Padre Island

National Seashore
Texas

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

Seashore Sites and Services

A park entrance fee is charged.

Malaquite Beach Area A new Malaquite Beach complex overlooking the Gulf of Mexico serves as the center of visitor services for the National Seashore. This complex includes a visitor center, observation deck, snack bar and gift shop, restrooms, rinse-off showers, and changing rooms. The visitor center has a wealth of information on what to see and do in the park. Rangers can answer questions and help plan your visit. The center, which is open daily, also has books, brochures, maps, and exhibits. Schedules of special activities, such as beach walks and evening campfire programs, are posted. Pets are prohibited in the Malaquite Beach area visitor center complex, but they are allowed in other park areas. Pets must be leashed at all times.

Malaquite Beach Campground has more than 40 sites suitable for campers with tents or recreational vehicles. The campground is open all year on a first-come, first-served basis. Picnic tables, restrooms, cold showers, and a sanitary dump station are provided; fire grills are not. A fee is charged. No electrical, water, or sewage hookups are available. Evening campfire programs are given in the summer. Visitor services are very limited outside the Malaquite Beach area.

Gulf Ranger Station Information and first aid are available here daily.

Bird Island Basin This site on Laguna Madre provides the park's only boat launching ramp, which is open all year.

Yarborough Pass A primitive campsite overlooking Laguna Madre can be reached only by 4-wheel-drive vehicles via a loose shell road. Chemical toilets and tables are available.

The Primitive Gulf Beach Five miles south of Malaquite Beach there are 55 miles of Gulf beach that are open to 4-wheel-driving and primitive camping, as well as other recreational pursuits. Driving and camping are restricted to the beach. No visitor services are available in this remote portion of the National Seashore.

Climate Padre Island's sunny climate is characterized by long, hot summers and short, mild winters. In summer, high temperatures average in the high 80s and low 90s°F, lows in the 70s°F. Afternoon and evening sea breezes help to moderate summer temperatures. In the winter, highs are commonly in the 60s°F, lows in the 40s and 50s°F. Winter cold fronts can bring even colder temperatures. In spring and fall high temperatures average in the 70s and 80s°F, lows in the 50s and 60s°F. Throughout the year the relative humidity seldom drops below 70 percent. About 28 inches of rain fall a year, most of it near the beginning and end of the hurricane and tropical storm season, which lasts from June to October.

For More Information Contact the National Seashore for more information by writing: Padre Island National Seashore, 9405 South Padre Island Drive, Corpus Christi, TX 78418; or calling (512) 937-2621.



Corpus Christi, Brownsville, and smaller area communities have a variety of visitor services including many that the National Seashore does not provide, such as lodging, gasoline stations, restaurants, and fishing tackle and bait shops. Padre Balli and Cameron County Parks and Mustang Island State Park have campgrounds with hookups for recreational vehicles. Padre Balli also has a popular fishing pier—Bob Hall Pier. You can observe bird life at Aransas National Wildlife Refuge, where a scenic drive and trails are available, or at the less developed Laguna Atascosa National Wildlife Refuge. Stop at the National Seashore's visitor center for more information on area attractions and recommended travel routes.

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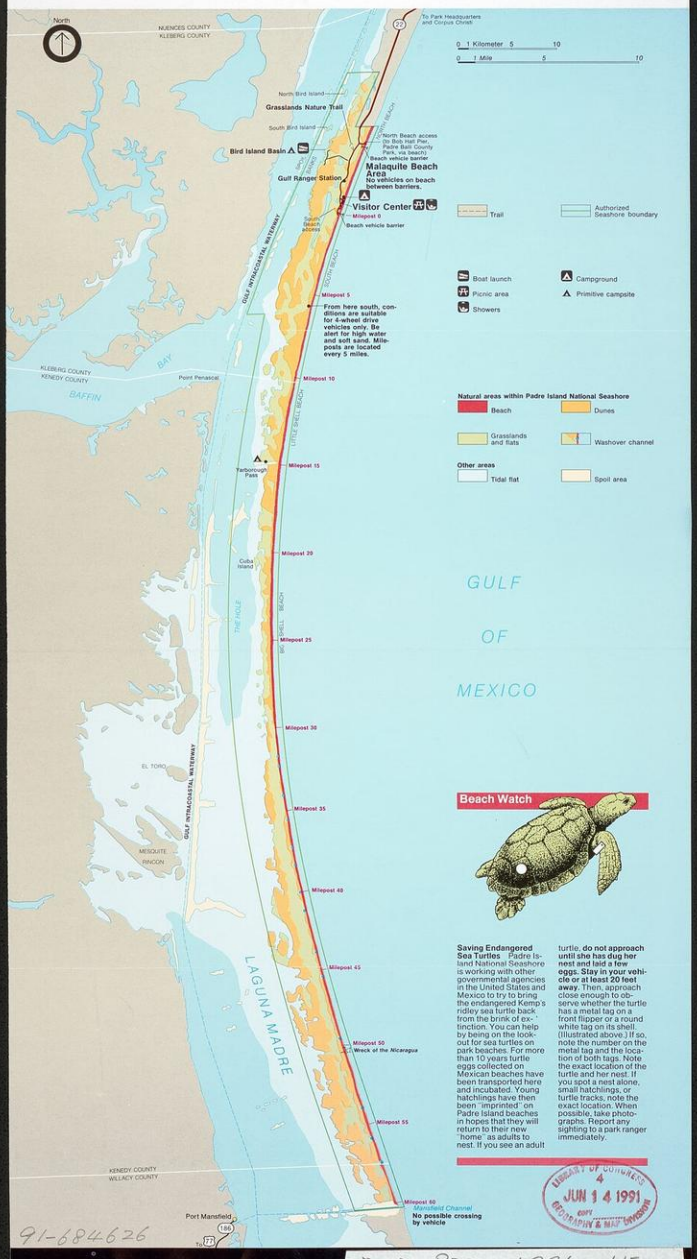

Beach Watch

Saving Endangered Sea Turtles Padre Island National Seashore is working with other governmental agencies in the United States and Mexico to try to bring the endangered Kemp's ridley sea turtle back from the brink of extinction. You can help by being on the lookout for sea turtles on park beaches. For more than 10 years turtle eggs collected on Mexican beaches have been transported here and incubated. Young hatchlings have then been "imprinted" on Padre Island beaches in hopes that they will return to their new "home" as adults to nest. If you see an adult turtle, **do not approach until she has dug her nest and laid a few eggs. Stay in your vehicle or at least 20 feet away.** Then, approach close enough to observe whether the turtle has a metal tag on a front flipper or a round white tag on its shell (illustrated above.) If so, note the number on the metal tag and the location of both tags. Note the exact location of the turtle and her nest. If you spot a nest alone, small hatchlings, or turtle tracks, note the exact location. When possible, take photographs. Report any sighting to a park ranger immediately.

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Padre Island

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Official Map and Guide



Recreation and relaxation by the sea. Matt Bradley

For years, legends have been told of great treasures hidden on Padre Island and just off its shores. The stories are of fortunes of gold and silver carried by Spanish galleons lost at sea and of vast sums of money and gems buried in the sand. Some of this wealth has indeed been found, and more may be discovered in the future. Meanwhile, there are natural treasures just as great—perhaps even greater—to enjoy in Padre Island National Seashore. Located along the south Texas coast, this sparkling preserve by the sea embraces 80 miles of white sand-and-shell beaches, picturesque windswept dunes, wild landscapes of grasslands and tidal flats teeming with shore life, and warm offshore waters. The National Seashore is one of the longest stretches of primitive, undeveloped ocean beach in the United States. Throughout this coastal wilderness you can enjoy the riches of relaxation and recreation. If you're a beach-lover, the sun, sand, and surf of Padre Island are ideal for swimming and sunbathing almost all year. If you're a fisherman, you can choose between the Gulf of Mexico and the shallow, extremely salty waters of Laguna Madre—both are renowned for their bounty of gamefish. For those who delight in the discovery of a seashell of exquisite design and color, or a peculiar piece of driftwood, there are miles of shoreline for beachcombing. Campers can awake to the sights and sounds of water and island birds such as gulls, herons, and ducks that live by the water's edge. If it's adventure and a chance to get away from it all that you seek, you can hike or drive a 4-wheel-drive vehicle along the long roadless Gulf beach. For those who like to poke around in the past, Padre Island has a history of small Indian tribes that once hunted and fished here, shipwrecks, hurricanes, cattle ranches, and oil and gas exploration. However you spend your time at Padre Island National Seashore, the rewards will be generous.

Profile of a Barrier Island

Padre Island is one of a chain of islands that stretches along the Atlantic and Gulf coasts of the United States from Maine to Texas. These islands are barrier islands, so-called because they guard the mainland from the direct onslaught of storms. On many of these low-lying islands man has left his mark: seaside homes, lighthouses, fishing villages, vacation resorts. But on Padre Island it is not the work of man but the handiwork of nature that is most evident.

Padre Island, like all barrier islands, is a dynamic place where you can witness change—change wrought by the gentle touch of breezes, by the relentless crashing of waves, by the rhythmic coming and going of tides, and, most dramatically, by the violent battering of tropical storms and hurricanes. The many environments of Padre Island—beach, dunes, grasslands, and tidal flats—are shaped and reshaped daily in response to these natural sculptors. You can see the signs of change everywhere: sand blowing in the wind, new seashells deposited by a wave, a washover channel cut into the island by the power of a great storm. Another more subtle change that is occurring, according to scientists, is the slow expansion of the entire island toward the mainland as winds and storms deposit sand on the island's west side.

The plants and animals of Padre Island are well adapted to the ever-changing nature of their native home. Sea oats, for example, thrive here. This wild shore plant is a pioneer species, one that moves into areas of loose, blowing sand where few other plants can grow, and takes root. With the sand anchored by roots, other plants take hold and dunes grow, sometimes to heights of 30 or 40 feet. The dunes are held in place unless something destroys the plants. A particularly fierce storm can do it. People can do it, by trampling the grasses or driving over them; that's why hiking and driving in the dunes are prohibited.

Among the wildlife that flourishes on the island are many birds that live here year-round or visit seasonally. Along the beach you may watch laughing gulls circling overhead, sandpipers skittering back and forth on shore searching for crustaceans, or terns, herons, and egrets flying by. In the shallows of Laguna Madre you may see flocks of white pelicans patrolling for fish. Inland, on the dunes and grasslands, killdeer, meadowlarks, and sandhill cranes live. Other animals, though not as readily observed, also inhabit the island; among them are coyotes, black-tailed jackrabbits, lizards, Western diamondback rattlesnakes, and, in the intertidal zone along the beach, ghost crabs and ghost shrimp. The underwater life of the offshore waters of the Gulf of Mexico is just as abundant, as is that of Laguna Madre, a fertile nursery for saltwater fish.

The world of Padre Island is a natural world of change and extraordinary variety and richness. It is the world of the barrier island.

Ghost crab: a hardy shore inhabitant. Dunes: created by sand, wind, and grasses and other stabilizing plants.



Stephen J. Krasemann

Seashells: treasures of the sea. Beach: battered by waves, tides, winds, and storms and frequented by birds and beachcombers.

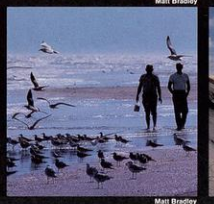


Matt Bradley

White pelicans: island residents. Inland pools: the remains of a washover channel.







Matt Bradley



Activities Ashore and Afloat

There are many ways to see the sights of Padre Island and to enjoy its many seaside pleasures. One is by **driving** along the scenic roads and sandy beaches. All vehicles can travel on the 8½-mile paved park entrance road, North Beach, and the first 5 miles of South Beach. Four-wheel-drive vehicles can continue "down island" from South Beach another 55 miles to Mansfield Channel. The soft sand and slippery shells can make the going tough along this stretch of the beach, so carry emergency tools. Before you take your first 4-wheel-drive trip on Padre Island, talk with a park ranger about what to expect. The dunes, grasslands, and tidal flats are off-limits to vehicles, as is the Malaquite Beach area. The noise of the surf may drown out the noise of your engine; be careful when approaching others. Obey posted speed limits; the limit on the beach is 15 miles per hour unless otherwise indicated. Vehicles must be state licensed and display a valid state safety inspection sticker.

Another way to explore the island is by **hiking.** The Grasslands Nature Trail, a ¾-mile loop trail, winds through a grasslands-and-dunes area. A guide pamphlet is available at the trailhead. Mosquitoes inhabit this area, so bring insect repellent. Western diamond-back rattlesnakes, though rarely seen, are found here, too. Hiking across the dunes is prohibited. Beach hiking can be slow going but rewarding, especially if you like **bird-watching** or **beachcombing.** Birders may spot many of Padre Island's 350 native bird species. Beachcombers may collect shells and other treasures of the sea; live animals and objects of historical or archeological value cannot be taken. Summer mornings, winter and spring days at low tide, and after a storm are the best beachcombing times. Metal detectors are prohibited.



Laguna Madre is ideal for sailing during the warmer months. Only smaller boats can navigate the waters of this large but shallow body of water.

Even casual observers can enjoy the entertaining and fascinating behavior of Padre Island's shore and wading birds.

Binoculars and a field guide are recommended for serious birders.



Matt Bradley

Warm Gulf waters and the hot Texas sun are ideal for **swimming** and **sunbathing** all year except January, February, and March, when uncomfortably chilly temperatures can occur. Swimming is permitted all along the beach. Lifeguards are normally on duty at Malaquite Beach in the summer. **Surfing** is popular along some parts of the beach, too, however it is not permitted at Malaquite Beach. Never go in the water alone, and beware of dangerous currents, undertows, Portuguese men-of-war, and stingrays.

Other ways to enjoy the water are **boating, waterskiing,** and **sail surfing** in Laguna Madre. Small power boats, fishing boats, sailboats, and other small watercraft can navigate its waters. The park's only boat launching ramp is at Bird Island Basin; boat launching is not permitted on the Gulf side. Boaters should carry nautical charts and keep an eye on the weather and other boaters.

Fishing is an all-season sport on Padre Island. Surf fishermen commonly catch redfish, speckled sea trout, black drum, and whiting in the Gulf, while in Laguna Madre fishermen pull in sheepshead, croaker, and flounder. A Texas state fishing license with a saltwater stamp is required.

John Tveten



One of the most popular pastimes on Padre Island is surf fishing in the Gulf of Mexico. All you need is a pole, some bait, an hour or two, and a Texas state fishing license.

Other year-round activities are **camping** and **picnicking.** Malaquite Beach Campground, a developed campground for tent and recreational vehicle camping, overlooks the Gulf. Primitive camping is allowed at designated sites along Laguna Madre and all along the Gulf beach except in the Malaquite Beach area. Campfires are permitted at the campground and on the beach. Keep your fires under control and well away from dunes and grasslands vegetation. Put fires completely out before burying them. Picnickers may use shaded picnic tables in the Malaquite Beach area, or simply spread out a blanket on the beach.