

# The Pulse

## CHATTANOOGA'S WEEKLY ALTERNATIVE

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## If Santa Claus Wore Shades and Flip-Flops

by Janis Hashe

November 13, 2014

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### Alabama's Gulf Shores/Orange Beach is your gift to yourself

It's almost sunset on Oyster Bay on Alabama's Gulf Shores, and the captain pilots your boat into the perfect place to watch the flaming ball descend into the water. Maybe you hadn't envisioned this as a perfect holiday experience. But really—why not?

Late fall and winter might just be the ideal time to get away to the Gulf Shores/Orange Beach. Why contend with spring breakers and summer tourists, when you can lounge on the deck of one of the region's 16,000 hotel rooms and condos now—perhaps with a holiday cocktail in hand?

A recent visit to Gulf Shores/Orange Beach revealed more outstanding dining and recreation options than ever. And lest you think you might miss out on more traditional Christmas trappings, the area has those planned for you as well.

### Settle in with all the comforts of home—then play

The three buildings of Caribe Resort in Orange Beach house gorgeous condos with equally gorgeous views. With full and fully equipped kitchens, you can make yourself a snack or a coffee whenever you feel like it—or whip up a holiday meal, if that's your fancy. Most homes, however, don't come with over 40,000 square feet of pools, a Lazy River to float down, tennis courts, beach shuttle service—and the happening Cobalt restaurant, complete with boat slips. [cariberesort.com](#)

Area beaches are famous for their white, silky sugar sand and you might just want to plop down and relax for a few days. But if you're ready to explore, there are a lot of options.

**Take a cruise.** Happily, sea life is once again frolicking in the Gulf and bays, and a dolphin cruise on Cetacean Cruises gives you a chance to see those intelligent charmers in the wild. (You'll also spot pelicans and possibly a turtle or so!) [cetaceancruises.com](#)

Wildlife is also featured on Wild Native Tours cruises. Their sunset expedition takes you on the



### The Pulse Calendar

FRI SAT SUN MON TUE WED THU

#### Friday

December 5, 2014

#### CONCERTS & LIVE MUSIC

##### CSO String Quintet

Dec 5, 2014 2:00 PM - 3:00 PM

Chattanooga Metropolitan Airport

#### CONCERTS & LIVE MUSIC

##### Jason Thomas and the Mean-Eyed Cats

Dec 5, 2014 5:00 PM - 6:00 PM

Chattanooga Choo Choo

#### ART & EXHIBITIONS

##### Choices

Dec 5, 2014 5:00 PM - 8:00 PM

In-Town Gallery

#### CONCERTS & LIVE MUSIC

##### Eddie Pontiac

Dec 5, 2014 5:30 PM

El Mesón

#### ART & EXHIBITIONS

##### Juried Members Exhibition

Dec 5, 2014 5:30 PM - 8:00 PM

AVA

#### ART & EXHIBITIONS

##### Opening Reception: "Two Footprints"

Dec 5, 2014 6:30 PM - 7:30 PM

River Gallery

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intercoastal waterway, Bon Secour River and Oyster Bay, where Captain Mike finds the perfect place to watch the sun set. Great photo ops! [wildnativetours.com](http://wildnativetours.com)

**Step back into the past.** You'll need to drive inland for just a few minutes to reach the hamlet of Magnolia Springs. Originally developed in the early 1800s, the small town has mostly been preserved, including its lovely little church. If bed-and-breakfast stays are your favorite way to travel, the award-winning Magnolia Springs Bed and Breakfast, presided over by proud papa David Worthington, is a gem, friendly cats, original woodwork and all. [magnoliasprings.com](http://magnoliasprings.com)

Be sure and allow time for lunch or dinner, because Jesse's at the Moore Brothers Village Market is worth the drive all by itself. The former grocery/general store is now one the area's top restaurants, specializing in farm-to-table, and of course, fresh seafood. A don't miss. [jessesrestaurant.com](http://jessesrestaurant.com)

**Zip-py-de-do-dah or paddle.** Adventurous souls will love the Gulf Adventure Center, on 14 acres at Gulf State Park. Hummingbird Ziplines will fly you along six linked ziplines, the last one almost completely over water. [gulfadventurecenter.com](http://gulfadventurecenter.com)

Kayaking is also a active option, as you explore Little Lagoon and its wild inhabitants with GoGo Kayaks. [gogokayaks.com](http://gogokayaks.com)

In fact, the many parks and recreation areas that surround Gulf Shores/Orange Beach offer so many hiking, biking and other outdoor activities, you will definitely work up an appetite. Which is a very good thing, because one of the other best reasons to visit is...

### **Eating. Plan to spend time on this.**

Besides the two outstanding restaurants already mentioned, Gulf Shores/Orange Beach has so many choices it's a foodie's dream.

Casual, right on the beach, and oh-so-laid back is The Gulf. Outdoor bar, various places to hang out...what's not to love? Try the grouper sandwich and check out the fun gift shop. Find them on Facebook.

New and already generating a big buzz is Bill's By the Beach. And they do mean "by the beach," as you'll dine with a lovely view of the Gulf. Of course, any of the seafood dishes prepared by Chef Vincent Cofer are winners, but try a catch of the day prepared "New Orleans style" and enjoy heaven. Flights of wine are another special here...how about a Grayson Chardonnay, followed by a Kiona Riseling, followed by a St. Supery Sauvignon Blanc? Salud! [billsbythebeach.com](http://billsbythebeach.com)

Should you be visiting premier shopping destination The Wharf in Orange Beach, your nose may well lead you straight to Villaggio Grille. Another great wine list, and can we just say "truffle honey shrimp with risotto"? [villaggiogrille.com](http://villaggiogrille.com)

Hardcore foodies may even want to take time to take a class at the Gulf Coast Culinary Institute. Find out what they're offering during your stay at [faulknerstate.edu](http://faulknerstate.edu)

**Special note:** Environmentalists in the Gulf have embarked on a mission that might be called "If You Can't Beat 'Em, Eat 'Em." Lionfish, not native to the area, and believed to have been released by Florida aquarium owners, have infested local reefs. Their spines are poisonous, they have no natural predators in the region, and they eat huge numbers of native fish and crustaceans.

So, the Gulf Coast Lionfish Coalition was formed, and is now promoting the consumption of lionfish. These fish are not poisonous once the spines are removed, and the light, flaky flesh makes, for example, a tasty fish taco. Look for lionfish on local menus and help the Gulf get rid of an invasive species.

### **Sleigh bells may not be jingling, but...**

You won't miss them at Bellingrath's Magic Christmas in Lights in Theodore, AL. Three million lights, 12 scenes, and a fully decorated house to tour. Opens Nov. 29 and runs through Dec. 31. [bellingrath.org](http://bellingrath.org)

And for a truly unique holiday treat, reserve now for "Coastal Christmas with Aaron Neville," Dec. 5 at the Orange Beach Center at The Wharf. The soulful singer will celebrate the season in his own sublime way. Tickets are \$50, visit <http://coastalchristmasconcert.eventbrite.com/?>