

Dream Town: Ocean Springs, Mississippi

This hamlet on the Gulf is a confluence of Southern charm, thriving new businesses, and a stellar arts scene.

By Tracey Minkin



1 of 9 Photo: Stephen DeVries

Gem on the Gulf

It's no coincidence that Ocean Springs calls itself "the city of discovery." What French explorers settled in 1699 remains every bit a revelation today: a quirky gem for art lovers and a culinary destination with more than 100 restaurants, many of which line the streets in the tiny historic district.

Colorful and sophisticated, the community is filled with folks who stood by each other after Hurricane Katrina, helping their neighbors rebuild. The result is an Ocean Springs that's even more beautiful than the one nature took away, and more vital than ever.





2 of 9 Photo: Courtesy of The Inn at Ocean Springs

Quality of Life

This city of 17,500 supports more than 150 independent shops and art galleries. Housing—from small cottages in the historic district to upscale homes along the waterfront—is on the upswing (but still affordable), and with low crime and great schools, the town is a magnet for families.

“When I cross into downtown Ocean Springs, I told my husband I had found the town we needed to move to,” says Roxanne Condrey, who purchased a historic cottage here and opened The Inn at Ocean Springs (pictured left).

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Local Spirit

Ocean Springs draws vacationers with a year-round string of art, music, and food festivals. It’s also home to the Anderson family, whose Shearwater Pottery lures collectors to its rustic studios on the water, and whose creative legacy is honored by the gemlike Walter Anderson Museum of Art, right in the heart of town.

But perhaps the spirit of Ocean Springs is most obvious at its beach, where a new playground features a large, whimsical ship that celebrates the town’s founding by those maritime explorers. As the day winds down, kids continue to play on the playground while a shrimp boat passes by on its way to local chefs, and two brown pelicans, wild and wheeling, dive for their own dinner.

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Why We Love It: The Art and Music

From galleries like Hillyer House, which features more than 50 local artists, to the funky Art House cooperative housed in a ramshackle red cottage, Ocean Springs puts art at the center of its economy.

And when it comes to music, yes, Elvis hung out here, and the live music continues to rock and roll, with Government Street as its epicenter. There’s live music nearly every night, with top spots including Mosaic Tapas Restaurant, the courtyard at Leo’s Wood Fired Pizza, and Government Street Grocery.

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Why We Love It: Gulf Islands National Seashore

America’s largest national seashore practically surrounds Ocean Springs. On the mainland, the Davis Bayou Area is great for birding and spotting armadillos. Offshore, a seasonal ferry runs from nearby Gulfport to West Ship Island, which offers quiet, bone-white beaches.

For more exploration, South Coast Paddling Company offers trips along the Pascagoula River (pictured left) and through Davis and Old Fort bayous.

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The Essentials: Beaches

A 20-minute stroll front downtown, Front Beach gently arcs from Biloxi Bridge to the Ocean Springs harbor. With a fishing pier, a playground, and views of the Gulf Islands, this beach is a true community destination.

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The Essentials: Main Street

Lined with live oaks, Washington Avenue hums with busy shops and restaurants. Realizations is devoted to the work of local artist Walter Anderson and his family, and The Pink Rooster carries some of the best locally made jewelry. Grab a sweet energy boost at the charming French Kiss Pastries (pictured left).

8 of 9 Photo: Stephen DeVries

The Essentials: Restaurants

Vestige restaurant leads with innovative local catch, like panko-crusted red snapper, while Aunt Jenny's Catfish Restaurant skillfully serves family-style, all-you-can-eat catfish. The Shed BBQ & Blues Joint (pictured left) is *the* spot for pulled pork.

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9 of 9 Photo: Courtesy of Front Beach Cottages

Where to Stay

The pastel-hued Front Beach Cottages (pictured left) are like a luxurious mini art colony, with private patios, hammocks, and kitchenettes. Rates start at \$95; 228-215-0969 or fronbeachcottages.com.

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