

Water, Water Everywhere:

Much to do in Mobile

By Elliot Free



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Mobile was founded in 1699 by Pierre d'Iberville and established in 1702 by the French, who named it for the Mobile (Mauville or Maubila) Indians. It is the only saltwater port in Alabama and is located on the northwest shore of Mobile Bay. This port is either the first stop or the last stop on the Tenn-Tom Waterway, depending on whether the red buoys are on your starboard or port side while traveling the Great Loop.

The people representing the six official flags that have flown over Mobile—France, Britain, Spain, Republic of Alabama, the Confederacy, and the United States—have created an unusual mixture of European and Creole ways, combined with southern charm. Today the natives are accommodating, the food outstanding, and the ways to enjoy the waterways are almost too numerous to list.

With the Gulf of Mexico about 20 miles south of the city through beautiful Mobile Bay, the vast Mobile River with Mile Marker 0 of the Tenn-Tom just to the north, and the Mobile-Tensaw Delta to the east, enjoying the water is a slam dunk. *Continental Magazine* selected Mobile in 2006 as one of the top eight International Water Cities. Some of the others in this pretty sporty group were San Diego, Los Cabos and Miami.

Because it's located on the Gulf of Mexico at only 30 degrees north, the climate is said to be mild subtropical. The average temperature varies from the 40s in the winter to the 90s in the summer and the 66-plus inches of annual rainfall make Mobile the wettest city in the continental United States.

This mixture makes for lush vegetation and in summer, humidity that residents admit takes a bit of getting used to. Hurricanes are a late summer and fall topic of conversation. Those 20 miles between Mobile and the Gulf provide some protection, but most port cities are subject to hurricanes. Locals are quite aware of the need for adequate wind and flood insurance coverage.

All manner and variety of water fun

The Mobile weather makes for all manner of outdoor activities. Water is everywhere; fresh, brackish, and salt water create an ecosystem that grows numerous species of fish, shellfish, turtles, and alligators. If you like to fish or hunt, Mobile Bay and the Mobile-Tensaw Delta can accommodate you.

The 10-day alligator season opened when I visited Mobile. The hunting is inherently dangerous as it is conducted at night, with no guns allowed. As you cruise in the delta waters,

PHOTO BY AUTHOR



Cooper Riverside Park shows the statue of city founder Pierre d'Iberville.



Airboat Express on the causeway, departing from the Original Oyster House.

PHOTO COURTESY OF MOBILE BAY CONVENTION AND VISITORS BUREAU

you look for the gator's eyes reflecting from your light, then throw a treble hook with 150-pound test line on the reel across his body, pull it taut, and the fun begins. If you are successful in bringing the gator to the boat, you can use a bow and arrow to subdue him before attempting to get him in the boat. Hunting alligators at night in the swamps with a rod and reel just is not the same as catching crappies with minnows at dawn—I have to admit that I must be a fisherman, not a gator hunter.

If this type of water activity is not for you, then sailing, kayaking, and powerboat cruising await. The weather allows year-round water and sun fun. If you are in a large boat, the Dog River, south of the city, has three excellent marinas for transients or major repairs to your boat.

Waterfront docking is permitted at Mobile Landing, but one should call for docking details between the Cooper Riverside Park and the Cruise Terminal. The park displays a large red sea buoy, the six flags that have flown over Mobile, and a statue of Pierre d'Iberville.

A short cruise south of Dog River is the Fowl River, where you can see pelicans, osprey, blue heron, and egrets. As the river turns from flowing south to east the beautiful Bellingrath Gardens appear on the west bank. This 65-acre garden of floral amazement, plus the Bellingrath Home, should be on your itinerary.

East of downtown Mobile on the causeway is the USS *Alabama* Battleship Park. In addition to the "Mighty A", there is the USS *Drum*, a WW II submarine. In front of the battleship are tanks and planes spanning seven decades of military armament. The time span concludes with Desert Storm, and I imagine the future will include Iraq memories. If a visit to this park does not cause a special feeling to you, you might not be American.

The Inner Man: Food and Shelter

After all this activity, you will want to refuel your body with some truly outstanding cuisine. The abundance of fresh seafood prepared by chefs of Southern, French, and Creole influences makes for food that will melt in your mouth.

Near the *Alabama* is Felix's Fish Camp Grill. Located directly on the northern shore of the Bay, the view is only bettered by the food and service. In addition to seafood, any landlubber will like their steaks. If you do not mind an

FYI

Mobile Bay Convention and Visitors Bureau
 PO Box 204
 Mobile, Ala. 36601-0204
 1-800-5-MOBILE (66-2453) or (251) 208-2000
www.mobilebay.org

Mobile Landing Docking
 (251) 208-7970
www.mobile.org

OTHER ATTRACTIONS IN MOBILE

Bellingrath Gardens and Home
 12401 Bellingrath Gardens Road
 Theodore, Ala. 36582
 (251) 973-2217 or 1-800-247-8420
bellingrath@bellingrath.org
www.bellingrath.org

USS *Alabama* Battleship Commission
 2703 Battleship Parkway
 Mobile, Ala. 36602
 (251) 433-2703
www.ussalabama.com

Historic Fort Conde
 150 South Royal St.
 Mobile, Ala. 36602
 (251) 208-7569
www.museumofmobile.com



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CHART BY PASADENA HOT SPOT

Detail of Mobile's location

USS *Alabama* battleship, on display along the shores of Mobile Bay.

early dinner, arrive before sunset for a spectacular view of Sol setting.

In the downtown historic area is Wintzell's Oyster House, which has been serving oysters since 1938. The gumbo is excellent and they advertise "oysters anyway you want'em—fried, stewed, nude and now grilled." Trust me, this seafood is superb.

Arriving with your trailerable boat or car means that you will need overnight accommodations. Mobile has 6,000 rooms in buildings that range from historic hotels to chain hotels to Bed-and-Breakfasts. The Malaga Inn was two townhouses built in 1862; every room is decorated differently.

Within walking distance of the riverfront is the Radisson Admiral Semmes Hotel where the service is excellent and the breakfasts are included.

Another hotel in downtown is the recently remodeled Battle House Hotel. The Retirement Systems of Alabama completely restored this place to its former beauty. The rooms are upscale and priced accordingly. We did not opt for the 2,000-square foot Presidential Suite, not because First

Mate would have felt like a queen, but the \$1,500 nightly tariff would have blown my budget.

Mardi Gras

The early winter to spring event is Mardi Gras, a two-week party leading into Lent and climaxing with the Fat Tuesday party. Mobile organized the first Mardi Gras in the new world, and it dates back to 1703.

Mobile touts this carnival as America's Family Mardi Gras. The parade routes are lined with revelers of all ages with the battle cry, "Throw me something, Mister." Mobile almost stops for these two weeks and recently it was decided that there would not be any Presidential Primary voting during this time of year in this town.

If you ever want to attend, find Easter on your calendar, move back 40 days for Lent. Those 14 days prior to Ash Wednesday are your time.

What's ahead?

Mobile is in the midst of an enormous economic expansion. The State Docks facilities are expanding, and Mobile is in a race to land the largest military contract in history, a \$200 billion Air Force tanker project. The German steel manufacturer ThyssenKrupp will build a \$4.2-billion steel mill at Mt. Vernon, just north of the city on the Tenn-Tom. They plan to hire 29,000 workers to build the plant. Upon completion there will be 2,700 permanent jobs. Mobile is expected to overtake Birmingham in 2012 as Alabama's largest city.

There is far more to see and do in Mobile that can be mentioned in one article. I can assure you that Alabama's port city is well worth a visit.

If you contact the Convention and Tourism office, they will send you an excellent packet of information. Read it, and work

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- ★ A cross-wind

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HOW TO GET THERE

By land: Mobile is located at the very southern end of Interstate 65, when it intersects with Interstate 10.

By water: The city is sited at the northern end of Mobile Bay at Mile Marker 0 on the Tenn-Tom Waterway, Right descending Bank.

MARINAS OF MOBILE

All three are located at
N30 degrees 34 minutes 076 seconds
W88 degrees 85 minutes 288 seconds

Turner Marine Supply

5010-A dauphin Island Parkway
Mobile, Ala. 36605-9724
(251) 476-1444
www.turnermarine.com

Dog River Marina & Boat Works

5004 dauphin Island Parkway
Mobile, Ala. 36605
(251) 471-5449
www.dogrivermarina.com

Grand Mariner Marina

6036 Rock Point Road
Mobile, Ala. 36605
(251) 443-6300
www.grandmarinermarina.com

DINING AND LODGING

Felix's Fish Camp

1530 Battleship Parkway
Spanish Fort, Ala. 36527
(251) 626-6710
www.felixsfishcamp.com

Wintzell's Oyster House

605 dauphin St.
Mobile, Ala. 36602
(251) 432-4605
www.wintzellsoysterhouse.com

The Malaga Inn

359 Church St.
Mobile, Ala. 36602
1-800-235-1586 or (251) 438-4701
www.malagainn.com

Radisson Admiral Semmes Hotel

251 Government St.
Mobile Ala. 36602
1-888-201-1718 or (251) 432-8000
www.radisson.com

Battle House, A Renaissance Hotel

26 North Royal St.
Mobile, Ala. 36602
1-866-316-5957 or (251) 338-2000
www.marriott.com/hotels/travel/
mobbr-the-battle-house

out what your family wants to do before you arrive.

Your first stop should be at the historic Fort Conde, a replica of the French fort built in the 1700s, located downtown just off the waterfront. Both printed information and ideas from the accommodating staff at Fort Conde are available there to help make final decisions on what to do. Without this preparation, you'll miss something that you would have wanted to see.

Yes, no matter what time of year, you can have family fun and eat outstanding food in Mobile until your heart's content. 🇺🇸

Joan and Elliot Free, from Cullman, Ala., boat in their trailerable 26-foot Grady-White, St. Joan. Their favorite destinations include gunkholes in the heartland, but also Florida and the Abacos.



USCG APPROVED COURSES! We arrange for drug test, medical exam, oath and fingerprinting, plus First Aid/CPR, required for all licenses. We also assist in filing your USCG applications.

OUPV: Known as the "6-Pack." Limited to 6 charter passengers on uninspected vessels (pleasure boats) up to 100GT.

Master: For boats carrying more than 6 charter passengers for USCG inspected vessels.

Tow Endorsement: This course allows the OUPV and licensed Master up to 200-Tons to acquire a "towing endorsement" that permits them to engage in commercial assistant towing services for hire.

License Renewal: A one day class to replace vessel time, to maintain your five year license.

OUPV (6 pack) classes

Pickwick Lake –Aqua Yacht Harbor	July 7-12
Belfast, ME–Maine Outdoor Learning Center	April 20-26
Land Between the Lakes, KY–Green Turtle Bay Resort	April 7-13
Louisville, KY–Louisville Dive Center	March 8-16
Pt. Clinton, OH–Lakefront Yacht Club	May 2-4
(3 consecutive weekends)	May 9-11
	May 16-18

25-100 Ton Master Upgrade

Pickwick Lake –Aqua Yacht Harbor	July 7-12
Cincinnati, OH–Four Seasons Yacht Club	March 28-30
Land Between the Lakes, KY–Green Turtle Bay Resort	April 18-20
Pt. Clinton, OH–Lakefront Yacht Club	May 30-June 1

License Renewal

Pickwick Lake –Aqua Yacht Harbor	July 7-12
Cincinnati, OH–Four Seasons Yacht Club	March 31
Land Between the Lakes, KY–Green Turtle Bay Resort	April 16

For information about classes in the listed cities CONTACT
Capt. Ronald Getter at 937-478-1947 or captaingetter@truecourses.com