

TEXAS HIGHWAYS—EL PASO—MALLORY

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¡Arriba El Paso!
The Old West meets Old Mexico
at the tantalizing tip of Texas

OR

¡El Paso!
Tantalizing Treats
at the western tip of Texas

Arrow-straight Interstate 10 pierces through Chihuahuan Desert. The horizon tells me I'm near the western tip of Texas. Ahead, I see a three-mile-wide gap between Mexico's Juárez Mountains and Texas' Franklin Mountains. This pass cradles the Rio Grande and the sister cities of El Paso and Juárez, Mexico—the largest urban area on the U.S.-Mexico border.

The words "El Paso" conjure up colorful characters—Native Americans and Spanish explorers, gold-rushers and settlers, gunslingers and railroaders. They also whet my appetite. This is, after all, where the Old West meets Old Mexico, a place for juicy steaks and fiery Mexican food.

On my visit, I decide El Paso is like *comida corrida*, the home-style lunch of restaurants in Mexico. *Comida corrida* comes with soup, salad or rice, entree, dessert, and fresh bread or tortillas...piqued with salsa. El Paso comes with colorful culture, grand vistas, unusual shopping, spicy cuisine, and lively entertainment....garnished with rich history.

Missions Possible

For millennia, Native American trade routes traversed this mountain pass. Spanish explorers first arrived in the 16th century. Then in 1659 Franciscan Fray Garcia de San Francisco built the Mission of Guadalupe on the river's south bank. The surrounding village was called *El Paso del Norte* (Pass of the North), now known as Juárez, Mexico. It was on North America's first *camino real*, a 1,600-mile royal road from Mexico City to Santa Fe.

(Two centuries later, El Paso del Norte changed its name to Juárez when surveyor Anson Mills platted Texas' El Paso on the north bank.)

Near the banks of the Rio Grande downstream from El Paso, Franciscans also built Mission Ysleta (1681) and Mission Socorro (1682) to serve Spaniards and Tigua Indians fleeing Pueblo Indian revolts in Santa Fe. Today, the missions (Texas' oldest) are some 15 miles downriver from downtown El Paso along a peaceful meander called the Mission Trail (officially Texas 258 or Socorro Road). The 10-mile drive between the three missions takes me through sleepy communities filled with low-slung stucco homes topped by evaporative coolers. Periodically, I notice farmers tending long rows of cotton plants growing from rich alluvial fields.

Ysleta's current mission was constructed in 1851. Its silver-domed bell tower (added later) welcomes parishioners from the surrounding Tigua Indian Reservation. The recognized tribe celebrates its heritage nearby at the Tigua Indian Cultural Center with a museum and restaurant, handicrafts, bread making, and dancing.

Dating from 1843, Socorro's current mission is under restoration.

Supervisor Pat Taylor oversees the tedious process of replacing aging walls with traditional adobe bricks handmade on site. I marvel at the sea of bricks stacked in front of the mission's symmetrical white-washed parapet and bell tower.

I also marvel at the third church on the Mission Trail, Presidio Chapel San Elceario. It's in sleepy San Elizario. (THE DIFFERENT SPELLING, *Elizario*, is a LOCAL VARIATION of *Elceario*, the French saint for whom the chapel was named.) Established in 1789, the chapel served a presidio (fort), later abandoned. The current 1877 chapel boasts European-style buttresses and a pastel painted interior.

A stone's throw away, I peek through the barred window of the 1850 Old County Jail. Legend says outlaw Billy the Kid (William Bonney) freed the only man to escape the small adobe hoosegow. (Another outlaw passing through El Paso stayed: Gunslinger John Wesley Hardin is buried in Concordia Cemetery.)

Near San Elizario in 1598, explorer Juan de Oñate claimed for Spain all territory drained by the Rio Grande. He also conducted what locals consider America's first Thanksgiving, reenacted each April in San Elizario.

Oñate forded a low-water crossing where El Paso's La Hacienda Restaurant now serves sizzling fajitas and icy Mexican cervesas. This rambling, white-stucco structure incorporates the 1849 home of mill operator Simeon Hart. The home was a Butterfield Overland Stage stop during the 1850s as fortune seekers crossed the pass en route to California's gold rush. I eat inside but notice a large, open-air dining patio beckoning outside. After my meal, I stroll

past the patio into a small open area between the eatery and the river where flagpoles and a monument commemorate Oñate's long-ago river crossing here along the El Camino Real.

Comings and Goings

El Paso's historical comings and goings take the stage each summer in the outdoor musical-drama, Viva! El Paso (June 6 through August 31, 2002). Spectacularly presented in McKelligon Canyon Amphitheatre, this year's silver anniversary heralds 400 years of history from Native Americans to the Mexican Revolution to the railroad's arrival in 1881. (The amphitheater also hosts classical productions during Shakespeare on the Rocks, September 5-29, 2002.)

In the heart of downtown El Paso, along the river where it makes an arching bend, culture and entertainment also unfold at Chamizal National Memorial on the site of a past land dispute

Floods re-routed the Rio Grande in the mid-1800s, leaving 600 acres of Mexico on the American side. A dispute over the land ended in the 1960s when the nations split the parcel and put the river's fickle flow in a permanent concrete channel.

"We're the only site in the National Park Service resulting from the peaceful settlement of a boundary dispute," superintendent Cordell Roy says as we enter Chamizal's 500-seat indoor auditorium. "We're also the only park with a fulltime professional theatrical staff."

TO HONOR the peaceful settlement, Chamizal hosts a busy year-round schedule of intercultural performances and celebrations. Each summer, the

Music Under the Stars concerts pack its amphitheater. Each spring, the Siglo de Oro Drama Festival hosts productions in Spanish and English from Spain's Golden Age of theater (mid-1500s to mid-1600s).

For more culture, I take to the streets...along self-guided walking tours of El Paso and Juárez. The stateside tour begins at San Jacinto Plaza.

Originally the site of a ranch corral, the 1903 Mexican-style plaza once held a pond with three alligators. In 1967 the alligators moved to the zoo, replaced by a colorful fiberglass sculpture of alligators by renowned local artist Luis Jimenez. The sculpture rises from a fountain which sprays a cooling mist on passersby...as well as pigeons who bath and drink here. All around, locals relax on benches under Chinese elms.

Several historic structures tower above the plaza—including the stately 1926 Cortez Building (formerly the Hotel Cortez), where President John F. Kennedy stayed in 1963, and the fanciful 1938 S.H. Kress Building, featuring a colorful 80-foot-tall tower patterned after Mayan architecture.

A block away in tiny Pioneer Plaza, a statue by John Houser of Fray Garcia honors El Paso del Norte's founder. It sits across from the 1912 Paso del Norte Hotel (now the Hilton Camino Real).

Listed on the National Register of Historic Places, the red-brick structure was designed by El Paso's most influential architect, Henry C. Trost. Its interior, the most elegant in the area, sports an ornate lobby bar topped by a 25-foot-diameter Tiffany stained-glass dome. It also boasts a round relief sculpture signed "H.C. Trost," the architect's only signed work.

Trost employed various styles of the day—from Victorian to Mission Revival to Art Deco—to build some 300 early 20th century buildings in El Paso. Of his 20 downtown buildings, nearly a dozen are on the walking tour, including the Spanish Colonial Palace Theatre, currently under restoration.

Trost was a virtuoso at terra-cotta detailing. At his 1930 O.T. Bassett Tower, Art Deco styling features a frieze of plant designs and a mustachioed face over the main entrance, reputedly Trost himself.

Trost's 1902 Popular Department Store (now 1 Union Fashion Center) reflects the Chicago Commercial Style in a stately all-white-terra-cotta exterior. Inside, I visit the cafe of the Bridge Center for Contemporary Art.

The Bridge, as the center's known, began in 1985 to nurture stimulating arts, music, dance, and literature that reflect on life along the U.S.-Mexico border. A cappuccino under my belt, I view local and regional artists' works in small galleries where locals once shopped for millinery and lingerie. An exhibit of paintings by long-time El Paso resident, the late Gloria Osuna-Perez grabs my attention. In vivid colors, the works explore the role of Hispanic women in contemporary culture.

¡Viva Juárez!

On to Juárez's historic walking tour!

Rather than hoofing it across Paseo Del Norte International Bridge, I hop on El Paso-Juárez Trolley Company's rubber-tired "Border Jumper" trolley. The red-and-green trolley facilitates a Juárez visit because it stops each hour throughout the day at 10 designated pickup points.

I make several stops—including Mission of Guadalupe and the adjacent cathedral, both on the lively Plaza de Armas. I also check out the Victorian 1889 Old Customs House, site in 1909 of the first meeting ever held between presidents of Mexico and the U.S.

Outside Juárez (City) Market, persistent waiters try to seat me at open-air cafes. Instead, I mosey into the mercado to peruse stalls of colorful handicrafts. I practice my Spanish with Juanita Briseño as she arranges her San Marcos blankets, serapes, and regional clothes.

Aisles later, I eavesdrop as vendor Johnny Hernandez bargains over a woven hammock. “You don’t have \$12? How ‘bout \$10. What a bargain!” Johnny lives in El Paso and has worked the mercado for 15 years. “I hit it off with American teenagers. They’re my best customers.”

A few blocks away, Cuauhtemoc Market offers a glimpse of a mercado geared more for Juarenses than *turistas*. The three-story structure features all manner of merchandise, practical and otherwise—plus restaurants and open-air fruit, vegetable, and meat markets...though not much English fluency.

Before leaving Juárez, I join fellow *turistas* sipping iceless margaritas at the city’s oldest and most famous drinkery, the Kentucky Bar. Locals swear the margarita was invented in Juárez. This bar’s dark interior bears photos of notable patrons—such as Jack Dempsey, Elizabeth Taylor, and John Wayne. Marilyn Monroe reportedly celebrated a Mexican divorce here.

Stateside, back in my own car, I shop El Paso’s Mexican import houses, some of which seem to have prices as good as in Juárez.

On Interstate 10 on the east side of town, I ramble around El Paso Connection. Its huge selection of imports includes a sea of cast-aluminum fountains and whatnots, roomfuls of talavera pottery, and a warehouse packed with unusual “old stuff” like ox carts and hacienda doors.

Downtown, at Galeria San Ysidro, I browse three floors of antiques, custom furnishings, stylish lamps, and all manner of decorative wrought iron. Down the street from Galeria San Ysidro, I also stock up on mango-peach salsa and fajita marinades at El Paso Chili Co. Lively proprietor Park Kerr chats about his award-winning *Texas Border Cookbook* and his new Tequila Nacional, made from blue agave.

Head for the Hills

Eager for altitude, I head for the hills on a driving tour into Franklin Mountains’ foothills.

First, I ease through the University of Texas at El Paso, designed by Henry Trost in the UNUSUAL architectural style of the Himalayan nation of Bhutan. Then I ramble past homes in Manhattan Heights and Sunset Heights, two of El Paso’s nine historic districts.

These rolling foothill neighborhoods date from the early 20th century when ambitious real estate speculators turned rocky terrain and arroyos into prosperous residential developments. Swaying palms and green lawns now frame well-kept homes built in a variety of revival styles from Tudor to Prairie School. My drive along streets with names like Gold, Silver, and Copper also

passes neat bungalows surrounded by native desert plants and fenced Mexican-style with stone walls or wrought iron.

Pulling grade on Rim Road, I halt at Tom Lea Park (named after a local artist) for a view of downtown. Rim Road feeds into Scenic Drive which takes me to a primo overlook park (elevation 4,222 feet). Metal plaques describe key viewing points, and coin-operated binoculars pinpoint them. On weekends, families and lovers arrive at twilight to watch the lights come up. It's a mini-fiesta, with vendors selling roasted ears of corn drenched in red pepper powder and fresh lime juice.

Even better sunsets come courtesy of Wyler Aerial Tramway.

Erected in 1960 to service a TV tower, the tramway later became a tourist attraction but closed in 1986. The Texas Parks & Wildlife Department reopened it last year after installing Swiss gondolas. I join two European exchange students as we glide 946 vertical feet on a silk-smooth, four-minute ride to the top of Ranger Peak (elevation 5,632 feet). On top, a 360-degree observation deck offers sunset views across 7,000 square miles of rocky mountains and desert.

Rocks and desert mingle more mysteriously 32 miles east of El Paso at 860-acre Hueco Tanks State Historical Park. Magma-borne rock juts 300 feet high above flat desert. Rock climbers flock to scale its faces. But the mystery hides in shadowy nooks.

Eight centuries ago, the Jornada Mogollon culture lived here, where water collects in depressions called huecos (Spanish for "hollows"). The Indians used iron ore, charcoal, and burnt-bone pigments to paint the rocks with 2,000

pictographs—including North America’s largest group of mask pictographs (some 200).

To view THEIR HIDING SPOTS IN MASSIVE ROCK OUTCROPPINGS, I slither through crevices with Tom Todsén and Deborah Cool-Flowers, both volunteer guides from New Mexico. “Some pictographs indicate location and amount of water,” says Tom. “Some are religious.” Either way, the primitive artistry proves graphically pleasing.

What isn’t pleasing is my rumbling stomach.

So far, I’ve sampled all sorts of fine Mexican food: I gorged on flautas and beef salpicon at Fortis Mexican Elder Restaurant, a mainstay for 25 years. I downed fish tacos and ceviche at Puerto Vallarta Grill. I had huevos rancheros and hot flour tortillas at H&H Coffee Shop (also a car wash!). I tried Chico’s Tacos’ flauta-like tacos swimming in thin soup mounded with shredded cheddar. (I also scoffed schnitzel at Kleines Edelweiss, an eatery frequented by German soldiers in training at nearby Fort Bliss.)

But I hadn’t sampled El Paso’s legendary steaks. So, from Hueco Tanks, I detour to Cattleman’s Steakhouse at Indian Cliffs Ranch.

German native Dieter Gerzymisch has served fresh-cut steaks for nearly 30 years on his 32,000-acre cattle ranch. Top seller—a whopping two-pound T-bone! I choose a manageable 10-ounce filet mignon tender enough to cut with a fork. Dieter also gives guests an Old West experience—including a lake-side gristmill, fort-like playground, and pens of Texas longhorns, buffalo, and

rattlesnakes. You can even see sets from two movies--*Resurrection* (1980) and *Courage Under Fire* (1996)—filmed here.

As I pull onto Interstate 10, headed back to El Paso, I'm more sure than ever that the western tip of Texas is like *comida corrida*: Just as *comida corrida* offers a menu that changes daily, El Paso promises a new menu of tantalizing treats with each visit.

El Paso

El Paso is on I-10 at the western tip of Texas. The **El Paso Convention & Visitors Bureau** (1 Civic Center Plaza, 534-0600 or 800/351-6024, www.visitelpaso.com) offers brochures and guides, including the Downtown Historic Walking Tour guides to El Paso and Ciudad Juárez. It also has information on guided tours of both cities. El Paso's planning department (2 Civic Center Plaza, 8th floor, 541-4192) has a guide to the city's nine historic districts.

El Paso has a 915 area code and is in the Mountain Time Zone.

A guide to the **Mission Trail** (Texas 258) is available from the El Paso Mission Trail Assn. (1 Civic Center Plaza, 534-0677, www.missiontrail.com). Dec. 14, 2002, all three missions light up with luminarios and host posadas. Ap. 26, 2003, San Elizario hosts a mini-reenactment of the First Thanksgiving.

Viva! El Paso runs Thu-Sat, 8:30 p.m., through Aug.31 at McKelligon Canyon Amphitheater, 565-6900 or 800/915-8482, www.viva-ep.org. The amphitheater also hosts **Shakespeare on the Rocks**, Thu-Sun, 8 p.m., Sept. 5-29.

Chamizal National Memorial, 800 S. San Marcial, 532-7273, www.nps.gov/cham. Upcoming events include: Chamizal Independent Film

Festival, 2 p.m. daily July 29-Aug. 2; Music Under the Stars (541-4481, www.artsresources.org), 8 p.m., Aug. 4, 11, 18, and 25; El Paso Chopin Music Festival Piano Concert, 8 p.m. Sept. 14; and "Grito!" Mexican Independence Celebration, 5 p.m. Sept. 15. The Siglo de Oro Drama Festival is Feb. 28-March 8.

Wyler Aerial Tramway State Park, 1700 McKinley Ave., 566-6622.

Tigua Indian Cultural Center, 305 YaYa Ln. on the Mission Trail, 859-5287.

University of Texas at El Paso, 500 W. University Ave., 747-5000,
www.utep.edu.

El Paso Chile Co., 909 Texas Ave., 544-3434, www.elpasochile.com.

El Paso Connection, 14301 Gateway W., 852-0898,
www.elpasoconnection.com.

Galeria San Ysidro, 801 Texas Ave., 544-4444.

Bridge Center for Contemporary Art, 1 Union Fashion Center, Ste. B, Stanton at San Antonio Ave., 532-6707.

La Hacienda, 1720 W. Paisano, 533-1919, www.LaHaciendaRestaurant.com.

Puerto Vallarta Grill, 1611 Montana Ave., 544-8169.

H&H Coffee Shop and Car Wash, 701 E. Yandell, 533-1144.

Chico's Tacos, 5305 Montana Ave., 772-7777.

Kleines Edelweiss, 5019 Alabama St, 564-4619.

Dave's Pawn Shop, 216 S. El Paso, 533-3334 [INCLUDE ONLY IF PHOTO
USED IN THIS STORY.....NOT MENTIONED IN COPY]

Concordia Cemetery, Gateway West at I-10 (Copia exit), 585-4862.

Hilton Camino Real El Paso, 101 S. El Paso St., 534-3000,
www.caminoreal.com/elpaso.

Cattleman's Steakhouse at Indian Cliffs Ranch (20 mi. east, off I-10), Fabens,
544-3200, www.CattlemansSteakhouse.com.

Hueco Tanks State Historical Park (32 mi. east, off US 62/1880), 6900 Hueco
Tanks Rd. #1, 857-1135, www.tpwd.state.tx.us/park/hueco.

Visit **Ciudad Juárez, Mexico** via the **El Paso-Juárez Trolley Co.** (1 Civic Center Plaza, 544-0062 or 800/259-6284). Or walk or drive to Juarez; contact the El Paso CVB (see above) for details. Popular destinations include: The **Kentucky Bar**, 629 Av. Juárez Norte; **Juárez (City) Market**, Av. 16 de Septiembre at Calle Augustin Melgar; **Cuauhtemoc Market**, Calle Vincente Guerrero at Calle Mariscal; **Old Customs House**, 209 Av. 16 de Septiembre; and the **Cathedral and Mission of Guadalupe**, Av. 16 de Septiembre at Calle Vicente Guerrero (on the Plaza de Armas).

For more on El Paso history and attractions, look for Leon Metz's ***Guide to El Paso*** and ***El Paso Chronicles*** or W.H. Timmons's authoritative ***El Paso: A Borderlands History*** (out-of-print).

TEXAS HIGHWAYS—EL PASO—RESOURCES—MALLORY

All 915 unless noted

1. Viva El Paso: Carolyn Mitchell (mrktg) 747-6292 (UTEP)
(www.viva-ep.org/) Hector Serrano, is the Artistic Director David Mills
2. El Paso Convention & Visitors Bureau--Peggy Boone
Assistant Director of CVB; pboone@elpasocvb.com; www.elpasocvb.com
3. Hilton Camino Real—mrktg, Michelle Kaip (as in cape)
4. Gary Williams, EPCF Heritage Coordinator
Nestor Valencia, EPCF
5. Umberto Quiñones, super.-- Wyler Aerial Tramway
6. Mary Davis, Mission Trail Association; www.missiontrail.com
7. Pat Taylor, Cornerstone, re: Socorro restoration
8. John Moses, mngr; Hueco Tanks State Historical Park
Deborah Cool-Flowers, guide; Tom Todsén, guide
<http://www.tsha.utexas.edu/handbook/online/articles/view/HH/gkh2.html>
9. Chamizal National Memorial; Cordell Roy, mngr. X108; Virginia Ness
(media/gallery) x102; Paul Roney (theater) x115
10. El Paso/Juarez Trolley Co., Rosalba Saenz, Mrkting
11. Juanita Briseño, Juárez market
12. Consuelo or David Forti, Forti's Rest.
13. H&H Coffee Shop, Kenneth Haddad
14. El Paso Connection, Tom Burks
15. Cattleman's Steakhouse, Dieter Gerzymisch
16. W. Park Kerr, El Paso Chile Co.
17. Historical Topics: Handbook of Texas Online
<http://www.tsha.utexas.edu/handbook/online/>
and Leon Metz, historian/author, 821-0202
and *The Pass of the North*, Oscar Martinez (El Paso Community Found)

18. re: Franklin Mts:

<http://www.tsha.utexas.edu/handbook/online/articles/view/FF/rjf14.html>