



JULY/AUGUST 2018

Alabama

JOURNEY

THE MAGAZINE FOR AAA MEMBERS



take
a **bite**
out of
shark
week

Explore ocean life along
Alabama's Gulf Coast



Top gear for your
summer travels

Tour the World's
Longest Yard Sale

Bhutan's surprising
road signs

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Kids of all ages can encounter creatures of the sea during Shark Week on Alabama's Gulf Coast.

By Cynthia J. Drake

Big Spoon CREAMERY

ON THE COVER

Dive into Shark Week on Alabama's Gulf Coast.

Happy staff at Big Spoon Creamery serve scoops with a smile. Read more on **page 14.**



TODD HELZER



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Gulf State Park
(251) 948-7275
alapark.com
/gulf-state-park

A DAY AT

GULF STATE PARK

There's no denying the appeal of Gulf State Park: 3.5 gorgeous miles of sugar sand beaches. But that's just the start. Explore the 6,180-acre property on foot, bike, kayak, or golf cart. Bring comfy shoes and a swimsuit for an action-packed day. —L.B.

➤ **8 a.m.** Start the morning with a chicken biscuit or a breakfast burger from **Southern Grind Coffee House** in Orange Beach.

➤ **8:30 a.m.** Cast your way to the quarter-mile fishing pier, the second longest in the Gulf, where anglers have pulled in sailfish. \$4 to visit, \$9 to fish, plus license; rental rods available. Or swing over to **The Refuge**, the park's 18-hole golf course. Adult admission, \$27.50.

➤ **11 a.m.** Head to the beach. Contact **Ike's Beach Service** (251-948-3757; ikesbeachservice.com) to rent chairs, umbrellas, and volleyball gear. Sign up for a parasail trip (\$75), if you dare. Grab lunch at the **Beach Pavilion's** concession stand, where you'll find hot showers, too. Parking, \$6.

➤ **2 p.m.** Paddle a guided **Lake Shelby** kayak trip. Reservations required through the park; several times a week. \$20.

➤ **4 p.m.** A **Segway** tour lets you roll through marshes, oak hammocks, and pine forests on a 25-mile trail system. \$75 per person.

➤ **6:30 p.m.** Dine with your toes in the sand at **The Gulf**, an outdoor restaurant built from colorful shipping containers. Order shrimp street tacos or the massive grouper sandwich.





shark tales

A black silhouette of a shark is swimming horizontally across the middle of the page. The shark's dorsal fin and tail are highlighted in red. The background is a dark teal color with a pattern of small white specks, suggesting an underwater environment.

Get kids hooked on the denizens of the deep during Shark Week on Alabama's Gulf Coast

By Cynthia J. Drake | Illustrations by Lori Anderson

Eva Pendley has been fascinated by sharks ever since she was a toddler. These days, she regularly gives talks about sharks to school groups through her part-time job with Marine Science Adventures. Her love of sharks runs deep. For her 16th birthday last September, she went shark cage diving off Cape Cod, where she went eye to eye with a mako shark.

The teen from Foley is not alone in her interest. Avid fans of the marine predators flock to the Discovery Channel for its annual Shark Week, the highly rated programming block that celebrates its 30th anniversary this year.

Alabama has its own version of the annual celebration. Gulf State Park will hold its second annual Shark Week on July 23-27. Through educational displays, games, crafts, and live streaming of the Discovery Channel, kids of all ages can learn about sharks and the important role they play in the ocean ecosystem.



family fin time

Have fun with these itineraries, one to fit each age group, but feel free to mix and match activities. Visit gulfshores.com for pricing and more information.



fish for tots

Try an **open-air helicopter tour**. The Beach Tour, recommended for families with small children, skims the coastline and on a clear day gives you a peek at the rays and other fish that swim near the beach. orangebeachhelicopters.com.

Pay a visit to the **Alabama Gulf Coast Zoo**, called "the little zoo that could," which features six animal encounters and a petting zoo. Cuddle with kangaroos and lemurs, and touch sloths, reptiles, and tamanduas (a type of anteater). alabamagulfcoastzoo.org.

Drive north about 25 miles to Summerdale to see alligators at **Alligator Alley**, a sanctuary and home to the reptiles that were formerly "nuisance gators."

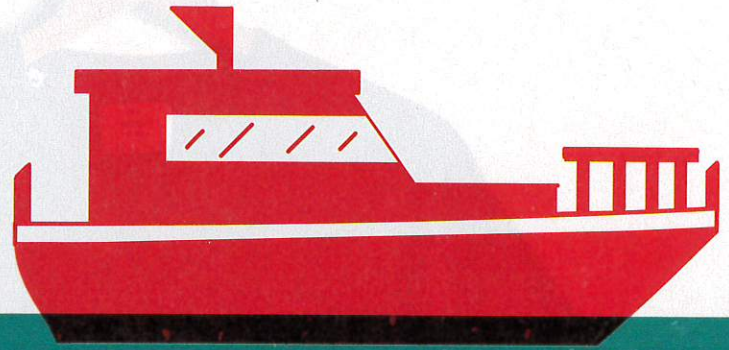
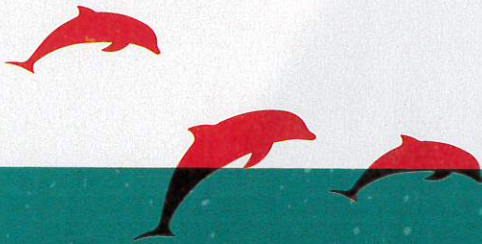
fins for teens

Head to the **Gulf State Park Nature Center**, which offers dozens of scheduled weekly enrichment activities and tours. A guided pier walk on the **Gulf State Park Fishing Pier** with one of the naturalists is a great option—you don't have to go any farther than the 1,500-foot-long structure to see sharks in their natural habitat. You might see species such as bull sharks, spinner sharks, and black tips awaiting snacks from local anglers. Go **fishing** off the pier. Purchase a fishing license online or at the pier. All necessary fishing gear is available to rent, making it easy for families and first-timers. alapark.com/gulf-state-park-nature-center.

Hike, bike, or take a Segway tour of the Hugh S. Branyon Backcountry Trail. The Segway trip covers about 10 miles of swampland. If you're lucky, you might spot local celebrity alligator Lefty and her babies. coastalsegwayadventures.com.

Visit the Bon Secour National Wildlife Refuge, where kids ages 4 and older can borrow a nature pack to bring on a family hike. The packs include binoculars, field guides, and other tools for learning about birds and other species you might encounter. fws.gov/refuge/bon_secour.

Look for **dolphins** on one of the many local cruises (Blue Dolphin Cruises, Cetacean Cruises, or Sailaway Charters). These graceful creatures seem to make their appearance whenever shrimp nets are present, happily frolicking in the wake of your boat. Don't worry; vessels are prohibited from baiting dolphins.



sharks for young adults

State park naturalists lead a morning **guided beach walk** to educate visitors about the coastal ecosystem. In April, the Gulf Shores and Orange Beach area completed a \$15 million beach revitalization project, changing the way visitors can access and interact with the beachfront, including a new boardwalk that makes it easy to walk along the white sand beach. alapark.com/gulf-state-park-nature-center.

Take the **ferry** (mobilebayferry.com) from Fort Morgan out to the **Dauphin Island Sea Lab** (disl.org), the marine education and research hub for Alabama, where you can learn more about the native marine life. The **Estuarium** is an aquarium that is open to the public and features four Alabama coastal habitats, plus an outdoor touch tank.



Cynthia J. Drake is an Austin, Texas-based travel writer who grew up near Michigan's shark-free Great Lakes.