



VISIT MISSISSIPPI GULF COAST African American Heritage Itinerary

DAY ONE

Begin your day at the [Biloxi Visitors Center](#) and Lighthouse. Explore the museum and learn about African American and other cultural influences in Biloxi and the Mississippi Gulf Coast. Across the street, a historic marker describes the turmoil of racial desegregation during the beach Wade-Ins of the 1960s.

Take time to visit the [Ohr-O'Keefe Museum of Art](#). Among the exhibits, don't miss the **Gallery of African American Art**, which features photography, sculpture and other art media created by African American artists.

Walk through the replica of the [Pleasant Reed House](#). The original house (destroyed by Hurricane Katrina) was the home of the late Pleasant Reed, the first free black man in Biloxi to build and own his home outright after the Civil War. This historic "side-hall camelback shotgun" from the early 1900s will take you back in time as soon as you enter its doors. The relocation of the Pleasant Reed House to the site of the Ohr-O'Keefe Museum of Art ensured that this cultural and educational resource can be used to tell the story of a modest but remarkable man who was part of Biloxi's diverse cultural legacy for years to come.



Pleasant Reed Interpretive Center Gallery features "**The Native Guard: A Photographic History of Ship Island's African American Regiment**". Photographs from the collection of C. P. ("Kitty") Weaver of Massachusetts from the diary of Colonel Nathan W. Daniels, supplemented by photographs provided by Isiah Edwards, record the history of the Second Regiment of Louisiana Native Guards that served for the Union at Ship Island in the Mississippi Sound.



Blues Trail markers dot the coastline. Coastal markers celebrate [100 Men Hall in Bay St. Louis](#), [Biloxi Blues](#), [Blues & Jazz in Pass Christian](#), [Broadcasting the Blues in Gulfport](#), [Gulfport Boogie](#) and [Mississippi Gulf Coast Blues](#) in Pascagoula.

Travel to the city of Gulfport for a lovely view of **Bayou Bernard**, one of the Gulf Coast's bayous named after a free black man, Bernard Beniot. Beniot operated as a blacksmith and forge on the banks of this bayou. For lunch, enjoy a delicious meal at [Blow Fly Inn](#) while enjoying a wonderful and relaxing view of Bayou Bernard.

Consider a relaxing cruise to [Ship Island](#) to visit Fort Massachusetts. During the Civil War, Ship Island was maintained by the [Second Regiment Louisiana Infantry Native Guards](#), the first black regiment organized during the war. By 1864 there were 1,200 Confederate prisoners on Ship Island that were guarded by the 74th Regiment, U.S. Colored Infantry. The Louisiana Native Guards controlled the island and fort from 1963-1965.

This afternoon, drive west along the beach to the town of Pass Christian and wander the town green. Marvel at the Eagle tree sculpture dedicated to **Col. Lawrence Edward Roberts, Sr.** (December 9, 1922 – October 12, 2004), father of newscaster, Robin Roberts, a pilot with the Tuskegee Airmen in the 1940s and a colonel in the United States Air Force with 32 years of total military service.

The town of Pass Christian boasts quaint shops, and we recommend stopping by the the wonderful [Pass Christian Olive Oil and Vinegars Shop](#). Spend some time tasting, testing and pairing oils and balsamic vinegars to suit your personal palate.

Day Two

Begin your trip with a spiritually unique tour of [St. Augustine Catholic Church and Seminary](#), the first seminary in the United States created specifically to train African American men for the priesthood. St. Augustine is the oldest existing Catholic seminary in Mississippi, established in 1922.

Explore the fascinating **Marian & Agony Grotto** adjacent to St. Augustine Catholic Church. View the sculptures inside the grotto that depicts the agony Jesus Christ went through before the Crucifixion. The grotto and the statues inside were designed and built by **Thaddeaus S. Bourcree**, an African American bricklayer.



Visit [St. Rose de Lima Church](#), home to the magnificent mural, Christ In The Oaks, an African Christ figure. View the surroundings of the mural, the altar, the tabernacle stand, the ambo, and other interesting furnishings made from driftwood and trees found on the shores of the Bay of St. Louis. This active church combines Southern Gospel with Roman Catholic tradition every Sunday. The multi-racial Gospel Choir perform each year at the New Orleans Jazz Festival.

Take a walk through the cemetery adjacent to St. Rose de Lima Church and see different ways people were buried, both above the ground in tombs and under ground.

Take a scenic drive through [Old Town Bay St. Louis](#) to see the shotgun houses and many other businesses that were constructed by **Eugene Ray**, an African American carpenter and developer who built nearly half of the buildings in Bay St. Louis in the 1800s.

Visit the [100 Men D.B.A. Hall](#), a longtime center of African American social life and entertainment. This meeting hall was built in 1922 by the One Hundred Members' Debating Benevolent Association. Over the years the association sponsored many events and also rented the hall to promoters who brought in blues, rhythm & blues, and jazz acts. Local residents have recalled performances by Etta James, Big Joe Turner, Guitar Slim, Irma Thomas, Professor Longhair, Ernie K-Doe, Deacon John, Earl King, and numerous others here. The Blues Trail marker, 100 Men Hall was erected in June 2011. Your group might enjoy Lunch and Live Blues at the club!

