



*Tour:*

# TEXAS ISLAND STEM ADVENTURE

Middle School Edition

*Destination:*

South Padre Island, Texas

*Specialization:*

Science, History, Teambuilding & Culture

*Itinerary:*

5-days / 4-nights

## TEXAS ISLAND ADVENTURE - MIDDLE SCHOOL EDITION

### South Padre Island, Texas

Day	Morning	Afternoon	Evening
1	Travel to Brownsville / South Padre Island; transfer to Hotel		Welcome, Safety & Orientation
2	University of Texas Coastal Science Laboratory: 2-hour Cruise on the Ridley Floating Classroom, Guided Beach Ecology Walk, Dogfish Shark Dissection & Lunch		Dinner
3	Beach Time / Free Time	Sand Dune Ecology & Restoration Program	SPI Birding & Nature Center + Alligator Sanctuary
4	Sea Turtle Presentation & Rescue Facility Tour	SERVICE PROJECT: Beach Care & Clean-Up Initiative	Sandcastle Team Building Beach Workshop
5	Port Isabel Lighthouse & Maritime History Program	Transfer to airport, depart South Padre Island for home	



As with all sample itineraries, please be advised that this is an 'example' of a schedule and that the activities and hotels shown may be variable dependent upon dates, weather, special requests and other factors. Itineraries will be confirmed prior to travel.



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## A Message From Our Team

At STEM Study Tours, we believe students learn best when they're immersed, engaged, and inspired. Every program is built with intention - blending hands-on discovery, academic depth, and meaningful experiences that help students see the world (and themselves) in new ways. Our goal is for each itinerary to spark curiosity, build confidence, and create moments students carry long after the trip ends. We're honored to partner with schools who share that vision and to help bring learning to life beyond the classroom.

— Michele & The Hammock Expeditions Team

## Why Travel With Hammock Expeditions & STEM Study Tours

Schools choose us because we design programs that are organized, intentional, and built around real learning. Our itineraries combine strong academics with smooth logistics, giving teachers confidence and giving students opportunities to explore, ask questions, and grow. We partner with trusted local experts, communicate clearly, and support groups every step of the way so educators can focus on their students - not the logistics.

## What Sets Us Apart

- **Purpose-Driven Itineraries** - Students actively participate in meaningful, real-world learning.
- **Safety, Structure & Professionalism** - From 24-hour support to vetted partners and clear communication, we ensure teachers can focus on their students while we handle the logistics.
- **Hands-On, High-Impact Learning** - Our programs emphasize field science, conservation, and experiential learning - the kind that sticks with students long after the trip ends.
- **Student-Centered Design** - We balance learning with fun, reflection with adventure, and structure with flexibility. Every day is crafted to keep students engaged, energized, and supported.
- **A Team That Travels With Purpose** - We're educators, planners, naturalists, and travel professionals who care deeply about student growth. Your goals become our goals.

## Our Commitment to You

When you travel with us, you gain a partner who understands your vision, anticipates your needs, and delivers an experience your students will remember for years to come. We're here to support your school, empower your students, and make every moment meaningful.

**We want to be your educational partner. Let us know how we may serve you.**

*Michele, Christina, Izzy, Dana, Taylor, and the Team*



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Discover south Texas' stunning shoreline on South Padre Island. Watch the gulls and pelicans fish the waters while teaching your students about coastal habitats and having some serious fun teambuilding on the beach.

**Texas Island STEM Adventure** immerses students in coastal science, conservation, and sustainability through hands-on field experiences at South Padre Island. From marine research aboard the R/V Ridley to dune restoration and wildlife ecology, each day blends discovery, teamwork, and environmental stewardship.

## Day 1 – Welcome to Texas!

Welcome Dinner

After arriving in Brownsville and crossing the Queen Isabella Causeway onto South Padre Island, students settle into their hotel and begin their coastal adventure. We'll gather for a Welcome, Safety & Orientation Meeting to set expectations, build excitement, and introduce the themes of science, stewardship, and teamwork that will shape the week. The evening concludes with a relaxed Welcome Dinner - your group's first chance to connect, unwind, and soak in the island atmosphere.

**South Padre Island...** Where science meets the sea and the coastline tells its own story. This barrier island—shaped by wind, water, and time, and framed by the calm Laguna Madre and the open Gulf of Mexico—invites students to explore one of the most vibrant ecosystems on the Texas coast. Here, marine research, coastal ecology, wildlife science, and sustainability come alive in real time.

Cross the Queen Isabella Causeway and everything shifts: the air softens, the horizon widens, and curiosity comes naturally. With 34 miles of sun-washed beaches and clear emerald water, South Padre Island becomes a living laboratory—one where dunes move, wetlands breathe, and every tide reveals something new.

From sea turtle conservation and dune restoration to research vessels, lighthouse climbs, and microplastics field labs, this island offers endless opportunities for discovery. Calm seas, warm sunshine, and a spirit of adventure make it an ideal year-round destination where students don't just learn science—they experience it.



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# Padre Island Fun Facts

- ✚ **Sea Turtle Rescue & Ecotourism** - South Padre Island is a leader in coastal conservation. At Sea Turtle Inc., visitors learn about endangered sea turtles and the efforts to rescue, rehabilitate, and release them back into the Gulf.
- ✚ **A True Tropical Latitude** - Sitting at latitude 26.1° N—nearly identical to Nassau, Bahamas—South Padre enjoys warm temperatures year-round, making it a natural outdoor classroom.
- ✚ **Longest Barrier Island in the World** - South Padre Island is part of Padre Island, a 113-mile barrier island—the longest on Earth. Fewer than 3,000 residents call the city home, giving it a relaxed, small-town feel.
- ✚ **A Hypersaline Bay** - The Laguna Madre is one of only six hypersaline bays in the world—saltier than the ocean and rich with unique marine life.
- ✚ **Shipwrecks & Spanish Treasure** - In the 1500s, Spanish fleets sailed this coastline. The 1554 “Wreck of the 300” scattered silver across the seafloor, inspiring treasure hunters for centuries.
- ✚ **The Karankawa People** - The island’s earliest inhabitants were known for their remarkable height and strength, and for their deep connection to the coastal landscape.
- ✚ **Glamour on the Gulf** - In the 1920s, the Port Isabel Yacht Club welcomed icons like Amelia Earhart, Al Capone, and Charles Lindbergh—adding a touch of golden-age glamour to the region’s history.

## Day 2 – Coastal Sciences

Breakfast & dinner included; lunch on own

Today’s activities include:

**University of Texas Coastal Sciences Laboratory** – Located on South Padre Island, the UT Coastal Studies Lab has been a hub for marine research, education, and coastal stewardship since 1973. Their mission centers on hands-on learning, scientific discovery, and community outreach focused on the Gulf of Mexico and the unique ecosystems of South Texas.

Today, your group will spend a full day immersed in coastal science. Depending on group size, students may rotate through activities in smaller teams. Each group will complete **three learning modules** with a break for lunch.



**2-hour Cruise on the Ridley Floating Classroom** - Students step aboard the 57-foot **R/V Ridley** for a guided research cruise through the Laguna Madre and surrounding ship channels. This floating classroom is fully equipped for field science, giving students the chance to investigate the marine environment using real research tools.

### Highlights include:

- Collecting specimens with **plankton nets, trawls, sediment samplers, and water-quality probes**
- Observing marine organisms in the **onboard touch tank**
- Using **digital microscopes** to study plankton and invertebrates



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- Learning from educator-naturalists about the **Laguna Madre ecosystem**, wildlife adaptations, and human impacts
- Spotting bottlenose dolphins, sea turtles, brown pelicans, and other coastal wildlife

The goal of the Ridley experience is to deepen students' understanding of this rare hypersaline bay and inspire long-term stewardship of Texas' coastal resources.

**Guided Beach Ecology Hike** - Led by a Coastal Studies Lab naturalist, students explore the shoreline and jetties while learning how dunes, pollinators, wildlife, and marine habitats interact to shape the island's ecosystem. After the hike, students tour the lab, investigate invertebrates in the touch tank, and complete a scavenger hunt or dichotomous key activity that reinforces species identification and ecological relationships.



**Dogfish Shark Dissection** - In this hands-on lab, students examine the anatomy and physiology of the dogfish shark, gaining insight into adaptations, organ systems, and the role of predators in marine food webs. Larger groups may also rotate through supplemental activities such as a **marine debris investigation** or a **watershed model demonstration**.

In the evening, we'll have dinner locally and then save time for an **evening beach stroll to look for crabs**. Make sure to bring your flashlight!

### **Day 3 – Island Ecology Day**

*Breakfast & dinner included; lunch on own*

Today's activities include:

**Morning Free Time!** - Enjoy an easy morning on the beach for fun in the sun, plan some shopping time, or let us help you create something amazing!

**Sand Dune Ecology & Restoration Program** - Students step into the island's most important natural defense system during this hands-on dune ecology and restoration program led by trained naturalists. Through guided exploration, they learn how dunes form, why native vegetation matters, and how wind and waves shape the barrier island over time. Students participate in restoration activities such as planting native grasses or assisting with erosion-control efforts, gaining a firsthand understanding of how healthy dunes protect wildlife, beaches, and coastal communities. This workshop blends field science with real-world stewardship, empowering students to make a meaningful impact on the island's future.



**SPI Birding & Nature Center + Alligator Sanctuary** - Students explore one of South Padre Island's most vibrant wildlife habitats during a guided visit to the SPI Birding & Nature Center and Alligator Sanctuary. Elevated boardwalks lead through coastal wetlands where herons, egrets, spoonbills, and migratory shorebirds feed and nest, offering students an up-close look at the island's rich biodiversity. Naturalists share insights into wetland ecology, bird behavior, and the importance of these habitats within the larger Laguna Madre ecosystem. The



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experience continues at the Alligator Sanctuary, where students learn about alligator biology, conservation, and the role of apex predators in maintaining healthy ecosystems. With a mix of observation, interpretation, and wildlife encounters, this program brings the island's wetlands to life in a way that is both educational and unforgettable.

**Gravity Park: Go-Karts & Mini-Golf** - Students wrap up the day with classic island fun at Gravity Park, South Padre's long-running beachfront amusement center. Your group package includes go-karts and mini-golf - perfect for friendly competition and team bonding. Those who want even more adventure can add optional attractions such as the Skycoaster, the Rocket reverse-bungee, trampoline rides, or the climbing wall. It's a lighthearted, high-energy evening that balances the day's science and exploration with pure fun.

#### **Day 4 – Sea Turtles & Conservation**

*Breakfast & dinner included; lunch on own*

Today's activities include:

**Sea Turtle, Inc.** - Students have the opportunity to visit a world-renowned organization dedicated to the rescue, rehabilitation, and release of injured sea turtles. Founded in 1977 to protect the endangered Kemp's Ridley, the center now leads global efforts in conservation, research, and public education. During their visit, students participate in a Turtle Talk and an interactive educational program that explores sea turtle biology, threats to their survival, and the critical role these animals play in healthy marine ecosystems. Through close observation and expert-led interpretation, students gain a deeper understanding of conservation science and the real-world impact of protecting endangered species.



**SERVICE PROJECT: Beach Care & Clean-Up Initiative** – Students spend the afternoon enjoying South Padre Island's shoreline while taking part in a meaningful conservation effort. Equipped with supplies provided by the City of South Padre Island, students participate in a guided beach clean-up focused on protecting coastal habitats and reducing marine debris. As they collect and sort litter, students learn how pollution impacts wildlife, dune systems, and the health of the Gulf ecosystem. This hands-on stewardship activity reinforces the importance of individual action and empowers students to contribute directly to the preservation of the island's natural environment.

**Sandcastle Team Building Beach Workshop** - Students tap into creativity, collaboration, and coastal engineering during this hands-on sandcastle workshop led by a professional sand sculptor. With shovels, buckets, carving tools, and expert guidance, teams learn the techniques behind building strong, sculpted sand structures — from water management and compaction to design strategy and detail work. Whether crafting a towering castle, a themed sculpture, or a custom message or logo, students work together toward a shared goal in a fun, relaxed beach setting. Larger groups can break into smaller teams, and those with a design in mind are encouraged to bring their ideas to life.



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**Reflection Circle** - Before heading to the airport, students gather for a final reflection on their week - a chance to celebrate everything they've learned, experienced, and accomplished together. From hands-on STEM labs to behind-the-scenes discoveries, they look back on the moments that challenged them, inspired them, and brought the group closer. It's a warm, meaningful pause in the day where students share highlights, thank their leaders, and recognize how much they've grown. With new confidence, new friendships, and a deeper understanding of the world around them, the group begins their journey home - carrying memories that will stay with them long after the trip ends.

### **Day 5 – Maritime History & Goodbye**

*Breakfast included; lunch & dinner on own*

Today's activities include:

**Port Isabel Lighthouse & Maritime History Program** - Students begin the day across the causeway in historic Port Isabel, home to the only lighthouse on the Texas coast open to the public. Climbing the spiral staircase to the top, they take in panoramic views of the Laguna Madre and Gulf of Mexico while learning how lighthouse keepers once guided ships through these shallow, shifting waters. The experience continues with a guided program at the Port Isabel Historical Museum or Treasures of the Gulf Museum, where students explore shipwrecks, Spanish treasure fleets, early navigation tools, and the maritime history that shaped South Texas. This program blends coastal geography, engineering, and history, giving students a deeper understanding of how people and the environment have interacted along the Gulf for centuries.

Later today, we'll depart the area for home, taking memories that will hopefully last forever!

## A Final Note

As your Texas Island STEM Adventure comes to a close, we hope your students leave South Padre Island with new knowledge, new friendships, and a deeper appreciation for the coastal environments that shape our world. From marine research vessels and wildlife encounters to conservation projects and reflection circles at sunset, this program is designed to inspire curiosity, stewardship, and a lifelong love of learning. We're honored to share this journey with you - and we look forward to welcoming you on your next adventure.



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**Minimum Booking Numbers:** 20 students

**What's Included:**

- ✓ Roundtrip flights OR motorcoach transportation
- ✓ 4-nights' accommodation in South Padre Island
- ✓ SPI airport transfers and local transfers via coach and trolley
- ✓ Breakfasts & dinners daily starting with dinner on your night of arrival and ending with breakfast on departure (dependent upon flight times)
- ✓ University of Texas Coastal Science Laboratory with:
  - 2-hour cruise on the Ridley Floating Classroom Marine Research Vessel
  - Guided Beach Ecology Walk
  - Dogfish Shark Dissection Lab
- ✓ Evening Crab Ecology Walk (bring your flashlight!)
- ✓ Sand Dune Ecology & Restoration Program
- ✓ SPI Birding & Nature Center with Alligator Sanctuary
- ✓ Go Carts & Mini-Golf at Gravity Park
- ✓ Sea Turtle Presentation & Rescue Facility Tour
- ✓ SERVICE PROJECT: Beach Care & Clean-Up Initiative
- ✓ Sandcastle Team Building Project
- ✓ Port Isabel Lighthouse & Maritime History Program
- ✓ Sunset Reflection Circle
- ✓ Personal Tour Director
- ✓ 24-hour emergency cover

**What's Not Included:**

- ⊗ Fully comprehensive insurance (**mandatory**)
- ⊗ Baggage costs, pay directly to airline if required
- ⊗ Baggage handling - everyone should be able to pull / load their own bag
- ⊗ Transfers to/from home airport
- ⊗ Lunches, snacks or beverages other than at designated mealtimes
- ⊗ Meal selections other than ones provided for the entire group (we are generally able to cater for allergy conditions, vegetarians, halal and in some cases vegan)
- ⊗ Cost of personal passports, visas or visa waiver fees
- ⊗ Cost of inoculations or medication required for travel
- ⊗ Sightseeing / Entertainment / Transport not shown in Itinerary
- ⊗ Hotel incidental deposits & bills – mini-bar, movies, etc.
- ⊗ Gratuities – drivers, hotel services, local guides, tour director
- ⊗ Credit card fees if individuals wish to pay via credit card instead of ACH
- ⊗ Additional taxes, fuel surcharges or fees levied by governments / suppliers

As always, our staff are always available to you to answer any questions you may have regarding programming. If we may serve you in any way, please do not hesitate to contact us.



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