

# ALABAMA/FLORIDA GULF COAST CYCLING

## ORANGE BEACH, PERDIDO KEY, GULF SHORES

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The Gulf Coast, where Alabama and Florida share a border, is renowned for its stunning, sugary white sand beaches and crystal-clear turquoise waters, creating a picturesque paradise that draws visitors year-round. This stretch of coastline, encompassing Gulf Shores and Orange Beach in Alabama and Perdido Key in Florida, offers a perfect blend of relaxation and vibrant activities, making it an ideal destination for families, adventurers, and those seeking a laid-back beach escape.



Gulf Shores, Orange Beach, and Perdido Key are touted for their serene, laid-back atmosphere. The beaches here are pristine, with powdery quartz sand that feels soft underfoot and sparkles under the sun. During our visits, we relax on the shore and enjoy the warm Gulf breezes while watching playful dolphins, graceful manta rays and sting rays, curious crabs, colorful fish, and soaring sea gulls. The marine life is abundant, and it's not uncommon to have an up-close encounter like wading into the shallow waters and feeling the gentle

bump of a school of fish: On one occasion, I humorously discovered



that a school of fish were swimming nearby when I was lightly tapped on the head by a curious fish jumping out of the water.

### **HISTORY**

The Alabama-Florida Gulf Coast region was sparsely populated before European contact, primarily serving as hunting and fishing grounds for American Indian tribes, including the Creek, Choctaw and Mabila. Its modern history began with Spanish rule from 1519 – 1699, followed by colonial rivalries. The region transitioned from Spanish to French control (1699 - 1763) to British (1763 - 1780), back to Spanish (1780 - 1813), and finally to American incorporation by 1819.

This area was explored by Spanish explorer Juan Ponce de Leon in 1513, when he claimed La Florida Spanish for "Flowery," referring to modern-day Florida for Spain. In 1519, Alonso Alvarez de Pineda, a Spanish cartographer and explorer, led a mapping expedition along the northern Gulf of America coast, from Florida to Panuco River in near present-day Veracruz, Mexico, under the orders of Francisco de Garay, the Spanish governor of Santiago (now called Jamaica). This expedition confirmed that Florida was a peninsula, not an island. The original map from this expedition is preserved in the Archivo General de Indias in Seville, Spain.

In 1559, Spanish explorer Tristan de Luna y Arellano established a settlement about 15 miles from Perdido Key at Pensacola Bay, Florida (then called Ochuse), marking one of the earliest European settlement attempts in what is now the continental United States.

This settlement predates St. Augustine (the oldest continuously inhabited colonial settlement in the continental United States), founded in 1565, by six years. However, a hurricane devastated the colony in 1559, leading to famine and its evacuation by 1561. A permanent Spanish settlement in nearby Pensacola, a key West Florida hub, was not established until 1698, marking a significant step in Spain's 213-year Gulf Coast presence.

In 1699, French explorers founded Fort Maurepas and Mobile, shifting control to French Louisiana until 1763, when the Treaty of Paris ceded the region to

Britain as West Florida. Spain regained control in 1780, setting the Perdido River boundary. In 1810, the short-lived West Florida Republic (74



days), marked by the Bonnie Blue Flag revolt, briefly claimed the region, including Mobile. On October 27, 1810, President James Madison issued a proclamation claiming West Florida as part of the Louisiana Purchase. U.S. forces occupied Baton Rouge on December 6, 1810, effectively ending the republic. Mobile, including areas near Gulf Shores, remained under Spanish control until U.S. forces seized it in 1813 during the War of 1812, finalized by the 1819 Adams-Onís Treaty. Louisiana commemorates the West Florida Republic by designating I-12 from Baton Rouge to Slidell as the Republic of West Florida Parkway, with the Bonnie Blue Flag as its emblem. These shifts shaped the region's development into a modern tourism hub.

Perdido Key, straddling the Alabama-Florida border, derives its name from the Spanish word "perdido," meaning "lost." The name was coined by Spanish explorers in 1693, during surveys of the Gulf Coast led by cartographer Carlos de Sigüenza y Góngora. They

described the area as "lost" due to its hidden, hard-to-navigate inlet connecting Perdido Bay to the Gulf of America. This elusive entrance, often obscured by shifting sands and tides, challenged the sailors seeking a deep-water channel, leading to the name for the barrier island and bay.

The colonial legacy of Spanish, French, and British rule shapes the cultural heritage of Gulf Shores, Orange Beach, and Perdido Key. The region's cuisine blends the colonial legacy with Southern elements,



seen in dishes like gumbo (French roux with local shrimp), jambalaya (inspired by Spanish paella and adapted with Gulf seafood), shrimp étouffée (Creole smothered dish), red beans and rice (French-Haitian roots), and grilled snapper (flavored with Spanish-style citrus and paprika). British rule (1763–1780) contributed

Southern staples like cornbread, now paired with Gulf seafood at local eateries.

While colonial-era architecture is scarce due to sparse settlement before 1813, nearby Mobile features French Creole cottages and Spanish influenced street layouts, such as Government Street. The region's military history endures in American-era forts like Fort Morgan and Fort Gaines, built in the 19th century to guard Mobile Bay, a strategic site valued during colonial rivalries. On a future biking trip, I plan to ride to Fort Morgan and other forts, like Fort Gaines, to explore their historical significance and the Gulf Coast's diverse past.

In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the Gulf Coast evolved from a fishing and trading hub into a tourist destination. The construction of railroads and highways in the early 20th century made the area more accessible, laying the foundation for the modern tourism industry. Gulf Shores and Orange Beach began to flourish as resort towns in the mid-20th century as seen by the tourist-related development in these communities. By contrast, Perdido Key is quieter and less developed.



## OUTDOOR ACTIVITIES

Beyond the beaches, the Gulf Coast offers a variety of outdoor activities. **Golf** enthusiasts can tee off at world-class courses like those at Kiva Dunes or Peninsula Golf Club, which combine



challenging play with scenic coastal views. **Birdwatchers** flock to the Alabama Coastal Birding Trail, where they can spot migratory species such as herons, egrets, and the rare reddish egret in the region's marshes and nature preserves. For families,

attractions like the Alabama Gulf Coast **Zoo** and **adventure parks** offer fun and educational experiences. **Kayaking and paddleboarding** through the calm backwaters of the Gulf State Park or the Perdido River provide opportunities to explore the area's diverse ecosystems. **Fishing** is a cornerstone of the



local culture, with deep-sea charters and pier fishing (available at Gulf State Park Pier and Zeke's Marina) offering chances to reel in red snapper, grouper, and amberjack.

## RESTAURANTS AND SHOPPING

The Gulf Coast's vibrant restaurant and nightlife scene in Gulf Shores and Orange Beach offers a delightful complement to its outdoor adventures. From bustling seafood shacks to lively beachfront bars, the area boasts a range of dining options showcasing fresh, local ingredients and flavors rooted in its colonial heritage. We savored meals at several standout spots, each with exceptional quality. Our top choice, **Zeke's Restaurant and Marina**, visited after my third day's bike ride, impressed with its waterfront views and dishes like grilled snapper, echoing Spanish colonial influences. **Hurricane's**, located at the corner of Perdido Beach Boulevard and West Beach Boulevard in Orange Beach, serves Creole-inspired gumbo, reflecting French roots. In Gulf Shores, the **Pink Pony Pub** and **The Hangout**, both on Gulf Shores Parkway near West Beach, offer lively atmospheres with Southern staples like cornbread-crusted fish, tied to British influences.

**The Annual National Shrimp Festival** in October transforms the beaches of Gulf Shores into a vibrant celebration of Gulf seafood, live music, and local culture, drawing thousands to savor colonial-inspired dishes and explore the region's heritage.

We also patronized **Flora-Bama Lounge**, a beachside bar



straddling the Alabama-Florida state line. Known as "America's Last Great Roadhouse," Flora-Bama is a music destination that hosts live performances from well-known artists

and up-and-coming musicians across genres like country, rock, and blues. Graffiti is encouraged in this establishment, and there is a lot of it. University of Missouri fans have left their mark reminding everyone which school reigns supreme.



The Gulf Coast is also home to numerous beach stores that are stocked with everything a beachgoer needs. From colorful swimsuits and flip-flops to sunscreen and quirky souvenirs, these shops are a treasure trove for enjoying the coastal lifestyle. One store we frequented is **Surf Style** that has a delightful bonus for shoppers. Their catchy jingle, "*Surf Style, Surf Style*," is a playful earworm that bounces through your head long after you've left, perfectly capturing the "fun in the sun" spirit of the Gulf Shores and Orange Beach scene.

## BIKE RIDES

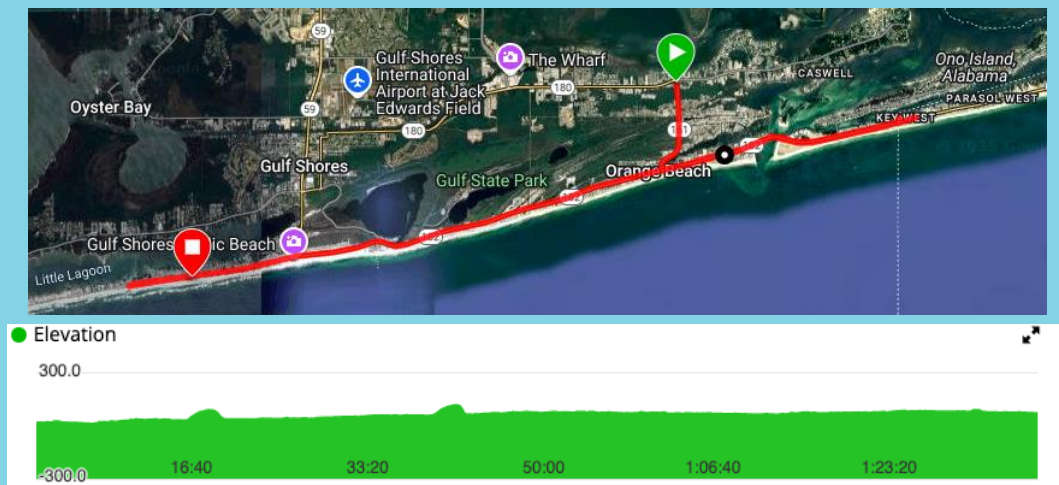
While visiting the area, I enjoyed a couple of memorable bike rides, detailed below. I rented a top-of-the-line bike from **Infinity Bike** Orange Beach, where the staff was exceptionally helpful. Drawing on past rental experiences, I brought my own pedals, which they kindly installed, and they fitted the bike seat perfectly using the measurements I provided. The high-quality bike ensured a smooth, enjoyable ride. I highly recommend Infinity Bicycles (link:

<https://www.infinity-bicycles.com>) for anyone looking to explore the area on two wheels.



Florida – Alabama Border

## ORANGE BEACH TO FLORIDA/ALABAMA BORDER TO GULF SHORES



Map Route's source: Google map - Garmin Edge 705, Software 3.30  
21.28 miles, Total ascent 270 feet

I picked up my rental bike from Infinity Bike Orange Beach and set off south along Orange Beach Boulevard, a scenic route with palm trees swaying with the salty Gulf breeze. Turning left onto Perdido Beach Boulevard, I pedaled through the vibrant commercial heart of Orange Beach, where colorful storefronts and



the hum of beachgoers created a lively atmosphere. The road led me to the bridge over Perdido Pass, the highest point of the ride, offering sweeping views of the shimmering waterway below and distant boats bobbing on the horizon. The bridge, a highlight for nature enthusiasts, features designated bird-watching areas where I spotted pelicans gliding gracefully overhead.

After descending the bridge, I continued towards Flora-Bama, the



beachside bar straddling the Alabama-Florida line, its weathered exterior exuding coastal charm. Crossing into Florida, I paused to capture photos of the state line sign, the sun casting a warm glow over the sandy dunes.

Retracing my route back into Alabama, I took in the familiar sights, the rhythmic sound of waves crashing nearby, and the occasional whiff of seafood from nearby restaurants.

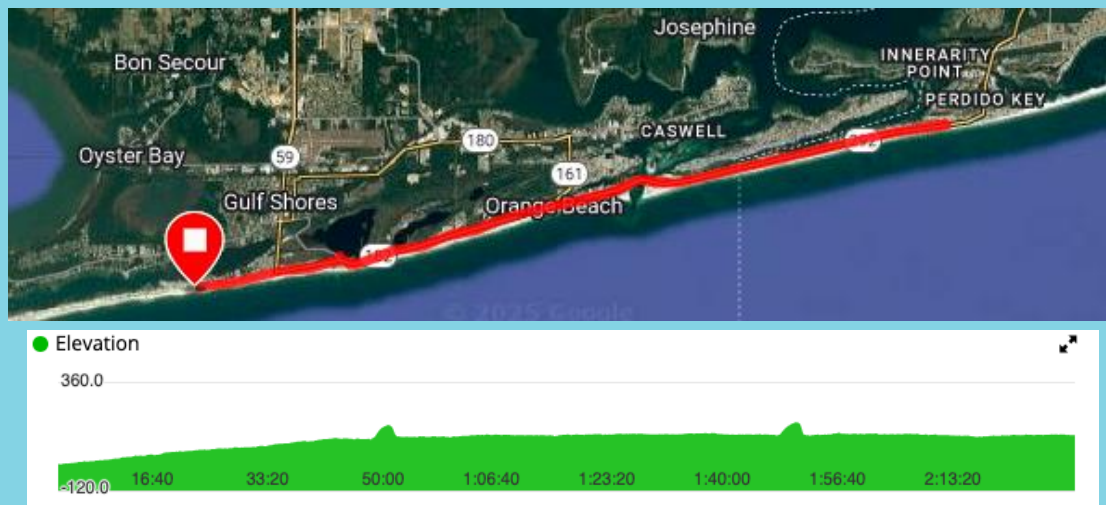
Past the Orange Beach Blvd intersection, Perdido Beach Boulevard transitions into East Beach Boulevard near the sprawling Gulf State Park, a haven for wildlife with its tranquil trails and marshes. This area, another prime bird-watching spot, buzzed with the calls of herons and egrets. As I rode through Gulf Shores' commercial district, I passed charming beach shops and bustling seafood shacks, the air filled with the scent of sunscreen and salty air. East Beach Boulevard eventually becomes West Beach Boulevard after the Gulf Shores Parkway intersection,



where the scenery shifts to a blend of modern hotels, cozy beachfront condos, and residential neighborhoods. The road hugged the coastline, offering views of the emerald-green Gulf waters on one side and the serene, reflective Little Lagoon on the other.

The ride was mostly flat, making it approachable for a leisurely cyclist, but the mix of commercial, hotel, and residential areas demanded constant awareness of passing cars, pedestrians, and the occasional golf cart.

### GULF SHORES TO PERDIDO KEY



On my second day, I embarked on another scenic bike ride, starting from Gulf Shores and following a route similar to my first day's journey. I crossed into Florida, where Perdido Beach Boulevard seamlessly transitions into Perdido Key Drive. This stretch felt distinctly

quieter, trading the commercial bustle of Orange Beach for a more serene, residential vibe. Elegant beachfront hotels and cozy vacation homes lined the road, interspersed with public beach access points inviting riders to pause and admire the sugar-white sands and emerald waves of the Gulf. The air was filled with the gentle rhythm of crashing waves and the occasional cry of seagulls, adding to the tranquil coastal ambiance.

I continued past Perdido Key State Park, a pristine natural gem with



low-lying dunes, sea oats swaying in the breeze, and trails beckoning for exploration. The park's untouched beauty was a highlight, offering glimpses of shorebirds like herons and

sandpipers darting along the shoreline. After the state park, I reached Perdido Key Public Beach Access #2, a perfect spot to pause and take in the panoramic ocean views, the sun glinting off the water. Here, I turned around, retracing my path back through Perdido Key and into Alabama, enjoying the same scenic route in reverse.



Orange Beach

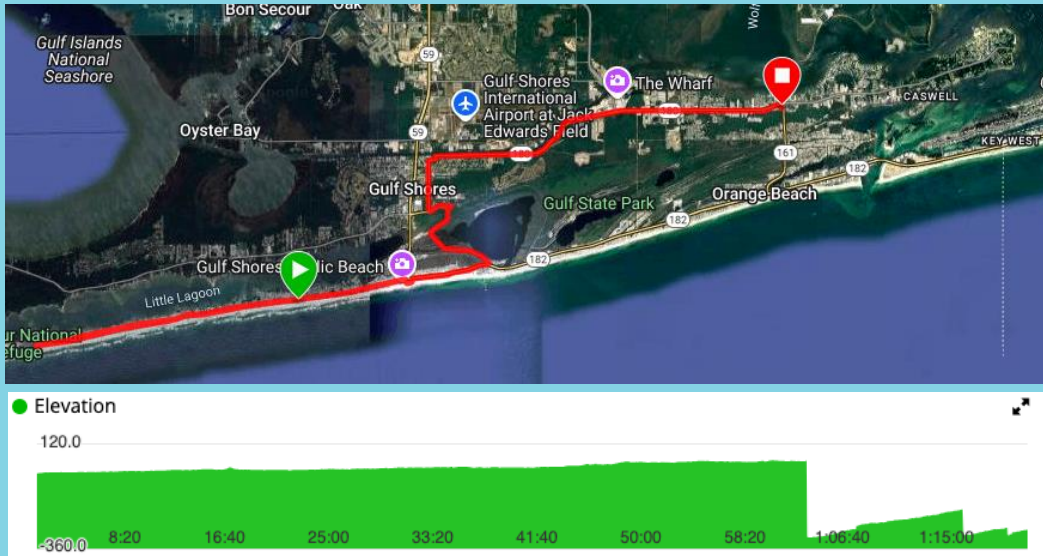


The return ride took me past the familiar sights of Gulf State Park. I paddled to the shores of Lake Shelby to get a glimpse of the lake and the surrounding marshes that were humming with wildlife. After my detour it was back onto East Beach Boulevard

through Gulf Shores' lively commercial district, eventually transitioning to West Beach Boulevard.

Like the first day, the ride was flat and approachable, ideal for a gentle pace, but required vigilance for traffic weaving through the residential, hotel, and commercial areas. The peaceful beauty of Perdido Key, combined with the vibrant energy of Gulf Shores and Orange Beach, made this ride a perfect blend of relaxation and exploration.

## GULF SHORES – ORANGE BEACH



Garmin elevation chart glitched towards the end of ride  
Map Route's source: Google map - Garmin Edge 705, Software 3.30  
22.31 miles, Total ascent 321 feet

On my third and final day, I set out on another memorable bike ride. I began by heading west along West Beach Boulevard from Gulf Shores, a picturesque stretch that blended serene residential neighborhoods with striking high-rise condos. The views were breathtaking: on one side, the emerald-green Gulf of America sparkled under the sun, its waves crashing rhythmically, while on the other, the tranquil waters of Little Lagoon reflected the sky, framed by swaying marsh grasses. The salty breeze and distant calls of seagulls created a calming coastal ambiance, perfect for a relaxed ride.



Reaching the end of West Beach Boulevard, where the road terminates near the Gulf's sandy shores, I paused to appreciate the serene beauty before turning around. I retraced the familiar route



from my previous days, pedaling east through Gulf Shores' vibrant commercial district, passing beachfront

shops and seafood shacks. As I approached Gulf State Park, I turned left onto a quieter road leading toward Lake Shelby, a shimmering freshwater gem nestled within the park's lush landscape. The route wound past the park's headquarters, where trails and boardwalks hinted at opportunities for bird-watching herons and egrets dotted the marshes, adding to the natural splendor.



Continuing, I connected to the Alabama Coastal Connection (State Route 182), a scenic byway flanked by dunes and coastal vegetation.



From there, I turned onto Canal Road (State Route 180), which guided me past the tranquil waters of Portage Creek, where

the air carried a faint earthy scent of the surrounding wetlands. The road then crossed the Foley Beach Expressway, a major thoroughfare, before leading me through a mix of



quiet residential neighborhoods and the lively commercial areas of Orange Beach, with its colorful storefronts and bustling energy. Eventually, Canal Road brought me back to Infinity Bicycles, where I returned my bike, grateful for their exceptional service and top-of-the-line equipment.

This route, like the others, was flat and approachable, ideal for a relaxed ride, but it required vigilance due to traffic. Alabama's well-marked bike lanes, clearly delineated with bright lines and signage, made the journey less stressful and more enjoyable, allowing me to focus on the splendid surroundings. The ride's blend of coastal views, natural beauty through Gulf State Park, and the vibrant pulse of Orange Beach made for a perfect finale to my Gulf Coast adventure.

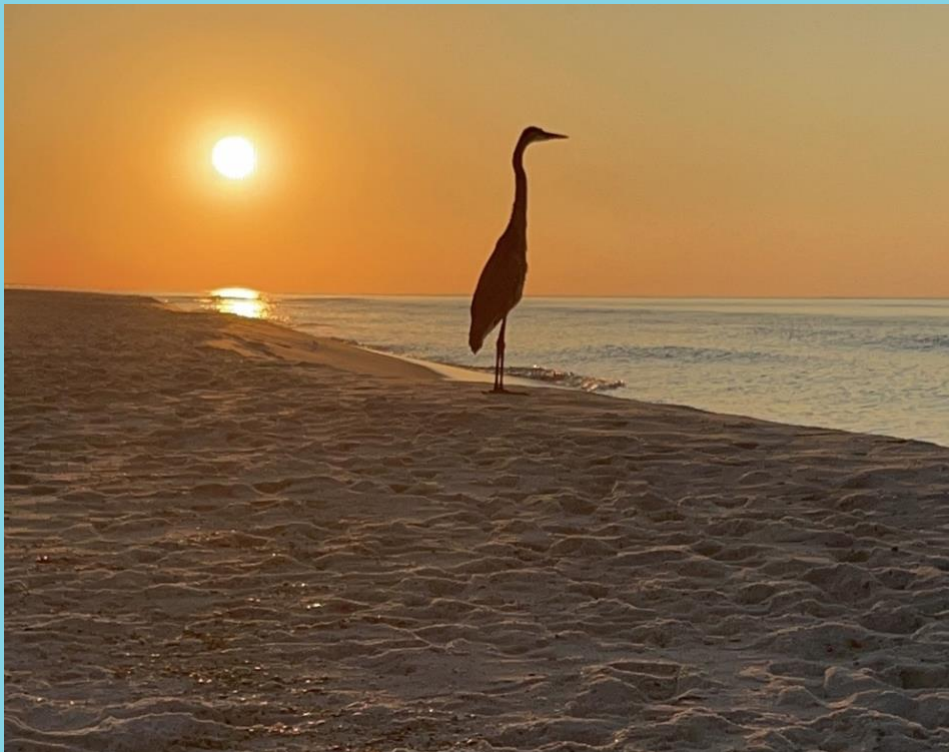


I met up with my family after my invigorating ride, and we headed to Zeke's Restaurant in Orange Beach for a well-deserved lunch. The experience was as delightful as the coastal scenery. Perched along the marina, Zeke's offers stunning views of Cotton Bayou's shimmering waters, where boats gently swayed. The salty breeze mingled with the aroma of grilled shrimp, and the laid-back hum of conversation created a perfect, relaxing vibe to unwind. As we were eating our lunch, we saw a gentleman be seated with his party at an adjacent table with a "Eskimo Joe" shirt



from Stillwater, OK, home of the Oklahoma State University Cowboys. After lunch, we approached the table and mentioned our link to the Cowboys. We all channeled Pistol Pete's spirit, saying "Go Pokes!" with a lot of cheerful laughing.

The Gulf Coast's vibrant energy and stunning natural beauty made my biking adventures unforgettable, perfectly capturing the laid-back allure of Alabama and Florida's beaches. Pedaling through Gulf Shores, Orange Beach, and Perdido Key, I immersed myself in the region's rich history, tracing the echoes of its colonial past.



Sunrise on the Beach