

exploring our world

BARBARA & JIM TWARDOWSKI, RN

Going to Galveston

There aren't many places in the world where a wheelchair user can roll through a rainforest, climb an oil rig and explore a three-story mansion all in one weekend. But Galveston, Texas, is one of them.

Located on Galveston Island along the Gulf of Mexico, the city of Galveston is about 40 miles south of Houston. The easiest way to see everything that this getaway offers is by car.

Moody Gardens

Make your first stop at the recently remodeled Moody Gardens Hotel, Spa and Convention Center.

Hotel amenities include an outdoor swimming pool with a pool lift, full service spa and salon, 24-hour room service, indoor lap pool, fitness center and golf. Wheelchair-accessible guest rooms are available.

Moody Gardens encompasses 242 acres and its landmark structures are three glass pyramids, which can be seen for miles. The 10-story Rainforest Pyramid with exotic animals and plants is a completely wheelchair-accessible, self-paced experience.

The Aquarium Pyramid has an impressive assortment of penguins and other sea creatures. The Discovery Pyramid offers changing exhibits. Also on property is the largest movie screen in Texas featuring 3-D and 4-D technology.

Throughout the year, Moody Gardens hosts a variety of special events



JIM TWARDOWSKI

Exotic animals can be seen in the 10-story tall and completely wheelchair-accessible Rainforest Pyramid.



JIM TWARDOWSKI

from the Festival of Lights and birding classes to magic shows and the Adaptive Water Sports Festival. Everything at Moody Gardens is family-friendly.

On-site transportation includes vans with chairlifts. Service animals are welcomed.

For more information, visit moodygardens.com.

Historic Spots

History buffs will want to begin their tour of Galveston at the Pier 21 Theater.

Located on the second floor, the 27-minute documentary *The Great Storm* details the 1900 hurricane that devastated the city. The storm is the deadliest natural disaster in U.S. history, and the film also looks at the resilience of the city's citizens.

The downtown area known as The Strand (galveston.com/downtowntour) is walkable, although some corners can



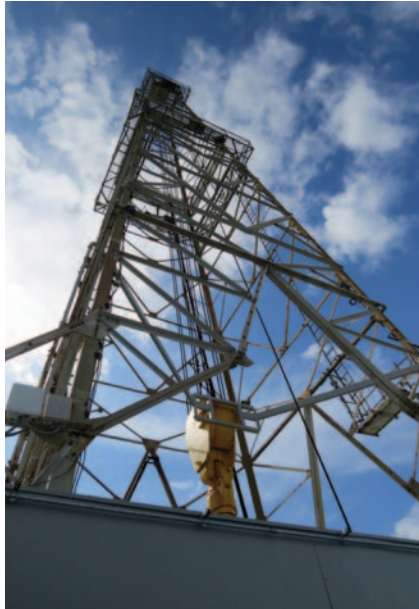
JIM TWARDOWSKI

The Aquarium Pyramid at Moody Gardens features sharks, seals and more.

The 10-story Rainforest Pyramid with exotic animals and plants is a completely wheelchair-accessible, self-paced experience.

be extremely steep. Many shops are wheelchair accessible, but often have stairs inside.

The Ocean Star Offshore Drilling Rig and Museum (oceanstaroec.com) is a retired jack-up drilling rig with three floors of models and displays detailing the process of extracting oil and life onboard a rig. Elevators and



The Ocean Star Offshore Drilling Rig and Museum is an interactive and accessible look into the world of offshore oil and gas.

wide doorways make the rig wheelchair accessible.

For those with a sweet tooth, don't miss LaKing's Confectionery (lakingsconfectionery.com). Opened in 1927, the shop features homemade candies, an antique soda fountain and a coffee bar. Many of the tempting candies are made the same way they were more than 100 years ago.

In the summer months, taffy is pulled, spun out and packaged in front of shoppers. The interior of the large shop hasn't changed much over the

JIM TWABOWSKI



**Paralyzed Veterans
of America**

YOUR FUTURE AWAITS

Paralyzed Veterans' scholarship program now accepting applications



Paralyzed Veterans of America invests in our members and their families.

Our Educational Scholarship Program assists members and their immediate family members by providing scholarship funds to help with a post-secondary education.

We will award scholarships in the amount of **\$1,000** to full-time students and **\$500** to part-time students for an academic year.

APPLICANT MUST BE:

- A Paralyzed Veterans of America member, spouse of a member, or an unmarried child (under 24 years of age) who is dependent (as defined by the IRS) on the member for principal support
- A United States citizen
- Accepted and enrolled as a full- or part-time student in an accredited U.S. college or university

Previous award recipients may apply.

Download an application at pva.org, or for more information contact Christi Hillman at (800) 424-8200, ext. 776; christih@pva.org.

Applications must be completed in full and postmarked no later than June 17, 2015.



Architectural historians consider the 19th century Victorian Bishop's Palace one of the 100 most important buildings in America.

years. Bypass the steps at the front of the store by boarding the wheelchair lift.

Feeling a little nostalgic? Visit the Galveston Railroad Museum (galvestonrrmuseum.com). One of the five largest museums of its kind in the country. Housed in a former train station, the iron horses are displayed in the outside courtyard.

Architecture & Art

The architecture of Galveston dates back to the early 1800s.

Begin with the home of one of Galveston's most philanthropic families — the Moody Mansion (moodymansion.org). It was originally built between 1893 and 1895 and the furnishings are original. An elevator takes wheelchair users to the first and second level of this grand abode.

Another impressive structure is the 1892 Bishop's Palace (409-762-2475), which is one of the most significant 19th century Victorian residences in the country, according to architectural historians. It features rare woods, stained-glass windows and luxury materials from around the world.

Art and architecture lovers won't want to miss the Tree Sculpture Tour (409-797-5144). In 2009, Hurricane Ike sent a tidal surge across Galveston Island that, when combined with powerful winds, uprooted thousands of trees.

While the homeowners mourned the loss of their canopied tree-lined street, they commissioned artists to turn the trees into art. The bulk of the sculptures are in the East End Historic District. Tucked into gardens and yards, visitors can hunt for the carved pieces of art in the yards of the Victorian homes with their gables, turrets and gingerbread ornamentation.

Galveston Island Tours conducts tours through the neighborhood aboard a long golf cart. For those who can't transfer, another option is to drive by the art using a free map.

Dining

After a day of exploring, be sure to enjoy some of the island's dining options.

The charming Sunflower Bakery & Café (thesunflowerbakeryandcafe.com) located in the heart of Galveston's East End Historical District is a local favorite.

The 104-year-old Gaido's Seafood Restaurant (gaidos.com) has impeccable service and succulent seafood. Save room for what is known as the best pecan pie in the Lone Star State.

Finish the evening with cocktails on the roof top bar at the historic Tremont House Hotel (thetremonthouse.com).

Year-round mild weather, affordable attractions and accessible accom-



The East End Historic District features many sculptures carved from trees that fell during Hurricane Ike in 2009.

modations make this Texas escape a great choice for wheelchair users looking for a new vacation destination.

For more information, visit galveston.com.

Jim and Barbara Twardowski cover the travel industry writing about boomer and accessible travel, accommodations, culinary/cultural offerings and destinations. ■