



## *Sand, surf and seafood on* **SOUTH PADRE**

Texas's South Padre Island shows a mother-daughter duo things they didn't know about themselves.

BY MELODY WREN

**T**HE BRIEF FOR A MOTHER-DAUGHTER holiday was simple: Somewhere hot with beaches and watersports. It would be an escape for my daughter, Sara, and a reconnection for both of us as we rarely get dedicated time together.

When we heard about South Padre Island, we knew it would fit. A barrier island off the Gulf Coast of Texas? How did we not know about it?

Asking for a rental car with a GPS at Brownsville Airport made the agent smile.

"You won't get lost, honey."

She was right. Forty-eight kilometres long, but just under one kilometre wide, the island is easy to explore. Dune buggies, bicycles, golf carts and cars all share the main street.

We signed up for a Jet Ski tour of the island, imagining ourselves clinging to a driver. The reality scared us both. A self-guided tour with us operating the Jet Ski, having never even been a passenger on one before. We struck superhero poses to work up the nerve. Eddie, our guide, reassured us that we could do it, as we took turns following him in the guide boat. Me first. I mimicked bravado for my daughter, dusting off a long-held mantra: "feel the fear and do it anyway."

With my hands gripped tight on the handles and my knees pressed into the console, I edged slowly into the "no wake zone" towards Laguna Madre Bay. I glanced ahead at Sara, who was the designated spotter in the guide boat. She made a gesture asking if I was okay. No way was I letting go of the handles to wave, so I tried to smile, but it was more of a grimace. Once out of the no wake zone, Eddie hit the gas. Uh oh. I remembered him say, "If you go faster, you get more control," so I cranked faster. I leaned back and the spray shot up behind me.

At first it was too fast, but then something shifted in me. I shouted "woohoo" and cranked it again. I was enjoying it – more than I thought possible. I hit huge waves and the Jet Ski bounced up and down. Spray washed over me, hair glued to my head.



South Padre Island Birding and Nature Center

Finally, exhausted, I gave the "quit" signal but Sara was watching something else. I kept gesturing when she excitedly pointed to several dolphins porpoising near me. Magical.

Afterwards, our legs still wobbling from exhilaration and exhaustion, we drove to Yummies Bistro to refuel. It was recommended by every local we asked. Shrimp tacos for Sara and a fresh salad for me.

Energized, we headed to the beach to meet up with José Sanchez from Sandy Feet Services. José, a sandcastle sculptor, put us to work immediately lugging pails of water from the sea. Then we dug with our hands, clawing at the sand until we stood knee-deep in our newly dug hole, gathering as much sand as we could for our creation.

Sara was the ace student. I took photos. José, was clear in his instructions: Use more artistic expression, take your time to be creative. By the end, our castle included spires, stairs, archways, doorways and architectural details created with plastic knives, paintbrushes, straws and skewers.

That evening we cleaned up at the hotel and, ravenous from being outside all day, we found the seafood-plentiful menu at the Painted Marlin Grille was exactly what we were looking for.

The next morning, we walked to the South Padre Island Birding and Nature Center with the intention of having just a brief look. Instead, we experienced a fascinating guided tour with Javi Gonzalez, the center's naturalist educator. We learned that the island is located



at the convergence of two bird migration paths, so we were in the company of some serious birders and some gorgeous birds.

I related most to the beautiful female green heron who rearranges the male's haphazard efforts to build a tidy nest of twigs. We also spotted several tri-colour herons, as well as a pair of striking roseate spoonbills. The Center took us completely by surprise and we spent almost four hours there.

It, like so many other things we experienced on South Padre Island, reminded us once more to be more open to new activities. **CT**

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## *When You Go*

### **GET AROUND:**

There's truly no need for a GPS on South Padre Island which features one long thoroughfare and side streets. Those who want to go car-free can take advantage of **Island Metro**, a free shuttle service. View the schedule and route map online.

### **WHAT TO EAT:**

Find some time to visit **Pier 19**, a favourite with islanders and tourists, the water view is a draw, as is the enormous menu filled with fresh local fish. Fresh, local and lots of seafood can be found at **Yummies**

# SO RELAXING.

## SO PADRE

