and Spa**, where luxurious service and modern amenities await; or **The San Luis Resort, Spa & Conference Center**, which has award-winning restaurants on-site, not to mention, coastal views.

**WHERE TO DINE:** On any given night, you can find Galveston's Mayor James Yarbrough ordering the Tex Mex pasta at **Sonny's Place**. It may not look like much, he admits, but Junior Pachetti and his family have been serving locals for nearly 75 years and they are one of the area's best kept secrets. The mayor also often enjoys a Tiger Shark sandwich from **Maceo's** before heading over to **Fort San Jacinto Historic Point** and watching the ships go by.