

# Padre Island

NATIONAL SEASHORE  
TEXAS

## **AN ISLAND BUILT BY WAVES AND WINDS**

Stretching for 182 kilometers (113 miles) along the Texas gulf coast from Corpus Christi on the north almost to Mexico on the south, the island ranges in width from about 100 meters (a few hundred yards) to about 5 kilometers (3 miles). It is separated from the mainland by Laguna Madre, a shallow body of water with a maximum width of 16 kilometers (10 miles). At each end of the island, some development has been completed by the counties and individuals. The park boundaries encompass the undeveloped central part of the island, 129.6 kilometers (80.5 miles) long.

From gulf to lagoon, the island consists of a wide, clean beach of sand that in places gives way to small shells; next an alignment of dunes paralleling the shore; then grassy flats, broken here and there by smaller dunes; and last a vaguely defined area of sand dunes and mud-flats that merges with the waters of the lagoon.

Padre is a textbook example of a barrier island, built by wave action and crowned by wind-formed dunes. Winds and strong tides continually change the appearance of the island. In some places, dunes move imperceptibly over the grassy flats before the force of prevailing winds off the gulf; in others, they have become stabilized by the binding roots of grasses and shrubs—stabilized until the inevitable day that hurricane winds and great tides break through the vegetation and start them moving again.

Plants, beset by strong winds and smothering sand, struggle for survival. On the outer dunes, such shrubs as senna and croton fringe the rounded outlines, and railroad vine reaches 6 meters (20 feet) and more across the sand, blending its purple blossoms with the yellow flowers of evening-primrose. On the flats of the island's interior, grasses nod before the sea breezes. Nearer the lagoon, pure stands of sesuvium form islands of vegetation where they have stabilized small dunes amid the moving sands.

More than 350 species of birds are year-round residents or seasonal visitors. Common along the gulf beach are the great blue herons, sand-erlings, and several species of gulls and terns. On the grassy flats behind the dunes are meadowlarks, marsh hawks, an occasional great horned owl, and—in winter—sandhill cranes. Many thousands of ducks and geese winter in the area.

Among the mammals are coyotes, gophers, blacktailed jackrabbits, Mexican freetail bats, and several species of rodents. And the reptiles include marine loggerhead turtles, light-gray keeled earless lizards, bull snakes, coachwhips, garter snakes, and western diamondback rattlesnakes.

Also present in or near the water are blue and ghost crabs, cabbagehead and portuguese man-of-war jellyfishes, gooseneck barnacles that float in on driftwood, and many species of fish that can be caught in the surf.

## **EARLY VISITORS**

In 1519, Alfonso Alvarez de Pineda discovered and charted the island on behalf of Governor Garay of Jamaica. First named Las Islas Blancas—the White Islands—the long island became infamous as a graveyard for ships driven onto this shore by storms out of the Gulf of Mexico. The best known of these disasters occurred in 1553, when a 20-ship Spanish treasure fleet ran into a hurricane and many of the galleons broke up on the island. Of some 300 survivors of the storm, only two survived the fierce Karankawa Indian attacks and hardships of the march down the coast to Mexico.

About 1800, Padre Nicholas Balli, for whom the island was later named, received a Spanish land grant that included Padre Island. With his nephew, Juan Jose Balli, he founded the Santa Cruz Ranch. Parts of the Dunn Ranch, established in 1879, were still used as collecting points for cattle during annual roundups until December 1970, when grazing was terminated in the national seashore.



## REGULATIONS

The disturbance or removal of any artifacts of archeological, historical, or scientific importance is prohibited by the Antiquities Act of 1906. Materials washed in by the recurring tides, however, that do not fall into these categories may be collected as beachcomber items.

**Metal Detectors** Federal regulations prohibit use of these devices.

**Plants and Animals** Your cooperation is required if the delicate ecological balance at Padre Island is to be maintained. All plants and animals within the park are therefore protected by Federal law. Please refrain from disturbing them in any way.

**Litter** Your degree of enjoyment is directly related to the park's cleanliness. Do your part by depositing your trash, including bottle caps, in the containers or taking it with you when you leave.

**Boating** Within the park's boundaries, boats must be operated under the statutory rules of the road promulgated by Congress for safe boat operation and be equipped in accordance with U.S. Coast Guard regulations. The U.S. Coast and Geodetic Survey can provide you with charts that show water depths near the island so that you may avoid shoals. Write to: Environmental Science Services Administration, Washington Science Center, Rockville, MD 20852.

**Water Skiing** Water skiers must wear approved flotation gear and be towed by a boat that has an observer as well as an operator on board.

**Hunting** The discharge of firearms and hunting are not allowed in the park, except on the waters of the Laguna Madre during the open season on certain waterfowl as prescribed by State and Federal agencies. No hunting is allowed on land.

**Vehicles** Driving vehicles on dunes and in grasslands is strictly prohibited. All vehicles must remain on established roads and the beaches that are open to vehicular traffic. Towing people on surfboards, skimboards, slides, and any similar device behind a vehicle is also not allowed.

**Camping** Tenting or camping is not allowed on, in, or behind the sand dunes. If camping on the beach, tents must be placed seaward of the sand dunes and vegetation.

**Fires** Fires are permitted on the beach providing they are not within 15 meters (50 feet) of the vegetation of the dunes. All fires must be extinguished before leaving.

## SAFETY ADVICE

Please exercise individual caution during your visit by avoiding the following hazards:

—**Overexposure to the sun.** Use discretion on the time that you are exposed to the sun on the beach. Suntan lotion and hats are helpful.

—**Swimming.** Keep a careful watch on children playing in the surf. Do not swim alone or away from others.

—**Rattlesnakes.** Be alert when walking in grass or brushy areas and be especially careful at night. Snakes are present throughout the year.

—**Portuguese man-of-war jellyfish.** These creatures sometimes float in on the surf and wash onto the beach. Their sting is painful either in the water or on the beach. If you are stung, contact a park ranger or go to one of the first-aid stations in the county parks at the ends of the island. Do not rub the irritated areas.

—**Small stingrays** near shore in the gulf, the dorsal fin of hardhead catfish, and the occasional shark that may come close in to shore.

—**Fishing lines** in the water.

—**Getting your car stuck in the sand.** Do not park your car where the rising tide can engulf it. Carry a shovel and car jack to use if your car gets stuck.

—**Broken glass and boards with nails** that have been washed onto the beach. Wear shoes while hiking.

—**Vehicle traffic on the beach.** The sound of the surf may drown out the sound of approaching cars so be alert for them.

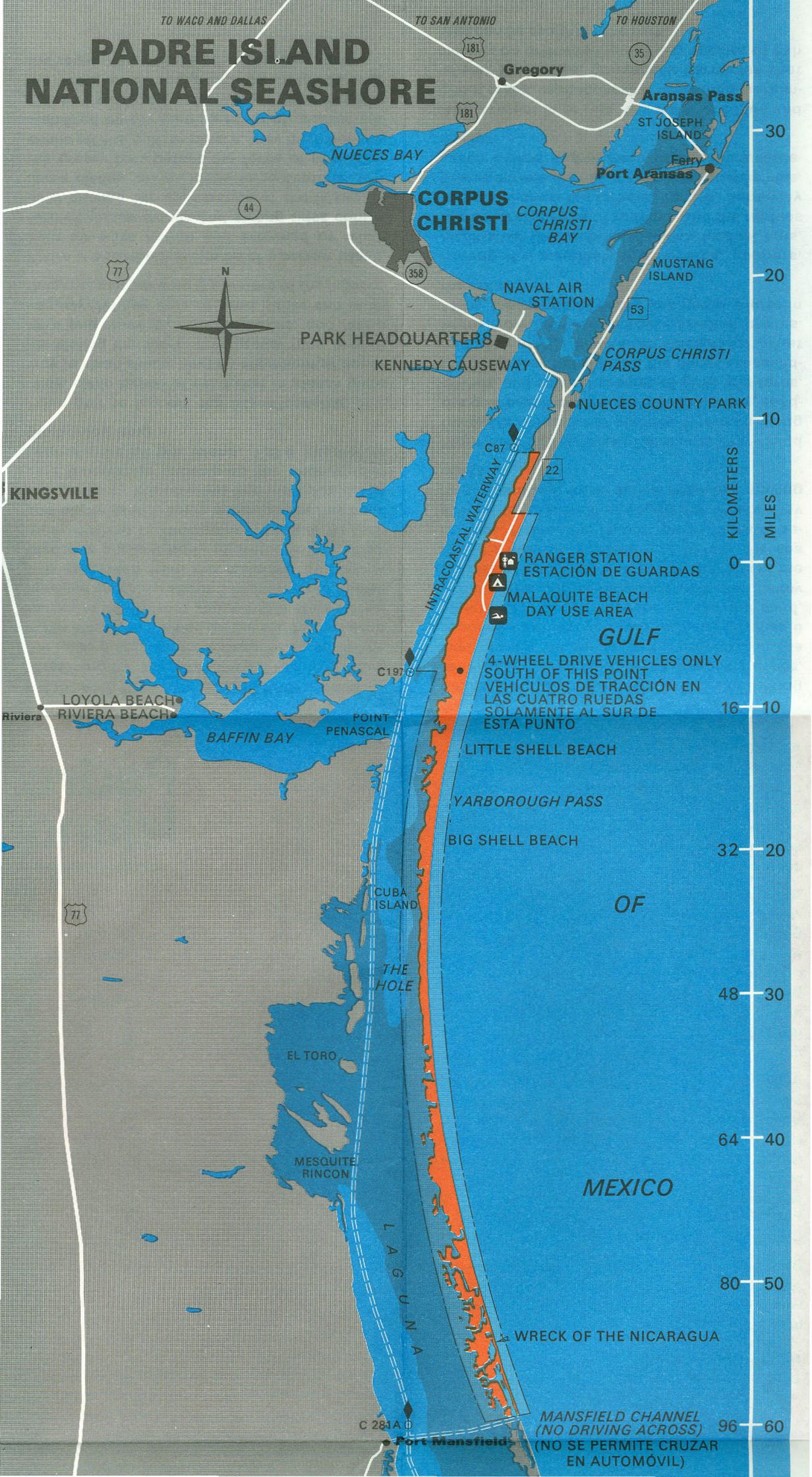
—**Drums** that occasionally wash ashore may contain hazardous chemicals. Please do not touch, open, or puncture the drums.

TO WACO AND DALLAS

TO SAN ANTONIO

TO HOUSTON

# PADRE ISLAND NATIONAL SEASHORE



**CORPUS CHRISTI**

PARK HEADQUARTERS

KENNEDY CAUSEWAY

NAVAL AIR STATION

CORPUS CHRISTI PASS

NUECES COUNTY PARK

INTRACOASTAL WATERWAY

RANGER STATION  
ESTACIÓN DE GUARDAS

MALAQUITE BEACH  
DAY USE AREA

GULF

4-WHEEL DRIVE VEHICLES ONLY  
SOUTH OF THIS POINT  
VEHÍCULOS DE TRACCIÓN EN  
LAS CUATRO RUEDAS  
SOLAMENTE AL SUR DE  
ESTA PUNTO

LITTLE SHELL BEACH

YARBOROUGH PASS

BIG SHELL BEACH

CUBA ISLAND

THE HOLE

EL TORO

MESQUITE RINCON

LAGUNA

WRECK OF THE NICARAGUA

C 281A 0

Port Mansfield

MANSFIELD CHANNEL  
(NO DRIVING ACROSS)  
(NO SE PERMITE CRUZAR  
EN AUTOMÓVIL)

KILOMETERS  
MILES

16 10

32 20

48 30

64 40

80 50

96 60

OF

MEXICO



KINGSVILLE

LOYOLA BEACH  
RIVIERA BEACH



Riviera

POINT PENASCAL

BAFFIN BAY

30

20

10

0

10

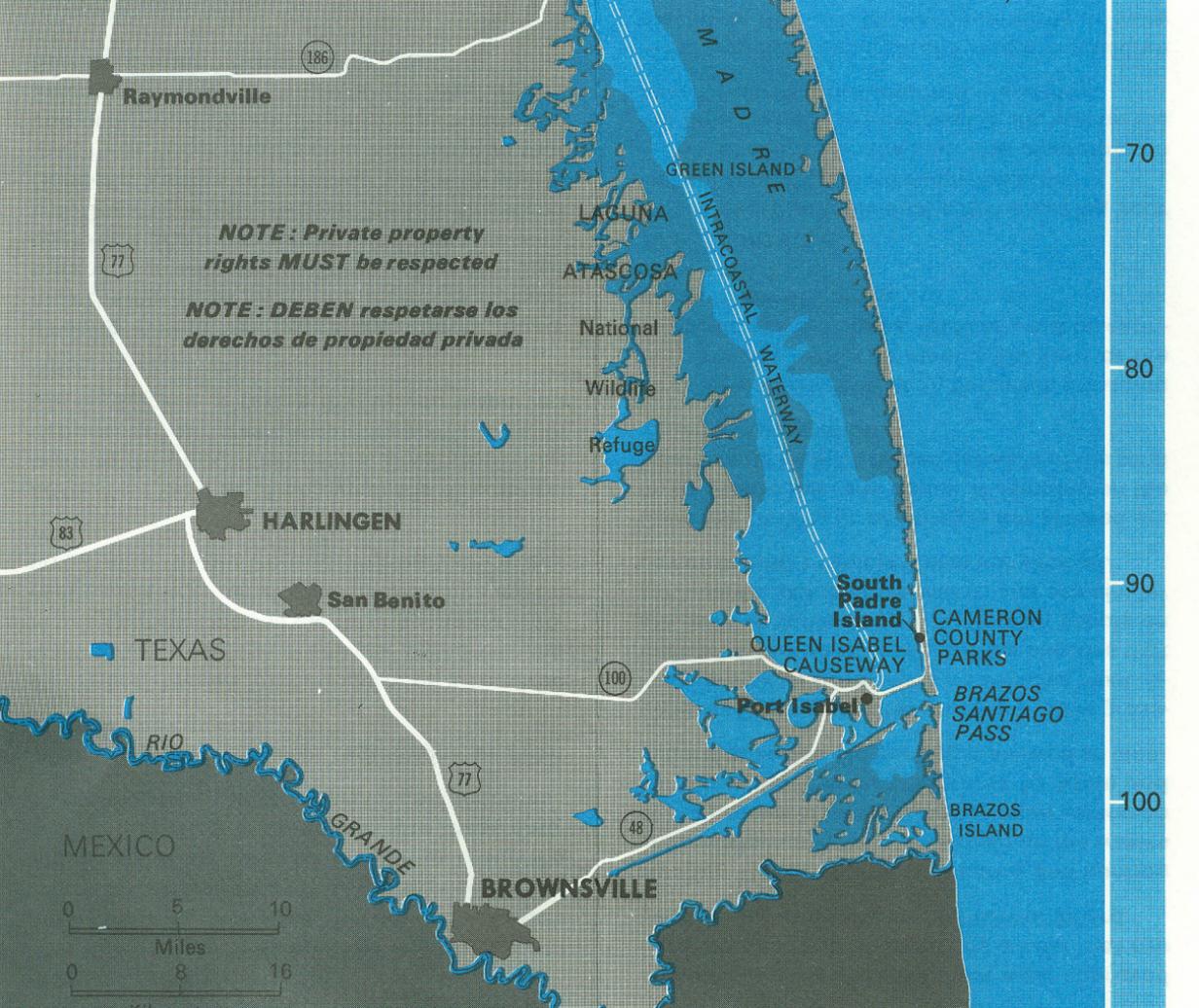
20

30

40

50

60



Raymondville

186

**NOTE: Private property rights MUST be respected**

**NOTE: DEBEN respetarse los derechos de propiedad privada**

77

GREEN ISLAND

LAGUNA

ATASCOSA

National  
Wildlife  
Refuge

M A T A M O R O S  
INTRACOSTAL WATERWAY

70

80

83

HARLINGEN

San Benito

TEXAS

South  
Padre  
Island

CAMERON  
COUNTY  
PARKS

QUEEN ISABEL  
CAUSEWAY

90

BRAZOS  
SANTIAGO  
PASS

Port Isabel

100

48

100

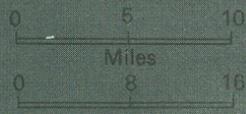
BRAZOS  
ISLAND

MEXICO

RIO

GRANDE

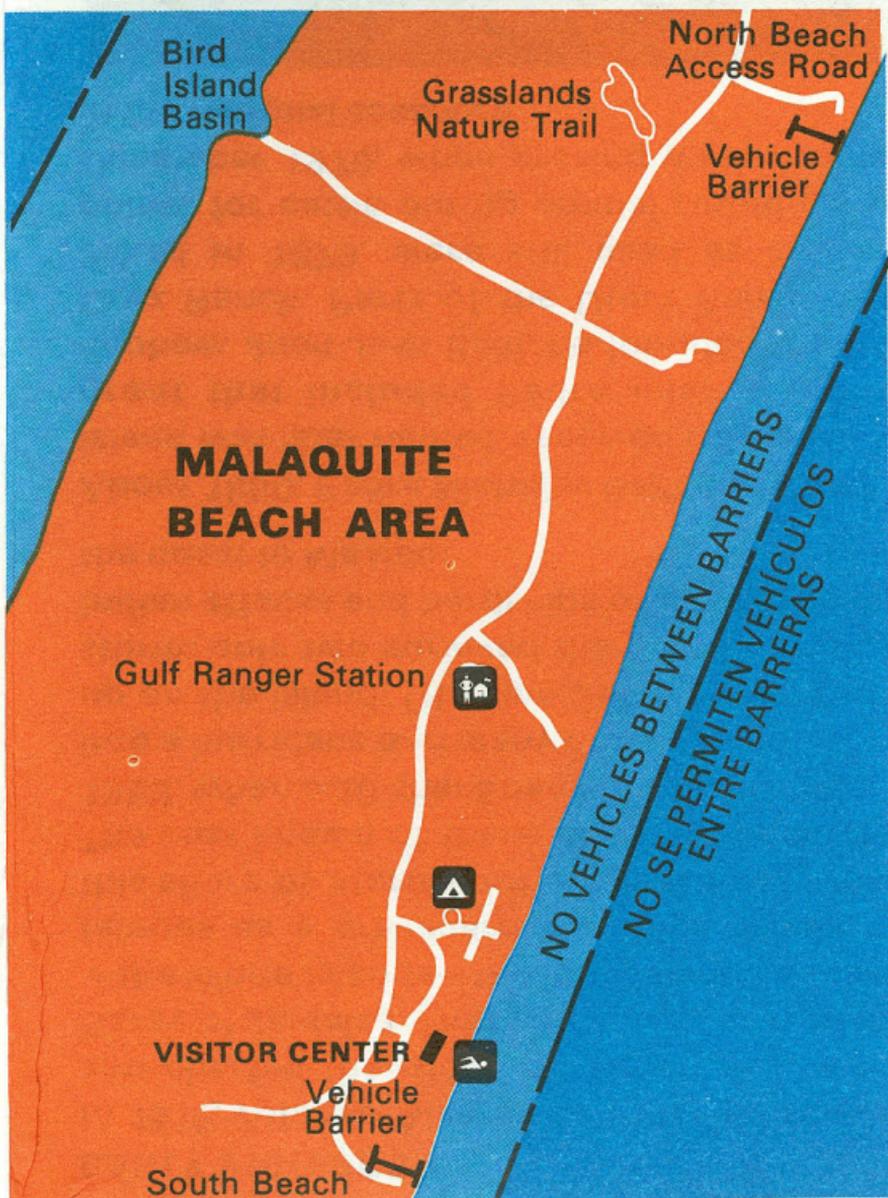
BROWNSVILLE



## WHAT TO DO

You can obtain information about the area at park headquarters in Corpus Christi and at the Malaquite Beach Visitor Center on the island.

**Road and Beach Driving** The entrance to Padre Island National Seashore is near the southern end of Park Road 22. You can drive a conventional car 23 kilometers (14 miles) south from the northern entrance. The first 13.7 kilometers



(8.5 miles) are on hard-surfaced road and the remaining 8.9 kilometers (5.5 miles) are on the beach. Further travel requires a 4-wheel drive vehicle as the sands are soft, intermixed with tiny shells, and will not support an ordinary passenger car. Mansfield Channel intersects the island and prevents a continuous trip along its entirety.

**Fishing** Game fish can be taken in accordance with Texas State regulations throughout the year in the Laguna Madre and the Gulf of Mexico. Speckled trout, redfish, black drum, croaker, and pompano are common throughout the year with "peaks" during the spring and fall. Sheephead are generally taken during the fall and winter. And sharks and rays are often caught in the surf throughout the year. A Texas fishing license is required.

**Swimming** The coastal waters of South Texas are warm enough for swimming most of the year. During January and February, however, water temperatures may fall to uncomfortable levels when cold fronts, "northers," pass through. When swimming, safety precautions should be taken. Be aware of dangerous undertows, especially when the waves are high. Please watch your children. Surfboards must not be used in designated swimming areas. Lifeguards are on duty at the Malaquite Beach swimming area during the summer months.

**Scuba Diving** The relatively shallow, murky water near the shore is not attractive to most swimmers using snorkel or scuba equipment. The best areas for this activity are near the Port Aransas jetties and the off-shore natural gas and oil platforms.

**Boating** Sailboating, power boating, and water skiing are popular recreational activities in the Laguna Madre. Bird Island Basin is an excellent jumping-off point for these sports. Launching or landing boats on the Gulf of Mexico side of the island is not permitted.

**Beach Walking and Hiking** We urge you to park your car and walk the beach looking at the marvels of the sea that continuously wash ashore. The part of Malaquite Beach that is closed to vehicles is an excellent place for beachcombing. You are free to hike over the island except in the sand dunes and areas fenced off for use by oil companies. There is no shade or shelter in the beach areas of the island. Water is available only at the developed areas. Inquire at the visitor center or the ranger station for current conditions before leaving for extended hikes.

## **COMMERCIAL TRANSPORTATION**

Commercial airlines and bus lines serve Corpus Christi and Brownsville where there are taxicabs and car rental agencies. There is no public transportation to the island.

## **ADMINISTRATION**

Padre Island National Seashore is administered by the National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior. A superintendent, whose address is 9405 S. Padre Island Dr., Corpus Christi, TX 78418, is in immediate charge. Telephone 512-937-2621.

## ACCOMMODATIONS

Motels and restaurants are located at both ends of the island and in Corpus Christi, Port Isabel, and the other communities along the approach highways. Picnic supplies and gasoline may be bought at both ends of the island and in nearby cities and towns.

A snack bar, gift shop, free showers, and beach rental equipment are available at Malaquite Beach during the summer months. Primitive tent camping and the use of 4-wheel drive recreational vehicles are permitted along the Gulf Beach and at Bird Island Basin along a designated section of the Laguna Madre. Campers using these areas must supply their own equipment and necessities, including drinking water.

A limited number of portable restrooms are available at these locations. At Malaquite Beach Campground, a paved campground with 40 sites, a fee is charged. Rinse-off showers, restrooms, a dump station, and picnic tables are provided. Hookups are not available. Similar facilities may be found nearby at Nueces County Park and Port Aransas County Park, and the Cameron County Park at South Padre Island.

Boating supplies and launching ramps are available along the John F. Kennedy Memorial Causeway, directly below the intracoastal waterway bridge.

**National Park Service**

**U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR**