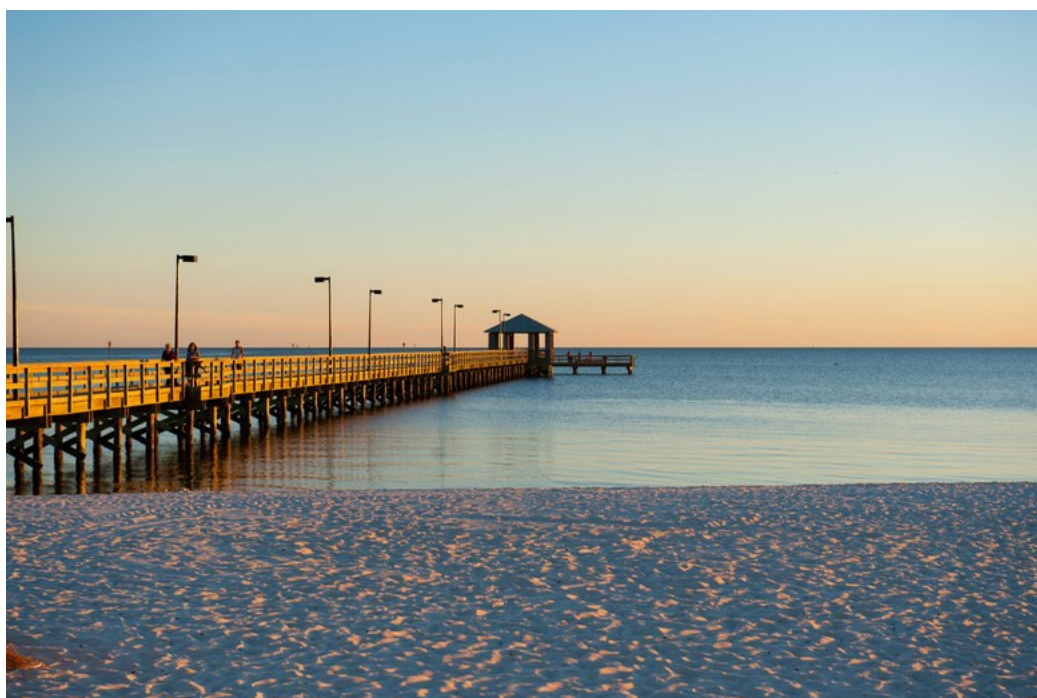




LIVING > TRAVEL

A Summer Road Trip Along the Mississippi Gulf Coast

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A pier on the Mississippi Gulf Coast
Photo: Alamy



William Faulkner once said, “To understand the world, you must first understand a place like Mississippi.” It is a complex state, that’s certain. Up north, there’s Oxford, where literati, James Beard chefs, and students buzz about the square. Nearby snakes the Blues Trail, where towns like Clarksdale and Indianola dot the floodplains of the Delta. And there’s the Gulf Coast of the state, spanning 62 miles—26 of which are a swath of sugar-sand beaches. Decimated by Hurricane Katrina, this area is coming back to life with a burgeoning food scene and a new batch of coastal artists who’ve followed in the footsteps of visionaries such as Richmond Barthé and Dusti Bongé.

Jessie Zenor and Kait Sukiennik, the impossibly cool duo behind the Greenhouse on Porter in Ocean Springs, are paving the way for a reinvented Mississippi. “We are coming together to correct our downfalls and beginning to talk about how we can

help each other and help others,” says Sukiennik. She adds that the people in this state are realizing they don’t have to fit into the stereotype of what Mississippi is supposed to be. “More and more, people are seeking out Mississippi, specifically the coast, as a vacation spot. I’m not going to lie, it still surprises me.”

Especially as a tourist destination, the Mississippi Gulf Coast is still unknown to many. But the region is slowly becoming a hotbed for art, music, and style. The Hamptons this is not—and that suits visitors just fine. The small towns are perfectly arranged along the coastline, making it easy to visit each in one day—though a long weekend is ideal.

Here, a few splendid towns along the Mississippi Gulf Coast.

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Bay St. Louis Harbor at sunset
Photo: Courtesy of Ellis Anderson



Bay St. Louis

About an hour’s drive from New Orleans, Bay St. Louis offers a second home for many New Orleanians seeking respite from the sweltering summer heat and a community for the creative-minded. The utterly charming Old Town area is void of sprawling condos or chains and instead is lined with a smattering of beach bars, high-end restaurants, galleries, and boutiques. Brunch at Lulu’s on Main is an essential stop. Helmed by Nancy Moynan, an alumna of the venerable Commander’s Palace, Lulu’s menu showcases a positively lovely redfish Florentine alongside a rich grillades and grits. The restaurant is home to an in-house boutique, where rooms are chockablock with everything from kitchen gadgets to jewelry. Come evening, the Sycamore House is best appreciated on the patio—shaded by mature oaks, it’s a breezy setting for cocktails and fine food.



Sycamore House

Photo: Ellis Anderson



Pass Christian

It's here comedian and actress Tig Notaro describes in her show *One Mississippi*. Notaro was born and lived in Pass Christian until her early childhood, and it is where she married actress Stephanie Allynne in 2015. It's easy to see why: Pass Christian offers some of the prettiest beaches with fewer crowds, set against a backdrop of palatial columned homes. Upholding its reputation for the written word, Pass Christian Books occupies a stylish space it shares with Cat Island Coffeehouse. It's a marriage of literature and caffeine, where guests sip lattes on the porch overlooking the Gulf of Mexico. The second-floor "Mississippi Loft" pays homage to the state's authors—an impressive collection—including Notaro.



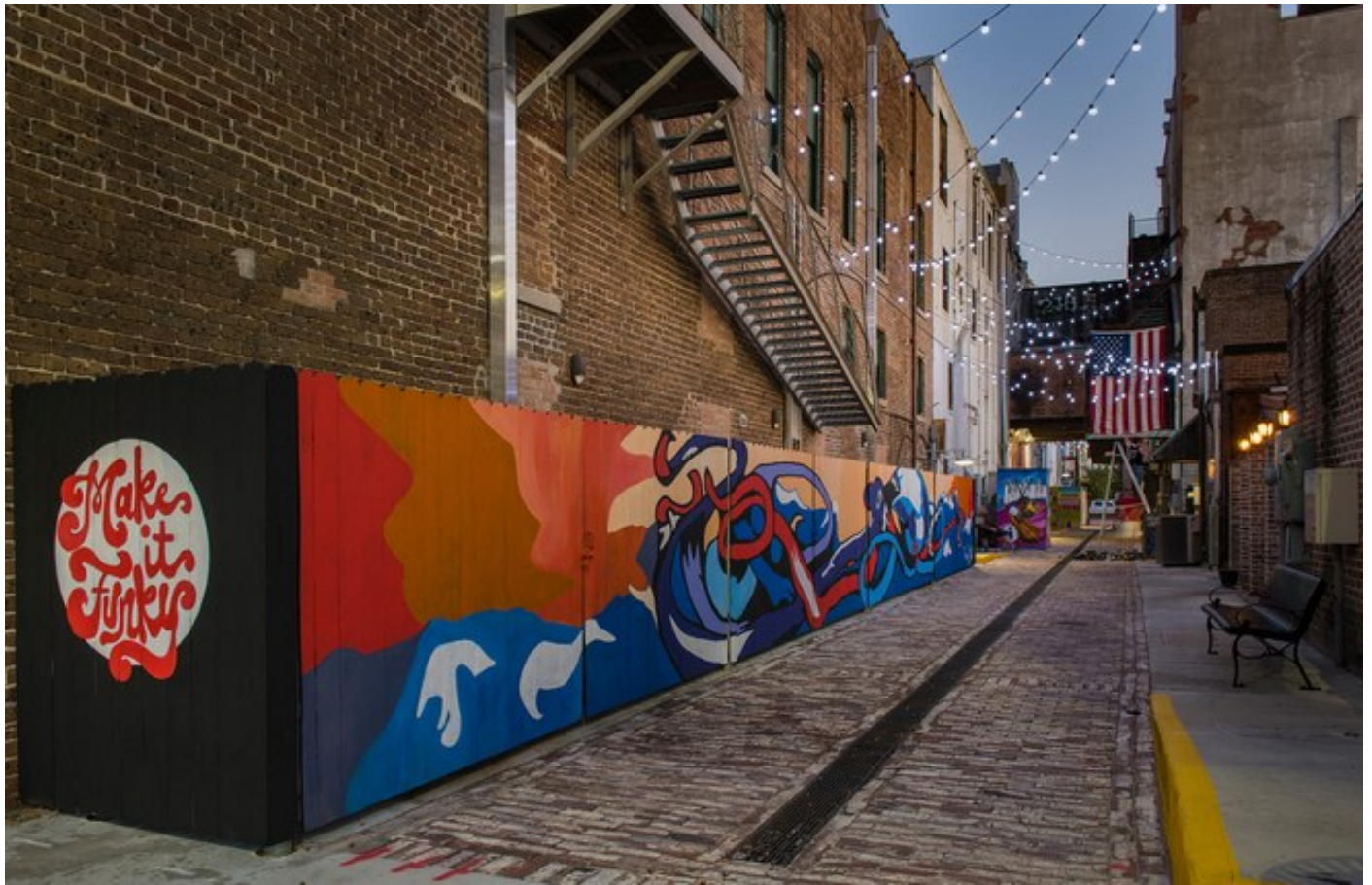
Gulfport Beach

Photo: Tate K. Nations / Courtesy of The Mississippi Development Authority



Gulfport

This city is having a serious comeback moment. The historic Markham Hotel is being rebuilt, and there's a bounty of cool, hip new businesses. One gem in particular is Fishbone Alley: a funky destination that backs up to a handful of restaurants and bars, boasting original local art along the buildings. Post-stroll, tuck into Trout Meunière Amandine and sip a cocktail on the sprawling front porch of The Chimneys.



Fishbone Alley

Photo: Courtesy of Alex North



Biloxi

Post up at the White House Hotel in Biloxi and feel as if you've been plopped onto the set of *Gone With the Wind*. Opened in the late 1800s, the hotel has been fully restored to its glory days and feels built for cocktail sipping on the terrace. While the property is historic, rooms are modern and stylish. Biloxi's not without an art scene: The newly minted Rue Magnolia Arts District is home to the Radish Loft 2, Gallery 782, the Dusti Bongé Art Foundation, and the Almost Circle Gallery. And the eye-catching Ohr-O'Keefe Museum of Art was designed by famed architect Frank Gehry and dedicated to the ceramics of George E. Ohr, the self-proclaimed "mad potter of Biloxi."



The White House Hotel
Photo: Courtesy of MGC Regional CVB



Ocean Springs

This is the kind of place you visit and then start perusing the local real-estate section. Dripping with charm, the colorful cottages are shaded by live oak trees, and residents bike through the bustling downtown, filling cloth bags with produce from the farmers' market. An artist's town at heart, Ocean Springs is home to the famed Walter Anderson Museum of Art and Shearwater Pottery. The Anderson family is celebrated just about everywhere, including the Roost hotel, a boutique property with just six rooms, each inspired by the Coast native. Dinner reservations should be made at Vestige: It's helmed by Ocean Springs native Alex Perry and his wife, Kumi Omori. They turn out a menu based on seasonal Mississippi fare. But no matter what you do, morning should start at The Greenhouse on Porter, set up in the plant-strewn building for which it's named. Zenor and Sukiennik bake big biscuits—like the kale and beet, heirloom tomato, and banana walnut—then slather them with a signature fluff—say a goat cheese or sorghum lemon variety. Zenor says, "Kait and I chose to start a business here because this is our home—this is where we want to be and this is the community we want to contribute to. I cannot imagine a place I would rather be . . . not even on the West Coast."