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# TEXAS TRAVEL LOG

A NEWSLETTER FOR THE TEXAS TRAVEL INDUSTRY DECEMBER 2004

## TXDOT

**C**OUNSELORS at the **Texas Travel Information Center in Gainesville** have settled into their **new facility** and travelers are thrilled with the changes, according to the center's supervisor Cheryl Cash. "They all love it," Cash says. "We've heard nothing but compliments from travelers and they love the furnishings."

The center's \$2.6 million renovation marks the final phase of a Capital Improvement Project (a little more than \$32 million overall) to upgrade TxDOT's Travel Information Centers.

Travel Services Section Director Brenda Harper says, "All the Texas Travel Information Centers are now state-of-the-art facilities that Texans can be proud of. We are ready to service visitors for at least the next 30 years."

The facility went from 4,851 square feet to 9,000 square feet and now includes a video room where travelers can see The Weather Channel or Texas tourism videos. They also have a festival arbor with picnic areas that have water and electricity, more lobby and display space, two larger parking lots (one exclusively for 18-wheelers) and twice as many bathrooms, available 24-hours a day.

For more information on the Travel Information Centers, visit [www.dot.state.tx.us/trv/trvtics.htm](http://www.dot.state.tx.us/trv/trvtics.htm).

**T**xDOT'S **Travel Information Center in Waskom** welcomes its **new travel counselor, Laura Goldman**. In her free time, Goldman and her husband John participate in historical re-enactments across the state. She began working at the center on Nov. 1.

## HEAPIN' HELPIN' OF HOSPITALITY

**T**RAVEL counselors from the **Texas Department of Transportation's Travel Information Centers** and **AAA** completed an extensive trip through the **upper and central coastal region** of the state as part of the **Texas Travel Industry Association's 2004 study tour**.

Counselors, led by local guides, visited aquatic attractions including Texas State Aquarium in Corpus Christi, Sea Center Texas in Lake Jackson and Moody Gardens in Galveston. They also visited historical sites like Presidio La Bahia in Goliad and the Chisholm Trail Memorial Park in Yoakum, as well as museums like the Matagorda County Historical Museum in Bay City and the Texas Maritime Museum in Rockport. Ecotourism was also highlighted with sites like the Leonabelle Turnbull Birding Center and the Joan and Scott Holt Paradise Pond in Port Aransas. The arts in all the communities also received a fair nod, including Victoria's future Performing Arts Center.

Tour leader Javier Rodriguez, of Tex-Tours, says, "Our hosts were wonderful and showed us what true Texas hospitality is all about."

Next year's TTIA Study Tour will cover West Texas.

## TRAVEL FORECAST

**F**OR THE FIRST year since 2000, **all travel industry sectors are showing increases in demand**, with some finally exceeding 2000 levels, according to the **Travel Industry Association's Travel Forecast**.

According to TIA, overall traveler spending by domestic and international visitors in the U.S. is forecast to increase 6.9 percent by year-end to nearly \$593 billion, up from \$555 billion in 2003. An additional 5.3 percent increase in 2005 will bring expenditures to about \$624 billion.

"The bright spot has remained domestic leisure travel," says TIA's Suzanne Cook, senior vice president, Research & Technology. "While some recent shifts in consumer preferences such as a desire to travel closer to home remain valid, Americans are now returning

to their more traditional habits."

Domestic leisure travel has slowly but steadily increased over the years, despite Sept. 11, 2001, the lagging economy, the war in Iraq and high gas prices.

## EXHIBITS

**S**PACE CENTER Houston — **NASA Johnson Space Center's** official visitor center — has been offering an educational peak at human adventures in space since 1992, but a new exhibit on the 1961 **Liberty Bell 7** spacecraft adds a special dimension.

"It's really cool these days because now there's this added historical aspect to the tour," says Space Center Houston spokesman Doug Mattice of *The Lost Spacecraft: Liberty Bell 7 Recovered* exhibit. It is an educational collection centered on the second American manned spaceship,

piloted by the late Gus Grissom, that was lost at sea for 38 years before it was recovered in 1999.

The four-part exhibit includes interactives such as a flight simulator, centrifuge experience, capsule controls and the recovery mission. It also has a simulated living room and historical highlights of the year, including John F. Kennedy setting a goal of putting a man on the moon by the decade's end, completion of the Berlin Wall, Hurricane Carla striking Texas and U.S. breaking diplomatic ties with Cuba.

Along with this exhibit, visitors can take a 90-minute NASA Tram Tour behind the scenes of Johnson Space Center, including stops at Mission Control, the Vacuum Chamber, the X-38 Development Building and Rocket Park.

Other ongoing attractions at the 180,000-square-foot "edutainment" complex include the new Blast Zone, a multi-media sensory Space Shuttle blast off experience, Texas' largest screen theater showing space-themed films, hands-on exhibits, astronaut and artifact galleries, live mission updates and the Martian Matrix play area.

For more information, call (281) 244-2100 or visit [www.spacecenter.org](http://www.spacecenter.org).

## INSIDE THIS ISSUE

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- ★ Smooth sailing for Texas' cruise industry
- ★ Looking back at Luckenbach
- ★ Texas lights up for the holidays
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**F**ORT WORTH's Amon Carter Museum exhibit *Encountering Texas, 1846-1856* showcases the art of three different individuals who offer unique perspectives about life in the region that was in the process of becoming the state of Texas.

The drawings and watercolors come from two military men — Edward Everett and James Gilchrist Benton — and homesteader Sarah Ann Lillie Hardinge. The men's works included primarily sites in and around the main military post at San Antonio while Hardinge's works portrayed the challenges of life on the open range. The exhibit runs through Dec. 19.

For more information, call (817) 738-1933 or visit [www.cartermuseum.org](http://www.cartermuseum.org).

**F**ORT DAVIS National Historic Site rescheduled its annual evening tours, traditionally held in November, until the spring — tentatively April 2, 2005.

This special event, entitled "From Retreat to Tattoo," takes visitors back in time to when the fort was an active military post.

Visitors are guided by lantern light through various buildings and locations around the post.

For more information on Fort Davis or the special event tour, call (432) 426-3224 ext. 20 or visit [www.nps.gov/foda](http://www.nps.gov/foda).

**T**HE U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's Gulf of Mexico Program has given Corpus Christi's Texas State Aquarium a \$50,000 grant to develop an exhibit called *Living Shores*. The exhibit will focus on the Texas shoreline ecosystem, including estuaries, barrier islands and nearshore habitats.

"This exhibit will allow visitors to explore the vital role marshes, bays, seagrass beds, and barrier islands play in helping to sustain the treasured ecology and economy of the Texas coast," says Bryon Griffith, Gulf of Mexico Program Director.

Tom Schmid, Texas State Aquarium CEO, says the *Living Shores* exhibit is in tune with the EPA goals to improve the health of the Gulf by promoting healthy ecosystems, preventing water pollution and protecting aquatic species.

**IN THE PRESS**

**T**HE TOWN of Golden — 80 miles east of Dallas, population 150 — and their cash crop received rave reviews from one of the nation's most prominent personalities, talk show host Oprah Winfrey. In a recent show that included her personal "Best of Everything" list, Golden's sweet potatoes made the cut.

**Oprah says, "Thank you Golden, Texas, thank you! It's the prettiest sweet potato."**



Winfrey says, after having been introduced to the town's prized produce, "I love sweet potatoes and I'm telling you it was pure heaven. They have found the purest, sweetest sweet potatoes, the best sweet potatoes I've ever had!"

Oprah noted that the small town — half the size of her studio audience — even gives the potatoes its own special day, The Sweet

Potato Festival. Her show included a special live report from the festival and a gift of Grade A sweet potatoes for audience members.

Oprah says, "Thank you Golden, Texas, thank you! It's the prettiest sweet potato."

For more information, call (903) 765-2444 or (903) 768-2267, or visit [members.aol.com/Wstnhouse](http://members.aol.com/Wstnhouse) (no www).

**T**HE LAID BACK Luckenbach, made famous by "Willie and Waylon and the boys" received notable attention in CNN.com's travel section. The feature pays homage to the "western trading post-turned-country music Mecca" inhabited by a tavern/general store, blacksmith shop and old-time dance hall.

The "eccentric town in the prickly pear-studded hills of the Texas Hill Country" draws people from all parts of the globe who want to play their country songs, hear the music, or simply find the mythical town. For more information on Luckenbach, call (888) 311-8990 or (830) 997-3224, or visit [www.luckenbachtexas.com](http://www.luckenbachtexas.com).

**CRUISE NEWS**

**I**N LESS than three years as a cruising homeport, the Port of Galveston — accounting for 96 percent of Texas' cruise activity — has grown to become fifth in the nation for that industry. In 2003, cruise passengers and crews spent nearly \$631 million in direct purchases in Texas, generating 9,767 jobs paying \$425 million in income. And the progress continues.

To meet the growing demands for cruise travel, Carnival increased passenger capacity by 38 percent by trading its smaller *Celebration* vessel for the 2,052-passenger Superliner *Ecstasy*. Carnival and the Port of Galveston also collaborated in a \$9 million project to renovate the cruise line's docking facilities.

"This was the first time that this type of partnership had been used for a port project in Texas. It worked out to benefit both parties," says Port Director Steven M. Cernak.

**"THE PORT of Galveston has come a long way in less than three years and we consider our cruise growth to be phenomenal."**

—Port of Galveston Director, Steven M. Cernak



Also benefiting the port are the introduction of Princess and Celebrity cruise lines ships that will homeport in Galveston.

Fans of television's "Love Boat" will recognize the Princess cruise line. Its 109,00-ton, 2,600-passenger *Grand Princess* launched service from the island on Nov. 8 with the help of actor Gavin MacLeod, aka Capt. Stubing of the TV show.

Celebrity's 1,870-passenger ship *M/S Galaxy*, rated one of the top 10 "world's Best Ships" in a *Conde Nast Traveler* readers' poll, set sail from the Port of Galveston for the first time on Nov. 1.

"This is going to be a stellar year for cruising from the Port of

Galveston, and by year end, we will have three year-round homeported cruise ships and two seasonal cruise ships operating from our cruise terminal complex," Port of Galveston Director Steven M. Cernak says. "We have invested more than \$35 million upgrading, renovating and enhancing our cruise facilities and we believe that all of the hard work and effort has paid off for the port and the city."

"Galveston is a strong addition to our program," says Dean Brown, Princess Cruise executive vice president of customer service and sales.

For more information, visit [www.portofgalveston.com](http://www.portofgalveston.com).

**IN THE RANKS**

**F**IVE TEXAS hotels were among AAA's 5-Diamond and Mobil Travel Guide's Five-Star designees for 2005.

The AAA designations, announced on Nov. 12, included three Houston hotels — Four Season Hotel Houston, Omni Houston Hotel, The St. Regis — Dallas' The Mansion on Turtle Creek and Irving's Four Seasons Resort & Club, which joined 142 other top designees in the nation.

Mobil Travel Guide listed The Mansion on Turtle Creek among its Five-Star lodgings.

**O**NDE NAST *Traveler* magazine critics have compiled their 2004 Hot List of trendy places to stay and to party.

Top hotel picks run the gamut from the "surprisingly successful décor ... right out of the movie *Moulin Rouge*" of Hotel Icon to the "Tex-Zen" lobby of The Magnolia, both in Houston. Or, the "magnificent multiculturalism"

HOLIDAY CELEBRATIONS

of San Antonio's Hotel Valencia Riverwalk or the "Old West meets New Age" of its neighbor the Watermark Hotel and Spa.

For travelers seeking top spots to feel the local beat, the magazine offers its first listing of Hot Bars, including Oslo in Austin — a "bastion of cool sophistication and Nordic serenity" — and Red Star — "crowded and trendy, Russian-themed nightclub in Houston's Midtown."

For more list information, visit [www.concierge.com/cntraveler](http://www.concierge.com/cntraveler).

**I**F YOU have to hang out during a flight layover, *USA Today* offers its **Top 10 best** choices, including **Austin's Bergstrom International Airport**.

"The city that bills itself as the Live Music Capital of the World extends that melodious tradition to the airport, where travelers can visit three venues offering up live music several times each week."

For more information, call (512) 530-2242 or visit [www.ci.austin.tx.us/austinairport/musicartstours.htm](http://www.ci.austin.tx.us/austinairport/musicartstours.htm).

**N**ATIONAL Trust Historic Hotels of America recently added 17 new members, including **The Fairmount San Antonio**. This latest additions brings the program's total membership to 213 hotels, representing 40 states, the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico.

The Fairmount San Antonio is a three-story Victorian structure built in 1906, six blocks from its present-day location. In 1985, the 3.2 million pound Fairmount hotel was moved, intact, to its current location near the Alamo and the Riverwalk. The relocation fete earned it a spot in the Guinness Book of World Records.

When its current location was being excavated, 19th-century artifacts, including many from the Battle of the Alamo, were discovered. The unearthed historical pieces (now displayed in the hotel's lobby), led to the hotel's designation as a Texas Archaeological Landmark.

The Fairmount San Antonio joins a host of other Texas accommodations in the Historic Hotels

**T**HE HALLS of Texas are decked out this holiday season with a definite Lone Star flair — like the life-sized gingerbread house at the Big Cypress Coffee House in Jefferson. Any town you visit showcases the spirit to one degree or another, with tree-lightings, parades, visits with Santa and assorted events.

Holiday-hungry travelers can experience lights and music from Tulia to Silverton, Quitaque, Turkey, Estelline and Memphis for the scenic 99-mile *Christmas on the Texas Ozark Trail*, or the similar *Lights of the Blackland Trail* through Taylor, Coupland, Elgin, Bastrop, Thrall, Thorndale, Granger and Bartlett. There's also the *Hill Country Regional Lighting Trail* through Blanco, Boerne, Bulverde, Burnet, Dripping Springs, Fredericksburg, Goldthwaite, Johnson City, Llano, Marble Falls, New Braunfels, Round Mountain and Wimberley. Moody Gardens

hosts its *Festival of Lights*, Fossil Rim Wildlife Center in Glen Rose is offering a **progressive holiday dinner** and you can go *Caroling in the Caverns* in New Braunfels or take a *Victorian Christmas* train ride from the Palestine Depot.

Other options include the *Nature in Lights* at Fort Hood's Lake Belton Outdoor Recreation Area, *Christmas Park Land of Lights* in Athens, *Twice as Bright Festival of Lights* in Texarkana, *Christmas in the Republic* in Washington and a re-enactment of *Main Street Bethlehem* in Burnet. There also are the *Fiesta de las Luminarias* in San Antonio, *Christmas at the Gap* in Buffalo Gap, Clear Lake's annual *Christmas Boat Parade* and a *Kwanzaa Fest* in Dallas.

For a more comprehensive listing of holiday events across the state, visit [www.texashighways.com](http://www.texashighways.com) or [www.traveltex.com](http://www.traveltex.com).

of America club. The others are:

- ◆ The Driskill, Austin
- ◆ LaSalle Hotel, Bryan
- ◆ The Stoneleigh Hotel, Dallas
- ◆ Stockyards Hotel, Fort Worth
- ◆ The Tremont House, Galveston
- ◆ Hotel Galvez, Galveston Island
- ◆ Cibolo Creek Ranch, Marfa
- ◆ Havana Riverwalk Inn, San Antonio
- ◆ Riverwalk Vista, San Antonio
- ◆ The Fairmount San Antonio
- ◆ The Menger Hotel, San Antonio

For a complete listing, visit [www.nationaltrust.org/historic\\_hotels](http://www.nationaltrust.org/historic_hotels).

**NEW FACES, NEW PLACES**

**T**HE AUSTIN Convention & Visitors Bureau relocated its offices to the Guaranty Bank Building, 301 Congress Ave., Suite 200, Austin, TX 78701.

The phone numbers, e-mail addresses and Web site remain the same.

For more information, call

(800) 926-ACVB or (866) GO-AUSTIN, or visit [www.austintex.org](http://www.austintex.org).

**A**NIS Schmees, formerly president of the Hershey-Capital Region Visitor Bureau in Pennsylvania, joins the **San Antonio Convention and Visitors Bureau** as **assistant executive director**, sharing duties with Executive Director Melvin Tennant.

**P**AULA Bennett joins the **Austin Convention and Visitors Bureau** as **Tourism Sales Manager**. Bennett, who previously worked as the International Marketing Coordinator for the Office of the Governor, Economic Development and Tourism, brings more than 24 years of tourism experience to her new role, developing programs that promote Austin and serving as a liaison with industry partners.

**G**ABRIEL Ornelas joins the **Texas Historical Commission** as its new **Senior**

**Communication Specialist** (a position formerly held by Wendy Papasan). Ornelas — who most recently promoted city events in the Reno, Nev. area — is an El Paso native and former Austinite. He will be marketing heritage tourism through THC's trails program.

**R**ORI Fojtasek has been promoted to **Director of Sales** for the **Irving Convention and Visitors Bureau**. The 13-year hospitality industry veteran has served the ICVB for 10 years as sales manager. In her new role, Fojtasek will continue to handle a portion of the corporate market, as well as oversee all bureau sales efforts.

**B**arbara Stephens, formerly tourism marketing coordinator for the **City of Shenandoah Convention and Visitors Bureau**, has left to become a full time mother. Stepping into the position (now titled Operations Manager) is **Lacey Love**.

TEXAS TRIVIA

Which Texas towns give travelers an especially good reason to 'book it' into town?

Archer City, about 25 miles south of Wichita Falls, is home to Booked Up, Inc., the largest collection of antiquarian books in the United States — about 200,000 titles strong. The books were collected over the years by town native Larry McMurry, author of several Western novels, including "Lonesome Dove." The rare and unusual books, as well as out-of-print publications, take up residence in four renovated buildings on both sides of Main Street. Even so, the title for largest bookstore in the state goes to The Book Gallery in El Paso, with its 400,000 titles.

TEXAS TRIVIA

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NUMBERS as of October 31, 2004

TRAVEL CENTER	Month Visitors	Percent Variation*	Year-to-Date Visitors	Percent Variation*
AMARILLO	9,550	-13.39	103,783	-4.28
ANTHONY	11,211	-16.80	125,700	+0.54
CAPITOL	8,041	+14.79	80,201	+0.08
DENISON	36,356	+3.08	376,218	+12.47
GAINESVILLE	24,496	+0.45	235,009	-8.77
LANGTRY	6,289	+16.46	63,462	+4.84
LAREDO	9,897	+27.56	124,095	+31.31
ORANGE	52,148	+4.79	523,080	+3.73
TEXARKANA	38,199	-3.67	441,775	-0.41
VALLEY	12,297	+11.62	178,179	+9.16
WASKOM	44,710	-7.00	480,128	-1.06
WICHITA FALLS	14,085	-2.40	157,514	-1.52
<b>CENTER TOTALS</b>	<b>267,279</b>	<b>+0.01</b>	<b>2,889,144</b>	<b>+2.56</b>

\*Compared to last year

Dial toll-free (800) 452-9292 for travel assistance from TxDOT's Texas Travel Information Centers (8 a.m.–6 p.m. daily, Central Time)

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• www.dontmesswithtexas.org

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