

# Adventures on South Padre Island: The Sweet Side of Texas

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At the tip of Texas on the Gulf of Mexico is South Padre Island, the longest barrier island in the world. The island is about 30 miles long, running north and south and only 1/2 mile across at its widest point, making it very easy to navigate. Cars share the road with dune buggies, bicycles and golf carts and are also allowed to drive right up on the beach. Families from Texas and Mexico have been visiting the island for generations.

With miles of pristine shorelines and emerald blue waters, the tropical, compact nature of the destination allows for easy access to the beach and bayside activities, dining, shopping, and entertainment and nature attractions.

## South Padre Island Attractions:

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The Beaches, of course! Beaches are accessible for disabled visitors with “Mobi-mats” from the boardwalk to make it easy for wheelchairs or strollers. Beach wheelchairs are available to check out for free at the City of South Padre Island Fire station. Even camping is allowed on several of the beaches.



Mobi-mats make it easier for strollers and wheelchairs to access the beach. Photo  
Melody Wren

Part of this island's focus is on waste mindfulness. There is a small admission charge to enter the larger beach access points, and the attendant gives visitors a garbage bag for trash. When leaving, if you present your garbage to the gatekeeper, you get your admission refunded. No litter of your own? Pick up someone else's and get a refund.

You can see the island on a sunset dinner cruise with [Ka Motion Sailing Adventure](#) hosted by Captain Sean Slovisky and first mate and wife, Letty. Daniel is the chief cook and spoiled the passengers with appetisers of fresh shrimp, followed by corn tortillas, choices of grilled flank steak or chicken and a variety of homemade salsas. The casual atmosphere-with laid-back sounds of the Beach Boys, Bob Marley and country music, and the easy chatting among our small group. It felt like a friend's dinner party, albeit on a 37-ft catamaran.



South Padre Island Sunset Sail – Photo Melody Wren

Take a kayak out with Eddie at [Parrot Eyes Watersports](#). You will set out on the narrow channels lined by houses and docks before setting out into the Laguna Madre Bay. It's a leisurely way to look at the island from a marine perspective.

The [Birding & Nature Center](#) shows why birders come to the island from all over the world. Take a guided tour as we did, with Javi Gonzalez, a Naturalist Educator who shares his knowledge about birds with a passion. Even though the Center has only been open for ten years, birds and birders alike flock there during the spring migrations from the Mississippi and Central U.S. Flyways. The boardwalk guides visitors through the fifty-acre wetlands lined by posted signs of birds you can expect to see.



Photo Melody Wren

Listed as one of the most fantastic birding places in the U.S., it is the convergence of two flyways for migration, the Mississippi flyway and the central flyway through the Center of the U.S. Both migration systems come in, bringing birds crossing the Gulf of Mexico. With their hormones kicking in, the birds wait for a good wind to catapult over the Gulf of Mexico, and they arrive on the island, see the Texas gulf coast, crash, then visit the Birding Center to eat and rest.

Next door is Sea Turtle Inc. Initially started in 1977 by islander Isla Foxletcher who is known as the 'turtle lady' since she launched the rescue and rehab in her home. Regularly giving turtle talks, she had large, blue turtle tanks in her backyard until it was moved into the large Center in 1999. Now holding 10-15 permanent resident turtles, the reasons they are there range from disease, boat and fishing-related injuries to going into shock from cold snaps. With a 90% release rate, they have a three-point mandate; education, rehabilitation and conservation. There is an informative talk every hour to uphold the original idea



Photo Melody Wren

Watching for dolphins on a 72-foot catamaran breezing through the Laguna Madre Bay with Osprey Cruises is another way to spend a few hours on a sunny afternoon. With only 12 passengers the Entertainment Director shares detailed information on the marine life. The Laguna Madre Bay is the third saltiest body of water in the world, after the Dead Sea, which accounts for the abundance of marine life, including the Atlantic Bottlenosed Dolphins which came close to the boat. Crew Dylan and Harley put out a shrimp net and pulled in what they caught to share with the passengers for observation only. It was quite interesting to see a squid fish that turned the water purple, a tiny Button squid, and a precious tiny starfish called a Serpent Starfish.



The faster you go, the more control you have! Photo Melody Wren

Hit the water with a Jet Ski Water tour with [Parrot Eyes Watersports](#). Guide Eddie Ruiz talked us through the finer points jetskiing with reassurance, reminding us constantly that driving *faster* would give us more control. I found that advice hard to believe but quickly learned he was right as his counsel guided me through monstrous waves. I drove my Jetski gently and slowly through channels “no wake”, zone which helped get the feel of the sensitive steering mechanism. I felt quite wobbly and unsure until I got into the bay and by the time we reached the zone where we could open it up, my hands were itching to press the throttle down. I was up to 25 and 30 mph and whooping and shouting. As we crossed the bay, parallel to the causeway from Port Isabel, my fears resurfaced as the waves appeared enormous. But then Eddie’s voice rang in my ears “*the faster you go, the more control you*

have," so I opened it back up and regained control. When my daughter had her turn, she was thrilled that dolphins swam beside her as she manoeuvred her way through the water. Jet Skiing is a wonderful way to see the island from a totally different angle.



Photo Melody Wren

Creative hours on the beach works for any age, so try a sandcastle lesson with [Sandy Feet](#). Jose Sanchez has been teaching sandcastle sculpture for two years after training under Lucinda Wierenga. Lucinda originally came to South Padre Island to teach high school, but once she discovered the beach, she started a business teaching sandcastle instruction in the 1980s. She now travels the world competing in sand sculpture competitions. South Padre Island is known as the sandcastle centre of the world. Families, corporations, school groups and tour groups all hire Jose to teach the art of building sandcastles. Working

through the methods, with large buckets and spades, much of the process is based on science. The finishing touches include spires, stairs and archways are done with a variety of tools, including pastry knives, straws, skewers, and paintbrushes.

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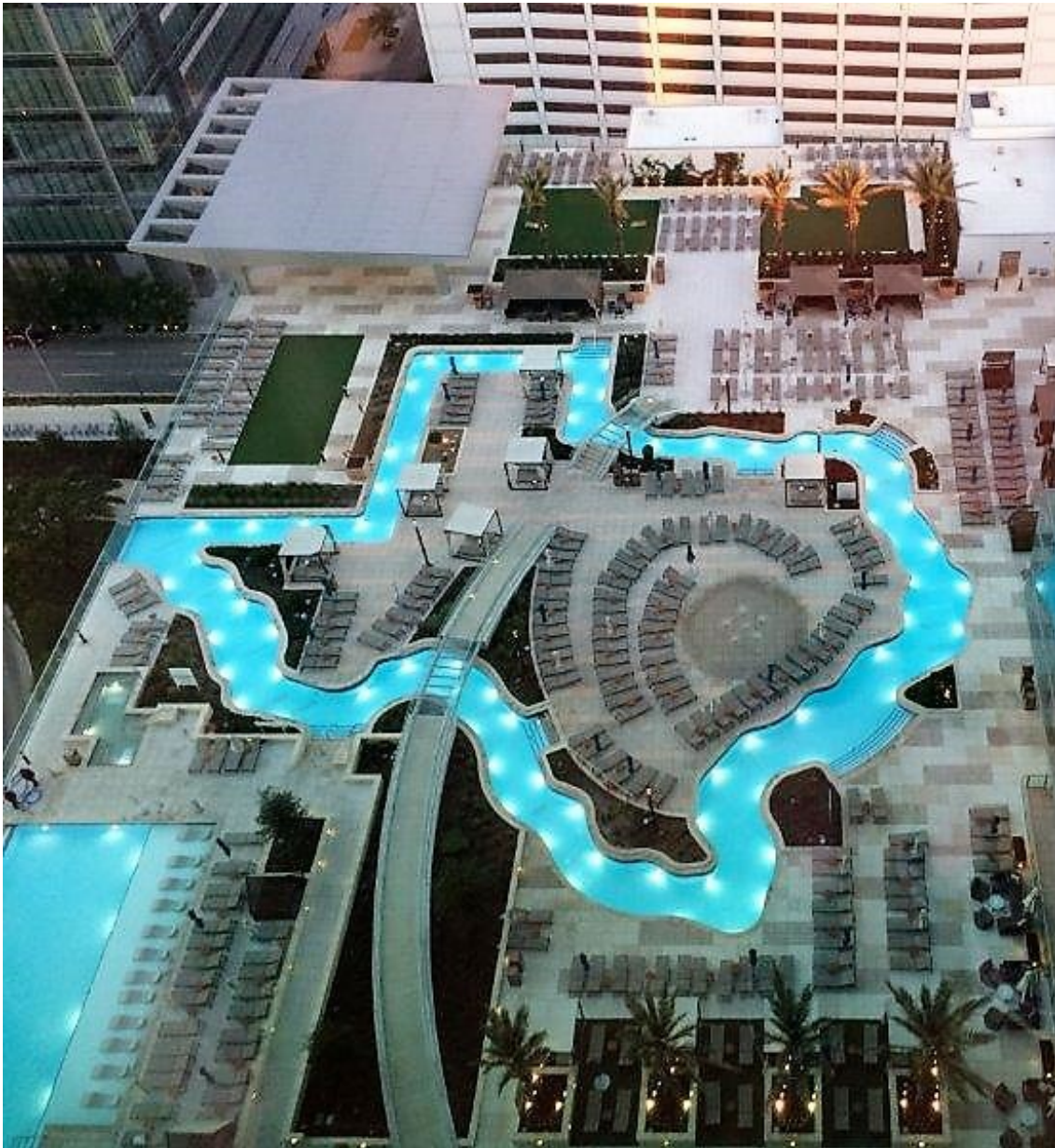




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About The Author

## Melody Wren

Melody is an Ontario based travel writer who believes travel stories are meant to encourage and inspire and considers her age (over 60) a gift in her journeys, bringing wisdom, experience, humour and a major 'if not now, when' attitude to her writing. A formerly nervous traveller, experiential travel has helped her conquer fears as she snorkelled through the Galapagos islands, glacier trekked in the Northwest Passage, danced around a fire in Africa, learned how to make the perfect tiramisu in Florence, kayaked amongst spawning salmon in Ontario, snow-shoed in Colorado, and sailed in the British Virgin Islands . Her work appears in Canadian Yachting Magazine, Canadian Jewish News, The Toronto Star, Kitchener Waterloo Record, Caribbean Beat Magazine, Cottage Life Magazine, Waypoints Global, Active Over 50, and Inspired Seniors.

