

South Alabama's Finest

THESE CHARMING, CLOSE-KNIT COASTAL CITIES HAVE MORE THAN ENOUGH FUN, SUN, AND SEAFOOD

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The Wharf

FROM THE MOMENT you turn onto Beach Boulevard, you'll be captivated by the diverse landscape that flanks either side of the road: serene state park woodlands to your right and sandy-white beaches with jewel-toned water to your left. It's rare to see nature so untouched in two distinct forms—land and sea—and that's just the first of many reasons to visit Gulf Shores and Orange Beach, Alabama.

ACCOMMODATIONS

To stay in the middle of it all, **Hotel Indigo** (hotelindigo.com) is where you'll want to rest your head. This immaculate boutique hotel welcomes visitors with a captivating lobby—

the oversize rope chair swings beckon you to sit for a while—and an exceptionally friendly staff. It's equipped with ocean views and top-notch amenities and provides access to a Gulf State Park trailhead and a beach access point. It also straddles the line of both Gulf Shores and Orange Beach, making it a centralized location to all the fun.

After you check in, you won't have to go far for a midday pick-me-up. **The Southern Grind Coffee House** (thesoutherngrind.com), a local coffee shop with cozy coastal cottage vibes, is conveniently located downstairs. Choose from an array of savory and sweet treats that pair well with any caffeinated beverage—the Honey Bee Latte is delicious.



Lucy Buffett's LuLu's



The Southern Grind Coffee House

FOOD OPTIONS GALORE

Good food is the backbone of these cities, so you better come hungry. For a nostalgic breakfast joint, you can't go wrong with **Hazel's Nook** (hazelsnook.com) or **Sunliner Diner** (sunlinerdiner.com). Hazel's Nook has been around for more than 60 years, and although Sunliner Diner is the new kid on the block, both boast classic diner booths and Southern favorites. If meat-and-threes are your thing, don't miss **Luna's Eat and Drink** (lunaseatanddrink.com), serving up coastal fare with Southern flair. Don't forget to end the meal with Fried Pecan Pie.

Seafood, of course, reigns supreme, and there's plenty to go around. For lunch, you have to go to **DeSoto's Seafood Kitchen** (desotosseafoodkitchen.com), a no-frills neighborhood joint owned by husband-and-wife duo Chris and Rosemary Steele that's been a hit with locals for many years. The beer-battered Coconut Shrimp will meet all your expectations, and the Sweet Potato Casserole is legendary.

For a casual, family-friendly spot, try **Lucy Buffett's LuLu's** (lulubuffett.com). The kids can take on the ropes course while you listen to live music and then get your meal started with Peel & Eat Shrimp or Smoked Tuna Dip. Another great option is **Ginny Lane Bar & Grill** (ginnylanebargrill.com). Take in views of the marina while you enjoy Shrimp and Grits or Seared Crab Cakes with fried green tomatoes.

If you want to treat yourself come dinnertime, **Fisher's** (fishersobm.com) offers both upscale and semi-casual dining on the Orange Beach marina. The downstairs Dockside portion of the restaurant is more relaxed but just as tasty. Renowned chef Bill Briand has perfected each and every dish on the menu, from the Pecan Crusted Gulf Fish to the Half & Half Po' Boy.



Hazel's Nook



Luna's Eat & Drink



Paula Deen's Family Kitchen



Safari Club

ACTIVITIES & THE ARTS

Once you're full and satisfied, it's time to get out and about. Both Gulf Shores and Orange Beach proudly support their local artists and artisans, and **The Coastal Arts Center of Orange Beach** (orangebeachal.gov/facilities/art-center) is a great place to start. It overlooks the scenic Wolf Bay and has activities like glass-blowing and clay-throwing for your family to enjoy. Down the road is **Pottery Central World Headquarters** (alabama.travel/places-to-go/waterway-village), where Steven Dark, a well-known local potter, has been creating funky and unique works of art for more than 30 years.

Not far from there is **The Wharf** (alwharf.com), an expansive destination for dining, shopping, and entertainment. Be sure to stop by **High Cotton Bath** (highcottonbath.com), where owner Marlo Webb will help you channel your favorite scent into custom-made bath and body products (even hand sanitizer!).

Just off the beaten path lies the **Alabama Gulf Coast Zoo** (alabamagulfcoastzoo.com), which contains 25 acres' worth of exhibits and attractions. Here, you're able to hand-feed Ben, the giraffe, explore the one-of-a-kind butterfly exhibit, and more. But you must make time to grab lunch or dinner at **Safari Club** (safariclubgulfshores.com), its on-site restaurant. Critically acclaimed chef Greg Buschmohle is a master at his craft, which is evident in each delicious and riveting item on this internationally inspired menu.

Undeniably, one of the best things about this area is the preservation of the surrounding nature. There are plenty of trails to hike, bike, and walk; you can even set up camp if you're feeling adventurous. Or simply enjoy the sun and sand on the many miles of coastline. For a more in-depth water experience, book a guided kayak sunset cruise with **Coastal Kayak Excursions** (facebook.com/coastalkayakexcursions). No matter which adventure you choose, untouched beauty awaits you in the form of wetlands, woodlands, and waterfront.

And, of course, it wouldn't be a trip to Alabama's coast without venturing to Foley, Alabama, for the day, just 15 miles away. **OWA** (visitowa.com), a 520-acre entertainment mecca, draws tons of visitors thanks to its 23 attractions and many exceptional dining options, including **Paula Deen's Family Kitchen** (pauladeensfamilykitchen.com). With family-style mains like Georgia Fried Catfish, Best Ever Southern Fried Chicken, and Chicken-Fried Pork Chop and scrumptious sides and desserts, you're guaranteed to leave full and happy. And, likely with a Paula Deen-approved treasure from the gift shop in tow.