
Stop 11. Galveston

Arrival datetime: Tuesday April 16, 5:30PM
Sites visited: Jungle Gardens, LA, Galveston State Park
Accommodations: The Crystal Palace Resort
States traveled: Louisiana, Texas

We cruised to Scott Joplin tunes from our New Orleans tour company gift shop. Wildflowers still lined the highways until they were replaced by marshes, then bayous. Scraggly cattle grazed on a variety of pastoral settings, from wetlands to forests. We thought there may be some bulls but could not tell for sure because it seemed some cows had horns.

Using only the green colors on the map as a guide as to where might be an interesting place to stop, we made a short detour to Avery Island. On the island, there were only two destinations where the public was allowed, the Tabasco Factory and the Jungle Gardens. We skipped the factory, but the Jungle Garden gift shop was full of Tabasco product anyway. The Gardens themselves were a lovely relief from the marshy farms of the highway. We meandered through wildflowers, palms, azaleas just past peak, and a bamboo forest that reminded us of Maui. A large lake held man-made platforms for nesting egrets and herons. There must have been thousands of elegantly plumed water birds delivering branches and weeds to their mates who were feathering nests around white fluffy chicks.

Signs all around warned of the dangers of alligators. The marsh walk had to be cut short because the underbrush was too close for comfort.

We stopped the car for 10 minutes beside one bayou while we traced a slow-moving snout heading toward us on the surface of the water. Michael got out to take a picture. Jennifer saw flashes of the movie “Faces of Death.” There was one scene where a guy got out of a perfectly safe car to take a picture of a bear and the bear killed him. But the snout turned out to belong to a turtle. By



Find the Alligator (oops, Turtle).

one lagoon, we saw a two-foot long alligator curled up in a pose that made it look like porcelain. We were not afraid of it so our confidence was high as we entered the “Sunken Garden” section of the park, and came across a 3-4 foot long



Nesting Herons of Bird Country in the Jungle Gardens on Avery Island.

poisonous snake. It had a brown arrow-shaped head and diamond print skin, just as depicted in the poster we had seen in Arkansas. Jennifer jumped three feet in the air and managed to stay there for a few seconds before landing, enough time for the snake to slither into the underbrush. The slithering noise ended almost immediately so we knew it was still there. But it was so perfectly camouflaged in the underbrush, we could no longer see it. That walk was cut short as well.

We were driving the Creole Nature Trail, a National Scenic byway. But there was no place to get off and walk about. We tried a Rockefeller State Wildlife Refuge, but were turned back by a sign that you

needed some kind of permit from the State of Louisiana to even travel its roads. We arrived at a car ferry about 4:30PM and watched it go to the other side, already full of cars. Then we watched barges block its way back over the canal. We got to the other side about 5:00PM. Finally, we were driving with the Gulf at our side. But it was not as we had imagined. We had imagined tranquil blue water as in Clearwater and Tampa, the only other places from which we had seen the gulf. Instead, we saw muddy, choppy waves and oil rigs.

Our next National Park site was in San Antonio. To make the driving distance per day reasonable, we had selected a

halfway point between New Orleans and San Antonio. On the map, we had found a State Park on the Gulf of Mexico in Texas, Sea Rim State Park. On the local chamber of commerce Internet site, we had found then made reservations at a place called Sabine Pass Motel. But as we drew closer to our destination, we realized that any place as close to the oil refineries and pumps as we were could not be pristine, serene, clean, or even healthy. So we bypassed Sabine Pass and headed toward Galveston.

The Crystal Palace was the first place we came to, but given another shot, we would probably drive on. The place was in the middle of renovation and our room was down to the plaster in several places. But it was clean and comfortable. We were the only guests when we checked in, and the only car in the parking lot other than the night clerk's. That made us dubious about leaving anything in it

and even more dubious about staying in the empty shell of a hotel where there was no cell phone coverage. But it was late and we were tired and hungry. A gas station attendant recommended Steve's Landing for dinner. We were finally able to relax over wholesome, fresh, cooked to perfection seafood. So we slept soundly. In the morning, there was actually another car in the parking lot.

We headed for the Galveston Island State Park. We walked through swamps and bayous like those we had seen from the highway. We took pictures of yellow, purple, blue, red, and pink soft-petaled wildflowers. Still wearing our hiking boots, we headed for the ocean side of the park. Rough water still pounded the beach, but the water was no longer muddy. We even saw a few foolhardy surfers in the waves. Michael collected shells.

Miles traveled: 382
Departure datetime: Wednesday, April 17, 7:00AM
Departure weather: Cloudy, Humid 75°