Houston Museum of Natural Science
Travel Program

Texas Coastal Ecology Excursion
Corpus Christi | Laguna Madre | Padre Island | Aransas Bay | Talley Island | Rockport
November 6 - 8, 2015

Experience the lower Texas Coast on this weekend adventure with marine biologists and researchers to learn about this amazing ecosystem. This expedition to Corpus Christi will be a crash course in Texas coastal ecology and natural history.

Our field guides for this trip are Dr. Wes Tunnell, HMNS curator of marine biology and a leading researcher on the Texas coast and Gulf of Mexico and aquatic education specialist and bay historian Jay Tarkington of the Center for Coastal Studies at TAMUCC.

$295 per person for HMNS Members • $355 per person for nonmembers
Limited to 30 participants

Price Includes
• Ecology and marine biology field guides
• Admission and fees for all activities listed in itinerary
• Two meals: Dinner on November 6 and Lunch on November 7
• Transportation to/from hotel/sites on November 7

Price Does Not Include
• Transportation to/from Houston/Corpus Christi/Rockport
• Lodging in Corpus Christi*
• Meals other than dinner on Friday and lunch on Saturday
Itinerary

Friday, November 6

The Corpus Christi Museum of Science and History will provide the perfect introduction to our coastal adventure. We will have a private tour of their history, ecology and paleontology galleries to learn the background of the area—from the prehistoric past that included dinosaurs and ice-age mammals, to the native Karankawa, Spanish settlers, Texas revolutionaries and Confederate forces. Our tour begins at 4 p.m. Participants can meet at the museum in own cars, or ride in HMNS van from hotel departing at 3:45 p.m.

This evening a group diner will be hosted at Water Street Seafood Company for the best seafood in town, and a few blocks walk from our hotel. The party room is reserved for our group at 7 p.m.

Saturday, November 7

Laguna Madre is the most famous hypersaline lagoon in the world, and Padre Island is the longest undeveloped barrier island in the world. What a treat to visit two world-class natural environments in one day along the South Texas Coast! Our guide for today is Dr. Wes Tunnell, HMNS curator of marine biology and a leading researcher on the Texas coast and Gulf of Mexico. Vans will depart the hotel at 8:30 a.m.

The day will start with a visit to the renowned Harte Research Institute for Gulf of Mexico Studies (HRI) at Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi, which focuses on solution-oriented problems of the Texas and other Gulf coasts in the US, Mexico and Cuba using an integration of multidisciplinary studies in natural sciences, policy and law, as well as socio-economics.

After our HRI tour, we will drive to Padre Island National Seashore (PINS) where we will first visit the shoreline of Laguna Madre. Our day here will include discussions of Laguna Madre’s highly productive and unique biota and ecology, as well as ecological zonation on the beach and dunes. We will tour the Malaquite Beach Visitor’s Center, where we learn about the Kemp’s ridley sea turtle recovery project. Lunch will be provided for our group at the visitor center. After lunch, we will continue down the beach where you will have the opportunity to collect seashells and drift wood.

Our next stop is the Texas State Aquarium. We will enjoy a tour that includes the highlights of the aquarium displays and then we will go on behind-the-scenes to see how staff cares for the animals and plants. We will see pumps, filters and miles of pipes working together to keep the animals and plants healthy. Our private tour
includes an exclusive peek at the nursery, where the newcomers are kept before they can be seen by the public. Our group will also have the honor of assisting with a feeding.

After returning to the hotel, you are on your own for dinner. There are numerous restaurants in walking distance.

**Sunday, November 8**

Today we will enjoy a boat excursion on Aransas Bay with a stop at Talley Island with Jay Tarkington, program director of the Center for Coastal Studies at Texas A&M Corpus Christi. Our group will spend the morning immersed in the wetlands. While exploring the island, we will learn about the important components of wetland ecology and how it has shaped human history, and continues to influence our future. Our group will have access to the Estes Education Station and participate in wetland sampling. We will see the varieties of seagrass, oyster, mangrove and birds, and learn about bay formation, geologic change and water quality.

Prior to this excursion, we will check out of our hotel this morning. Driving your own cars, the group will meet at a boat dock in Rockport at 9 a.m. Our estimated return is noon. After the boat excursion, our group will part ways. There are a few lunch spots nearby before hitting the road back to Houston.

---

**Omni Corpus Christi Hotel**

* Lodging is not included in the price of the trip. Participants are responsible for making and paying for their own hotel reservations at the Omni Corpus Christi Hotel. Located in the lively downtown Marina District, Omni Corpus Christi Hotel offers newly renovated rooms with spectacular views of the Corpus Christi bay. A discounted rate has been negotiated for our group at $139 per night plus tax and fees. **Room reservations must be made by October 1.** Group reservation code and web link will be given upon registration.

Omni Corpus Christi Hotel  
900 North Shoreline Blvd.  
Corpus Christi, Texas 78401  
(361) 887-1600
Field Guides

Wes Tunnell
Marine biologist and ecologist Dr. Wes Tunnell serves as the visiting curator of malacology at the Houston Museum of Natural Science and curated the new Hamman Hall of Coastal Ecology. He is associate director of the Harte Research Institute for Gulf of Mexico Studies and director of the Center for Coastal Studies. For 30 years he taught coral reef Ecology. He is editor of GulfBase, an award-winning database developed by HRI researchers. Most recently, Tunnell, a Google Ocean advisory committee member played a vital role in creating “Ocean in Google Earth.” His most recent books are *Coral Reefs of the Southern Gulf of Mexico* and *Encyclopedia of Texas Seashells*.

Jay Tarkington
The Center for Coastal Studies aquatic education program director Jay Tarkington is dedicated to helping people connect with South Texas ecology. Tarkington is a certified U.S. sailing instructor and U.S. Coast Guard licensed captain, and he educates the public on the Coastal Bend bays and estuaries through tours on the Wetland Explorer water vessel. Tarkington’s current projects include a coastal ecology tour guidebook, Coastal Bend kayaking guide, and Estes Wetland Education Station. In addition, he's involved with grants from Texas Parks and Wildlife, the Coastal Bend Bays and Estuaries Program and the Agriculture Extension Service.

Registration

Participants can register for this trip at the HMNS Box Office, online at [www hmns org travel](http://www.hmns.org/travel) 713.639.4629. By purchasing a ticket you agree to the “Participant Requirements and Responsibilities” and “Cancellation Information” (page 5). Full payment is required for registration. After purchase you will be contacted by HMNS with confirmation of your registration and hotel reservation information. Pricing is $295 per person for HMNS Members and $355 per person for nonmembers.

Cancellation Information

- Cancellations made 60 days or more prior to departure will be refunded 50% of the price. No refunds for cancellations within 60 days prior to departure. Tickets are transferable; however HMNS must be alerted of the new traveler’s name, mail, cell number and home address.
- There is a minimum number of 8 participants. In the event that less than the minimum number of participants register for the trip, the trip will be cancelled and all participants will receive full refunds.
- No refunds will be made if a traveler chooses to not participate in group activities or misses a departure.
Participant Requirements and Responsibilities

- Participants should be in good physical condition, capable of walking a fair distance on uneven ground while outdoors, and able to walk up and down stairs. Please check with HMNS if you have any accessibility accommodations that are necessary for you to enjoy the trip prior to registration.
- Access to restroom facilities is not possible at all times.
- The minimum age of participant for this trip is 12. Each minor must be accompanied by one adult guardian. Guardians are responsible for the supervision and safety of their children.
- Participants should notify HMNS staff of any medical issues in case of emergency.
- No partial refunds will be made for missed activities. If participants miss a departure time, they must make their own arrangements to meet the group.
- Participants will meet in Corpus Christi. Our first group activity begins at 4 p.m. on November 6 at the Corpus Christi Museum of Science and History.
- Tobacco use, alcohol, illegal drugs and firearms are not permitted on the tour.
- Prior to trip, participants must complete HMNS Release and Consent form.
- Participants must be self-sufficient and carry their own belongings.
- This trip is rain or shine.

Waiting List

This trip is limited to 30 participants. A waiting list will be kept once the trip is sold out. To be placed on the waiting list, email travel@hmns.org.

Packing List

- Layered clothing for comfortable for activity, windbreaker
- Comfortable, sturdy, close-toed waterproof shoes
- Personal daypack with water bottle
- Sun hat, sunglasses, sunscreen
- Camera, binoculars
- More details will be sent to those registered prior to the trip

HMNS Contact Information

travel@hmns.org, 713.693.4737, www.hmns.org/travel