

The South's Secret White-Sand Island Is Reopening For Tourism This Spring

By: Sam Sears



Avoiding Florida's rowdy crowds this spring is a lot easier than you think.

All you have to do is venture westward to a neighboring southern state to discover pristine waters and gleaming white sand.

At first glance, Gulf Shores, Alabama may come to mind, but that's not the right spot either. We all know the entirety of Florida draws hordes of visitors of all ages during spring break too.

That said, there's a secret oasis beyond [Gulfport](#) and Biloxi that's closed off to visitors for a chunk of the year, but [set to reopen](#) for tourism this spring.

Think of this island as the “anti-Mississippi” — a far cry from what you'd expect to see, as it's more comparable to Florida's vibrant seascape, except there's not a hint of crowds in sight.

There's nothing wrong with opting for Mississippi's cluster of beach towns lining the white-sand coastline.

We at [Travel Off Path](#) have reported on almost all of them, ranging from the most popular Biloxi to the little-known Long Beach.

That said, all Mississippi's delightful coastal towns all have one thing in common: it's the not quite the paradise you hope for a typical white-sand getaway.

Sure, you can fish, boat, and kick back and work on your tan, but snorkeling and maybe even swimming, depending how squeamish you are, are off the table as oftentimes you can't see your feet once you're 10 yards in the Gulf.

That's where **Ship Island** comes in as Mississippi's exception to the rule. A visit to this hush-hush hideaway, which southern locals love to keep secret, levels up your beach game from one white-sand shoreline to another, except it's even more luminous with clear, bluish-green waters perfect for swimming, snorkeling, and even wildlife spotting, as many visitors report dolphin sightings.

Definitely scope out **Swim Beach** for obvious reasons...

You may not see starfish, but you can transform into a human starfish with so much space to sprawl out — something that can't

be said for Biloxi, Gulf Shores, and much of Florida, especially during summer.

Ship Island Excursions is the only option to get here, unless you befriend a boat owner at a Gulfside marina.

In that case, Ship Island is open year-round. However, a majority of Ship Island patrons opt for the ferry during the sunniest months of the year.

This service holds rave reviews across the board. There are **no hotels on the island**, so this will definitely be a day trip.

That makes the \$48 round-trip charge for adults and \$38 for kiddos worth the price of admission.

The most recent reviewer claimed, “We went in august, THE WATER WAS CLEAR LIKE THE CARIBBEAN, we saw so many crabs stingrays, ett. The ship island excursion are all SO friendly and helpful. The boat has a very nice air conditioned cabin”.

There are officially 3 seasons of service. As such, schedule times may change:

- Spring: March 14th – May 15th
- Summer: May 16th – August 9th
- Fall: August 12th – November 1st



No Hotels, But Brimming With History

Ship Island is run by the National Park Service as part of the National Seashore, which spans Florida and Mississippi.

[Fort Massachusetts](#) helps visitors take the focus off what the island lacks — you know, hotels, shade, and beach bars.

This Civil War masonry fort dating back to the 1850s is worth a visit (and [guided tour](#)) not only to have a break from the sun, but to deep dive into Ship Island's strategic role in the Civil War.

Additionally, NPS rangers not only provide insightful tours, but also have a booth to **rent beach loungers**, reserve picnic tables, and sell snacks and refreshments from an on-site convenience store.

