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Stand-up paddle surfing at Horace Caldwell Pier in Port Aransas.

## Surf's up in Port Aransas

**A**s the Beach Boys sang, "Let's go surfin' now, everybody's learnin' how!"

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 especially 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, not to worry: If the waves are breaking nicely at the pier on any given day, the waves will be serviceable waves throughout 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.

Some words of caution for beginners:

- Always wear a surf leash -- a plastic cord that tethers a surfboard to a surfer's ankle. The leash prevents the board from being driven into swimmers. A leash also prevents a surfer from having to make a long, tiring and possibly dangerous 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. A soft hit is better than a hard one.

- 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.

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