

Road Trip #16 Eastern Shore – Girlfriends Bay Getaway

(INTRODUCTION)

Experience a girlfriends getaway on Alabama's Eastern Shore where the charming small town of Fairhope offers boutiques, bistros, art and the top-rated Marriott spa in the world just down the road. As you cruise along Scenic Highway 98 to Fairhope, you'll drive under canopies of oak trees draped with Spanish moss. The picturesque views are breathtaking and the beautiful buildings include the modern Daphne City Hall, built in 2008 and inspired by Italian architecture. A statue of Daphne sits atop a water fountain surrounded by palm trees.

'This charming village [Fairhope] nestles on the eastern shore of Mobile Bay like an idealized, movie-set small town.' - *Coastal Living Magazine*

The waterfront village of Fairhope on Mobile Bay includes residences of writers Winston Groom and Fannie Flagg and the gallery of artist, Nall, who lives in Fairhope when not in France. The downtown streets are lined with flowers and dress shops, antique stores, cafes, B&B's, a bookstore and shops where you'll find that unique gift to take home. It has been named "**Best Small Southern Town**" by *Southern Living* and a **Top 25 Place to Retire** by CNN Money. *Coastal Living* magazine wrote, "this charming village nestles on the eastern shore of Mobile Bay like an idealized, movie-set small town."

Don't Miss the Fairhope Arts & Crafts Festival

On the third weekend in March, more than 200 artists bring their works from across the U.S. to show and sell at the **Fairhope Arts & Crafts Festival** [<http://www.eschamber.com/>], a prestigious, juried art show. The three-day weekend also includes live entertainment and has been chosen as a top 10 event by the Alabama Tourism Department and the Southeast Tourism Society. If this isn't enough to make you want to visit, keep reading.

Getaway, relax and unwind as you take in the breathtaking beauty of Fairhope at the **Fairhope Pier and Park** on the bay located at the west end of Fairhope Avenue. The park is half a mile from downtown and has a fantastic display of flowers. The pier is a quarter-mile long with restrooms and a covered area. It's a great place to watch birds and spectacular sunsets over Mobile Bay.

On a still night along the Eastern Shore, you might also be lucky enough to witness a **Jubilee** [http://www.cofairhope.com/vis_jubilee.php] on a still night, a phenomenon that occurs in only two places around the world – the Alabama's Eastern Shore and Tokyo.

Nobody knows when a Jubilee will happen, but some locals say it has to do with tides and the pull of the moon. Fish, crabs, shrimp, eel and other sea creatures are washed ashore due to

low oxygen levels in the water. Locals and lucky visitors run to the shores with buckets to scoop up the bounty. Friends, family and neighbors call out to alert each other to the phenomenon by yelling, "Jubilee!"

Your getaway starts as you exit I-10 onto Hwy. 98 in Spanish Fort (Exit 35) and take the scenic route through Daphne and Fairhope. After exiting I-10, drive approximately 1.7 miles and turn right onto Scenic Hwy. 98 (just past the Publix shopping center). Downtown Fairhope is approximately 9.8 miles.

Drive along Scenic 98 under the live oaks draped with Spanish moss from Daphne [<http://www.daphneal.com/>] and Fairhope to the Grand Hotel in Point Clear. Make a quick stop in Daphne at the beautiful city hall and take a picture of the statue of Daphne. A historic marker in front provides a brief history of the city. Stop at the pier in Fairhope to relax and watch the birds flying gracefully over the bay. It's also a great spot to watch the sun set.

Spend your getaway in a room at the Four-Diamond **Grand Hotel Marriott Resort in Point Clear** [<http://www.marriott.com/hotels/travel/ptlal-grand-hotel-marriott-resort-golf-club-and-spa/>] (1 Grand Blvd., Point Clear, 251-928-9201), a bedroom community next to Fairhope. This hotel, once referred to as the "queen of Southern resorts," was named a top resort by *Travel + Leisure* magazine. The Grand is a luxurious resort offering 405 guest rooms right on Mobile Bay. Plenty of activities will keep you busy like relaxing on the white sand beach, bicycling, golfing, playing tennis on one of 10 courts, kayaking or relaxing at two pools where a poolside bar offers food and drinks. The hotel has bicycles for rent, so you can bike along the boardwalk or Scenic Hwy. 98 to take in the sights.

Pamper Yourself at the Spa at the Grand

Get ready for a weekend of pampering at the **Spa at the Grand Hotel** [<http://www.pchresorts.com/spacard>], the highest-rated Marriott spa in the world. It offers 20,000 square feet of total bliss.

Indulge in the luxury of aromatherapy, a Swiss or custom massage, shiatsu, body treatment, facial and manicure/pedicure. Relax in a quiet room where you can enjoy the soothing sounds of a bubbling hot tub and tranquil music. Step into the hot tub, soak in a therapy bath, unwind in the steam room and sauna or take a dip in the indoor pool. The pampering continues with makeup applications and hair styling in the salon. Buy a Spa Trail card for \$40 and receive a gift card and discounts on services, food and your hotel room.

Insider tip: Ask to stay in the spa building so you can be close to the spa. When you step from your room into the hallways, you will smell the fresh, clean aroma emanating from the spa on the second floor. You can also take home lotions and soaps used in the spa by visiting the gift shop across the hall.

Dine in at the Grand

You must experience a meal in the main dining room at the Grand to take in the breathtaking views of Mobile Bay. While enjoying the mouth-watering cuisine, you can

watch the sun set over the water as pelicans fly across the rippled surface. For breakfast, try the crab scramble, a culinary delight listed in “**100 Dishes To Eat in Alabama Before You Die.**” [http://www.yearofalabamafood.com/wp-content/themes/yof/images/pdfs/100Dishes_Brochure2012.pdf]

Get the girls together and experience afternoon tea at the **Charming Teacup** in Point Clear (17111 Scenic Hwy. 98; 251-990-3377), just one mile south of the Grand Hotel next to the Punta Clara Candy Kitchen and The Wash House restaurant. Call ahead to reserve; the cost is \$18 per person.

Experience the Storybook Charm of Fairhope

Stroll the waterfront village of Fairhope and you'll discover its storybook charm along the flower-lined streets. Find a bargain in one of the dozens of trendy boutique shops and art galleries filled with designer clothes, art galleries, souvenirs, antiques and more. There are a number of restaurants, a hotel and B&Bs, as well. The city is also known for its beautiful flowers throughout the year.

You may want to make your first stop at the **Fairhope Museum of History** (24 N. Section St., Fairhope; 251-929-1471) to learn about this small town from its early beginnings. The museum features changing exhibits and is also the place to get information on Fairhope's history like the origin of its utopian single tax. Visitors can also see the old town jail, toys, Native American artifacts and other displays. The museum is open Tuesday through Saturday, 9 a.m.-5 p.m.

Next door to the museum is the **Fairhope Welcome Center** [http://www.cofairhope.com/ser_welcome.php] (20 N. Section St.; 251-928-5095). It's a great place to pick up brochures, coupons and a layout of the shops. They also have public restrooms.

Take home a work of art from the **Eastern Shore Art Center**. [<http://www.esartcenter.com/>] (401 Oak St., Fairhope; 251-928-2228). You can purchase works by local painters, sculptors and woodworkers. The center also holds workshops for adults and children.

You'll find books by Winston Groom, Fannie Flagg, Rick Bragg and more Alabama authors at the quaint bookstore on the corner in downtown Fairhope, **Page & Palette** [<http://www.pageandpalette.com>] (32 S. Section St.; 251-928-5295). Enjoy a cup of coffee or a latte at the **Latte Da** coffee shop while you're there.

Where To Eat

Take a break from shopping and stop for lunch at **Panini Pete's** [<http://www.paninipetes.com/>] (42½ S. Section St.; 251-929-0122) in the French Quarter section of downtown. Try the muffuletta and taste why many celebrity chefs have stopped in. Or try the hot beignets for breakfast. The restaurant has been featured on Guy Fieri's **Diners**,

Drive-ins and Dives on the Food Network. It's open for breakfast and lunch until 2:30 p.m. Monday through Saturday.

Master Joe's (21 N. Section St.; 251-928-8668) offers sushi and other Asian cuisine. It was voted best sushi in the Mobile area. It is next to the Hampton Inn in downtown Fairhope.

The Wash House restaurant [<http://www.washhouserestaurant.com/>] (17111 Scenic Hwy. 98, Point Clear; 251-928-4838) is one mile south of the Grand Hotel and provides a romantic dinner setting. You can enjoy steak, seafood, lamb and veal at this Southern treasure. The restaurant is housed in an outbuilding that was built in 1897 and served as the wash house and servants quarters for the adjacent Victorian home (now the Punta Clara Candy Kitchen).

After your shopping adventure in Fairhope, head out for another shopping excursion at the **Eastern Shore Centre** in Spanish Fort [<http://www.easternshorecentre.com/>] (30500 State Hwy. 181, Malbis, Exit 38; 251-625-0060). The retail center features specialty stores, a movie theater and a variety of dining options. Stroll through delightfully landscaped streets and stop to enjoy an open-air musical performance or the dancing fountain at the community courtyard.

Where To Stay

A Fairhope landmark, the **Church Street Inn** [<http://www.bbonline.com/united-states/alabama/fairhope/churchstreet.html>] (51 S. Church St.; 866-928-8976) is in the heart of downtown Fairhope next to boutique shops. It is also listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

Located on the water but within easy walking distance of the downtown area sits the **Bay Breeze Guest House** [<http://www.bbonline.com/united-states/alabama/fairhope/baybreeze.html>] (742 S. Mobile St.; 866-928-8976).

The only hotel in downtown Fairhope is the **Hampton Inn & Suites** [<http://hamptoninn.hilton.com/en/hp/hotels/index.jhtml;jsessionid=4ZRAFTAB5B0KQCSG BJBOD4Q?moreDesc=true&ctyhocn=MOBFHXX>] (23 N. Section St.; 251-928-0956) which blends beautifully into the surrounding architecture of the town. Step outside the hotel and you are ready to shop. It's across the street from the Fairhope Welcome Center. For a complete listing of area lodging facilities, visit the Eastern Shore Chamber of Commerce [http://eschamber.com/shore_thing.php]

Getting There

The Eastern Shore consists of the towns of Spanish Fort, Daphne, Fairhope and Point Clear and is located on the east side of Mobile Bay. To get there from downtown Mobile, take I-10 across the bay bridge to the first exit (Exit 35). Take a right onto Hwy. 98 and make sure to turn right on the Scenic 98 route about one mile from I-10. The scenic route will take you through Daphne, Fairhope and Point Clear. You'll drive along streets lined with aged oak trees draped with Spanish moss.

(ABOUT FAIRHOPE, DAPHNE AND SPANISH FORT)

In 1894, Fairhope was established by a group of adventurous people looking for their own utopia. They established the town as a single-tax colony that they believed would have a “fair hope of success.” The first single-tax colonists who believed in Henry George's economic theories advocating no taxes other than a single land tax, settled on a high bluff overlooking Mobile Bay in 1894. Now, more than 100 years later, Fairhope still retains much of its original small-town ambience. Shoppers benefit today because there is no local sales tax.

Over the years, artists, writers and craftsmen have found Fairhope to be an inspiring haven for their work and have helped to make the community what it is today. After a national magazine ranked Fairhope as the second-best town for retirees in the nation, the population grew by 47 percent in the 1990s and the cost of homes soared.

Fairhope's natural beauty, unique shopping and entertainment experiences and cozy restaurants and cafes draw visitors from around the world.

Daphne was named by the first postmaster's wife to recognize the abundance of laurel trees that were once abundant in the area. (She was inspired by the tale of the Greek goddess Daphne, who was transformed into a laurel tree.) You can read the history of Daphne on a historic marker at the front of the fountain outside City Hall.

Spanish Fort was incorporated in July 1993, but its beginnings date back to 1781 after the American Revolution when Spanish troops defended Mobile from British attempts to recapture the city. Military action also took place in Spanish Fort during the War of 1812 and the Civil War.

To share questions or comments about this road trip, please email edith.parten@tourism.alabama.gov [edith.parten@tourism.alabama.gov].