

College Life in Mobile

A student's guide to the University of South Alabama

MOBILE, ALABAMA

Mobile pairs a historic Gulf Coast port city with the University of South Alabama's medicine and engineering programs — and it's the closest college town on this list to real beaches, with the Gulf less than an hour and a half away.

Quick Facts

University	University of South Alabama (USA) — Sun Belt Conference, Division I FBS
Setting	Historic Gulf Coast port city
Nearest beaches	Gulf Shores / Orange Beach, under 70 miles
Nickname / colors	Jaguars — red, blue & white

Housing & Cost of Living

As of mid-2026, average Mobile apartment rent runs about \$870 for a studio, \$1,042 for one bedroom, and \$1,207 for two bedrooms — with rent near campus averaging around \$1,220/month, still below the national average. Budget roughly \$900–\$1,200/month for total living expenses beyond rent (food, transportation, and other costs).

- Look for communities with secured entry and on-site security, common near campus
- Downtown Mobile is about 15 miles from the main campus area
- Gulf Shores and Orange Beach are within reasonable driving distance for a day trip

Getting Around

Mobile is a spread-out coastal city, so a car is genuinely helpful for getting between campus, downtown, and the beach. Budget accordingly if you're relocating from a more walkable city.

Food & Nightlife

Downtown's Dauphin Street entertainment district is the heart of Mobile nightlife — many bars stay open past 2 a.m. under Alabama's private-club rules, and the block-long strip makes it easy to bar-hop with a drink in hand. For food, Wintzell's Oyster House is a Mobile institution for fresh Gulf seafood, and Mo'Bay Beignets on Dauphin Street is a well-known dessert stop. Serologist Brewing and Goodfoot Brewing round out the local craft beer scene.

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Things to Do

Mobile claims the title of Mardi Gras' American birthplace, and the two-week celebration each year brings parades, balls, and citywide festivities well before New Orleans' version. Year-round, the USS Alabama Battleship Memorial Park, the Mobile Carnival Museum, and the restored 1920s Saenger Theatre are worth exploring. And with 32 miles of Gulf beaches in the area — including Gulf Shores and Orange Beach under 70 miles away — a beach day is always within reach.

Staying Safe

As with any coastal city, it's worth getting familiar with specific neighborhoods before signing a lease. Check current safety information directly with the University of South Alabama's police department and the City of Mobile rather than relying on general reputation.

Questions Students & Parents Ask

How far is the beach from Mobile?

Gulf Shores and Orange Beach are under 70 miles away — roughly 45 minutes to an hour and a half depending on where you're starting from in the metro.

Do I need a car in Mobile?

Yes — Mobile is spread out, and a car makes campus, downtown, and the beach all realistically accessible.

Looking at housing near University of South Alabama, or thinking about the Gulf Coast long-term? I'd love to help you explore the options.