



Traveling Down Island

Driving on the beach is an incredible adventure, but does take experience and preparation. Remember that in Texas all beaches are public highways and all traffic laws apply, including seat belt regulations. Two-wheel-drive vehicles have limited access to driving down South Beach, and the wind, Gulf currents and weather can make beach driving conditions unpredictable at times. Read this guide to learn how to best prepare yourself for traveling down island and call Malaquite Visitor Center at (361)949-8068 or the Weather Hotline at (361)949-8175 for the most current tide, weather and driving conditions.

Beach Driving Safety Suggestions:

- (1) The following items are useful to bring along on any down island trip: water, sunscreen, protective clothing, shade structure, extra fuel, spare tire(s), shovel, five-gallon bucket, wooden planks or old carpet/towels, and a first aid kit.
- (2) Travel in the tracks of those that have gone before you. This will not only help avoid areas of very deep sand, but also most debris. Also, remember that northbound vehicles have the right of way.
- (3) Keep moving in deep sand. It may be difficult to pull out if you stop.
- (4) Although it may be easier to drive on the hard sand at the water's edge, bear in mind that in some areas a steep shell embankment may exist, which may make leaving the hard sand difficult. If water is seen puddling in your tracks, do not stop. Move to drier ground.
- (5) Stay within the posted speed limits. In addition to being the safest way to drive, this is the most comfortable. Often the beach has a washboard texture, which makes driving over it at high speed like hitting a series of speed bumps. In addition, this will lessen damage to your vehicle should you encounter any unseen debris.
- (6) If you do get stuck, use your shovel to dig yourself out or place your planks or carpet in front of or in back of your tires and try to drive out. Use buckets of seawater to wet the sand for more traction. You can also use seaweed under your tires for increased traction. The National Park Service does not tow vehicles and the cost for a private wrecker to come down island may cost from several hundred to several thousand dollars.
- (7) Do not attempt to drive off the beach and into areas of vegetation. In addition to being prohibited, it is also unwise, because the grass often conceals large areas of standing water and very soft mud.
- (8) Park where you will not block traffic. If you park on the driving road, people will be forced to drive in the soft sand, which increases the likelihood that their vehicles will get stuck.
- (9) Watch for pedestrians, especially near tents and parked vehicles and especially at night. Watch for small children near the surf, where they cannot hear approaching vehicles.
- (10) During the sea turtle nesting season of April to August, be alert for nesting sea turtles crawling across the beach--both during the day and at night. Do not disturb any you see and direct passing motorists around the nesting turtle or emerging hatchlings. Mark the location and immediately report the sighting to the nearest ranger as soon as possible. If no rangers are nearby, call the park sea turtle biologist at 361.949.8173, ext. 226.