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photograph by JEFF MINTON



Gene Gore, the owner of the South Padre Surf Company, with his six-year-old son, Micah, at Isla Blanca Park.

7. Catch the Wave South Padre Island

ASK GLOBE-TROTTERING surfaholic Gene Gore to name the best surfing spot in the state, and he answers without hesitation: "South Padre. It's the Hawaii of Texas." It's an assessment based not only on his ten years of teaching surfing there but also on his intimate knowledge of the entire Gulf Coast. Three years ago, he and his wife, Rachel, who run the South Padre Surf Company, paddled on surfboards from the mouth of the Rio Grande to the mouth of the Sabine River. Even after nineteen days and 404 miles of such deliberate travel—the likes of which our shores haven't seen since the Hernando de Soto expedition of 1542—Gore's allegiance to South Padre surf remains steadfast. He praises Isla Blanca Park, on the south end of the island, for its "Waikiki-style waves" in summer. "Those two-foot waves are your best friend when you're a beginner," he says. (I'll vouch for that; anything bigger and this novice would've wiped out immediately.) For more oomph, he recommends heading to the Port Mansfield Channel, approximately a thirty-mile trip in a four-wheel-drive vehicle to the north end, where the jetties dependably magnify the waves. Sure, the surf may lack the power of California's, but Gore says it also lacks the logjam of boards you'll find in the Golden State: "The only time you'll see another surfer here is when you bring one with you." *Isla Blanca Park: south of the Queen Isabella Causeway at the southern tip of the island (956-761-5494 or co.cameron.tx.us/parks/ccparks.html); \$4 entrance fee per vehicle. Port Mansfield Channel: From Beach Access Road 6, go 30 miles north (accessible only with a four-wheel-drive vehicle). South Padre Surf Company (Isla Blanca Park, 956-772-7272 or southpadresurfcompany.com); lessons start at \$40 an hour.*

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