

★ TEXAS

TRAVEL LOG

INSIDE:

- ★ African-Americans' historical legacy is honored in the pages of THC's latest travel guide
- ★ Museum Fine Arts, Houston Director Peter Marzio dies
- ★ Hill Country noted as the best 'Hidden Gem Wine Region'

SEA SCENE

AFTER MORE than a year of renovations and a soft opening to coincide with the **State Fair of Texas, The Children's Aquarium at Fair Park: An Ocean of Adventure in Dallas** officially opened its doors Dec. 3 with a seaweed-cutting ceremony.

The former Dallas Aquarium at Fair Park, part of the Dallas Zoo family, originally opened in 1936 in the same Art Deco building being used today but was closed in 2009 for an \$8.2 million redesign with children in mind.

"Children are fascinated by the underwater world," says Gregg Hudson, executive director of the Children's Aquarium at Fair Park and the Dallas Zoo. "We want to create a fantastic adventure that engages them with exhibits and displays that are designed to entertain while they learn about the aquatic ecosystems around the world."

Brian Potvin, curator of aquatic husbandry, says "public response to the grand opening weekend was tremendous. We had almost 14,000 visitors over the weekend and very positive feedback."

The highlight of the new Children's Aquarium is Stingray Bay, an outdoor pavilion featuring a 58,000-gallon pool with eagle and southern stingrays as well as bonnethead and zebra sharks. Next to it is a stingray touch tank, where guests can touch and feed cownose rays.

Indoors, the kid-friendly design offers interactive exhibits for hands-on exploration, with feeding demonstrations, child-high viewing windows and touch pools.

Potvin says visitors "make a bee-line to the coastal touch pool, where they can hold crabs, sea stars and other creatures while an interpreter answers their questions."

The aquarium also features intertidal, freshwater and saltwater galleries that showcase a variety of



Visitors learn fun facts from volunteer Tom Oglin at the newly renovated Children's Aquarium at Fair Park in Dallas.

specimens such as jellyfish (upside down and moon), schooling fish, bass, trout, pirhanas, cichlids, clown fish, eels (moray, garden and wolf), giant Pacific octopus, king crabs and two albino American alligators.

"We have put together a 'greatest hits' collection of sea creatures for the public to enjoy," Potvin says.

For more information, call (496) 554-7340 or visit www.childrensaquariumatfairpark.com.

DESIGN work is underway to **redevelop Sea Rim State Park** facilities that were damaged first by Hurricane Rita, rebuilt and again destroyed (before it could

reopen) in September 2008 by Hurricane Ike. All new park facilities, which will include a headquarters building and a residence for park personnel, will be designed to make the park hurricane-resistant and more energy efficient.

For now, the state park offers only limited facilities such as portable toilets and trash receptacles. It is open for day use (\$3) and primitive camping (\$10) through a self-pay system. The park's Gambusia Boardwalk (nearly a mile long) has been restored, and, for the first time in park history, seasonal equestrian use is being allowed from December through February.

"Even with limited facilities, it's great to see the park open again for public use," says Park Superintendent Tracy Ferguson. "If you're looking for a primitive escape along the Gulf, you'll find it on Sea Rim's secluded five-mile stretch of beach."

The Texas Parks and Wildlife Department has developed a two-phase master plan to redevelop the state park that the agency expects to begin implementing this summer.

The first phase, which will take about nine months to a year to complete, will include a boardwalk to the beach, a maintenance building, park superintendent's residence and two public vault toilets, according to Gary Kosut, TPWD Infrastructure Division project manager for the Sea Rim redevelopment.

The second phase includes a headquarters building, camping-area restroom with showers, tent platforms, wildlife viewing blind, equestrian camping accessories and fish-cleaning shelter. This phase, however, has yet to be funded.

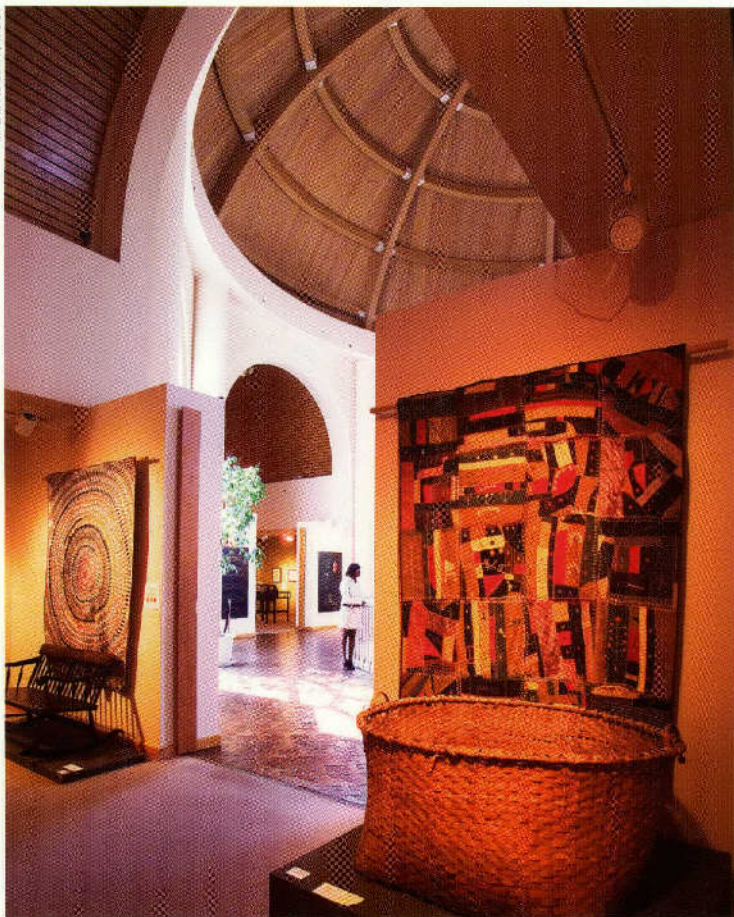
In addition, in 2012, the Texas Department of Transportation will reconstruct park roads and parking lots for day-use visitors.

FREE FOR ALL

IF YOU ENJOY *Texas TravelLog* and would like to **continue receiving it**, please be sure to **complete the form** on the back cover and mail or fax it back, along with the mailing label. Each year, the form appears in the first three issues of the year. Only one response is needed.

If you know of others who would also like to receive free copies of this tourism industry newsletter, please pass on the word that they may simply request it. For questions, contact *TravelLog* Editor Lois M. Rodriguez at (512) 486-5874 or via e-mail at trv-log@txdot.gov.

J. GRIFFIS SMITH/TXDOT



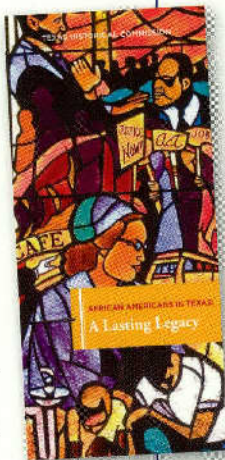
The African American Museum of Dallas is among the many sites featured in the booklet *African Americans in Texas: A Lasting Legacy*.

LEGACY HONORED

AFTER YEARS of development and research, the **Texas Historical Commission unveiled the booklet, *African Americans in Texas: A Lasting Legacy***, during a ceremony on Dec. 2 at Dallas' St. Paul United Methodist Church.

At 72 pages, the booklet detailing Texas' African-American history, is the largest THC travel guide produced to date. It showcases 79 sites throughout the state and explores African-American heritage in Texas through powerful tales of survival and innovation, as well as the impact of civil rights, religion, politics and other fields.

"This booklet tells one of the most significant and stirring stories of Texas history," says THC Executive Director Mark Wolfe. "The



Texas Historical Commission is dedicated to accurately honoring the impact African-American heritage has made, and continues to make, on the Lone Star State. The years that went into creating *African Americans in Texas: A Lasting Legacy* have resulted in our most dynamic travel guide to date, and we encourage heritage travelers to get out and explore these important cultural sites."

Organized by the 10 regions in the THC's award-winning Texas Heritage Trails Program, the booklet contains a detailed, chronological introduction to African-American history in Texas; a multi-page timeline; and nine thematic sidebars on topics such as education, freedmen's communities, agriculture and Buffalo Soldiers. Along with the booklet, the THC

launched a companion website, www.africanamericansintexas.com, featuring all the sites noted in the booklet, as well as maps, a photo gallery, additional sites and travel planning resources.

The THC's Texas Heritage Trails Program helps Texas communities promote tourism, revitalize local economies and foster community leadership through historic preservation. The program encourages people to venture out and rediscover Texas' historic and cultural marvels.

For more information about *African Americans in Texas: A Lasting Legacy*, call (512) 463-6255 or visit www.africanamericansintexas.com.

IN THE RANKS

BUDGETTRAVEL.com has offered its list of **America's 10 Best Winter Beach Retreats** — no passport needed — and **one Texas locale** is touted among the many warm getaways.

Galveston made the list alongside hot spots like Rincón, Puerto Rico; Kauai, Hawaii; Long Key, Fla.; St. Petersburg, Fla.; Laguna Beach, Calif.; Grand Isle, La.; San Diego, Calif.; St. Simons Island, Ga.; and Orange Beach, Ala.

Of Galveston, BudgetTravel.com says, "savvy travelers skip crowded East Beach (which gets overrun in March with spring breakers) and head to the more secluded West Beach or Galveston Island State Park. Both have wide expanses of sand that are perfect for trolling for shells or soaking up some sun. Once you're out of the water, the historic Strand district, along Strand Street between 25th and 11th, is worth a stop. Buildings from the 1800s have

been restored recently and now house restaurants, antiques stores, and many galleries full of fine art and photography. The town's other big attraction is the Schlitterbahn Galveston Island Indoor Waterpark, which attracts families with its water chutes, speed slides, wave pool and, for the adults, enormous 30,000-person hot tub with a swim-up bar."

AWAY.COM, a travel research and planning website, has placed **Texas' Hill Country on top of its list of Top 10 Hidden-Gem Wine Regions** in a recent article that explores off-the-beaten-path vineyard destinations this fall.

"Most people tend to associate vineyards with California, forgetting some equally lush, yet budget-friendly wineries right in their own backyard," says Away.com Senior Editor Kate Chandler. "Away.com's list of undiscovered spots in America's wine country highlights its geographic diversity, and their proximity to metropolitan areas makes them an ideal detour."

According to the site, the No. 1 ranked Texas Hill Country, is "one of the nation's fastest growing wine destinations. Boasting 24 wineries along the Texas Wine Trail, this area is a must-see for its unparalleled wine diversity."

Other mentions went to Bloomington, Ind.; Cape Cod, Mass.; Botetourt County, Va.; Long Island, N.Y.; Arkansas River Valley; Cleveland, Ohio; Yakima Valley, Wash.; Traverse

ON DISPLAY

SEVERAL **tourism organizations** have been awarded **free exhibit space in the TxDOT Texas Travel Information Centers**.

From March through August, these areas will be promoting their attractions with special displays — including colorful photographs and other promotional materials — in the centers' lobbies.

Every six months, use of the display cases rotates to another set of tourism organizations.

Here are the newly selected exhibit space pairings:

- **Amarillo:** I-10 Corridor Association
- **Denison:** Arlington, Grand Prairie, Mansfield
- **Gainesville:** Brazoria County Tourism Council
- **Langtry:** West Texas Co-op
- **Orange:** Texas Settlement Region
- **Texarkana:** Texas Hill Country Trail Region
- **Valley:** Round Rock, Georgetown, Elgin, Taylor
- **Waskom:** Frisco, Plano, McKinney

TxDOT will accept applications from June 1–10 for the next display period — September 2011 through March 2012. For more information, call the Travel Services Section at (512) 486-5800 or visit www.txdot.gov/travel/tourism_industry_resources/display_cases.htm.

City, Mich.; and Brandywine, Penn. The picks for Top 10 “Hidden Gem” Wine Regions were selected by Away.com’s editors and travel contributors and are based on the research and opinions of the writers.

THIRTY-TWO campgrounds and RV resorts have earned all-around “A” grades in the third annual National Association of RV Parks and Campgrounds consumer satisfaction survey of independent parks. Making the list were **Canton’s Mill Creek Ranch RV & Cottage Resort and Grapevine’s Vineyards Campground & Cabins**, which have received the association’s top rating for the past three years.

About 30,200 camping and RV enthusiasts participated in the online survey, which evaluated guest experiences at 2,400 independent campgrounds and RV resorts affiliated with the National Association of RV Parks and Campgrounds.

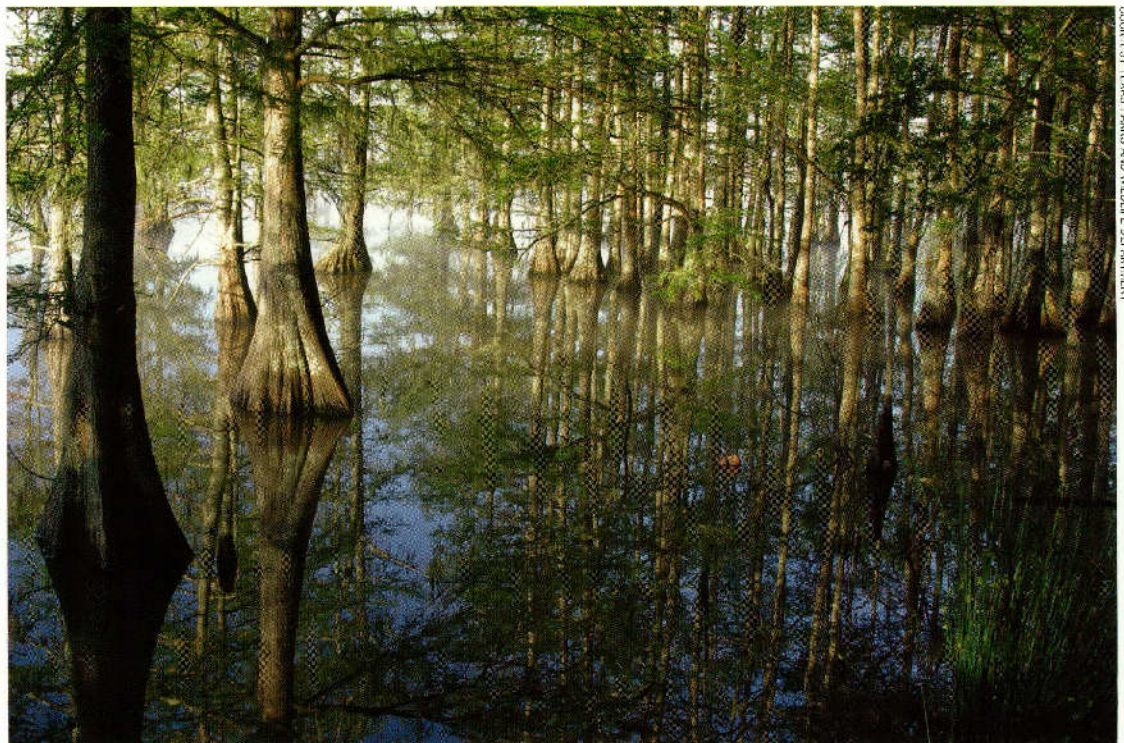
“Twenty two of the nation’s 32 top parks in our survey also received ‘A’ ratings last year, while 13 parks have received ‘A’ ratings three years in a row,” says Bob MacKinnon, president and CEO of GuestReviews, the company that created the online survey for the National Association of RV Parks and Campgrounds.

“The objective of these surveys is to help private campground, RV park and resort operators to pinpoint the improvements they need to make to provide their guests with the best possible camping experience,” says Linda Profaizer, president and CEO of the National Association of RV Parks and Campgrounds.

STAGED EXHIBIT

THE PANHANDLE-Plains Historical Museum and the Amarillo Little Theater join forces to showcase the artistry of one of the most understated components of a theatrical production — the costume.

Made to Fit: The Amarillo Little Theater and the Texas Panhandle, which runs March 26–November 2011 at the museum in Canyon, features a selection of costumes from some of The Amarillo Little Theatre’s most successful productions, including *The Best Little Whorehouse in Texas*, *Beehive: The ‘60’s*



COURTESY TEXAS PARKS AND WILDLIFE DEPARTMENT

FOUR NEW East Texas paddling trails in and around Martin Dies Jr. State Park were dedicated Dec. 16 to mark the latest entrants into the Texas Parks & Wildlife Department’s Texas Paddling Trails program, which now includes 25 waterway trails. The four paddling trails — Neches, Walnut (pictured here), Sandy Creek and Bevilport — pass through the state park’s rivers, sloughs and the B.A. Steinhagen Reservoir. This unique East Texas paddling trail system is the longest system of its kind connected to a state park. For more information, visit www.tpwd.state.tx.us/paddlingtrails.



Vintage fashion photography is replicated as part of the *Made to Fit* costume exhibit at the Panhandle-Plains Historical Museum in Canyon.

Musical and *The Producers*. Most of the costumes featured were made by the local costume designers and worn by local performers.

“Having the right costume establishes a feel for the character, not only for the actor portraying that character, but also for the audience,” costumer and 16-year theater volunteer Raymond Girard says.

The costume process begins with

the designer familiarizing themselves with the physical, mental and emotional nuances of each character on stage.

Familiarizing also includes research into the time period of the show, as well as the fabrics and fashion choices of the era.

“Costumes are an extremely important element in the overall look and feel of a show. They help a director and actor to establish time, place, social status, strength or weakness of the characters on the stage,” says Amarillo Little Theater Managing/Artistic Director Allen Shankles.

The Panhandle-Plains Historical Museum will tell the story of the Amarillo Little Theater — established in 1927 — via those costumes, shoes, hats and other theatrical items.

MFAH DIRECTOR DIES

PETER C. MARZIO, Museum of Fine Arts, Houston’s longest serving director, died Dec. 9 at the age of 67.

Marzio, who has been credited for making art more accessible and more reflective of the community, grew up working as a gas station attendant and reportedly hadn’t entered

a museum until college, after being inspired by a Goya painting (“Forge”) during a lecture. He earned his Ph.D. from the University of Chicago, where he researched high art and the common man. Marzio worked as a research assistant and a historian at the Smithsonian Institute in Washington, and later was CEO of the Corcoran Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C. He took on his role with the MFAH in 1982.

Under his leadership, the MFAH’s permanent collection more than quadrupled in size — from 14,000 to 63,000 artworks. Also, the museum saw the edition of the Lillie and Hugh Roy Cullen Sculpture Garden, a European decorative arts center at the donated Rienzi estate, and the Audrey Jones Beck building. Marzio was planning a third building focusing on art movements in the Americas, Europe and Asia.

Marzio was awarded numerous scholarships and academic prizes, including a senior Fulbright research fellowship to Rome from 1973 to 1974. He wrote five books and numerous articles, and he lectured throughout North America, South America, Europe and Asia.

TEXAS TRIVIA

What Texas location is known to birders as the only place in the U.S. to have four species of Kingfisher — the ringed, belted, green and Amazon?

From late January to early February, Laredo and Webb counties have their highest concentration of bird species — about 240. That makes the Laredo Birding Festival, slated for Feb. 2-5, the perfect time to try to spot them all. Expert birders from the Monte Mucho Audubon Society, Texas Ornithological Society, Wildlife Biologists and Texas Parks and Wildlife Department will all be present to make the event fun and educational. The festival also includes family-oriented events, programs for the beginner birders, kayaking field trip and a photography workshop. For more information on the festival, visit www.laredobirdingfestival.com.

TEXAS TRIVIA

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TEXAS TRAVEL INFORMATION CENTERS

VISITOR NUMBERS as of November 30, 2010

| TRAVEL CENTER | Month Visitors | Percent Variation* | Year-to-Date Visitors | Percent Variation* |
|----------------------|----------------|--------------------|-----------------------|--------------------|
| AMARILLO | 5,486 | -8.75 | 86,854 | -3.57 |
| ANTHONY | 4,538 | -19.12 | 75,319 | -3.40 |
| CAPITOL | 5,785 | -10.93 | 79,708 | +2.61 |
| DENISON | 26,592 | -19.79 | 303,469 | -11.46 |
| GAINESVILLE | 21,552 | -4.53 | 271,210 | -3.60 |
| LANGTRY | 3,948 | -15.46 | 51,509 | -9.42 |
| LAREDO | 5,403 | -34.34 | 87,788 | -15.35 |
| ORANGE | 35,765 | +17.37 | 379,871 | -12.83 |
| TEXARKANA | 12,231 | -51.96 | 229,526 | -20.05 |
| VALLEY | 7,967 | -32.80 | 145,496 | +3.13 |
| WASKOM | 25,239 | -30.91 | 335,724 | -6.48 |
| WICHITA FALLS | 12,745 | +14.79 | 143,258 | -8.53 |
| CENTER TOTALS | 167,221 | -17.27 | 2,189,732 | -9.14 |

*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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