



Visiting Mississippi's Barrier Islands



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Gulf Islands National Seashore protects incredible barrier islands, including over 55 miles of shoreline on the Mississippi Gulf Coast. Horn and Petit Bois Islands are designated wilderness areas. Maritime forest, marshes and meadows, freshwater ponds and lagoons, sea oats and sand dunes, and diverse wildlife await discovery. The barrier islands provide critical habitat for threatened and endangered species such as piping plovers. Protection and preservation for future generations is our mission.

Traveling to the Islands

The islands are accessible by boat only. A list of approved charter boat companies is available on our website www.nps.gov/guis and can also be mailed to you. Call 228-230-4100 for more information.

Ferries to West Ship Island are available March through October. Visit www.msshapisland.com or call Ship Island Excursions at 228-864-1014 to learn more.

Bringing your own boat?

Travel on a 20-foot or longer vessel. Inland water boats are not suitable for travel to the islands. Navigation charts #11372, 11373, and 11374 will help identify shoals, obstructions, and shallow water.

Tell family or friends on the mainland your destination (specific island and location), the dates you will leave and return, anyone accompanying you and who to contact if you are overdue. Assure they have the name and registration number of your boat, and where your vehicle and boat trailer will be parked.

Bring a marine VHF radio equipped with

channels 16, 22, and 23. Know how to use it. Bring another person that knows how to operate both the boat and the radio. If the boat breaks down, be prepared to call a towing service. Rangers will not tow disabled vessels.

Assure a wearable Type III life jacket is available for everyone on board. Have more than one type of signaling device. When signaling for help, wave something besides your arms.

The US Coast Guard provides information about boating rules and safety. Visit their website <http://www.uscgboating.org/> or call (800) 368-5647.

Anchoring

The government pier on Horn Island is closed to the public. Use the correct anchoring equipment for your type of boat. Boats too close to shore may run aground or be damaged by breaking surf when wind and tides change. Assure your boat is in deep water during this situation. Do not anchor in or allow propeller to drag through seagrass beds.

Emergencies

Know how to use your VHF marine radio. The US Coast Guard monitors channel 16 for emergencies. Cell phones and CB (Citizen Band) radios do not carry far over water.

When a shore station answers, tell them to call one of the following:

911

National Park Service dispatch (MS): 228-875-2211

US Coast Guard, Gulfport: 228-868-3743

US Coast Guard, Pascagoula: 228-760-5600

Be prepared to give your precise location and a description of your vessel. Signal for help with a red flag, flare or continuous horn. If a plane flies over, stand high, stretch out, and slowly raise and lower your arms.

Wilderness Areas

Horn and Petit Bois Islands are federally designated wilderness areas. According to the Wilderness Act of 1964, “A wilderness. . . is hereby recognized as an area where the earth and its community of life are untrammelled by man, where man himself is a visitor who does not remain.” and “land retaining its primeval character, . . . protected and managed so as to preserve its natural conditions and which. . . has outstanding opportunities for solitude.”

Though these special islands qualify for the highest levels of protection, this status does not make the islands invulnerable to damage. Thousands of visitors a year, more powerful than nature if they are careless, could threaten the islands’ wild character. You can help preserve the wilderness by visiting on the islands’ terms.

Plan Ahead and Prepare

Good planning keeps you safe and comfortable, and reduces your impact on the wilderness. Familiarize yourself with rules, laws, closed areas, and Leave No Trace Principles. Fishing requires a Mississippi saltwater fishing license. Hunting and firearms are prohibited.

Gulf Islands National Seashore does not provide shelter, restroom facilities, trash cans, drinkable water, or any visitor facilities on any barrier islands, with the exception of West Ship Island, where all of these are found seasonally. On Petit Bois, Horn, East Ship, and Cat Islands, pack in all

provisions, and pack them out as well as all trash and toilet paper, when you leave.

You will need:

- * Two gallons of water per day per person. Bring extra food and water in case of a delayed return.
- * Long-sleeved shirts and trousers to protect from sun and insects. Also bring clothes for extreme heat or cold, high winds and heavy rain, and a change of warm, dry clothing.
- * A hat, sunscreen, sunglasses, insect repellent, and mosquito netting.

Camp Softly

Camping is allowed on Cat, East Ship, Horn and Petit Bois, and Spoil (Sand) Islands year-round. Camping is not allowed on West Ship Island. Boaters may anchor in the water near West Ship, but must be off the pier and island between sunset and sunrise. Please respect private property on Cat Island.

Visit in small groups and avoid busy areas when camping. Camp only on flat beaches without plants or dunes and at least 200 feet from ponds and other water bodies. Camping on dune tops damages the plants that hold together the fragile dunes. Campsites must be separated by 1/10 mile and may not be used by more than 10 people at any one time. Groups of 10 or more campers need a free wilderness permit. Call 875-3962 to obtain a permit.

Insects are the least annoying on the islands’ tips, or where there are sea breezes. During stormy

weather, seek shelter on the lee (downwind) side of the woods. Extra long tent stakes are best for camping in sand.

Leave plants, rocks, animals, artifacts, sea turtle and dolphin parts as you find them. Driftwood may only be collected to build a fire and may not be removed from the island. Do not build structures, dig trenches, or alter campsites.

Respect the quality of the wilderness experience for others. Let nature’s sounds prevail by keeping loud voices and noises down.

Fires are permitted on the beach below the high tide line. Do not build a fire on the dunes or in wooded areas. Use only available driftwood; cutting firewood or hauling it from the woods is prohibited. Put out the fire with water and disperse ashes in the surf.

Travel Lightly

Stay on designated trails and walk in single file. The only official trails are the West Cross Island trail and the Ranger Station Trail on Horn Island. Generators and motorized equipment are not permitted on the islands. Motorized boats are prohibited from the inland ponds and lagoons.

Everything you bring to the islands must come back with you, including trash and used toilet paper. Securely store your food to prevent wildlife from eating it.

Properly dispose of what you can’t pack out. Human waste must be buried under at least six inches of sand, away from trails and 200 feet from freshwater ponds and other bodies of water. Wash yourself and your dishes using small amounts of biodegradable soap, at least 200 feet from water sources. Groups of more than ten (10) must pack out human waste in leak-proof containers (for example, a 5-gallon drum with tight-fitting lid).

Pets are not allowed on Horn or Petit Bois Island or the public swim beach on West Ship Island or inside Fort Massachusetts. Where pets are allowed, they must be leashed and controlled at all times. Pick up your pet’s waste and remove from the island. Or, leave your pets at home.

Areas of the islands may be closed during bird nesting seasons. Respect all breeding season closures on foot and in boats. Always observe wildlife from a distance. When observing, if the animal changes its behavior, you are too close. Feeding wild animals, including sea gulls and raccoons, is prohibited.