

Greetings members and supporters of SEAAIS:

For the second time in my memory, we return to historic Baldwin County, the largest county in Alabama. Some of you may recall when we met at the Grand Hotel in Fairhope some years back. This area was first discovered/charted by the Spanish in 1519, later settled by the French in 1699 who were overcome by the British in 1763. Subsequently, Baldwin County experienced battles during Creek Indian War, the War of 1812 and the War Between the States. Two movies (Close Encounters of the Third Kind and one of the Friday the 13th slashers) were filmed in the county seat, Bay Minette. For those wanting more than CME, the original county hospital features the Holmes Medical Museum with a display on medical quackery (free admission). The Baldwin County/Gulf Shores area also plays host to multiple sporting events, including the annual beach volleyball championship and a youth baseball championship. Finally, the least expensive gasoline I've purchased in a year can be had at the cultural phenomenon Buc-ees at the I-10 and Baldwin Beach Expressway intersection.

The Lodge at Gulf Shores State Park is an oasis of a tranquility amongst the frenetic, high-rise hotels/condos along the Gulf of Mexico. It is an ecofriendly, LEED property with a combination of energy saving design and utilization of local products and resources, featuring local artists and artisans. Throughout the hotel, you'll see displays, pictures and informative exhibits pertaining to Alabama products, business and industry. There is an immense amount of sugary white sand beach just outside the door in a natural state without any contrived landscaping.

Recreational activities abound at the Lodge. In addition to the beach, pool, horseshoes, ping-pong, corn hole, there is also an enormous expanse of state park just across Highway 182. This portion of the park offers fishing, camping, boating and a fascinating nature center, which includes various local wildlife species, such as birds of prey, alligators, and an albino snake. This area is easily accessed via a pedestrian bridge over the highway utilized by not only walkers but also bicyclists. The park contains over 25 miles of trails, and the Lodge allows you to check out bicycles gratis. I did so and to paraphrase Christopher Robin, it was a rather good explore. I even spotted an alligator along Rosemary trail and a bald eagle on another trail.

In keeping with the theme of utilization of local products, onsite restaurants Perch and Foodcraft serve predominately food harvested from Alabama, in a setting overlooking the gulf. A breakfast treat at Foodcraft is the famous delectable Alabama sausage brand Conecuh. Perch has a fine seafood selection but also features local beef, including the increasingly rare Delmonico cut of steak. Two Alabama microbreweries, Braided River and Good People are served at both restaurants. Offsite on the other side of the park, is a fun family friendly seafood restaurant, Tacky Jacks (no relation to author) on the intercoastal waterway, featuring playground arcade and karaoke.

Finally, let me express my thanks to the steadfast Jean Owen, with whom I made this site visit. She is the glue that holds the SEAAIS together.

Respectfully submitted,

Jack, Eades, MD
Site selection committee chair person