

HOUSTON

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TEXAS ROCK LEGEND

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Fall in Love with Galveston Island

ANY LOVE AFFAIR with Houston most often includes a little two-timing with the small-town charm of Galveston Island.

Known for its elegant historic architecture and sparkling Gulf waters, this vibrant barrier island has wooed visitors for decades, sweeping them to a tropical escape where flip-flops replace dress shoes and the scenery echoes a bygone era.

An hour's drive from Houston, Galveston Island is unique and fascinating. The island was a booming business hub and elite tourist destination known as the "Playground of the South" during the late 1800s. After the Great Storm of 1900 — the deadliest storm in U.S. history that devastated the island — determined residents rebuilt, preserving much of its Victorian character. Today, Galveston's 32-mile beachfront ranks as the most-visited beach destination in Texas.

Galveston Island is home to one of the largest collections of Victorian architecture in the country. Standouts include the imposing 1892 Bishop's Palace and the 1895 Moody Mansion. The streets of Galveston's East End Historical District are lined with classic Victorian homes painted in authentic period colors. There, visitors can stroll on a self-guided tour of elaborate Galveston Tree Sculptures carved from oak trees ruined by Hurricane Ike in 2008.

In the Historic Downtown Strand Seaport District, majestic iron-front buildings house restaurants, boutiques, and galleries of coastal-inspired art. The district's main street, The Strand, draws visitors for shopping, architectural tours and museum browsing. A few blocks away is the historic Grand 1894 Opera House on Postoffice Street.

Across Harborside Drive is

Galveston's Pier 21, an ideal place to savor the enchanting seaside city. For the best view of Galveston Harbor, request a patio seat at Olympia Grill and watch as Harbor Tour boats pass by filled with tourists eagerly anticipating sightings of dolphins.

Among Galveston's newest attractions is the Galveston Island Historic Pleasure Pier, which extends over the Gulf of Mexico. Its many thrill rides operate in the same location as a similar pleasure pier during the 1940s.

On the West End, families find adventure in the Moody Gardens resort, home to three pyramid-shaped buildings that feature a live rainforest replica, aquarium and interactive museum. Outside the pyramids, one can stroll through botanical gardens, take a cruise on the Colonel Paddlewheel Boat or play the greens at the Moody Gardens Golf Course.

Schlitterbahn Galveston Island Waterpark and the Lone Star Flight Museum are located within walking distance of Moody Gardens. The flight museum stores a collection of rare World War II aircraft and other fighter planes that still fly today. Tales told by museum guides are as fascinating as their beloved, restored "war birds."

And, when heading to the far West End of Galveston, travelers will find a quiet oasis where beachfront homes and rentals line the shore. Here, one can experience a relaxing paradise, marked by the sound of crashing waves and sea birds wheeling overhead, and maybe even fall in love with Galveston a little more.

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