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The Gulf Coast of Mississippi was severely damaged by Hurricane Katrina, but this popular city has rebounded with a storm surge of culture and activities.

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The first thing you should do when arriving in Biloxi is head to Mary Mahoney’s Old French House Restaurant at Magnolia and Water Streets. Located in a building thought to have been built in 1737, this historic home and adjoining courtyard suffered significant damage during Hurricane Katrina. Inside the brick-walled entrance to the bar, the water-level markers and the pictures on the wall show the utter devastation the area went through. Nevertheless, Mary Mahoney’s (www.marymahoneys.com) reopened a mere eight weeks after the storm, serving stuffed snapper and cups of seafood gumbo to locals and volunteers.

In many ways, this venerable restaurant, owned by the Mahoney family since 1962, epitomizes the post-Katrina spirit of Biloxi. As co owner Bobby Mahoney says, the look of the city may have changed, but the spirit of the people remains the same.



Before Katrina, Biloxi was a city on the move, with a growing number of resort casinos, as well as marquee golf courses, charter fishing and surprising cultural offerings combining to create a unique travel spot poised for significant growth. Now, after surviving one of the nation’s greatest natural disasters, the area has set its sights even higher.

The Mississippi Gulf Coast region didn’t garner as many post-hurricane headlines as New Orleans, but there’s a success story unfolding here. The coming together of community leaders and private investment— supported by the can-do attitude of rebuilding local residents—has Biloxi striving to become a Tier 1 travel destination by 2010.



While the city still has a lot of work to do, the Beau Rivage Resort & Casino (www.beaurivage.com) is already there. Reopened after a \$550 million

renovation, the AAA Four Diamond hotel has made the most of a difficult situation and transformed itself into the region's most luxurious property, with shopping, a pool deck and a full-service spa. It has three new restaurants—a Mediterranean concept from celebrity chef Todd English called Olives, casual but sophisticated Memphis Q Smokehouse & Barbeque, and the nightclub and restaurant Coast.



Another post-Katrina standout is the casino and resort IP (www.ipbiloxi.com), which features 47 brand-new penthouse suites decked out with textured walls, entertainment centers and huge jacuzzi tubs, all with a clean, modern look. Everything is larger than life at IP, from the 65 plasma TVs at the bar to the Back Bay Buffet. Check out the live music and cocktails at Chill Ultra Lounge or the festive Carnival de Brasil, the area's first full-blown churrascaria. Above it all is 32 Steak and Seafood, offering fresh fish, impressive wine and spectacular views.

But there is more to Biloxi than casinos. The city has a rich maritime history. One way to experience the area's sea life is the Biloxi Shrimping Trip (www.gcww.com/sailfish), a small-scale version of a commercial shrimping expedition aboard the Sailfish.



Biloxi also offers charter fishing for every budget and skill level. Larger groups can cruise for a few hours on a comfortable catamaran or embark on a three-day tour to the Chandeleur Islands in search of redfish and speckled trout aboard a 79-foot yacht. Smaller groups can troll for tuna offshore on the Jig-a-Low, or book a light tackle outing on the 25-foot Mr. Champ. Check www.gulfcoast.org for a full list of area charters.



Head to nearby Ocean Springs to visit the Walter Anderson Museum of Art (www.walterandersonmuseum.org). Tormented by mental illness, Anderson was a talented artist working in pottery, sculpture and murals during his 62 years. His work was inspired by the area's natural surroundings. While in Ocean Springs, stop by Government Street Grocery (1210 Government St) and try the Southern Pecan Nut Brown Ale from the only local brewery, the Lazy Magnolia Brewing Company (www.lazymagnolia.com).



When heading back to Biloxi, drive toward the ocean to the brand-new pier along the beachfront. Take a look at the proud schooners, replicas of the oyster ships that dominated the coast in the late 1800s. Before Katrina hit, there were 200-year-old homes along this prime stretch of real estate. The next time you visit, Biloxi will most likely look a lot different—but there's little doubt its spirit will remain the same.