



## INTERPRETIVE GUIDE

# GALVESTON ISLAND STATE PARK



## YOUR VISIT TO GALVESTON ISLAND

HELP US protect the plants and animals that live here. Plan your activities to minimize your impact on the environment. Stay on designated footpaths. Remove all trash before you leave.

VISIT other coastal parks such as Goose Island, Sea Rim, and Mustang Island state parks. Your visits will help us preserve the natural resources of the Texas coastline.

JOIN US for interpretative programs presented year-round throughout the park. Check with the office or nature center for information and program schedules.

DISCOVER the natural wonders of Galveston Island State Park by hiking our trails on the land or paddling our trails on the water.

Galveston Island State Park  
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GALVESTON ISLAND STATE PARK  
FEATURES 2,000 ACRES OF  
AN UPPER GULF COAST  
BARRIER ISLAND ECOSYSTEM.  
BARRIER ISLANDS MOVE AND  
CHANGE CONSTANTLY THROUGH  
THE ACTION OF WAVES, WINDS  
AND TIDES. BECAUSE BARRIER  
ISLANDS LIKE GALVESTON SERVE  
AS TRANSITION ZONES BETWEEN  
LAND AND OCEAN, THEY SUPPORT  
A VARIETY OF DISTINCT  
HABITATS, INCLUDING BEACHES,  
PRAIRIES AND WETLANDS.



## STEWARDSHIP

Each habitat supports a diverse array of life. Beaches are so much more than just sand and water. They support and depend on a vast community of plants and animals. The park's lagoons, bay, and salt marshes serve critical functions in the life cycles of many ocean species. Maintaining this ecological diversity depends on what we do.

How Can You Help? Explore the park, learn what makes it unique and important, and tell others about your discoveries. Post about your visit on social media. You can join a beach cleanup, volunteer to guide others, or plant native species in the park.





## THE ISLAND'S PAST

People came to Galveston Island for its natural resources. Han Akokisa and Karankawa people hunted and fished on Galveston Island for generations before European explorers discovered the island in the sixteenth century. Spaniard Cabeza de Vaca found himself shipwrecked on Galveston Island in 1528. His journals provide our earliest record of the native people who lived on the island at the time. In 1817, pirate Jean Lafitte built outposts on Galveston Island. At the end of its flight from the Mexican army in 1836, the first government of the Republic of Texas found refuge on Galveston Island.

Later in the nineteenth century, Galveston became increasingly important as a port and entry point for immigrants from many countries. In 1890 land speculators tried but failed to develop what is now Galveston Island State Park into a town site: South Galveston. The prominent Stewart family then acquired the land that is now the park and used it for ranching and as a gathering place for the politically powerful during the first half of the twentieth century.

How Can You Help? Please don't pocket the past. If you find any artifacts at the park, leave them where you found them and tell a ranger. You can also help preserve the legacy of the park by staying in one of the restored, historic residences once used by the Stewart family and their guests.



GILCREASE MUSEUM



Willet

**Beaches and Dunes** change constantly. Wind and water continually reshape the island's shores. At Galveston Island State Park, plants and animals that live on the beach and dunes must be well adapted to survive the harsh conditions created by these changes.

Beach life includes the Laughing Gulls, Piping Plovers, Sanderlings, and Willets that eagerly feed along the shoreline. Sargassum seaweed plays a key role in building and maintaining the dunes while sustaining other plants and animals that breathe life into the beach every day. Panicum, Morning Glory, and Primrose plants decorate the beach while helping to stabilize the dunes. The dunes, in turn, shield the rest of the island from wind and waves.

How Can You Help? To protect the beach, give space to nesting shorebirds, stay out of the dunes, and pick up litter. If you bring it with you, please take it with you. If it's not litter, then leave it for the beach.



Sargassum seaweed

**Coastal Prairies** define the land lying between the beach and dunes and the bay. Once coastal prairie habitat dominated the Galveston Island landscape, dotted only occasionally with small groves of Live Oak called "mottes." The native grasses that prairie animals depend on have largely disappeared under the assault of past ranching practices, human development, and invasive plants that carpet much of the island now. Today less than 1% of Texas coastal prairies remain, making them one of the most endangered habitats.

Behind the dunes, wind and water carve out small depressions in the earth called "swales." These swales collect rainwater and provide a source of fresh water for the birds, coyotes, opossums, rabbits, and snakes that make their home in the Galveston Island coastal prairie.

How Can You Help? You can help restore and protect the prairies by staying on the trails while birding or hiking at the park and share your experiences and photos with others. If you live nearby, plant native prairie grasses in your yard or talk to a ranger about helping with habitat restoration here at the park.

White Ibis over  
a prairie wetlandSandhill Cranes  
in the prairie

Great Blue Heron

**Salt Marsh Wetlands** lie beyond the prairie's edge, on the bay side of the island, and form a transition zone where land gradually gives way to water. In this murky world, many fish and other marine animals begin their lives. Spotted Seatrout, Red Drum, Flounder, Blue Crab, and Shrimp all depend on the shallow waters and tangles of seagrasses for refuge. Great Blue Herons, Snowy Egrets, and Roseate Spoonbills gather in the salt marshes to feed on the fish and crustaceans.

Wetlands are critical to protecting the environment by filtering impurities from the water and absorbing excess water from storms. They also offer park visitors opportunities for sunset views, fishing, crabbing, and ten miles of paddling trails at Galveston Island State Park.

How Can You Help? The park has built new wetlands and a rock breakwater to protect them. You can protect these by obeying boat wake regulations. Staying on designated hiking trails also helps preserve habitat and control erosion. To protect submerged seagrass beds, lift your engine and let your boat drift or move it solely by a pole or trolling motor.