

# BEACHiN<sup>9</sup>

SUMMER 2024

## It's time to get out on the water

It's summer. You're at the beach.  
Find fun, adventure or serenity with excursions  
from sunrise dolphin cruises to parasailing

### THE *SUMMER* ISSUE

**Your guide to the Alabama Gulf Coast.**  
Award-winning events and festivals, places  
to take the kids, museums and more

**7 things** that define  
**Big Beach Brewery's**  
head brewer Rod Murray

### Meet David Rainer

How a longtime local journalist  
has been telling the stories of  
Outdoor Alabama for  
almost 20 years



A PUBLICATION OF

GULF  CAST MEDIA





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A man navigates the expanse of Little Lagoon on a jet ski in Gulf Shores. Whether you're a visitor, recent transplant or longtime local, this issue of Beachin' has everything you need to know to enjoy yourself this summer. From peaceful sunset cruises, family fun putt-putt and go-karts, educational exploration at the zoo or trips to museums and sea labs off the white-sand beaten path, there's something for everyone on the Alabama Gulf Coast.

**Photo by Micah Green.**



**COVER STORY**  
**35**





## Off the Beaten Path

Explore the Alabama Aquarium at the Dauphin Island Sea Lab, just a ferry ride off Fort Morgan.



## The Summer Issue

Things to do on the water, in the skies and on the shore, no matter your speed.



## Outdoor Storytelling

Get to know what inspires David Rainer, a career journalist, to continue his weekly Outdoor Alabama column.



## 7 Things

Big Beach Brewing brewmaster Rod Murray is more than beer. Learn what he defines himself by.



## Bird's-eye View

Gulf Shores High School students built an airplane. We took a ride.





  
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# FIND YOUR FUN

## THINGS TO DO ON THE GULF COAST FROM MOBILE TO PENSACOLA



### ALL SUMMER LONG

#### Evenings of fun at The Wharf

**What:** Every Monday, Tuesday and Thursday through July 31, The Wharf will offer themed evenings of fun. On Mondays, enjoy the Red, White + Wharf, Tuesdays offer a taste of the Wild West with Wild Wild Wharf, and Thursdays take you Under the Sea. Stick around until the sun goes down and take in the SPECTRA Laser Light Experience. To learn more, visit [www.thewharf.com](http://www.thewharf.com).

**When:** Mondays, Tuesdays and Thursdays through July 31, 6-9 p.m.

**Where:** The Wharf, Orange Beach

#### Beach Break 2024

**What:** If you are looking for a fun experience off the beach this summer, look no further than Gulf State Park. Every Monday, Wednesday and Friday in June and July, the Learning Campus at Gulf State Park offers educational adventures for all ages. Each day offers two different sessions. For more information or to register, visit [www.learningcampusgsp.com](http://www.learningcampusgsp.com).

**When:** Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays through July 31, times vary

**Where:** Learning Campus at Gulf State Park, Gulf Shores

#### Tacky Jacks Summer of Fun

**What:** The 12th-annual Summer of Fun series features family friendly events each Tuesday through Thursday through July 25. To see the monthly schedule of events or to reserve your spot (required), visit [www.tackyjacks.com](http://www.tackyjacks.com).

**When:** Tuesday – Thursdays through July 25

**Where:** Tacky Jacks, Gulf Shores and Orange Beach locations

#### Guided Tours at

#### Graham Creek Nature Preserve

**What:** Learn all about what Graham Creek Nature Preserve in Foley offers residents and visitors. Each tour is limited to eight people, so call to reserve your place, (251) 923-4267

**When:** Fridays through Dec. 6, 9 a.m.

**Where:** Graham Creek Nature Preserve, Foley

### WANT MORE EVENTS?

HEAD TO OUR

EVENT CALENDAR AT

[WWW.GULFCOASTMEDIA.COM](http://WWW.GULFCOASTMEDIA.COM)







## JULY

### July 4th Weekend Party at OWA

**What:** Celebrate Independence Day weekend at OWA with a full slate of family friendly fun for everyone. Enjoy a Dive – In movie (Tropic Falls admission required), live music, hot dog eating contest and more. Wrap up the fun with patriotic fireworks show. For a full schedule of events, visit [www.visitowa.com](http://www.visitowa.com).

**When:** Thursday, July 4 – Saturday, July 6

**Where:** OWA Parks & Resort, Foley



## City of Gulf Shores

### Independence Day Celebration

**What:** Grab a spot on the sand near the Gulf State Park Fishing Pier and get ready to be dazzled by the annual City of Gulf Shores' fireworks display. The show is free to attend, but you may have to pay for parking. The show is visible along the beach.

**When:** Thursday, July 4, 9 p.m.

**Where:** Gulf State Park Pier, Gulf Shores

## Flora-Bama

### All-American 4th of July Party

**What:** Celebrate America's birthday on the beach or in the bars of the Flora-Bama on the state line. Stick around and enjoy the fireworks at 9 p.m.

**When:** Thursday, July 4, all day

**Where:** Flora-Bama Lounge & Package, Perdido Key, FL

### Flora-Bama Freedom Run

**What:** Spend your Saturday morning at the Flora-Bama's Annual Freedom Run. This patriotic run features two courses: a 4-mile course and a 1-mile fun run course. Break out your best red, white and blue attire. For more information or to register, visit [www.florabama.com](http://www.florabama.com).

**When:** Saturday, July 6, 7 a.m.

**Where:** Flora-Bama Lounge & Package, Perdido Key, FL

## Blue Marlin

### Grand Championship of the Gulf

**What:** Take in the biggest spectacle in sportfishing as anglers vie for a massive payday for the biggest catch. The finale of the Gulf Coast Triple Crown Series, the Blue Marlin Grand Championship is a remarkable sight. Watch as massive marlin, tuna and more are weighed in Marlin Circle. To learn more, visit

[www.blumarlingrandchampionship.com](http://www.blumarlingrandchampionship.com).

**When:** July 10-14

**Where:** Marlin Circle at The Wharf, Orange Beach

## Blue Angels

### Pensacola Beach Air Show

**What:** Locals and visitors look forward to watching the U.S. Navy's Blue Angels take to the skies for the annual Pensacola Beach Air Show. If you want to avoid the insane crowds on Pensacola Beach, take in the practice show July 11 at 2 p.m.

**When:** July 11-13

**Where:** Pensacola Beach, Florida

## AUGUST

### S'mores on the Shore

**What:** Wrap up summer on a sweet note with S'mores on the Shore. The bi-annual Gulf Shores tradition is the only time visitors and residents can enjoy campfires on the beach. The city provides s'more packets to those in attendance along with live music and activities. Don't forget your beach chairs and blankets and enjoy a sweet sunset.

**When:** Thursday, Aug. 1, 6 p.m.

**Where:** Gulf Place, Gulf Shores

## SEPTEMBER

### Charter Boat Billfish Tournament

**What:** Following a successful launch, the Charter Boat Billfish Tournament returns for a second year. This tournament makes it a little easier for people who do not own a boat to participate in a large tournament. Simply call Zeke's Landing Marina and get paired up with a professional to buy a spot on their boat. The tournament wraps up with a weigh-in party with live music, drink specials and prize giveaways. For more information, visit [www.zekeslanding.com](http://www.zekeslanding.com).

**When:** Thursday, Sept. 5 – Saturday, Sept. 7

**Where:** Zeke's Landing Marina, Orange Beach

## Flora-Bama

### Bulls on the Beach

**What:** There is nothing like the excitement of the rodeo. Grab your family or friends and watch professional bull riders from across the country attempt to beat the clock on some of the biggest bulls around. For more information or to purchase tickets, visit [www.florabama.com](http://www.florabama.com).

**When:** Sept. 5-7, 6 p.m.

**Where:** Flora-Bama Lounge & Package, Perdido Key, FL

## Brett Robinson

### Alabama Coastal Triathlon

**What:** The annual Brett Robinson Alabama Coastal Triathlon attracts athletes from across the region. The flat course makes for a speedy race. If you aren't ready to take on a full triathlon, take on its little sister, the Coastal "Tri-It-On" Triathlon. To find out more about the event, visit [www.trisignup.com](http://www.trisignup.com).

**When:** Saturday, Sept. 7

**Where:** Gulf Place, Gulf Shores



# BEACH ACCESS? WE'VE GOT YOU!

**Alabama Point East-A Gulf State Park Beach Area** is located 0.3 miles east of Perdido Pass Bridge and offers over 6,000 feet of wide beach in addition to sand dunes, boardwalks, picnic areas, restrooms and outdoor showers.

**Cotton Bayou** is located at the intersection of Highway 182 and Highway 161 between some of the area's most popular condominiums. There are restrooms and showers on site.

**Romar Beach-A Gulf State Park Beach Area** is located 6.8 miles east of Highway 59 and has a limited amount of free parking (no facilities).

**Gulf State Park Pavilion** is located six miles east of Highway 59 and offers a beach pavilion with air-conditioned restrooms, private showers, a snack bar, shady spots to sit and eat, plus a large fireplace for chilly days. There is a \$10 to park all day (more for larger vehicles), but there are plenty of spaces and a lot of room for large vehicles and RVs.

**Gulf Place (Gulf Shores Main Public Beach)** is located where Highway 59 ends. There are beach attendants, three open-air pavilions, a picnic area, restrooms and showers. Parking is \$5 for four hours and \$15 to park all day between March 1 and Nov. 30. Arrive early to get a prime spot in this popular hangout.

**Gulf Shores 2nd Street Public Beach** is just two blocks west of Highway 59. Facilities include an accessible restrooms, outdoor shower and covered pavilion with picnic tables.

**Gulf Shores 4th Street Public Beach** offers only pedestrian crossing beach access, perfect for those staying at nearby properties.

**Gulf Shores 5th Street Public Beach** is located five blocks west of Highway 59 with parking on the north side where the boardwalk leads to the beach. Parking is also available on the south side beside Bahama Bob's.

**Gulf Shores 6th Street Public Beach** is located six blocks west of Highway 59. Walk the boardwalk to the beach. Facilities include an outdoor shower and accessible restroom.

**Gulf Shores 10th Street Public Beach** offers beach access only with parking across the street. Facilities include restrooms and showers.

**Gulf Shores 12th Street Public Beach** offers beach access but no parking. Facilities include restrooms and showers.

**Gulf Shores 13th Street Public Beach** has street-side parking with a dune walkover. Facilities include restrooms and showers.

**Lagoon Pass Beach** is 2.9 miles west of Highway 59 and has restrooms, outdoor shower and a water fountain. Parking is located on the northeast side of the Lee Callaway Bridge.

**Bon Secour National Wildlife Refuge Beach** is located at 12295 State Highway 180 (Fort Morgan Road) in Gulf Shores. Park along Mobile Street for easy beach access. It is a wildlife refuge, so there are no facilities. There is a Refuge Office located nearby.





# DON'T FORGET ABOUT PARKING RULES!

If you're reading this, there's a chance you're a summer vacationer or local who doesn't live in Gulf Shores or Orange Beach. If any of the above apply, it's important to know there has been a change to parking fees for public beach access on the island.

## THE CHANGE

An increase to parking fees on Gulf Shores public beaches to a flat rate of \$15 was approved at the end of 2022, and two locations will have \$5 passes available that will be good for four hours.

Grant Brown, Gulf Shores recreation and cultural affairs director, said the main reason for the increase is to help fund an increase in beach security, safety measures and cleanliness of the beaches.

The city has in recent years also transitioned from an in-person ticket booth to parking stations to alleviate the amount of parking traffic and keep cars from lining up on the highway. The parking stations generated at least \$750,000 in 2022. That money covered public works expenses for the season.

## GULF STATE PARK

Gulf State Park began charging for parking in 2021 at its four beach access points in Orange Beach – Romar Beach, Cotton Bayou Beach, Alabama Point East and Shell Beach – and two in Gulf Shores – the Fishing and Education Pier and the Beach Pavilion. Pay kiosks are located in the parking lots. They accept cash and credit cards but do not issue change.

\$10 – All day for personal vehicle

\$15 – All day for passenger vans

\$30 – All day for buses and large RVs (Beach Pavilion)

\$100 – Annual pass parking decal (Purchase from Park Headquarters, 20115 State Park Road, Gulf Shores. Valid for one calendar year with expiration Dec. 31)

Veterans park for free. Obtain a parking decal from Park Headquarters.

Beginning with 2024 veteran passes, the decal does not expire.

## MORE DETAILS

While most parking lots will only offer \$15 all-day parking, there are some that will offer hourly parking, and there will still be areas near the beach to park for free.

"The parking lot by the Pink Pony Pub and the Hangout will have hourly parking," Brown said. "Also, Bahama Bobs will have additional parking spots for \$5 for four hours or \$10 for the whole day."

The all-day pass runs from 7 a.m. to 2 a.m. and is good for the day of purchase, allowing patrons to move between different lots for no additional fees if there is an available space. Pay stations are in place from March 1 through Nov. 30 each year.

## WHAT ABOUT LOCALS?

City residents with a Gulf Shores hurricane/re-entry decal can park at any of the paid city sites at no charge. Orange Beach residents can pick up a free parking decal at Orange Beach City Hall, 4099 Orange Beach Blvd.

## BEACH PARKING FEES FOR 2024 IN GULF SHORES

### \$5 for 4 hours or \$15 all day

- Gulf Place (main public beach area)
- West 5th Street

### \$15 all day

- West Gulf Place
- West 6th Street
- West 10th Street
- West 13th Street
- Lagoon Pass

### Locations with free on-street parking

- East 1st Avenue
- East 1st Street
- East 2nd Street
- West 1st Avenue
- West 2nd Avenue
- West 1st Street
- West 2nd Street
- West 5th Street north of Beach Boulevard
- West 12th Street



An underwater photograph of a fish tank. The water is a deep, dark green. In the upper half, a large, dark fish with a lighter, mottled pattern on its side swims towards the left. Below it, a smaller, dark fish swims towards the right. In the lower half, several other fish of various sizes and species are visible, some swimming near the sandy bottom. The overall scene is dimly lit, creating a serene and mysterious atmosphere.

# *Beyond the shore*

Dauphin Island Sea Lab's Alabama  
Aquarium offers a fun way to learn

Words by Trevor Ritchie  
Photos by Micah Green



## THIS WASN'T IN THE BROCHURE!

A series exploring nearby places off the beaten path.

**D**id you know the Dauphin Island Sea Lab, Alabama's primary marine research and education center, is just roughly a 45-minute ferry ride off the Beachin' path from Fort Morgan?

On this 17-mile-long barrier island approximately 3 miles from the mainland and 35 miles south of Mobile, visitors can find a 35-acre campus bordered by Mobile Bay to the north and the Gulf of Mexico to the south, only a five-minute walk from the Mobile Bay Ferry and historic Fort Gaines. DISL's feature public attraction – the Alabama Aquarium – (open every day, 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.) showcases a wide array of engaging exhibits that give a better understanding of marine life interactions in four key habitats of coastal Alabama, including the Mobile Tensaw River Delta, the Barrier Islands, the northern Gulf of Mexico and Mobile Bay, the fourth-largest estuary system in the United States.



### THE ALABAMA AQUARIUM IS LOCATED AT 102 BIENVILLE BLVD. ON THE EASTERN END OF DAUPHIN ISLAND.

From Mobile, take Exit 17A off I-10 to Dauphin Island. Once on the Island, take a left at the water tower. The facility is 2 miles on the left. Parking is free.

You can also ride the Mobile Bay Ferry from Fort Morgan. More details and times available at [www.mobilebayferry.com](http://www.mobilebayferry.com).





Officials reveal the new sign welcoming guests to the Alabama Aquarium at the Dauphin Island Sea Lab in July 2023. In addition to aesthetic improvements, the facility was also updated with writings and graphics from findings of recent research conducted through the Lab.

Renovated last year for the first time since 1988, the aquarium includes a 10,000-square-foot Exhibit Hall with more than 100 species on display, as well as a 7,000-gallon stingray touch pool and Living Marsh Boardwalk.

“We are a state-funded agency that was created in 1971 by the Alabama Legislature,” DISL Public Relations Director Angela Levins said. “The beginning idea for us was university programs where we were creating higher education and reducing the redundancy in higher education for our marine science programs within the state of Alabama. Today, we work with 21 schools in the state, colleges and universities, with about 18 of the colleges and universities represented as we have our first session of summer classes. Basically, wherever the students go to school, they come here for their field courses and lectures.”

Educational resources are also provided to K-12 students, undergraduates, graduates and educators alike through field classes, STEM programs, summer camps, residential marine science classes, workshops, internships and the National Science Foundation’s research experiences. DISL’s site hosts a library, multi-stressor lab, wet lab, flow-through mesocosm, Marine Mammal Necropsy Center, seven lecture/lab classrooms,



Photo provided

Through weekly guided tours, visitors can explore the home of nearly 20 research labs, powered by scientists analyzing topics such as deep seas bacteria, hurricanes, manatees and beyond, allowing the community a unique experience to view areas otherwise not open to the public.



two computer centers and more.

DISL also offers the public interactive opportunities like Boardwalk Talks and salt marsh; beach, dune and maritime; and R/V Alabama Discovery excursions. The R/V Alabama Discovery, DISL's largest vessel (one of two large research vessels maintained, in addition to several other small vessels used to conduct research), voyages through surrounding waters to collect samples reflecting the biodiversity of Mobile Bay and northern Gulf of Mexico, while the R/V E.O. Wilson undertakes research operations in coastal and nearshore environments.

During weekly DISL Research Lab guided tours, visitors can explore the home of nearly 20 research labs, powered by scientists analyzing topics such as deep seas bacteria, hurricanes, manatees and beyond, allowing the community a unique experience to view areas otherwise not open to the public.

Through its Marine Mammal Research Program, DISL researches and monitors marine animals (cetaceans and manatees) that pass through the north-central Gulf of Mexico and surrounding waters during their travels. The program is focused on marine mammal health and ecology, attempting to develop a better understanding of habitats, resource use, movement patterns, threats and causes of stranding and death – using the DISL's Manatee Sighting Network (the only formal network to receive and track manatee sighting in the northern Gulf of Mexico), the Alabama Marine Mammal Stranding Network and other research projects.

"Our main goal is to determine the cause of death," Marine Mammal Stranding Coordinator Mackenzie Russell said. "That is why we're here, why we have this (Marine Mammal Research Facility) and why we have this equipment – to determine the cause of death for these animals, in turn being able to inform management and conservationists exactly what's going on, if there are any trends or any pathogens coming in and out that we need to be aware of."

Community members and visitors can report dolphin and whale strandings, both live or carcasses, at 1-877-WHALE-HELP. For manatee sightings, call 1-866-493-5803 or visit [www.manatee.disl.org](http://www.manatee.disl.org). This information is shared with other researchers, managers and the public to support recovery efforts, which has

## DISL offers a wide array of engaging exhibits that give visitors a better understanding of marine life interactions in four key habitats of coastal Alabama, including the Mobile Tensaw River Delta, Mobile Bay, the Barrier Islands and the northern Gulf of Mexico.

allowed the lab to process over 4,000 manatee sightings since the MSN's inception and reduce the likelihood of conflicts between manatees and people that can cause the animals to be injured or killed.

DISL continues to serve the general public, all levels of government and the academic community in hopes it can disseminate critical knowledge regarding marine life, train future generations scientists and increase public understanding of marine resources to solidify itself as a center for transformative oceanic and coastal research and education.





# The HOTEL Magnolia



EST. 1908

Restaurant & Lounge

Restaurant and Lounge hours: Open Tuesday – Saturday  
Lunch 11am -3pm & Dinner 4pm -9pm Restaurant is  
Closed Sunday & Monday

\*Happy Hour 11am -7pm Closed Sunday & Monday

\*Live Music with a Dance Band. Friday & Saturday night.

\* Check our Facebook page for Scheduled Events, daily featured menu items

\* <https://www.facebook.com/thehotelmagnolia>

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\* check out our website for reservation for the Hotel. <https://www.thehotelmagnolia.com/>



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# Menu



Aged Ribeye and  
Filet Mignon



Surf & Turf



Whole  
Flounder



Pan Seared  
Salmon



Blackened Creole  
Shrimp Bow Tie Pasta



Shrimp & Grits  
with Creole Gravy





*Open 7 days a Week  
Located in Ft. Morgan*

7am - Sunset



# Rise & Shine BREAKFAST

*Served Daily 7am - 11am*

## The Basics

**BREAKFAST BOWL** | 12  
gouda grits topped with hash browns, a fried egg & crumbled bacon

**BREAKFAST BUDDY** | 11  
fried egg with cheese and choice of bacon, sausage or ham on toasted English muffin. Comes with grits or hashbrowns

**ALL AMERICAN** | 16  
two eggs any style, bacon, sausage or ham, grits or hash browns with toast

**BISCUITS, GRAVY & EGGS** | 14  
two biscuits topped with two fried eggs covered with sausage gravy

**BREAKFAST BURRITO** | 11  
scrambled egg, sausage or bacon & cheddar cheese comes with grits or hashbrowns

### *Specialties*

**SHRIMP & GOUDA GRITS** | 17

## Sweets

*choice of bacon, sausage or ham*

**FRENCH TOAST STICKS** | 11

### *Pancakes*

**BLUEBERRY** | 13      **CHOCOLATE CHIP** | 13

**BANANA PECAN** | 13      **PLAIN** | 11

## Benedicts

*served with grits or hashbrowns*

**CHICKEN FLORENTINE** | 17  
fried chicken, sautéed spinach and basil, poached eggs, hollandaise sauce on a toasted English muffin

**VEGGIE** | 17  
fresh spinach, portabella mushroom, sliced tomatoes, poached eggs, hollandaise sauce, fresh herbs on a toasted English muffin

**CAJUN** | 18  
conecuh sausage, 2 poached eggs, on an english muffin, topped with crawfish queso

# Late Day ENTREES

*Served Daily 7am - Close*

## Sandwiches

*served with slaw and choice french fries, sweet potato fries, chips, and onion rings*

**HAMBURGER** | 15  
8oz patty, choice of cheese, on a buttered toasted bun

**TERIYAKI CHICKEN BREAST** | 15  
bacon & swiss cheese on a toasted ciabatta roll dressed & served with honey mustard sauce

**BUFFALO CHICKEN** | 15  
fried chicken tenders coated with a spicy buffalo sauce. Served dressed on a toasted bun with a rancho bleu or swiss cheese dressing

**REUBEN** | 15  
corn beef, swiss cheese, sauerkraut & thousand island dressing on grilled rye

**TURKEY FLATBREAD** | 15  
turkey, swiss, spinach with a pesto sauce

**SHRIMP POBOY OR WRAP** | 16  
remoulade sauce, dressed on a warm cuban hogie

**MAHI POBOY OR WRAP** | 17  
fried, grilled or blackened

### *Platters*

**SHRIMP PLATTER OR FISH PLATTER** | 17  
grilled, fried or blackened, corn fritters, coleslaw & choice of side

**CHICKEN TENDERS PLATTER** | 15

**SEAFOOD COMBO** | 20  
mahi, shrimp, grilled, fried or blackened with choice of side

## Salads

*Choice of Ranch, Caesar, Bleu Cheese, Italian, Honey Mustard, Apple Cider Vinaigrette & Balsamic Vinaigrette*

**CRAISIN SALAD** | 10  
Mixed Greens with Sugar Coated Walnuts, Goat Cheese, & Craisins Served with an Apple Cider Vinaigrette. Add Chicken Or Shrimp \$6

**CAESAR SALAD** | 10  
Romaine Lettuce, Parmesan Cheese, Fresh Baked Croutons with Caesar Dressing. Add Chicken Or Shrimp \$6





# PORTABELLA'S

*Everyone is family here*

## Foley's Tastiest Italian Cuisine



321 Suite B S McKenzie St,  
Foley, AL 36535

251.943.7773

[www.portabellasitalian.com](http://www.portabellasitalian.com)

Lunch served 11AM - 2PM

Tuesday: 3:00 PM - 8:00 PM

Wednesday: 3:00 PM - 8:00 PM

Thursday: 3:00 PM - 8:00 PM

Friday: 3:00 PM - 9:00 PM

Saturday 3:00 PM - 9:00 PM

Closed Sunday and Monday





## Appetizers

Spinach Artichoke Dip  
8.95

Garlic Knots  
6.95

Stuffed Portabella  
10.95

Bruschetta  
6.95

## Pasta

Meatball Marinara  
Small: 11.95  
Large: 16.95

L.A. Pasta  
Small: 12.95  
Large: 17.95

Ravioli  
Small: 12.95  
Large: 16.95

Greek Pasta Marinara  
Small: 11.95  
Large: 16.95

Chicken Parmesan  
Small: 11.95  
Large: 15.95

Chicken Cacciatore  
Small: 12.95  
Large: 17.95

Alfredo  
Small: 11.95  
Large: 16.95

Lasagna  
14.95

Create Your Pasta  
Price Varies

## Salads

Caesar  
8.95

House  
8.95

Spinach  
9.95

Greek  
9.95

## Sandwiches

Meatball  
House-made meatballs,  
marinara, mozzarella

Muffuletta  
Ham, salami, provolone  
cheese, house olive spread

Italian  
Ham, salami, pepperoni,  
provolone cheese, house  
dressing

Chicken Carbonara  
Chicken, bacon, green  
and red peppers, onions,  
mushrooms, swiss, alfredo

Chicken Parmesan  
Paniced chicken breast,  
marinara, mozzarella,  
parmesan

## Desserts

House Made Tiramisu  
6.95

Salted Caramel Cheesecake  
7.95

Mini Cannolis  
5.95

Limoncello Dream  
6.95

Flourless Chocolate Torte  
6.95

## Pizza

Elberta  
Italian sausage, smoked  
sausage, mozzarella

Foley  
Peppers, kalamata olives,  
mushrooms, onions,  
pepperoni, italian sausage

Pleasure Island  
Ham, onion, green peppers,  
red peppers, pineapple

Farmers Market  
Fresh spinach, mushrooms,  
onions, peppers, tomato,  
mozzarella

Magnolia Springs  
Fresh spinach, chicken,  
artichoke hearts, feta, sun-  
dried tomato paste

The "Lion"  
Italian sausage, ham, beef,  
bacon, pepperoni

The Florentine  
Alfredo sauce, spinach,  
bacon, tomato, shrimp or  
chicken

The Gulf  
Fresh spinach, shrimp,  
artichoke hearts, feta, sun-  
dried tomato pesto

Five Cheese  
Mozzarella, feta, swiss,  
provolone, parmesan

Mardi Gras  
Ham, genoa salami,  
pepperoni, house-made  
olive salad



# Voted "People's Choice"

Since 2004

- Best Lunch • Best Dinner
- Best Seafood

also been voted • **Friendliest Staff**



Casual family atmosphere  
Reasonable prices • Senior menu available

Award-winning  
Shrimp and Fish  
Specialties



# DeSoto's

## Seafood Kitchen

138 West 1st Ave • Gulf Shores • 251-948-7294



Visit website to add your party to the wait list

[www.Desotosseafoodkitchen.com](http://www.Desotosseafoodkitchen.com)

251-948-7294



### Lunch Menu

#### HOME-STYLE LUNCH SPECIALS

(Served with your choice of two side dishes)

Fried Shrimp - tail less  
Blackened Catfish  
Fried Catfish  
Broiled Flounder  
Fried Flounder  
Grilled Chicken  
Chicken Creole  
Fried Chicken Tenders  
Country Fried Steak  
Hamburger Steak  
Pork Chops  
Country Ham  
Vegetable Plate

#### SANDWICHES

(Served with french fries)

Complimentary Ice Tea and Bread Served with All Dine in Lunch Entrees.  
Add House or Substitute Salad for side dish  
Po-Boy Sandwich  
Cheeseburger  
Crab Cake Po-Boy  
\*Monte Cristo Sandwich

### Dinner Menu

#### STARTERS

Oysters on the Half Shell  
1/2 dozen ..... 1 dozen  
Southern Style Crab Cakes  
Crab, Spinach & Artichoke Dip  
Coconut Shrimp  
Stuffed Mushrooms  
Alligator Bites  
Fried Crab Claws

Tuna Dip 1/2 lb  
Sweet Potato French Fry Basket 1 lb  
Fried Green Tomatoes

#### GUMBO & SOUP

Seafood Gumbo  
Crab & Shrimp Bisque  
cup  
bowl  
cup  
bowl

#### FRIED SEAFOOD FAVORITES

(Served with your choice of two side dishes)

Butterfly Shrimp  
Tail-less Shrimp  
Bon Secour Oysters  
Crab Claws  
Fried Fish of the Day  
Shrimp & Flounder  
Shrimp & Oysters  
Fried Catfish

#### SALADS

Dressings: Honey-Mustard, Ranch, Bleu Cheese, Italian, Thousand Island, French, Low-Fat Ranch, Raspberry Vinaigrette, Balsamic Vinegar, Balsamic Vinaigrette, Sesame Asian, Oil & Vinegar

#### Riviera Salad

- with pecan chicken tenders  
- with chicken tenders  
- with boiled shrimp  
- with grilled or blackened chicken

#### Caesar Salad

- w/grilled or blackened chicken  
- w/boiled shrimp

Gumbo & Salad - a cup of Seafood Gumbo and our

#### Bisque & Salad

#### SEAFOOD FAVORITES

(Served with your choice of two side dishes)

Add House or Caesar Salad  
Substitute Salad for side dish  
Fried Butterfly Shrimp  
Fried Oysters  
Fried Crab Claws  
\*Coconut Shrimp  
Grilled Shrimp  
Fried Seafood Platter

#### SEAFOOD PLATTERS

(Served with your choice of two side dishes)

Shrimp Lover's Platter  
Fried Seafood Platter  
Broiled Seafood Platter  
Creole Platter  
Caribbean Platter  
Crab Platter

#### SEAFOOD SPECIALTIES

(Served with your choice of two side dishes)

Stuffed Shrimp  
Shrimp Scampi  
Blackened Catfish  
Coconut Shrimp  
Grilled Shrimp  
Shrimp Creole  
Crawfish Etoufee  
Crab Cake Dinner

#### STEAMED SEAFOOD

(Served with new potatoes & one side)

Snow Crab Legs - 2 lbs.  
Royal Red Shrimp - 1 lb.  
Combo - 1/2 pound Royal Reds & 1 pound Snow Crab

#### TONIGHT'S CATCH

(Served with your choice of two side dishes)

Choose from the following preparation styles:

Fried Catch  
Blackened Catch  
Grilled Catch  
Broiled Catch

#### Broiled Seafood Platter

Stuffed Shrimp  
Mahi-Mahi  
Yellow-Fin Tuna  
Tilapia  
Grouper  
Snow Crab Legs  
Royal Reds - 3/4 lb.  
Combo - 1/2 lb. Each  
Crab Cakes - 2 cakes

#### PASTA

#### Fettuccini Alfredo

- w/grilled or blackened chicken  
- with shrimp or crawfish

#### Basil Pesto Pasta

- with Roma Tomatoes  
- with grilled chicken  
- with shrimp

#### SIDE DISHES

Fried Green Tomatoes ~ Green Beans  
Turnip Greens ~ Sweet Potato Casserole  
Corn Fritters ~ French Fries  
Mashed Potatoes w/Gravy ~ Fried Okra  
Au Gratin Potatoes ~ Steamed Veggies  
Kernel Corn ~ Yellow Rice  
Black-Eyed Peas ~ Cole Slaw  
Lima Beans ~ Macaroni & Cheese

New Orleans Catch  
Mediterranean Catch  
Caribbean Catch  
\*Pecan Encrusted Catch  
\*Panned Catch

#### LAND LOVER'S FARE

(Served with your choice of two side dishes)

Hawaiian Rib-eye - (12 oz.)  
- add jumbo grilled or fried shrimp  
Jamaica-Jerk Chicken  
Grilled Chicken Breasts  
Fried Chicken Tenders

#### PASTA

Fettuccini Alfredo  
- with grilled or blackened chicken  
- with shrimp or crawfish

#### Scallops Alfredo

Shrimp & Pasta Marsala

#### Basil-Pesto Pasta

- with grilled chicken  
- with shrimp

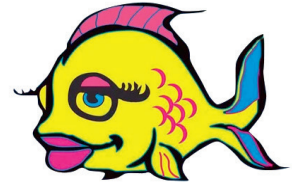
#### SIDE DISHES

Substitute House or Caesar Salad for a Side Dish  
Sweet Potato Casserole ~ Cole Slaw  
Baked Potato ~ Steamed Vegetables  
Yellow Rice ~ French Fries  
Fried Green Tomatoes



# FISH RIVER GRILL

Where the locals love to eat!



**AWARD WINNING**  
Seafood, Burgers,  
Creole Gumbo &  
Sweet Thang Beignets



## “HOME OF THE ORIGINAL”

Swamp Soup & our Cajun Crawfish Pistols  
Creole Crabmeat & Shrimp Gumbo

**FISH RIVER GRILL #3**  
GULF SHORES  
1545 Gulf Shores Pkwy.  
(Next to Rouses)  
251.948.1110

**FISH RIVER GRILL #2**  
FOLEY  
608 S. McKenzie  
(Foley Plaza on Hwy. 59)  
251.952.FISH (3474)



Hours: Tuesday - Saturday 10:30 a.m. - 9 p.m.





# Fish River Grill

Where the locals luv to eat!



**Award  
Winning**

1545 Gulf Shores Parkway • Gulf Shores, Alabama (Next to Rouses)

**251.948.1110**

**OMG! SHRIMP FEAST POBOY!!!**

*CHOSEN IN TOP "100 DISHES TO EAT IN ALABAMA BEFORE YOU DIE"*

**GRILLED or FRIED**

**AUTHENTIC SOUTHERN COOKED SEAFOOD PLATTERS**

(Served w/ Fries, Coleslaw, Hushpuppies, Fried Okra, Tartar or Cocktail Sauce & Swamp Soup)

Bayou Seafood Platter - Fried Gator, Frog Legs, Shrimp, Oyster, Catfish

Seafood Platter - Fried Shrimp, Oyster, Catfish

Golden Fried Catfish Platter - (U.S. Raised)

Fried Select Oyster Platter

Fried Shrimp Platter

Fried Gator Platter

**Cajun  
Crawfish Pistols**  
There's Nothing  
Like 'Em!

**VOTED BEST BURGERS IN BALDWIN COUNTY**

Hurricane Burger • Hillbilly Melt • River Burger

Swamp Burger • Bleu Cheese Bacon Burger

**REDNECK REUBEN • ALABAMA CHICKEN MELT**

PoBoys • Chicken • Shrimp • Oysters • Gator • Frog Legs

Crawfish Pistols • Catfish • Whitefish • Stuffed Crab

**\*\*\*Cajun Crawfish Pistols Dinner (2) w/ Fries & Slaw\*\*\***

OMG! Shrimp Feast Po-Boy • Seafood BLT

**APPETIZERS ~ SALADS ~ POBOYS & SANDWICHES ~ KIDS MENU**

**Free Swamp Soup with Every Entree!!**

**DON'T FORGET YOUR SWEET THANG**

"Sweet Thang" Signature Dessert! Redneck version of a New Orleans Beignet & Granny's Apple and Peach Cobbler Rolled in Powdered Sugar. Mmmmm...this "thang" is SOOOOOO good!

**BEST BAR PRICES ON THE COAST**

**SWAMP JUICE ~ BUSHWACKER**

608 S. McKenzie Street  
(Foley Plaza on Hwy. 59)

Foley, Alabama

**251.952.FISH (3474)**

1545 Gulf Shores Pkwy  
(Next to Rouses)

Gulf Shores, Alabama

**251.948.1110**

**Hours: Monday - Saturday 10:30 a.m. - 9 p.m. • Gulf Shores Later Hours Spring & Summer**



**VOTED BEST  
MEXICAN FOOD  
ON THE GULF  
COAST!**



**CACTUS  
CANTINA  
Mexican Grill**

**SPECIALIZING  
IN FULL-SERVICE  
EVENT CATERING!  
WE DO IT ALL!**

108 North Section Street  
**Fairhope, AL 36532**

1605 S. McKenzie Street  
**Foley, AL 36535**

3849 Gulf Shores Parkway, Suite 1 and 2  
**Gulf Shores, AL 36542**

25311 Perdido Beach Blvd.  
**Orange Beach, AL 36561**

25908 Canal Rd., Suite A  
**Orange Beach, AL 36561**

601 E. Gregory St  
**Pensacola, FL 32501**

5121 North 12th Avenue  
**Pensacola, FL 32504**

[www.MyCactusCantina.com](http://www.MyCactusCantina.com)



**FREE**  
**Small Cheese Dip**  
with purchase of 2 Entrees  
Up to \$5.99 Value

Dine In Only. 1 coupon per table and not valid on to go orders.  
Please mention coupon when ordering. Not valid with other discounts, specials or coupons.  
Expires 09/30/2024 . Summer Beachin 2024







## STARTERS

### 3 AMIGOS CHEESE DIP

Large bowl of our delicious cheese dip with grilled shrimp, steak\* and chicken. Served with pico de gallo on the side and warm flour tortillas. 11.49

### CACTUS GUACAMOLE

Fresh chunks of avocado mixed with tomatoes, onions, light jalapeños, lime juice and cilantro. LARGE 9.99 | SMALL 5.99

### CANTINA SAMPLER

A trio of our famous cheese dip, pico de gallo and guacamole. 11.99 (no substitutions please)

### CHEESE DIP

LARGE 8.99 | SMALL 5.99

### BEAN + CHEESE DIP

LARGE 8.99 | SMALL 5.99

### BEEF + CHEESE DIP

LARGE 8.99 | SMALL 5.99

### CHORIZO SAUSAGE + CHEESE DIP

LARGE 8.99 | SMALL 5.99

### JALAPEÑO + CHEESE DIP

LARGE 8.99 | SMALL 5.99

## NACHOS

### FAJITA NACHOS

Grilled steak\* or chicken on a bed of tortilla chips with onions and bell peppers. Topped with cheese dip and sour cream. 14.99

### GRANDE SUPREME NACHOS

Tortilla chips topped with black or refried beans, seasoned shredded chicken or ground beef, lettuce, tomatoes, sour cream, jalapeños and topped with cheese dip. 13.99  
Sub steak\* or grilled chicken + 2.99

### TEXAS FAJITA NACHOS

Grilled steak\*, chicken and shrimp on a bed of tortilla chips with onions and bell peppers. Topped with cheese dip and sour cream. 14.99

### NACHOS

CHEESE 8.99

CHEESE & BEAN 9.49

CHEESE & BEEF 9.99

CHEESE & SHREDDED CHICKEN 10.49

CHEESE, BEEF & BEAN 9.99

## SOUPS + SALADS

### TACO SALAD

A large crispy tortilla shell on a bed of refried beans, filled with lettuce, tomato, sour cream and your choice of shredded chicken or ground beef with a side of our cheese dip. 10.99

### CACTUS GRILLED CHICKEN SALAD

Grilled chicken over lettuce, spinach, avocado and diced tomatoes, topped with pico de gallo. 10.49  
Sub grilled steak\* +2.49

### NEW! BOOM-BOOM SHRIMP SALAD

Mixed greens with onion, tomato, shredded cheese and fried shrimp tossed in a Boom-Boom sauce. 12.99

### TEXAS FAJITA SALAD

Grilled steak, chicken or shrimp with sautéed onions and bell peppers on a bed of refried beans in a crispy tortilla shell with lettuce, tomatoes and sour cream, drizzled with cheese. CHICKEN 11.99 STEAK 13.99 TEXAS 14.49

## FAJITAS

A sizzling platter of bell peppers and onions with your choice of meat. All fajitas are served with lettuce, pico de gallo, sour cream, guacamole and choice of two (2) sides: Mexican rice, black beans, cactus grits or refried beans.

CHICKEN 16.99  
SHRIMP 17.99  
STEAK 17.99

### PIÑA FAJITAS

A grilled half pineapple stuffed with chicken, sautéed bell peppers and onion. 19.99  
Substitute: Steak\* + 3.00  
Shrimp + 2.00.

### TEXAS FAJITAS

A sizzling platter of bell peppers and onions with grilled steak\*, chicken and shrimp. 18.99

## SEAFOOD

### GULF FISH TACOS

Served two different ways: Grilled or Fried.  
CANTINA STYLE: Tossed in Boom Boom sauce and topped with pineapple black bean pico, cilantro-lime cabbage.  
TRADITIONAL STYLE: Topped with lettuce, pico de gallo and honey habanero sauce. Served with your choice of two sides.  
TWO TACOS 13.99  
THREE TACOS 15.99

### NEW! BOOM-BOOM SHRIMP TACOS

Fried shrimp tossed in our Boom-Boom sauce topped with pineapple-black beans and pico de gallo. Served with two sides.  
TWO TACOS 13.99  
THREE TACOS 15.99

### SHRIMP + GRITS

A bowl of our delicious Cactus-style grits mixed with our seasoned jumbo shrimp. 10.99

### SHRIMP DIABLO

Grilled shrimp cooked with our spicy cheese sauce served with two sides. 15.99

### GRILLED SHRIMP TACOS

TRADITIONAL STYLE: Topped with lettuce, pico de gallo, an avocado slice and our honey habanero sauce.  
CANTINA STYLE: Tossed in Boom Boom sauce and topped with pineapple black bean pico, cilantro-lime cabbage.  
TWO TACOS 13.49  
THREE TACOS 15.49

### SEAFOOD QUESADILLA

Grilled shrimp and grilled gulf fish with fresh pico de gallo, sautéed onions and bell peppers. Served with sour cream, lettuce and tomato on the side. 13.49  
Add rice and/or beans +2.49  
Top with cheese dip +1.99

### GULF COAST SEAFOOD BURRITO

A blend of grilled gulf fish and shrimp mixed with fresh pico de gallo, house spices and tomato salsa, then topped with cheese dip and red burrito sauce. Served with your choice of two (2): Mexican rice, black beans, Cactus grits or refried beans 15.99

## BURRITOS

Burritos are served with your choice of two (2): Mexican rice, black or refried beans or cactus grits.

### CALIFORNIA BURRITO

Grilled steak or chicken with your choice of two sides all rolled into one large flour tortilla topped with cheese dip, avocados, sour cream and your choice of hot or mild salsa. CHICKEN 15.99 STEAK 16.99

### TEXAS BURRITO

Large flour tortilla stuffed with grilled steak\*, chicken, shrimp, grilled onions and bell peppers. Covered in our cheese dip and salsa. 16.99

### BURRITO MEXICANA

Shredded chicken, carnitas or ground beef rolled in a flour tortilla, covered with cheese dip and topped with lettuce and sour cream. 13.99

### CACTUS GRILLED BURRITO

Large flour tortilla with grilled steak\* or chicken and covered with our cheese dip. CHICKEN 13.49 STEAK 14.99

### BURRITO RANCHERO

Large flour tortilla filled with grilled steak\* or chicken, grilled onions, peppers and topped with our zesty ranchero salsa and cheese dip. CHICKEN 14.99 STEAK 15.99

## DESSERTS

### SOPAPILLA 3.99

With ice cream 5.79

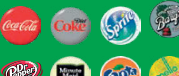
### CHURROS 5.99

CHEESECAKE CHIMICHANGA

With strawberry sauce. 5.99

### FRIED ICE CREAM 5.99

## BEVERAGES



COKE | DIET COKE  
TEA | DR PEPPER | SPRITE  
BARQ'S ROOT BEER  
LEMONADE | ORANGE FANTA  
MELLO YELLO | COFFEE

## TACOS

All taco entrees are served with your choice of two sides: Mexican rice, black beans, Cactus grits or refried beans. Tortilla choice of soft flour, soft corn or hard corn shell.

### TEXAS TACOS

One steak\* taco, one grilled chicken taco, one shrimp taco served with pico de gallo, lettuce and cheese. 16.99

### TACOS MEXICANOS

Authentic Mexican-style street tacos with carne asada, fresh cilantro and onion on soft corn tortillas. Served with lime and verde sauce. TWO TACOS 12.99  
THREE TACOS 14.99

### NEW! CARNITAS TACOS

Authentic slow-roasted pork on soft corn tortillas with cilantro and raw onion, and a side of cilantro-lime cabbage and salsa verde. TWO TACOS 13.99  
THREE TACOS 14.99

### BRINGO TACOS

Juicy grilled chicken tacos with fresh grilled pineapple and chorizo. Topped with raw onion and cilantro. TWO TACOS 14.99  
THREE TACOS 16.49

### CACTUS TACOS

Seasoned ground beef or shredded chicken tacos with fresh pico de gallo, lettuce and cheese. TWO TACOS 12.99  
THREE TACOS 13.99

### TACOS DE POLLO

Juicy grilled chicken tacos with fresh pico de gallo, lettuce and cheese. TWO TACOS 13.99  
THREE TACOS 14.99

### STEAK TACOS

Grilled marinated steak\* tacos with pico de gallo, lettuce and cheese. TWO TACOS 14.99  
THREE TACOS 15.99

## TRADITIONAL plates

Traditional plates are served with your choice of two (2): Mexican rice, black or refried beans or cactus grits.

### NEW! FLAUTAS

Three flour tortillas fried with your choice of shredded chicken, carnitas, or ground beef. Served with pico de gallo, lettuce, sour cream, and a side of cheese dip. 14.49

### CACTUS BOWL

All bowls are served with Mexican rice, black beans, broccoli, pico de gallo, and choice of guacamole or sour cream. GRILLED CHICKEN 13.49  
GRILLED STEAK 15.99  
GRILLED SHRIMP 15.99  
CARNITAS 14.99  
VEGGIES 12.99

### CHICKEN DIABLO

Grilled chicken cooked with our spicy cheese sauce. 15.99

### POLLO CACTUS MELT

Chicken breast smothered in bell peppers, onions and our cheese sauce. 14.99

### ARROZ CON POLLO

Grilled chicken served on a bed of rice topped with cheese dip. 11.99 (no sides)

### ENCHILADA SUPREME

One shredded chicken, one beef and one cheese enchilada topped with lettuce, tomato and sour cream. 14.99

### CARNITAS

Slow-simmered pork tips cooked with sautéed onions. Served with fresh tortillas, lettuce, guacamole, pico de gallo and sour cream. 15.99

### CARNE ASADA

A grilled 9-oz skirt steak served on a sizzling bed of onions and bell peppers. 16.99

### TADITOS

Three corn tortillas fried with your choice of shredded chicken, carnitas, or ground beef. Served with pico de gallo, lettuce, sour cream and cheese dip. 14.49

### CHIMICHANGA PLATE

A large flour tortilla stuffed with beef or shredded chicken, then lightly fried and topped with cheese dip. 13.99  
Add steak\* or grilled chicken +1.99

### COMBOS

All combos are served with your choice of two sides: Mexican rice, black or refried beans or Cactus grits. Additional charges for steak\*, grilled chicken or shrimp.

BURRITO - CHILE RELLENO ENCHILADA - TAMALE TACO - CHALUPA - TOSTADA

ANY ONE 10.99  
ANY TWO 12.99  
ANY THREE 14.99

\*THESE ITEMS ARE COOKED TO ORDER: Consuming raw or undercooked meats, poultry, seafood, shellfish or eggs may increase your risk of foodborne illness, especially if you have a medical condition.

## KIDS'MENU

For children 12 years and younger, includes soft drink or tea (dine-in only), add 2.00 for adults.

### TACO

Chicken or beef taco served with your choice of two (2): Mexican rice, black beans, Cactus grits or refried beans. 6.99

### ENCHILADA MEAL

Cheese, chicken or beef enchilada served with your choice of two (2): Mexican rice, beans, Cactus grits or fries. 6.99

### MINI NACHOS

Choice of ground beef, shredded chicken or plant with cheese dip. 6.99

### MINI QUESADILLAS

Kid-sized quesadillas stuffed with cheese and chicken or ground beef and served with your choice of two (2): Mexican rice, beans, Cactus grits or fries. 6.99

### CACTUS MINI BURRITO

Beef or shredded chicken burrito served with your choice of two (2): Mexican rice, beans, Cactus grits or fries. 6.99 Substitute steak\* or grilled chicken + 1.50

### CACTUS FINGERS

Chicken fingers with fries. 6.99

**Disclaimer - price subject to change.**

\*THESE ITEMS ARE COOKED TO ORDER: Consuming raw or undercooked meats, poultry, seafood, shellfish or eggs may increase your risk of foodborne illness, especially if you have a medical condition.



# EXPLORE BALDWIN COUNTY'S VERY BEST



*Summer is here, and the pull to the white sugar sand beaches of the Alabama Gulf Coast is unavoidable. Whether you're visiting, a recent transplant or longtime local, Gulf Coast Media can help you plan a perfect day out in South Baldwin.*

One of the fun aspects of having a vacation destination in your backyard is the ever-changing activity and entertainment offerings. The downside is having so many choices can cause a bout of choice paralysis.

The overall cities around South Baldwin County, from Gulf Shores and Orange Beach to Foley, consistently win national awards for overall desirability, affordability and more, but what to do once you get here or

want to learn more about your new home can be tougher.

That's where we come in. Gulf Coast Media readers voted for over 400 of their favorite businesses, restaurants, events and attractions in our 2024 Best of Baldwin readers choice contest. The winners are searchable at [www.GulfCoastMedia.com/BestOf](http://www.GulfCoastMedia.com/BestOf).

To help jumpstart your excursion planning, here is a list of award-winning activities to enjoy in southern Baldwin County according to our readers.



## BEST LOCAL ATTRACTION ALABAMA GULF COAST ZOO

Alligators, bears and lemurs, oh my! You are never too old to enjoy a day at the zoo, and the Alabama Gulf Coast Zoo is a gem. The campus offers visitors an up-close look at some amazing animals, hands-on experiences, education and fun. Don't miss your chance to feed a giraffe, hold a kangaroo or ask a zookeeper questions while they feed the animals. If you get hungry, you don't even have to leave the property. Just pop into Savanna and enjoy a delicious meal with views of the zoo.

**20499 Oak Road East, Gulf Shores**  
[www.alabamagulfcoastzoo.com](http://www.alabamagulfcoastzoo.com)



## BEST GOLF COURSE CRAFT FARMS

Clean your clubs, buy some extra balls and wear your beachiest golf shirt because it's tee time. The 36-hole championship golf course was designed by Arnold Palmer. Both courses offer golfers of every level a challenging good time.

**3840 Cotton Creek Circle, Gulf Shores**  
[www.craftfarms.com](http://www.craftfarms.com)

## BEST CHARTER BOAT OFF THE HOOK CHARTERS

For three categories – Snapper, Deep Sea Fishing and Inshore Fishing – Gulf Coast Media's readers really love fishing with this crew. If you are looking for proven experts to locate the snapper for you this season, look no further. Even if you only have limited time, the captains

with Off The Hook Charters can take you on a two-hour inshore fishing or a 12-hour offshore excursion and everything in between.

**1577 AL – 180, Gulf Shores**  
[www.offthehookfishingcharters.org](http://www.offthehookfishingcharters.org)

## BEST MINI-GOLF PIRATE'S ISLAND ADVENTURE

Keep your treasure locked in the car while you putt your way around Pirate's Island. Pirate's Island Adventure Golf offers visitors 36 holes of putting challenges among water hazards and scallywags.

**3201 Gulf Shores Pkwy., Gulf Shores**  
[www.piratesislandgolf.com](http://www.piratesislandgolf.com)

## BEST BOAT TOUR SAIL WILD HEARTS

The Wild Hears catamaran sails around Orange Beach, Gulf Shores and Perdido Key every day offering visitors amazing views and experiences. The options range from a sunset cruise to a morning dolphin cruise. The 53-foot catamaran sailboat is spacious enough for 49 passengers and offers areas below deck to take shelter from the elements. Give your family the experience of being on the open water.

**27075 Perdido Beach Blvd., Orange Beach**  
[www.sailwildhearts.com](http://www.sailwildhearts.com)



## BEST MUSEUM FOLEY RAILROAD MUSEUM

Trains are a draw for the young and young-at-heart, and the Foley Railroad Museum & Model Train Display is a fun and free way to take a little break from the summer sun. Members of the Caboose Club built and maintain the 1,200-square-foot model train display. The O scale model train display is an impressive sight, and Caboose Club members are happy to answer questions. See if you can spy the maintenance hatches in the display. You may get lucky and see a member's head pop up through one to work on the display.

**125 E. Laurel Ave., Foley**  
[www.foleyrailroadmuseum.com](http://www.foleyrailroadmuseum.com)



## BEST BIKE TRAIL

### THE BACKCOUNTRY TRAIL

The Hugh S. Branyon Backcountry Trail isn't just the Best of Baldwin. In 2023 and 2024, it took first place in the USA Today Reader's Choice Awards and is up for the awards again this year (go vote before it's too late). The 26 trails cover more than 28 miles of paved trails within the 6,150-acre park, which is a collaborative effort between Gulf State Park and the cities of Gulf Shores and Orange Beach. Bring your bikes or just take a stroll and enjoy the nine distinct ecosystems full of wildlife and plants.

**3801 Orange Beach Blvd., Orange Beach**  
[www.backcountrytrail.com](http://www.backcountrytrail.com)

## BEST AMUSEMENT PARK

### TROPIC FALLS AT OWA

Are you looking for a day of adrenaline? Look no further than Tropic Falls at OWA. The park's location on the Baldwin Beach Express makes getting there easy, and the massive free parking lots ease your stress. The Downtown OWA area is filled with shops and restaurants to enjoy before, during or after your visit to the park. Visitors can choose to enjoy both the indoor/outdoor water park and amusement park or just the amusement park. The park offers rides for the big kids and grown-ups as well as the tiny tots

in your crew. The indoor water park has loads of slides, a massive lazy river and kids splash area. It is easy to spend all your time riding the waves. Once the weather warms enough, you can also enjoy the Big Water Bay wave pool outside.

**1501 S. OWA Blvd., Foley**

[www.visitowa.com](http://www.visitowa.com)

## BEST GO-KARTS

### THE TRACK-GULF SHORES

Do you feel the need, the need for speed? Head to The Track-Gulf Shores and burn some rubber on the best go-kart tracks in Baldwin County. The multistory wood track is a blast for the young and old. In addition to go-karts, play a round of putt-putt, win all the tickets in the arcade, or get wet in the water shooting bumper boats. It's a fun place for the whole family.

**3200 Gulf Shores Pkwy., Gulf Shores**

[www.funatthetrack.com](http://www.funatthetrack.com)

## BEST ESCAPE ROOM/ BEST WATER PARK

### WATERVILLE U.S.A.

If you are looking for some family bonding moments, pack up the crew and head to Waterville USA for 60 minutes of puzzles. The Escape House Escape Room at Waterville will test your

team's knowledge and patience in one of two escape rooms: The Great Mysto or The Hurricane. While you are at Waterville, why not explore all they have to offer? Of course, they have all the water park fun, which was voted Best of Baldwin, but they also have a mini golf course, Top Golf Swing Suite, Splash N Stike Bowling and a bar.

**906 Gulf Shores Pkwy., Gulf Shores**

[www.watervilleusa.com](http://www.watervilleusa.com)

## AWARD-WINNING CITIES

In 2024, **Orange Beach's food scene** got a much deserved nod in USA Today's 10 Best Small Town Food Scenes in the U.S. The small town was selected at No. 7 on the list that included small towns like Cape May, New Jersey; Covington, Louisiana; Oxford, Mississippi and Lewisburg, West Virginia.

This year, you can say you vacation (or live!) in one of the top small coastal towns in the nation after Gulf Shores was ranked No. 4 in USA Today's 10 Best Coastal Small Towns. This year's top five included:

No. 1 - Stuart, Florida

No. 2 - Saugatuck, Michigan

No. 3 - Key West, Florida

**No. 4 - Gulf Shores, Alabama**

No. 5 - Pismo Beach, California

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*Journalist.*

*Outdoorsman.*

*Storyteller.*

David Rainer has always loved the Southern outdoors, and he has been a journalist since college. Now, writing his weekly column for the Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources allows him to live in both worlds. **Why would he retire? There's nowhere he'd rather be.**

Words by Kayla Green  
Photos by Micah Green



**You'd never know, without turning off Hwy. 59, or 98 or I-10 or anything with the word Express, how quickly the resort condos sputter into homes scattered around the, in comparison, rolling landscape. You'd never know how the white beneath your feet saturates into green for tens of acres at a time, how it smells not like salt but fresh cut yards lined by trees that were here long before Baldwin County became the fastest growing area of the state.**

You'd maybe know that the amberjack on the menu and the Royal reds you can buy by the pound were caught from nearby waters maybe even today, but you'd maybe not know that Alabama's turkey hunting season is one of the longest in the country or that the river and fingers of the Mobile-Tensaw Delta is one of the most biodiverse concentrated areas of the nation.

Maybe you're an avid outdoors aficionado. Maybe you've lived here long enough with enough interest to find out. Maybe you read his column. If not, you'd never know.

David Rainer knows. He's been telling Alabama's stories that are not confined to air conditioning and building walls for nearly 20 years.

### THE ROAD HOME

Rainer is the writer for Outdoor Alabama Weekly, a column published under the umbrella of Outdoor Alabama, the news and information website of the Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources.

ADCNR is an executive and administrative department of the state, where the governor-appointed commissioner advises said governor and the Legislature on management and protection of the state's wildlife, state parks, state lands and marine resources.

That's the view from the sky. On the ground, in the dirt and sand and rivers and shallows, Outdoor Alabama is a resource for anything you need to know about what's in its name that doesn't involve the act itself of being outside. You can learn about when seasons and waters open and close and apply for licenses. You can book campsites, read up about wildlife and explore research.

Find shooting ranges, scan a calendar of upcoming programming. Learn to hunt. Learn to shoot. Learn to fish. You can look up hiking and canoe trails or find out what you can hunt, where you can hunt. You can download boating access maps and download fishing tournament applications.

Or you can learn from the expert.

Rainer has probably written about most of these subjects at some point in his 18-year state career. If he hasn't, it's probably on his to-do list.

"(The outdoors) is a place of solace for many people, out there on a deer stand or some kind of duck hunting blind or out there in the middle of the Gulf on a boat where the only distraction is whether the







fish are biting or not," Rainer said as the mosquitoes swirled around an early summer evening in Silverhill. "It's a great place, and that's why I'm still doing it. Because I'm past retirement age, but why retire? The deal is, [my wife] Robbie says, 'What would you do if you retire?' She said, 'Hunt and fish?' I said, 'Probably.' She said, 'Well, you're doing that now, and you're getting paid for it.'"

Rainer grew up in the outdoors. His father taught him a love for it. But a lot of people, especially in the South, share that connection. Rainer takes his experience and his knowledge – and his professional background – and turns it into stories.

He has about 3,000 subscribers to his weekly column, and ADCNR sends it out to about 170 media outlets that can in turn pub-

lish it (Gulf Coast Media included) at no cost. He may be a state government employee, but his ability to keep a reader engaged and help people learn about the world around them comes from his journalism background. So, he's a hybrid writer of sorts.

At the heart of it is the journalist in him. It's been his whole career, albeit previously the grass on which he stood was often closely curated, or it was sod, or it was not even real grass at all.

Rainer started out as a sports journalist in Mississippi. By the time he got the outdoor writer job in 1992 at the *Mobile Press-Register*, he had covered the PGA Championship at Shoal Creek in Birmingham for *The Clarion-Ledger* (Jackson, MS), the Masters twice and three New Orleans Saints Superbowl

appearances for *The Meridian Star*. Highlights of a career that started with a 1973 *Star* byline about high school football and now takes the husband, father, grandfather to more serene arenas of water and forest. Though the deep-sea fishing rodeo he covered for the *Press-Register*, "work, work, work" that produced 20 stories out of 9 a.m.-midnight days for a week, were not for the faint of heart.

He had already started helping with the outdoor page in Mississippi, but he assumed the role fulltime at the *Press-Register*, for which he lived in Mobile for three months before deciding "real quickly this was the side of the bay we needed to be on."

## THROUGH TWISTS AND TURNS

Rainer's introduction to the Alabama Gulf Coast is like many. His family used to vacation in Gulf Shores and fish on Dauphin Island.

"But I had no idea how vast the Mobile Delta was until I came to the *Press-Register*. I'd heard stories, but I never really experienced it," he said. "One of the great perks I ever had in my life was the *Press-Register* provided me with a 21-foot bay boat. And that is really unheard of for a newspaper that size.

"So, I stayed in that boat all the time."

He explored the delta and Mobile Bay, boating from one end to the other, following the fish. Catching trout, redbfish, suddenly a bass. It can be intimidating, he said, the five rivers and numerous narrow routes shooting off them, to navigate, and it can get pretty shallow, "but once you learn it, you'll love it." You have to be



aware of what the river is doing. Of the tides. They'll tell you where and when to be fishing.

Rainer said his 14 years at the *Press-Register* was "a fantastic job, but in 2006 I guess it was, I could tell the newspaper industry was changing, and I didn't know whether it was going to provide me with long-term employment, so I started looking at different things."

He may not have that bay boat anymore, but Rainer has no shortage of inspiration. That's what he loves about living here. The opportunities are endless. All you have to do is get outside.

"I'm always looking to (write about) something different," he said. "If I've done too much hunting, I'll do fishing or I'll stick in conservation, some non-game animal stuff, and I try to mix it up as much as possible. Some of it has to do with what we've got coming up (seasonally)."

When what comes up is the unexpected, journalists know to drop whatever they had planned and pay attention. Pivot. And when the unexpected is something huge, journalists often end up writing about things that are impacting them back at home.

Rainer and his wife, Robbie, have been married for 45 years, a partnership he esteems crucial to the success of his career. The home they've been in since 1996 (or 1997; it's up for debate. They're not really sure. They moved in on a Jan. 1) has made it through multiple hurricanes. Ivan in 2004 delivered a bounty of topics to write about, from future impacts on natural amenities and related industries to the dangers of submerged debris and re-learning how to navigate your tree-downed hunting camp. It also delivered the need for a new roof and inside work to the Rainers' home.

In the aftermath of the Horizon Deepwater Oil Spill in 2010, he worked in the Joint Information Command in Mobile where people called in with questions, and he got to fly in an Alabama National Guard helicopter looking for slicks. He didn't pivot for a while after the spill.

His most popular stories are usually about big fish and big deer, like a recent one on how many saltwater fishing records are being broken at tournaments or a "humongous buck" in Birmingham.

As everything does, people's perception of Alabama's outdoors, and the outdoors itself, has evolved since he started pointing his pen toward paper with it in mind. Some people don't realize how Baldwin County was born out of agriculture, how development is making farming lands smaller and smaller. People



haven't always talked about how much there is outside our doors.

"People are starting to notice it more. I think COVID-19 and the lockdown really made people take a look at that and appreciate what we have. And as bad as that was, it did open a lot of people's eyes," Rainer said. "...I think another thing that's driving people to the outdoors is their awareness of where their food comes from. It's natural, organic food and you can actually go harvest your own food, and I think a lot of people are tuned into that these days more than they were several years ago."

To write in the way Rainer does is not just to write because it's important, not just to put information out there for people to do what they want with it. To write in his way is to share a passion, to give something he loves to friends, family and strangers alike.

"It's so great to live in this part of the world," he said. "There's just so many things to do."

All you've got to do to start is get outside. But maybe read his column first.

**"If I choose hunting, it'd be hunting turkeys. If I choose fishing, it'll be speckled trout and red fish because it's casting and trying to figure out where the fish are and trying to locate them, whereas in the Gulf you've got your spots with structure. But that's still enjoyable, but I enjoy casting and reeling."**



A sunset over a body of water. The sun is low on the horizon, creating a bright orange and yellow glow. The sky is filled with dark, dramatic clouds. The water reflects the sun's light, creating a shimmering path. In the foreground, a person is riding a jet ski, leaving a wake. In the background, a line of houses and trees is visible on the shore.

# Get out *on the water!*

Words by Melanie LeCroy  
Photos by Micah Green

Create lasting memories with your family and friends during your beach vacation by getting out on the water.

Splashing in the warm Gulf waters is nice, but seeing the area from the water can give you a whole new perspective. The waterways and natural areas around the Alabama Gulf Coast offer a variety of animals, birds and native plants you may not see at home.





## ***Make fun memories on The Fun Boats***

Gulf Coast Media had an opportunity to head out on the waterways in Orange Beach on one of The Fun Boats. Before stepping onto the bright red boat with Capt. Harold and deckhands Rowan, Brady “The Original” and “New” Brady, we chatted with owner Capt. Dean Williams.

Williams and his wife, Jody, have spent the past 12 years helping families make lifelong memories on their red dolphin cruise boats. Over the years, they have seen families return

annually and watched the families grow up.

Williams grew up on the Gulf Coast fishing and exploring the local waterway. Like many, he grew up and entered the corporate world. As his job was ending, he started spending time with a friend who owned a dolphin cruise boat. Before he knew it, he and Jody were buying one of their own. They now own three!

“I would rather be here than in an office,” Williams said.

When asked what his favorite part of running The Fun Boats is, Williams answered quickly.

“The people,” he said. “Different people

every three hours, different groups from all over the world. From California and New York to Canada and South America. We love it.”

While they don’t have a running total, Williams guesses they have taken over 200,000 people on dolphin cruises. The boats run 11 months out of the year. They could run 12, but there must be time for maintenance and inspections.

There are many dolphin cruises to choose from in our area, but Williams and his team of captains and crew offer more than a dolphin-seeking mission.

“We try to stand out. With the Fun Boats,





I don't know if it was Jody or I who came up with that idea, but we work as a team. We're married, work together, eat together and think together," Williams said. "As we started doing the first cruises, we noticed there was a lull time. The kids didn't have anything to do as we were searching for dolphins. So, we came up with the idea to show them fish, shrimp and crabs."

Over time, The Fun Boats added a water fight as well.

The deckhands are well versed in the area, the waterways, history and the creatures that call the area home. During the cruise, all the children and adults are called to the back deck during a slow time and have the chance to hold crabs, shrimp and fish and learn about them. Many of the animals are the dolphins' favorite treats, and the deckhands explain that as well.

"We're not just a dolphin cruise. We're an adventure. We're family fun. We're education," Williams said. "When school starts, we will get emails sometimes that say, 'My child made a 100% on a report because they wanted to do it on dolphins and they used everything they learned on your boat.' It's an incredible way to make a living."

Williams, his captains, and crew all take pride in showing their guests an enjoyable and comfortable time. The crew is patient with the smallest and most inquisitive of guests. If you haven't been on The Fun Boats, make memories with your family and book a trip.

For more information on The Fun Boat, visit [www.dolphincruises.net](http://www.dolphincruises.net).

## **Boat tours**

### **Sail Wild Hearts**

The Wild Hearts catamaran sails around Orange Beach, Gulf Shores and Perdido Key every day offering visitors amazing views and experiences. The options range from a sunset cruise to a morning dolphin cruise. The 53-foot catamaran sailboat is spacious enough for 49 passengers and offers areas below deck to take shelter from the elements. Give your family the experience of being on the open water.

[www.sailwildhearts.com](http://www.sailwildhearts.com).

**Cruisin' Tikis Orange Beach** – Nothing screams beach vacation quite like a Tiki bar. If your family or group of friends would enjoy being captained around the waterways on a floating Tiki bar, you are in luck. The excursion offerings range from short cruises to three-hour adventures. To learn more, visit [www.cruisintikiorangebeach.com](http://www.cruisintikiorangebeach.com).

**Anonyme Cruises** – Let Captain DD Russo take you on a cruise through the Southern Alabama waterways on one of her adorable vessels. Russo grew up on the local waterways, and her father and brothers started a chartering business in the 1980s. She is now carrying on the family tradition of building memories for residents and visitors on her electric Anonyme II or her 17-foot center console Boston Whaler. To learn more or to book your cruise, visit [www.anonymecruises.com](http://www.anonymecruises.com).



**Dolphin Cruises Aboard the Cold Mil Fleet** – Capt. Philip and Paula Taylor started Cold Mil Fleet in 1997. They will welcome you aboard the 50-foot reconditioned Navy Transport Boat for a 1.5-hour cruise through the calm bay waters to find dolphins. For more information, visit [www.dolphincruises.com](http://www.dolphincruises.com).

**Hammock Time Tiki Tours** – Hammock Time Tiki Tours offers visitors a new take on island tours. Their tiki boat offers guests a Tiki bar and two hammocks to lounge in. Cruise to an island and enjoy some of the on-board toys and games or just relax. To learn more, visit [www.hammocktimetikitours.com](http://www.hammocktimetikitours.com).

## Self-propelled water fun

**Pure Aloha Adventures** – Let the guides from Pure Aloha Adventures take you into Little Lagoon in the Bon Secour National Wildlife Refuge, Lake Shelby at Gulf State Park and more. If you are lucky, some of the native animals will visit with you as you paddle like herons, osprey, pelican, gulls and rays. Kayak tours are just one of the many options Pure Aloha has to offer. To learn more, visit [www.purealohaadventures.com](http://www.purealohaadventures.com).

**WildNative Tours** – Seeing dolphins and the local wildlife from the beach is nice, but paddling a kayak alongside is even better. Let WildNative Tours take you out for a three-hour tour of the waterways and learn about the local environment and animals. The company also offers tours of the Delta and the massive cypress trees in the Delta. To learn more or book a tour, visit [www.wildnative-tivetours.com](http://www.wildnative-tivetours.com).

**Ike's Beach Service** - Ike's Beach Service is a staple in the area for renting beach equip-



ment, but if you are looking for kayaks or paddle boards to enjoy on your vacation, they have you covered. Throw on your lifejacket and set out on an exploration of the local waterways. For more information, visit [www.ikesbeachservice.com](http://www.ikesbeachservice.com).

**Sea View Tours** - See the local waterway in a whole new way with Sea View Tours. The company offers clear kayak tours and rentals. Book one of the evening tours and your clear kayak will glow. To learn more, visit [www.seaviewtoursal.com](http://www.seaviewtoursal.com).

**Perdido Beach Service** - Perdido Beach Service has served the area for over 30 years. Along with the typical beach rentals like chairs and umbrellas, they also offer kayaks and stand-up paddle boards. Visitors can also book group surf lessons if the weather conditions permit. For more information, visit [www.perdidobeachservice.com](http://www.perdidobeachservice.com).

## Parasailing boats

**Orange Beach Parasail - Best of Baldwin 2024**

Selected by our readers as the top parasailing boat for 2024, Orange Beach Parasail will give you the thrill of a lifetime as you soar through the skies. The company has two boats that can carry up to 12 passengers, and they even offer photo packages so you can remember your experience for a lifetime. For more information, visit [www.obparasail.com](http://www.obparasail.com).

**Chute Em Up Parasail** – Chute Em Up Parasail has been sending guests into the air since 2004 and has expanded to 15 boats across the area. Regardless of what area of the Alabama Gulf Coast you are staying on, they probably have a boat nearby. For more information, visit [www.parasailorangebeach.com](http://www.parasailorangebeach.com).



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**Parasail Sky Surfer** – Step aboard the 35-foot Sky Surfer for a parasailing adventure. You will have a bird's eye view of the pristine shoreline and marine life. For more information, visit [www.parasailkysurfer.com](http://www.parasailkysurfer.com).

**Ike's Parasail** – Ike's Parasail offers guests many locations to choose from for your parasailing adventure. If flying high isn't your thing, take a ride on the Ike's banana boat. For more information, visit [www.ikeparasail.com](http://www.ikeparasail.com).

**Blue Sky Parasailing and Watersports** – How does 800 feet in the air sound? Blue Sky Parasailing can take up to three people for an unforgettable view over the Alabama Gulf Coast. They also offer Jet Ski rentals and banana boat rides. To learn more, visit [www.blueskyparasailingandwatersports.net](http://www.blueskyparasailingandwatersports.net).

## ***Boat rental***

If you would prefer to take to the waterways on your own, many local businesses are offering a variety of boat and Jet Ski rentals to choose from. Here are five local options:

**Hudson Marina** – 4575 S. Wilson Blvd, Orange Beach - [www.hudsonmarina.net](http://www.hudsonmarina.net)  
**Happy Harbor Watersports** – 27212 Marina Road, Orange Beach – [www.happyharbors.com](http://www.happyharbors.com)

**Wahoo Watersports** – 26214 Garrett Lane, Orange Beach – [www.wahoowatersports.com](http://www.wahoowatersports.com)

**Pelican Boat Rentals** – 22830 Brown Lane, Orange Beach – [www.rentpelicanboats.com](http://www.rentpelicanboats.com)

**Flora-Bama Marina & Watersports** – 29603 Perdido Beach Blvd., Orange Beach – [www.fishflorabama.com](http://www.fishflorabama.com)





# 7 THINGS

with **Rod Murray**  
Brewmaster,  
Big Beach Brewing

Words by Kayla Green  
Photos by Micah Green

It started, as many things used to, when he noticed something in an article.

He had been brewing beer since 2011 (actually, since 1994 after taking a brewing course), starting with a 3.5-barrel system whose success promoted him to head brewer and promoted Public House Brewing in St. James, Missouri, to a 20-barrel production-level system. When he and his wife moved to Gulf Shores and he read that the island's soon-to-open first brewery was looking for help, he cold-called and said whether you want me or not, I'll be there.

The father and Army veteran's plan was to retire in eight-10 years. If he could work at a smaller facility then semi-retire, that'd be perfect. He was hired without having met the Shamburgers, starting May 31, 2016, five months before the first beer was tapped for a customer.

Now, eight years later, even though regulars and loyal visitors have never known Big Beach Brewing without him, that retirement plan is kicking in. Kind of. He'll still be around. But he's looking forward to dipping his toes into four-day weekends.

And he's more than hops and taps. We went beyond the barrel and learned how Big Beach's first brewmaster defines himself. Here are the 7 Things that make Rod Murray.





## 1. GAMING

Lights flash, Rush sings. That's what you're greeted with when you walk into Murray's house. He has always been a gamer, a pastime he enjoys every day. Evidence lays around the house, from the small Diablo 3 head whose crystal disguises the game's USB drive to the Zelda sword he was gifted at a Big Beach Christmas party. But it's impossible to miss the Rush-themed pinball machine.

Murray has been a Rush fan since, well, he doesn't actually know when. Teenager?

And he's been a pinball fan for that long, too. So, yeah, good luck trying to beat any of the high scores set by Murray or his son, Ian.

## 2. KANSAS BASKETBALL

The pinball machine is a newer build. He has pieces of floor that are older.

Murray has been a Kansas University basketball fan since long before he went to a game, having listened to them on the radio in Missouri. Then the military sent him to get his master's in environmental engineering from Kansas, and the fandom locked in. He doesn't need any help remembering the Jayhawks' 2022 national championship defeat of the University of North Carolina by rallying the largest comeback win in the championship game's history, but an encased ticket doesn't hurt to have. Neither does a piece of the actual floor on which they won the title in 2008.

## 3. MOMO

A companion who was around for both of those wins is Momo, the Murrays' 17-year-old peekapoo. While she technically came to the family as one of his daughter's dog, she eventually had to go to college. That's when she became Murray's Momo. And she's definitely his. She grew quite attached to him, will even look around the corner when his wife gets home to see where Dad is. She's certainly in her elder years and loves a good, long nap, but she can't deny a treat if offered.



## 4. POOL

Brewing is not the only string that connects Murray from Missouri to Alabama. They always had a pool wherever they lived in Missouri but moved into a house without one in Gulf Shores. They saved up for three years to get one installed. Just a few months later, at 3 a.m., his son woke up during what was supposed to just be a storm of heavy wind and rain to look outside. "Dad, you don't want to see this," he said. Well, of course he has to look now, Murray thought. Hurricane Sally had blown the entire lanai off its foundation, steel bent, imploded into the pool.

Today, the rebuilt enclosure is lined with tiled turtles to represent their volunteerism with Alabama Coastal Foundation's turtle walks, where they help scan the beach for nests.

## 5. MILITARY

Before his brewing career took flight, Murray served the U.S. Army for 20 years as a chemical specialist. He was stationed in Alabama, Missouri, Germany, Iraq, Qatar and Korea, among others. Photos and commemorations of his service are framed on his home-office wall alongside his American flag, a photo of his father, an inventor, and a recognition of Rod's Reel, his American cream ale recipe he has been brewing and winning awards for since before he stirred his first mash at Big Beach.

## 6. KIMCHI

Murray has always loved Asian cuisine and fermented things, but his love for kimchi blossomed when he was stationed in Korea. Later, he got a vegan cookbook and started making the version his own. He's no longer vegan (tries to eat mostly vegetarian but loves a good hamburger), but his kimchi usually is. You just have to take out the shrimp paste or fish sauce. Some people replace it with pineapple or something else acidic, but the fermentation "gives you that funky taste anyway."



## 7. BREWING

Of course, it all comes back to beer. He found a community at Big Beach, and he helped make the spot what it is. It has never been sans their brewmaster. But fear not. Just because he's starting to enjoy long weekends and more traveling doesn't mean he's disappearing. "I won't let it fall," he said. He's been training the incoming brewmaster, Chris Gadd, for a year now, and longtime front-of-the-house face Derrick Wheeler for about six months. Gadd owned and ran a brewery in Tennessee before moving to the island. He has big shoes to fill, but with his experience and Murray's training, Murray is confident Big Beach will keep paddling.







# TAKING FLIGHT

*GULF SHORES HIGH SCHOOL AVIATION ACADEMY STUDENTS BUILT  
A TWO-SEATER AIRCRAFT. WE TESTED THE PASSENGER SEAT.*

*WORDS BY KAYLA GREEN / PHOTOS BY MICAH GREEN*

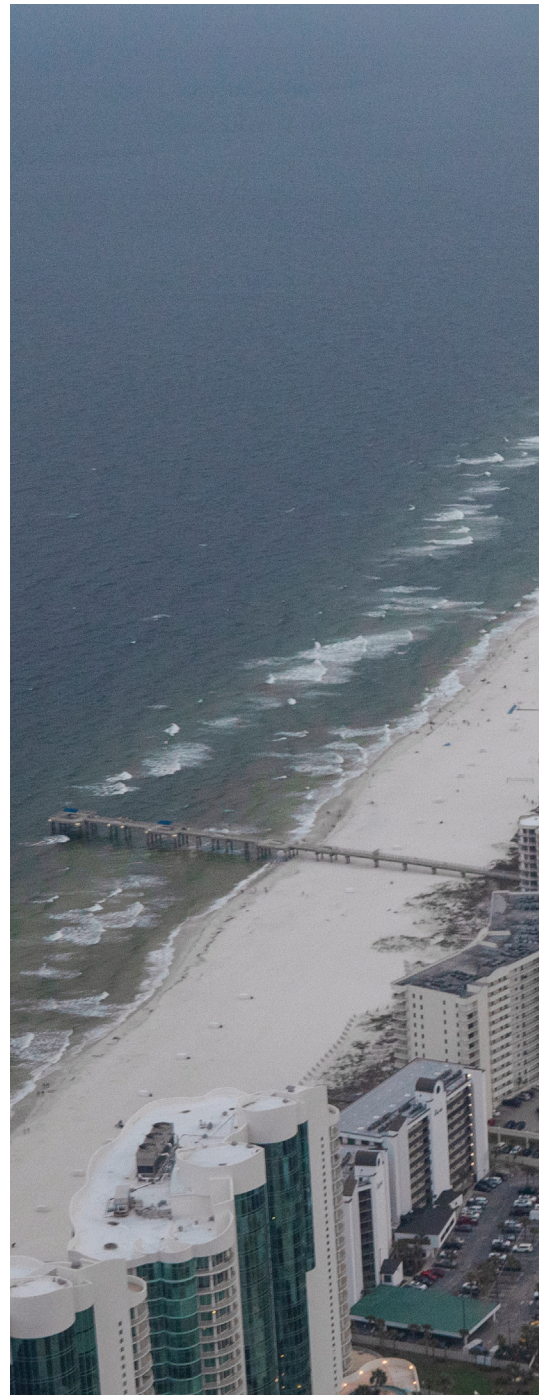
I've seen many coasts from the vantage point of many airplane windows, but never quite like this. Two types of orange blend below, the last remnants of the setting sun casting golden reflections on glass-walled resort condominium buildings as turtle-safe lights luminate houses, parking garages and restaurant lots. It can all get lost down there together, just another intersection of land with sea, but there, that pink building on the sand. They have good fried shrimp. And back that way, those are the string lights of my own backyard!

It's one thing to recognize the city below on a flight, but it's a whole other experience to do it in the town you live in from a two-seater airplane built by students from the high school on the other side of your neighborhood. There's got to be some perks to this job, right? Micah and I were lucky enough to be asked to take a flight with Gulf Shores High School Aviation Academy Instructor Haley Kellogg in the metal aircraft her students built.

The academy is open to all high school Dolphins. Students learn about mechanics aerospace











**Photos bottom left, bottom center and bottom right courtesy of Haley Kellogg**

engineering and aircraft maintenance. No, they more than learn. They do. Tango Flight, a nonprofit that provides students with hands-on training, offers airplane kits with parts and instructions to build a Federal Aviation Administration-approved aircraft from scratch.

More than 100 people gathered at the Gulf Shores International Airport May 1 as the engine purred to life from within the shiny metal plane. Kellogg, a GSHS alumna, took Alabama State Superintendent of Education Eric Mackey on the first official flight.

Two months later, we lifted off. Weather was rolling in by the time my turn came around, but the short flight was worth the time. I see small aircraft ascend and coast downward from my house every day, so to see the city from a new vantage point, at dusk, was incredible. To see how the bending

fingers of the state park's waters wind around and between boardwalks along roadways. To see human-made landmarks and just how fast the shore becomes the deep Gulf. How it's all connected.

Kellogg, who started training for her pilot's license out of high school, said she wishes programs like this were around when she was in high school. The hands-on experience is getting more students interested in related careers, whether she sees her students go into mechanics and engineering or becoming a pilot.

Tango Flight sold the aircraft, set to deliver it to a private buyer just a few days after our flight. Proceeds from the sale will be used to buy a second kit for the next round of students. So look to the skies, and you might just see Dolphins soar.





# house favorites

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### Shrimp or Chicken Alfredo Baked Pasta

Gulf shrimp tossed with rich garlic Alfredo sauce and penne pasta, baked with Parmesan and mozzarella cheese. 20  
Add garlic bread for 2

### Butter Pecan Mahi

Carefully grilled Mahi topped with our special sweet pecan butter. A real Southern treat! 26



### Shrimp Au Gratin

Shrimp baked in a cheddar and Romano cheese sauce. 19

### Grilled Chicken Breasts

Twin chicken breasts grilled with herb butter. 17.50  
Or blackened with hollandaise sauce - add 2

### Butterfly Shrimp Florentine

Shrimp stuffed with spinach, onions, mozzarella and Romano cheese then topped with a light cream sauce. 21

### Josh's Blackened Shrimp and Grits

Tender blackened shrimp served over creamy cheese grits. 24.50

### Crab Stuffed Flounder

Mild flakey fillets stuffed with blue crab dressing, baked and served with hollandaise. 20

### Parmesan Baked Shrimp

Tasty shrimp baked with applewood smoked bacon, garlic butter and grated Parmesan cheese. 19.50



### Steak and Butterfly Shrimp

Chef's cut with eight fried shrimp. Market

### Chef's Cut Steak

Handcut. 12oz. Market

### Steamed Alaskan Snow Crab Legs

Snow crab legs and drawn butter. Market

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