

SUMMER FUN

A 34-mile tropical island, South Padre is considered the jewel of Texas beaches



Best Texas Beaches

Fun Beach Vacations for Your Katy Family



Written by Kelly Isenberger



The summer heat is rising, and many Katy families find the vacation budget shrinking. What's more affordable than soaking up the sun on one of Texas' many beaches? With around 370 miles of coastland, Texas offers several beachfronts that provide hours of playtime, as well as budget friendly lodging. Most of the beach communities also have historical sites, fishing excursions, and many wildlife viewing opportunities. Simply look over this guide and pick a destination to begin planning your summer holiday.

South Padre Island

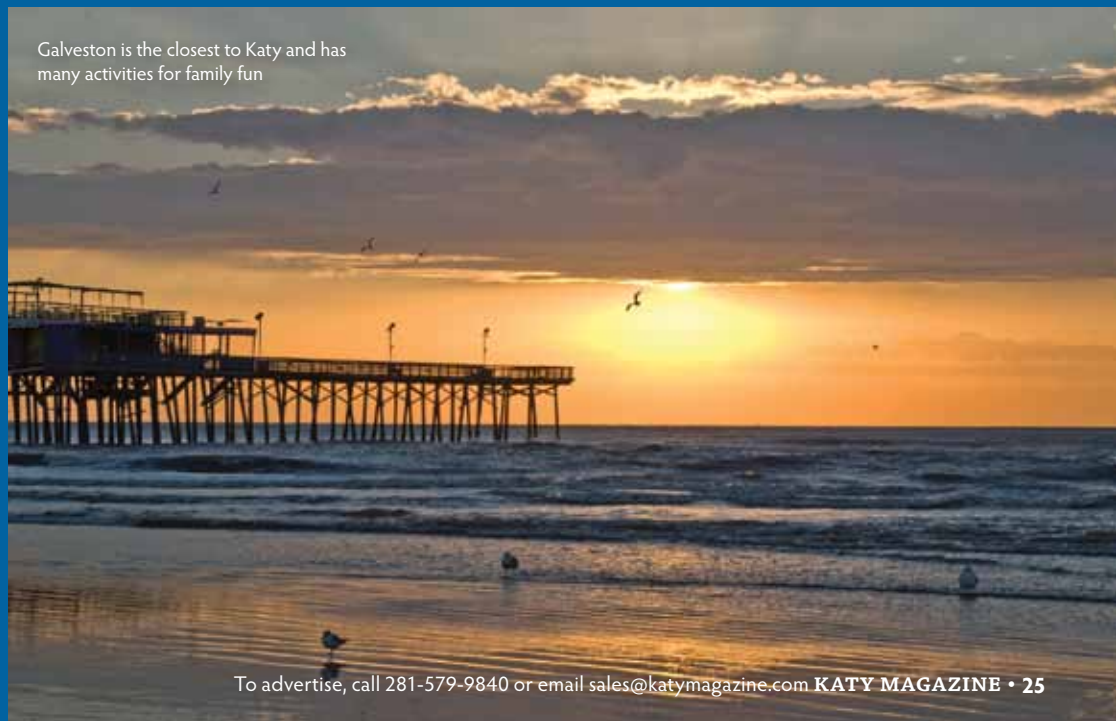
South Padre Island is the jewel of Texas beaches. It's a 34-mile tropical island surrounded by clear blue waters and white sand dunes. With many hotels and condos right on the beach, your stay will be easy and comfortable. Tracey Simmons, a Katy resident, recently vacationed there. She describes her experience, "The water was blue and beautiful with pelicans flying around and coconuts were washing up on the shore. The kids just played and collected seashells." Simmons loves to relax on the beach. She explains, "Every wave that crashed onto shore is one ounce of stress gone." Your kids will love playing in the sand dunes or even racing a dune buggy over them. Sand castle building is serious business in South Padre. Perfect the skill by taking sand castle lessons. In the water, the kids can learn to surf, snorkel, scuba, or take a banana boat ride. When the kids need a break from the summer beach fun, take them over to Port Isabel to climb up the lighthouse, and then on a Black Dragon pirate cruise. Or go look for dolphins on the Sea Ranch Dolphin Watch cruise boat. Horseback riding on the beach is a must and is sure to be a kid favorite on your family beach trip. South Padre Island is about a six hour drive from Katy, but if you have the time, it's well worth it.

North Padre Island and Corpus Christi

North Padre Island is in Corpus Christi, and is an option for those who do not want to drive all the way to South Padre. It's about a three-hour drive, and it offers some of the same beach fun as South Padre. Tiffany Bates' family has visited Corpus, and suggests visiting the USS Lexington, a famous naval aircraft



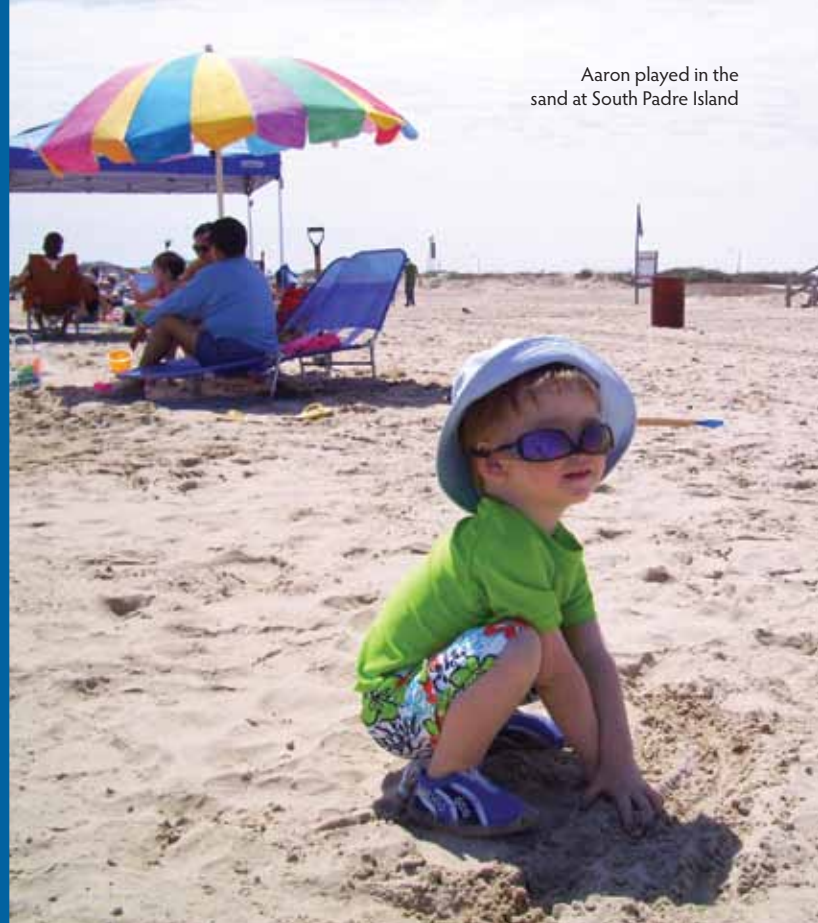
Galveston is the closest to Katy and has many activities for family fun



Brianna and Keegan had a blast with a boogie board and skim board at the beach



Aaron played in the sand at South Padre Island



carrier from World War II. The whole family can experience the real life sights and sounds of being on a naval carrier. Experience what it's like to be a jet fighter using the onboard flight simulator, and watch a movie in their mega-theater. Bates also says, "The Texas State Aquarium is cool and the kids love it." Be sure to visit the aquarium where you can see and learn about sea life native to the Gulf of Mexico. Watch dolphins and touch stingrays, be entertained by trained birds, and learn about sea turtles. For the more adventurous family, the island is great for renting a sail boat and taking a sailing lesson. North Padre has shallow waters perfect for the new sailor to learn in. And for the golf enthusiast, Corpus has many world class golf courses. There's something for everyone in the family at North Padre, and with such a short drive, it can be a great vacation for your family this summer.

Port Aransas/Mustang Island

Known as the "Fishing Capital of Texas," Mustang Island is a great vacation choice for those who want to get away from the hustle and bustle and slow things down a bit. It's located north of Padre Island, and it draws a smaller crowd, which makes for a serene nature lover's getaway. Tara Hall's family enjoys Port Aransas for just this reason. She explains, "There is no pressure here. The whole family can come and just hang out at the beach, which is something you can't do many other places." They love to wait for the tide to go out, and then go find sand dollars and neat sea shells. Her son, Nolan, still remembers finding a crab. You can also enjoy fishing off the jetties or in the surf, take a guided tour, or charter a boat. They also have fishing tournaments almost every weekend in the summer. Mustang Island has a wonderful beach for fast water play, such as jet skiing, kite boarding, kayaking, and windsurfing. Port Aransas is also the place to bird watch; it has more birds than any other site on the Gulf Coast Birding Trail and offers many educational tours and centers. Mustang Island is a great choice for those families looking to get away for a few days and relax together.

Galveston Island

A family could easily spend an entire week exploring Galveston Island. Katy is most familiar with this beach, since it's the closest; however, many people overlook the variety of activities that Galveston has to offer. From renting a beach house so you can play on the beach all day, to staying in a resort to enjoy spa treatments, there is something for the entire family here. Galveston is home to the beautiful Moody Gardens where the kids can experience the ocean life that thrives in the deep, and watch a movie on the huge IMAX screen. If you want some fresh water fun, be sure to visit Schlitterbahn Water Park. The whole family can enjoy twisty water slides, relax in the lazy rivers, and watch the little ones play on the pirate ship. The Strand is home to many historic shops, and while on the north side of the Island, be sure to take the kids to the Offshore Drilling Museum. A fun trip in the evening is to ride the ferry and watch for dolphins and feed the birds. Robin Espey's family has a bay house and has been visiting Galveston for years. Her family enjoys relaxing at the bay house, reading, boating and fishing. She also advises visiting Galveston in December, during Dickens on the Strand. When asked what her favorite thing to do in Galveston is, she responds quickly, "Sitting on the balcony or boat and watching the sunset." Galveston may not have white sands and blue waters, but it offers a close get away to Katy families who have limited time and resources.

If you're looking for the perfect vacation this summer, but can't go far, why not check out our own home state. Whether you're looking for fun, adventure, or relaxation, you can find it at one of our Texas beaches. The whole family will enjoy getting out of the daily grind, spending some quality family time together, and it will be easy on the pocketbook. **KM**

KELLY ISENBERGER is a Katy mom who loves to take her kids to the beach. Her favorite Texas beach is South Padre, with Galveston being a close second.

Texas Beaches Resources

sopadre.com

South Padre Island
1-800-SOPADRE

portaransas.org

Mustang Island/Port Aransas
1-800-45-COAST

corpuschristicvb.com

Corpus Christi
1-800-766-BEACH

galveston.com

Galveston Island
1-888-425-4753

15 FUN THINGS TO DO AT THE BEACH

- 1 Build a sand castle
- 2 Search for seashells
- 3 Fly a kite
- 4 Play in the waves
- 5 Hunt for crabs at night
- 6 Bury a friend in the sand
- 7 Feed the seagulls
- 8 Lay out in the sun
- 9 Boogie board
- 10 Play volleyball
- 11 Nature and/or people watch
- 12 Write messages in the sand
- 13 Throw a Frisbee
- 14 Relax with a good book
- 15 Watch the sunset



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