



Beau Rivage makes quite an impressive statement on Beach Boulevard.



Fallen Oak Golf Course

PHOTOS/COURTESY OF BEAU RIVAGE

BY HOPE S. PHILBRICK

After enjoying a professional spa treatment while on vacation, it's never quite a vacation again without a spa treatment on the itinerary. Even more indulgent is a luxurious full day of pampering at the spa instead of a massage here or pedicure there. At the 20,000-square-foot Beau Rivage Spa and Salon in Biloxi, Miss., unable to choose just one treatment from the list of more than 70 options, I sprung for three: the zen trilogy body wrap, caviar-and-pearl facial and signature manicure. Each experience coaxed me deeper into relaxation. By the end of that heavenly day, with (nearly) every inch of me thoroughly polished, moisturized and massaged, I floated out of the spa, up to my spacious guest room and climbed into bed to sleep like I'd never slept before.

The next morning, after pulling back the drapes and gazing for awhile at the Gulf of Mexico, I was confronted with a mild stressor: What should I choose to do among the dozens of available options, many just an elevator ride away? And then I sank back into a plush chair and procrastinated. Ah, the pleasures of a vacation.

If you haven't visited the Mississippi Gulf Coast region since Hurricane Katrina, you may be thinking, "Vacation in Biloxi? Really?"

Yes. If there's one thing that locals want you to know about the Mississippi Gulf

Coast, it's this: "We are open for business," says Craig Ray, director of the Mississippi Development Authority Tourism Division. That news may come as a surprise when you consider that Hurricane Katrina hit on Aug. 29, 2005, devastating a 90,000-square-mile area over the course of 12 hours with winds of up to 175 miles per hour and a 35-foot high storm surge of ocean water, on top of which rode 17-foot waves. More than 65,000 buildings were lost, 600 of which were listed on the National Register of Historic Places, and hundreds of thousands more were damaged. Hundreds of lives were lost. Yet recovery began almost immediately. In fact, Beau Rivage re-opened on the one-year anniversary of Hurricane Katrina, all spiffed up after a \$550 million renovation.

At 32 stories and 3.2 million square feet, Beau Rivage is the tallest and largest building in Mississippi. In addition to the spa and salon, it boasts 12 restaurants, four lounges and bars, 12 boutique shops, a pool, a theater and a state-of-the-art casino with 93 table games, 2,100 slot machines, 230 video poker games and a 16-table poker room. There's also a high-roller area with 10 blackjack tables, 100 slot machines and a table that flips between roulette and baccarat.

Tourism contributes \$6.5 billion to Mississippi's economy each year—a third of that figure earned in the Gulf Coast region alone. Knowing this, I felt obligated to get



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BILOXI

Relax on the Mississippi Gulf Coast

IF YOU GO

GETTING THERE

The Mississippi Gulf Coast is about a six-hour drive from Atlanta. Or fly nonstop in about an hour on AirTran or Delta to Gulfport-Biloxi International Airport.

WHERE TO STAY

■ Beau Rivage Resort & Casino

875 Beach Blvd.
Biloxi, MS 39530
1-228-386-7111
www.beaurivage.com

■ IP Casino Resort & Spa

850 Bayview Ave.
Biloxi, MS 39530
1-228-436-3000
www.ipbiloxi.com

WHAT TO DO

- View regional artwork at Shearwater Pottery, the Ohr-O'Keefe Museum of Art and the Walter Anderson Museum of Art.
- Go deep sea fishing, and reel in a number of the 200 species of fish available in the Mississippi Gulf (as permitted by season).

MORE INFORMATION

■ Mississippi Gulf Coast Convention & Visitors Bureau

11975 Seaway Road
Gulfport, MS 39503
1-228-896-6699
www.gulfcoast.org

out of my room and do what I could to help stimulate the economy.

One option available to guests of Beau Rivage is Fallen Oak Golf Course. Designed by Tom Fazio, the 18-hole, par-72 course boasts rolling greens, dramatic bunkers, thousands of trees and five sets of tees for all levels of golf, from 7,486 yards to 5,300 yards, according to John Hurt, a golf pro at Fallen Oak. "We try to make it as comfortable and slow-paced an environment as we can," he says. The facility also houses a driving range, short game range, and practice chipping, putting and sand areas. Service is top-notch: For example, upon arrival I found that a locker had been reserved for me with a personalized nameplate.

In the evening, I headed to the 1,550-seat Beau Rivage Theatre to see "Y," a fast-paced show that alternated routines by China's Hebei Acrobatic Troupe and the Russian dance company, Todes. With its upbeat music, adrenaline-pumping choreography, elaborate costumes and dynamic effects, the 80-minute show was well worth its under-\$30 ticket prices. (Upcoming shows include Lord of the Dance, Jay Leno and Crosby, Stills & Nash. Prices vary.)

At BR Prime, I ended the day with a delicious meal of seafood salad, pork rack with mitake mushrooms and sweet potato gratin with a decadent chocolate dessert. After all, a vacation could never be a vacation without chocolate! **SP**