

## Dauphin Island

Dauphin Island, Alabama, U.S.

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May 3, 2017 by [Scott Gilbertson](#)

From Fort Pickens we headed inland, through Pensacola and up around Mobile Bay before heading back down to the coast and out to Dauphin Island.



I was not a fan of Dauphin Island. I mean it's an island in the gulf, it's not that bad. The beaches are nice enough, though nothing like what you'll find on the other side of Mobile Bay, in Florida. The ocean is brown here, from the rivers, but you can't help feeling that it might be, as my daughter put it, "because Alabama is dirty?" No, it's just the river, I swear.





Left to our own devices we'd have stayed one night and moved on, but we'd already made plans to meet up with some family who were nearby on a trip of their own. We ended up staying for four days. Sometimes it's good to spend time in a place you're not that fond of if only to better understand why you like the places you do. In this case it might just be a luck of geography, Florida got better sand and clearer water. But it might also be because Florida's beaches have been better cared for and protected.

If you need any firsthand insight into the advantages of turning land over to federal management — currently very unpopular — head to Dauphin Island. There is no federally managed land on Dauphin Islands, just county land and in the grand scheme of tax money, counties typically don't rake it in. To see the difference a generous budget can make, head over to Gulf Islands National Seashore, which, as the name suggests, is managed by the National Park Service.

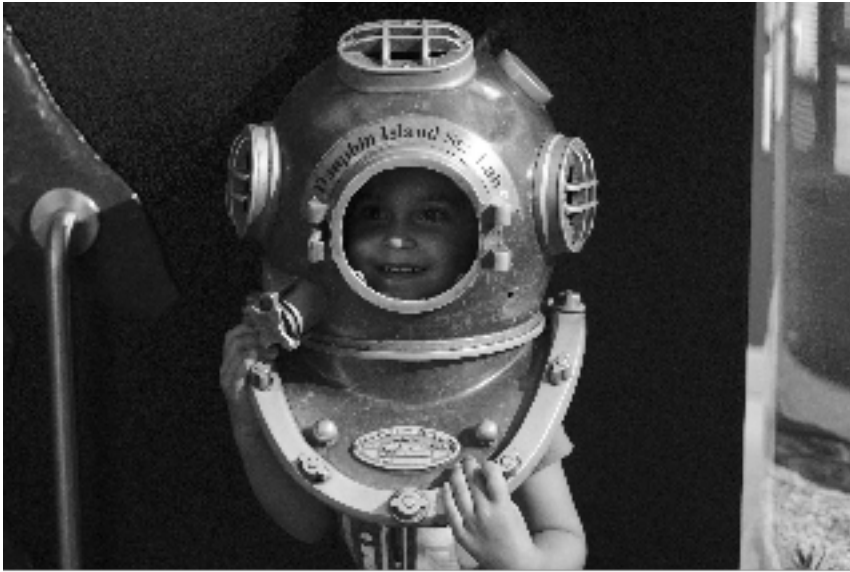
Forget the part where the non-federal owned one is covered in houses and garbage while the federally owned one features relatively pristine beaches without a house in sight, all I want to contrast are the facilities and what you get for your money. For \$28 in Gulf Islands you get a nice clean, level camp site

with 50 amp, 30 amp and 20 amp hookups, along with good fresh water, a spacious picnic table, and a fire pit. Every day at 9 AM ranger comes and cleans the bathroom. This more or less the same as every other national park in the U.S.

For \$42 a night at Dauphin Island Park & Beach Board you get a tiny sliver of land that hasn't ever been leveled, will more than likely have giant roots you'll need to navigate and a picnic table so small my three children under five barely fit on one side of it. Your neighbor's RV will be just beyond arm's reach. The electric service will max out at 30 amps and stop working at the first hint of rain. You'll need to bring your own fire pit and the last time the bathrooms were cleaned at Dauphin Island RV Park Jimmy Carter was president<sup>1</sup>. The beach, which could be quite nice, will, inevitably, courtesy of your neighbors, almost every single one of whom will be from Alabama, be covered in trash, beer cans and whatever refuse happened to be used while said neighbors were at the beach. Because to an Alabaman Alabama is nothing so much as a giant trash can.

This actually extends from top to bottom from what I can see. Not only is trash everywhere, it gets celebrated in exhibits. About 25 percent of the local aquarium is more or less a pro-oil propaganda exhibit that spends most of its time highlighting all the ways in which oil can be cleaned up without ever showing a single picture of what an oil spill of the size of the Deep Water Horizon disaster actually looks like when it rolls ashore, nor mentions the devastation it has done to the local fishing industry which as more or less gone belly up and had to sell out to multinational corps since the accident. It's so breathtakingly one-sided that you notice it.













Of course it's not like we sat around miserable the whole time. As you can probably tell from the pictures we had a pretty good time. It's not the worst place on earth after all, but there's certainly many better in this world and we couldn't wait to get to them.

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1. The bathrooms are technically cleaned every day, they just don't actually get any cleaner. [↗](#)

6 Comments



Linda Norman May 11, 2017 at 8:01 p.m.

So glad you stayed so we could see you!! 24 hours of bliss for us!!



[Scott](#) May 12, 2017 at 9:19 a.m.

@Linda- Things got better when ya'll got there.



classical\_liberal May 15, 2017 at 10:02 a.m.

Following along on your adventures. I've heard pretty good things about the Biloxi/Gulfport area. Are you continuing west on the coast? I'd be interested to read a contrast vs the disappointing Alabama coast.

As always, great photos! I've been considering giving photography a shot as a hobby since I, evidently, lack any artist ability with my hands. Photos have always spoke to me. What would you recommend for a frugal beginner to start?



[Scott](#) May 15, 2017 at 10:57 a.m.

@classic\_liberal-

Thanks for stopping by. So we did find some cool stuff in the Gulfport area, particularly Ocean Springs was nice. That'll be the next post. Been too busy in New Orleans to get anything up lately, but I'll get back to it this week.

For photos, I really don't know. A lot of people say the gear doesn't matter, which is true in the sense that a skilled photographer can make a great photo with any camera, but not entirely true in the sense that different size sensors are capable of different things.

That said, I would suggest getting something cheapish off ebay, not a point and shoot, but don't spend a ton until you're sure you like it. Micro 4/3 camera's are a great place to start, lenses are cheap and work regardless of maker (i.e. panasonic lens work fine on Olympus cameras and vice versa, which is not true of other sensor sizes).



gwen macallister May 16, 2017 at 9:13 p.m.



My only context for Dauphin Island before reading your post is a poem of the same name that I love by southern poet Jeff Hardin. You have kind of destroyed the lovely image I had of it due to the poem. At least I know not to visit now! Enjoying following your journey and the great photos.



[Scott](#) May 16, 2017 at 9:42 p.m.

@gwen- Hey, thanks for stopping by. That's a nice poem. Not a Dauphin Island I recognized, but then I came very close to not publishing this because I hate to be negative about places. I should probably keep my mouth shut so to speak and say nothing so other people can discover for themselves without my coloring things ahead of time. It could just be me. It probably is just me. So don't take my word for it :) In fact, I'd be sorta curious to go back, though I wouldn't camp there. The campground is definitely a dump, I stand by that.

By the way, finished up Travels with Charley while I was at Dauphin Island, thanks for the recommendation.