

Port Aransas beaches attract surfers

Cowabunga, dude! Miles of shoreline in Port Aransas present many opportunities for seasoned surfers to catch waves and for beginners to get in on the thrill too.

Mustang Island generally doesn't have such towering or powerful waves as California and Hawaii. But Texas surf can be surprisingly big and shapely at times. And, unlike most of California, Texas waters are warm enough to be surfed without a wetsuit throughout most of the year.

Several beach-oriented businesses in Port Aransas, including a few surf shops, have surfboards for rent and for sale. Surf lessons also are available, for a fee.

Many experienced surfers enjoy surfing next to Horace Caldwell Pier, where sandbars help create nice waves.

Beginning surfers should avoid surfing near the pier in order to avoid getting in the way of seasoned surfers and also to avoid accidentally running into the pier's concrete pilings. But if the waves are good at the pier, there will be rideable waves at other Port Aransas beaches.

When the wind is blowing hard, kite surfers and windsurfers favor the area between the south jetty and Horace Caldwell Pier.

Wave conditions can change quickly in Texas. A day when nothing but one-foot waves are breaking can be followed by a day when the waves have climbed to four feet or more -- if winds start blowing hard or if a powerful offshore storm begins edging close.

In Texas, waves tend to be small close to shore and larger farther out. On some days, waves more than eight feet high have been known to break a few hundred yards offshore.

Cautions for beginners:

- Always wear a surf leash tethering your ankle to your surfboard. It keeps the board from hitting swimmers. It also prevents a surfer from having to make a long, tiring swim to retrieve a loose board.

- Beginners should strongly consider renting surfboards with soft foam exteriors rather than hard boards made of fiberglass or plastic.

Beginners commonly are hit in the heads by their boards while being tossed around in the surf.

- While experienced surfers welcome the large, powerful waves generated by hurricanes and tropical storms far out in the Gulf of Mexico, beginners should exercise extreme caution when faced with storm surf. Big waves can create potentially deadly conditions such as rip tides that can carry swimmers and surfers far offshore.



A surfer rides the nose of his board on a nice day for waves earlier this year near Horace Caldwell Pier in Port Aransas.

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