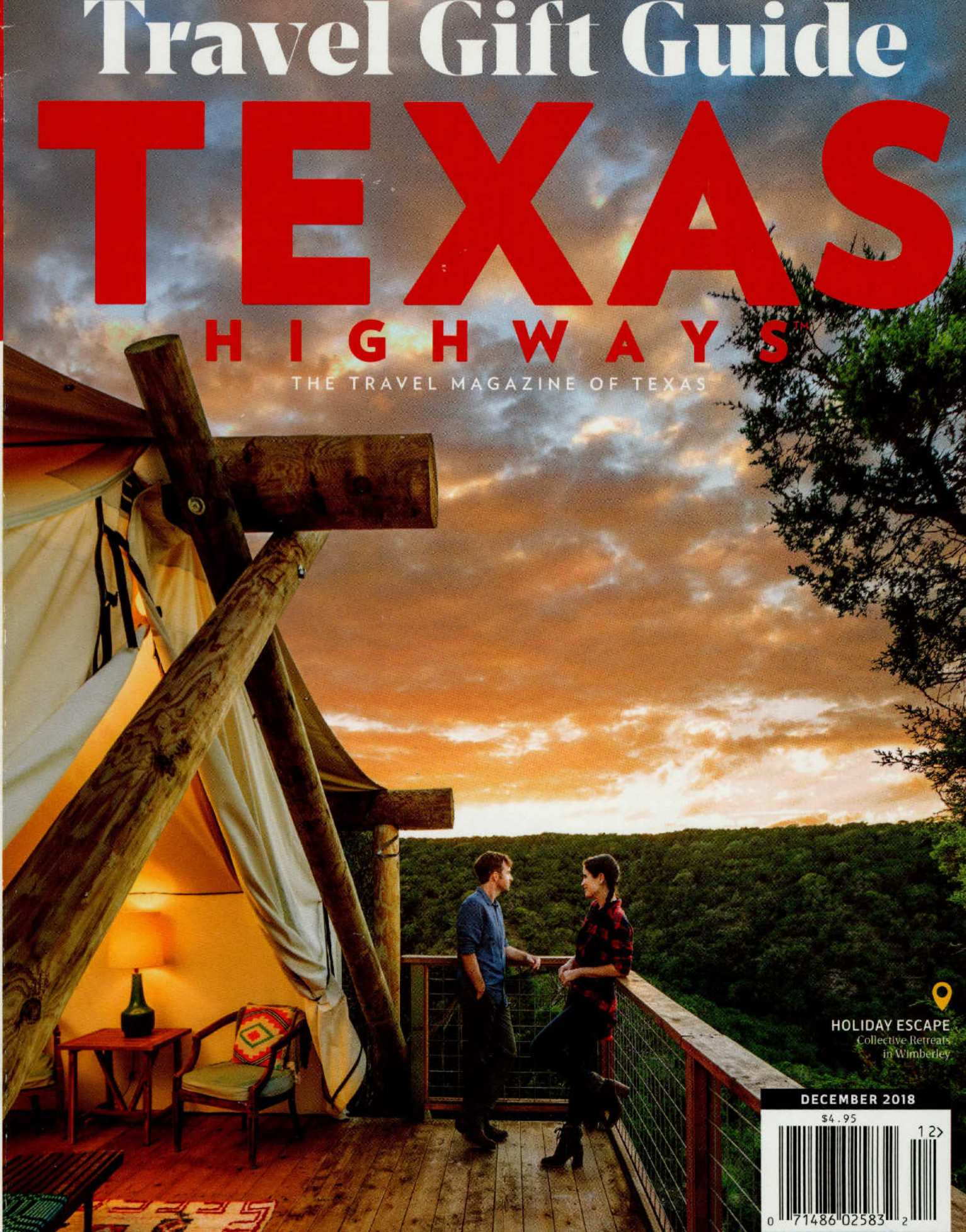


# Travel Gift Guide

# TEXAS

## HIGHWAYS

THE TRAVEL MAGAZINE OF TEXAS



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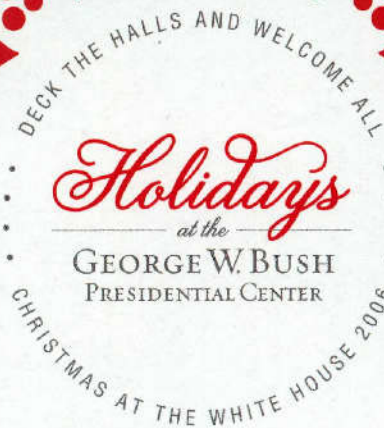
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EDITOR'S  
**NOTE**



The Texas State Railroad in Palestine hosts Polar Express-themed train trips in December, one of many options for experiential gifts this holiday season.

## Holiday Joy

**O**n my son's third birthday last year, he received a gift we'll probably never top: snow in Austin. The 4-inch snowfall provided enough white powder for all the winter fun he'd only seen in cartoons or picture books until then. For two magical hours, he ran around our yard making snowballs and snow angels and catching snowflakes on his tongue. Nearly a year later, he still brings it up on a regular basis—the night so cemented in his mind, I'm betting it'll be one of his first recallable memories. The toys and clothes he got for gifts that year, not so much.

There's a reason experiences like this loom so large in our minds. According to Raj Raghunathan, a professor of marketing at the University of Texas and author of *If You're So Smart, Why Aren't You Happy?*, things lose their luster fairly quickly, while memories of experiences only brighten with time. Part of the reason for that, he says, is other people are much more interested in hearing about our experiences than, say, the expensive car we just bought. And for vacations or events we plan in advance, the anticipation can be just as sweet as the trip itself. "Before you go, you think of all the fun things you're going to do," he explains. "And afterward you only remember the

**Things  
lose their  
luster  
fairly  
quickly,  
while  
memories of  
experiences  
brighten  
with time.**

---

good. It's called the rosy view effect—before or after an experience, you enjoy the experience more."

So as we head into the busiest buying season of the year, consider planning a trip with loved ones or giving them an experience they can enjoy in the future. We've got some ideas to get you started in our "Experiential Gift Guide" on Page 32. Because experiences leave room for the unexpected—like building a snowman in Texas on your birthday.

---

### NEW WEBSITE:

Be sure to visit [texashighways.com](http://texashighways.com) this month for an all-new online experience. Along with expanded magazine content and the latest travel news, new features include curated destination guides to help you plan your next Texas trip.

**EMILY ROBERTS STONE**  
EXECUTIVE EDITOR



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December 8

Washington on the Brazos  
**CHRISTMAS ON THE BRAZOS**  
December 8

Bluebonnet Wine Trail  
**HOLIDAY CRYSTAL WINE TRAIL**  
December 9

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# DECEMBER



**IN THE HOLLAND HOTEL'S** lobby, a mounted African kudu trophy gets festive for the holidays. Page 50.

32

## The Experiential Gift Guide

Forget gift baskets and gadgets and give a stay at a luxurious glamping resort or tickets to a magical underground concert this holiday season.

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## Winter Swell

Winter is the best time to surf in Texas, so revel in the relatively empty beaches and get stoked to ride some gnarly waves.

*By Heather Brand  
Photographs by Kenny Braun*

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## Railroad Hotels

Five lodges that historically served overnight rail passengers remind present-day travelers of the glamour and excitement of train travel.

*By Matt Joyce*



TEXAS HIGHWAYS MAGAZINE  
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# DECEMBER



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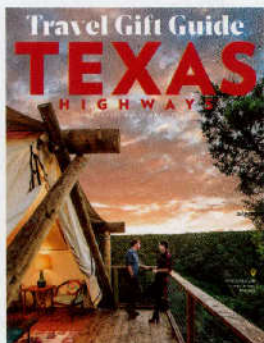
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Collective Retreats Hill Country at Montezino Ranch in Wimberley

Photo by Jeff Wilson

Photos: Jesse Mendoza (top); Brandon Jakobeit (bottom)



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Visit [texashighways.com](http://texashighways.com) for more content and events.



## Behind the Story



We were knee-deep in producing this issue in October when news broke of the historic flooding that deluged the Llano and Colorado rivers. The flooding caused wide-ranging destruction, prompting Senior Editor Matt Joyce to check in with The Antlers Inn in Kingsland, one of five historic hotels he profiled in "Railroad Hotels" (Page 50). The 117-year-old Antlers sits about 100 yards from the Lake LBJ shoreline. "People from all over the United States have called, wanting to know how we fared," reported LaVelle Haynes, the Antlers' senior front desk clerk, a few days after the flood. "I was happy to tell them that we did just fine." Not that it was all business as usual. The flood reached the foot of one of the Antlers' cabins and left behind boats and dock debris on the Antlers' property. But the hotel only closed for one night, and cleanup was complete by early November. "For a while there, we were watching on TV, and water was flowing up the Colorado where the Llano flows into the lake," Haynes said. "I've never seen anything like that before."

## Featured Contributors



### Sarah Hepola

The Dallas-based writer, who penned this issue's ode to the solo road trip (Page 12), is the author of *The New York Times* bestselling memoir *Blackout: Remembering the Things I Drank to Forget*. She is currently working on a second book about a long, tortured relationship with her own body.



### Kelly Stocker

This McAllen native grew up thinking that everyone had tamales for Christmas, which served as the inspiration for her story about Delia Lubin's famous tamales (Page 59). Stocker recently launched

a productivity coaching business and is always in pursuit of discovering the next incredible hole in the wall.

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# MERGE



When *Texas Highways* arrives at the post office in this little Arkansas town, I grab a beer, sit on my front porch, and begin my trip of nostalgia through your pages of beauty and memory.

*Melinda Reynolds, Gravette, Arkansas*

## New Look

When the November issue arrived in my mailbox, I have to admit my initial reaction was “Uh-oh ... they’ve gone and changed it.” But, to my delight, I am enjoying all the modifications, including the maps with the stories and the new format for events. I’m looking forward to years of worthwhile reading.

*Alicia Rueda, Brenham*

## Living History

I enjoyed reading Sarah Bird’s rhapsody on the Paisano Ranch [“Meanwhile, Back at the Ranch,” November]. Being a living historian, I was also glad to see her attention to such a historic figure as Cathy Williams. One of the greatest things about Texas is the ability of this land to produce more unique characters than any other place on earth.

*Timothy Phillips, Taylor County*

## Worth a Stop

Thank you so much for your article on Canadian [“Curiously Canadian,” October]. We had driven through Canadian a few times, but after reading the article, decided we would go there as a destination. We stayed at Prairie Haven (the sourdough baked goods were indeed outstanding) and were able to visit a number of the sights mentioned in the article. We had a wonderful time!

*Mac and Susan Biggs, Center Point*

## L’Air Ball

The bronze figure *L’Air* by Aristide Maillol at the Kimbell Art Museum’s restaurant, The Buffet, has always taken on a more mundane role in my mind than the lofty title might imply [“Painted Palate,” September]. As an avid baseball fan, my first thought when I see the statue is an umpire’s call as a base runner slides

into home plate: With arms stretched out, the ump cries “SAFE!” every time!

*Michael Morawey, Richardson*

## Lofty Landmarks

I used to fly Pipers out of the airports in Pecos and Fort Stockton, and gaining altitude I could see El Capitan and Guadalupe Peak off in the northwest [“Five-Peak Week,” November]. Those were great navigational points. I never got lost.

*Joe Cole, Fort Worth*

## We want to hear from you!

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## Winter Wild

Scarlet possumhaw berries and the bright plumage of the male northern cardinal add a splash of warmth to an otherwise cold winter day. While possumhaw is found in Central and East Texas—sprouting berries in fall and winter—northern cardinals can be spotted year-round through most of Texas. Like this iconic winter bird, other songbirds, gamebirds, opossums, and raccoons all dine on the possumhaw's conspicuous berries.



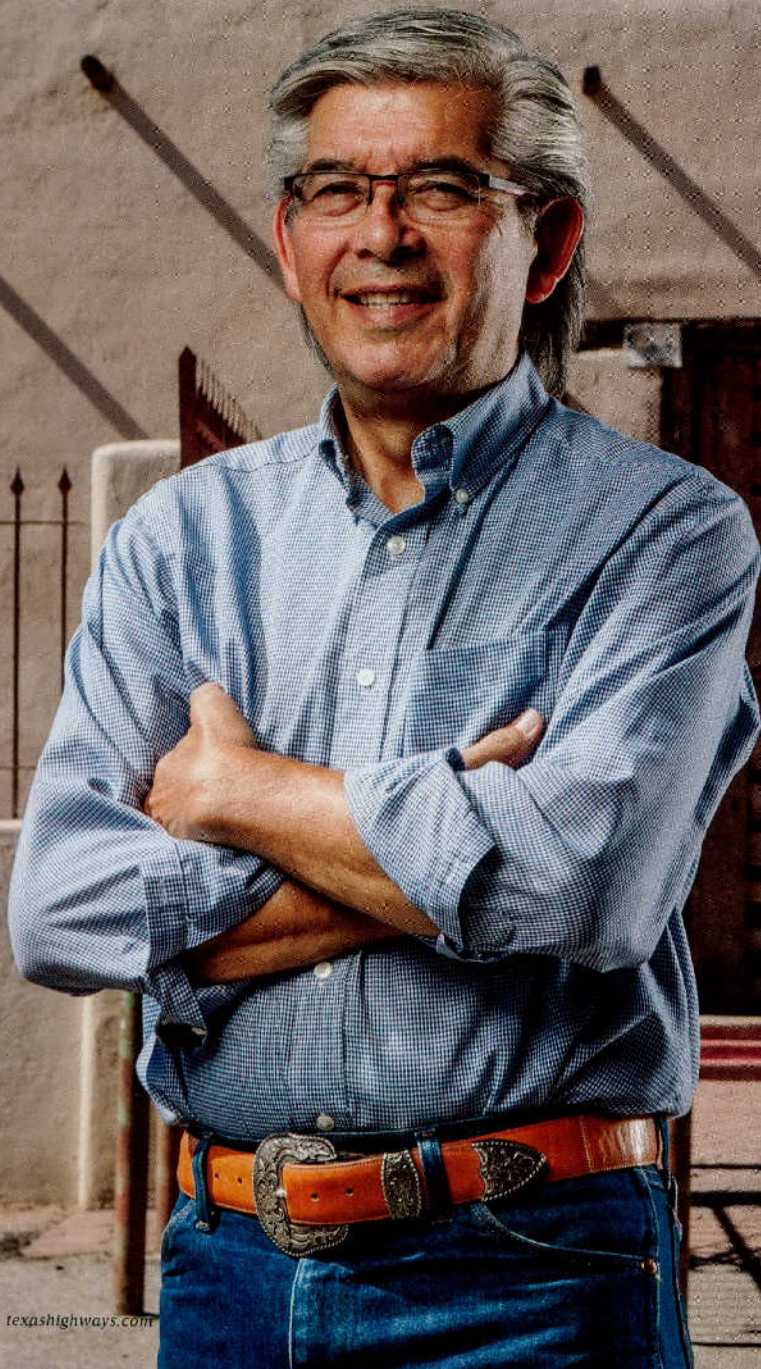




# San Elizario

Borderland history in the 'Birthplace of the Southwest'

By Matt Joyce



**AL BORREGO** reopened the Adobe Horseshoe Dinner Theatre, a 350-seat performance space in San Elizario, in October. December shows include the *Nutcracker* ballet.





## TOWN TRIVIA



POPULATION:

9,700



NUMBER OF STOPLIGHTS:

3



YEAR FOUNDED:

1598



NEAREST CITY:

El Paso,  
20 miles north



MARQUEE EVENTS:

Luminaria Festival & Posada Celebration, Dec. 22; Rio Grande Festival and History Conference, April 26-28; Billy the Kid Festival, May 31-June 2.



MAP IT:

Los Portales Museum and Information Center, 1521 San Elizario Road

As he guides walking tours of San Elizario, Al Borrego paints a vivid picture of the town's 400 years of borderland adventure and enterprise.

On Main Street, Borrego describes the day in 1598 when explorer Juan de Oñate marched through with an expedition of 500 colonists. Outside the immaculate San Elizario presidio chapel, Borrego explains how the community was actually south of the Rio Grande until an 1829 flood realigned the river. At the Old El Paso County Jail Museum, he recounts how in 1876, Billy the Kid liberated a jailed associate without firing a shot. San Elizario grew up as a Spanish military fort and farming village, about 20 miles southeast of El Paso. *Acequias* lace the town like veins, irrigating crop fields and adding to the Southwestern feel of the colonial layout and historic adobes that now house residences, galleries, and offices. A painter with a downtown gallery, Borrego champions local history as president of the San Elizario Genealogy and Historical Society, which hosts walking tours and operates the Los Portales Museum and Information Center.

### Southwestern Roots

"My dad's family I can trace back here in San Elizario to about 1816, and my mom's family came to Socorro around 1880, right when the train got here. My great-grandfather on my mom's side was a Chiricahua Apache from Arizona. He was working with the railroad, and this is where he finished working on it."

### Pride of Place

"We call ourselves the birthplace of the American Southwest because when the Oñate expedition came through here in 1598 he claimed New Mexico for New Spain. Oñate also created *El Camino Real de Tierra Adentro* from Mexico City to Santa Fe, the thoroughfare of merchandise for almost 300 years into the American Southwest. Everything you see here now—the people, the faith, plants, domestic animals—all of that went through here."

### Historic Art District

"I used to be the president of the El Paso Art Association, and because I know so many artists, I started bringing in artists and building the Historic Art District. We've got about 52 artists that exhibit in the district, mostly from the region. We've had them from all over the place, artists from Canada and from Mexico."

### Older than El Paso

"We always get lumped in with El Paso. San Elizario was born in 1598, and El Paso was born in 1873. So, there's a big space in there. Of course, El Paso's the one that grew. I think that's a result of the Salt War of 1877, when the people that were running San Elizario left and moved north to what is now El Paso."

### San Elizario Chapel

"It's an honor to be able to call this your church. Since I've been here, I've gone through seven or eight different priests. There's been some really good ones, and then some that don't care about our heritage and history. Those you have to protect against because they want to make changes. When I do tours, I never bring anybody inside because it's my place of worship. I tell them what to look for when they come in, and I wait outside."

### Divine Protection

"The angel candelabras near the altar are probably the oldest relics in the church, donated in 1854. Now, they weren't here when I got back to San Elizario, and I asked the priest, 'Have you heard about the angel candelabras?' He announced it at Mass on Sunday, and that Monday they were outside on the church steps."

### EL PASO MISSION TRAIL

Although it's not a mission church, the San Elizario presidio chapel is one of three sites, along with mission churches in Ysleta and Socorro, that anchor the El Paso Mission Trail.





**BILLY  
THE KID  
MUSEUM**

**TERLINGUA  
GHOSTTOWN**

TEXAS  
US  
281



# Go West, Young Woman

A solo traveler takes a road trip through her state of mind.

By Sarah Hepola

**O**

One sunny morning in July, on an otherwise unremarkable Wednesday, I slide into the driver's seat of my car and head south. I pull onto the highway, a map of Texas in the passenger seat, like an ancient rune from a time before GPS, and I watch as the billboards turn unfamiliar and disappear. Big-box stores and strip malls turn to metal silos, oil refineries, and wheat fields.

I wonder if such a small act of freedom will be unfathomable to future generations. You know, when robots have taken over and no one actually drives anymore, and we all just plug into the cloud of immersive reality or something. I wonder if stories like this one will sound as impossibly ancient as the pioneer wagons did to me when I was growing up in the '80s, flipping through old-timey Westerns on the couch with a sleeve of Ritz crackers in my lap. Long ago, little girl, there was a thing called a road trip, and brave Americans took to the interstates in a machine filled with gas and good guesses—not because they had to, but because they could.

My itinerary is three days, 1,000 miles. From Dallas, where I live, to the high desert of West Texas, tracing a backwards L-shape across the state. I've taken many road trips, but this one will be different. Usually my adventures are pointed Out There, to the coastal cities and the grand canyons beyond our borders. As a little girl, I considered Texas a temporary affliction, one I would inevitably shed, and I grew into a woman who studied the dots on the map where she hadn't been with more reverence than the dots she had. Sometimes the only cure for this kind of self-loathing is to ship out and discover what you miss. I left Texas nearly 15 years ago, and I slunk back six years later. This road trip is part of a bigger mission—not to escape the place that shaped me, but to explore it.

By myself? That's right. But you're a woman! Also true. I know some might consider what I am about to do unsafe, but I'd politely point out that whatever risks might exist make for a hearty education in self-reliance. Every human deserves to know they can make their own way—especially women, who are often told the opposite. I wonder if my long-held insistence that I can travel alone isn't partly the influence of Texas, a place built on bravado and defiance. Tell me I can't do something—then watch me do it, mister.

Every human deserves to know they can make their own way—especially women, who are often told the opposite. I wonder if my long-held insistence that I can travel alone isn't partly the influence of Texas.



**MY ADVENTURE BEGINS** heading south on US 67, eager as I am to avoid the slalom of misery known as Interstate-35. Taking US 67 out of Dallas and then heading south on US 281 has emerged as the softer, gentler path to move north and south-bound through our state. I pass haystacks and pastures as I glide through towns like Midlothian, Alvarado, and Glen Rose, home to Dinosaur Valley State Park and fossils of the *Acrocanthosaurus* that once roamed these parts.

Glen Rose is also where the late author John Graves lived and not too far from where he ended his canoe trip down the Brazos River, a solo expedition that formed his classic 1960 travelogue, *Goodbye to a River*. These days, canoeing sounds as outdated as dinosaurs, but Graves was a philosophic soul who believed the past lived inside the present. So I row my Honda down the auto-river, knowing that wherever I am headed, dinosaurs and native tribes and non-indigenous settlers and curious writers had helped to pave the path.

I stretch my legs in Hico, picking up US 281 about 100 miles from where I began. I hitch up my blue jeans as I climb out of the car and walk across the square in my wedge heels to the Billy the Kid Museum, where a white-haired woman named Sue fulfills all my fantasies about chatting with a friendly local, though it turns out she's from Houston and moved to the country only in her retirement.

"We've been getting a lot more folks like you lately," Sue says, straightening the popped collar of her leopard-print button-down as I scan the guest book to find most visitors from Austin or Dallas. "Nobody wants to drive I-35 anymore."

The modest one-room museum is premised on a bit of speculative history: The Old West's most famous outlaw was not shot and killed by Pat Garrett in 1881, but

rather escaped and lived his final days in the area under the name "Brushy Bill" Roberts. Back home in Dallas, we've learned a few things about the power of a conspiracy theory and how far people will fall into the rabbit hole of alternative facts. Is the Billy the Kid Museum telling a true story? How would I know? We live in a time when people can't agree on what happened yesterday. I doubt we'll gain consensus on one dark night in 1881. But I know one thing: good stories are often better than true ones.

Back in the lobby, I turn the squeaky postcard rack lined with sepia-toned pictures of Billy, whose top hat and kerchief would make him right at home among the hipster elite. Other postcards tout the famous Davy Crockett line: "You may all go to hell, and I will go to Texas."

I've driven through most of the 50 states, and I've never seen any of them foist themselves on their citizens like Texas. I wouldn't blame anyone for hating us because of our oversized egos, and yet I can't help feeling a bit sorry for the folks out there who will never purchase a pot-holder in the shape of their state, or pass a barn painted in the colors of the flag, or find themselves bound to strangers by this curious mix of kitsch and pride and overcompensation.

By mid-afternoon, I enter the rippling asphalt of the Hill Country. I stop in Marble Falls at the Blue Bonnet Cafe, a diner where pies line a glass case like winning trophies.

US 281 might well be nicknamed the Pie Corridor. Nearly every town boasts some fabled spot where sugar-spun concoctions are the specialty, and the Blue Bonnet is one of the most popular. I linger near the kitchen and admire a towering lemon meringue with its tawny foam top fighting gravity with all the panache of a 1960s homecoming queen and her Aqua

Net. Indeed, there is something twinned about Texas hair and Texas pies. The flamboyance is over the top. But as the saying goes: The higher the meringue, the closer to God.

Blue Bonnet is a far cry from the trendy coffee shops that have come to define the big-city experience, with their screeching espresso grinders, macaron selections, and young people tractor-beamed by the glow of a MacBook Air. I happen to love those places, but sitting in the Blue Bonnet, you might forget we live in an age defined by stress and technology. A family actually talks to each other at a nearby table. A couple shares forkfuls from the same gloppy slice. A man in a baseball cap pushes the remainders of a chicken-fried steak away from him. "I'm gonna burst," he says, as the waitress smiles and refills his mug with the glass pot of coffee she carries around to each of us.

The great Texas writer Larry McMurtry spent much of his career tracking the move of Texans from rural to urban spaces. He liked to puncture the romanticism that city slickers like me spy in the slow-syrup pour of country living. "Small towns don't enlarge one's character, they shrink it," he wrote in his 1968 essay collection *In a Narrow Grave*.

But more than a century into our great urban migration, small towns may have a counterargument. As the cities grow more crowded and polluted, marked by rising rents and ambient anxiety, small towns offer a peaceful path to a more sustainable modern life. The internet has made city living less critical than ever while crumbling old barriers of ignorance. All of us, wherever we roam, have access to the wider world. In fact, I post a picture of those pies on social media when I sit down, and by the time I get my check, the comments section is filled with heart-eyed emojis and jealousy from my

What I love about West Texas is the way it connects you to something beyond yourself. To the country you live beside. To the earth, the mountains, the stars.



friends who are walled up in their cubicles and high-rises.

My destination tonight is Castroville, an Alsatian town about 30 miles west of San Antonio. If I once felt out of place in Texas, imagine what the settlers of Castroville felt like, trading the lush vineyards and mountain views of the French-Swiss-German border for the Middle of Nowhere, Texas, in the decades before climate control.

I booked an 1850s-era cabin on Airbnb. Though rustic, it's gotten a few upgrades over the years, including a chugging AC unit and indoor plumbing.

My sleep is fitful, sweaty, and if I believed in ghosts, I'd place money a few are hanging around with me, though I can hardly blame them. What pioneer spirit wouldn't be curious about the strange lady in the wedge heels with the iPhone? If John Graves was right, and the past lives on in the present, then maybe there is no such thing as a solo road trip. Maybe nobody ever really travels alone.

---

**ON THE SECOND DAY OF MY TRIP,** I head west on US 90. Just that phrase—head west—has long filled me with the high fumes of possibility. Here, I let the moonscapes of the Chihuahuan Desert swallow me whole.

I stop for coffee in Hondo ("Welcome, hunters," reads a banner) and later in Uvalde, birthplace of Matthew McConaughey, where I pull up to one of those ice vending machines on the side of the road and am soon confounded by the simple contraption. I puzzle over the dollar slot and the metal chutes when two men in cowboy hats pull up in a giant truck. Ugh, just what this moment needs: witnesses. The men wait patiently for me to drop my independent-woman routine and ask for help, but I am nothing if not stubborn. Finally, I press a button—you know, the giant red button in the center—and a bag of ice flies down the chute. I wave to them as I depart, put a wiggle in my walk to regain a bit of dignity, and they wave in return. All yours, gentlemen.

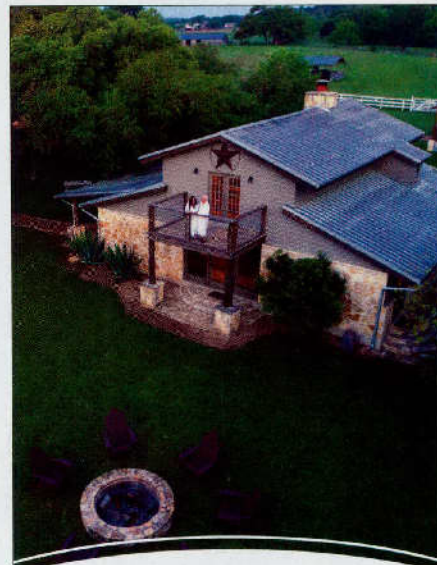
The next few hours are a kind of

mental flatline—the meditative state I am always driving toward on a road trip, where I hurtle down the highway at a cool 80 mph, staying ahead of my own mind. I pass the blue-green waters of Amistad Reservoir and then Seminole Canyon, as pink and maroon cliff-sides rise and fall alongside me.

I pull over at the Pecos River, known as the place where the Wild West begins. Trucks whizz past as I walk along the fence, hoping to find a better angle for my photo. I trade my wedge heels for flip-flops, but neither shoe was designed for what I do next, which is to hop up on a metal embankment and scramble up the fence for an unobscured view. Would previous generations of cowboys have found my action brave—or idiotic? Poor girl has the comfort of that cozy Honda, and she risks her life for glory on Instagram.

I head toward Terlingua, a 19th-century quicksilver mining town turned ghost town turned enclave for artsy nomads who believe Austin isn't keeping it nearly weird enough. I gas up in Marathon (pronounced *Mara-thtn*) and head on to US 385 toward Big Bend National Park, the most solitary stretch of asphalt I've traveled thus far. I drive about 30 minutes without passing anyone when I notice I have no cell phone reception. About 15 miles later I start worrying I'm going the wrong way. My mind begins to unfold disaster scenarios: a blowout, a rattlesnake in the back seat. How long would I linger on the side of the road before someone found me? People who complain about a lack of privacy these days, well, come out to US 385, my friends. This is what it's like to disappear.

Soon enough, I arrive at the entryway of Big Bend, closed at this hour, but still welcoming to me, and pass a road sign that assures me I am about an hour and a half from Terlingua. Big Bend is one of the lesser visited national parks, which is a shame given its rugged beauty, but that also might be what saves the place in the end. I have fought selfie sticks in Zion and stood in hour-long lines at Yellowstone, but Big Bend is too remote, too brutal, too much of a fight to get | continued on Page 86



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# DRIVE



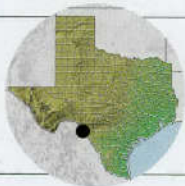
**CAMPING ABOVE**  
the shores of Amistad  
Reservoir at Amistad  
National Recreation  
Area in Del Rio.



# Dos Amigos

Amistad Reservoir is an international oasis for boating, fishing, and rock art

By E. Dan Klepper



**AMISTAD NATIONAL RECREATION AREA**  
 4121 Veterans Blvd., Del Rio,  
 830-775-7491; nps.gov/amis

The Texas badlands east of the Pecos River and along the state's border with Mexico bristle in thorn-covered plateaus and jagged limestone canyons. But after spring rains, the country often reveals a softer side, blushing with Texas sage blooms. The sage grows on both sides of the Rio Grande, clinging to crevices, thriving among the flats, and populating the rocky shores of Amistad Reservoir, home to Amistad National Recreation Area and ground zero for the most important shared resource in badlands territory—water.

Amistad—"friendship" in Spanish—blurs the two countries together, submerging the border beneath several hundred feet of water, a uniformity replicated by nearby Del Rio and its sister city, Acuña. Like Amistad's natural world, the two communities meld into one.

"There's no boundary here because things come and go in nature," says Sarah Howard, an Amistad biologist. "We see the same animals, plants, and birds. And we share the same water on the surface and underground."

The lake keeps floodwaters and drought in check for the region, gathering the downstream flow of the Rio Grande, the Devils, the Pecos, and the Rio Conchos of Mexico behind Amistad Dam. The dam also generates power, providing over 100 million kilowatt hours of hydroelectricity annually for each country.

## THE WHITE SHAMAN

rock shelter, one of several well-preserved pictograph sites in the Pecos River region near Amistad Reservoir.






But for most Texans the lake is all about fun. Amistad National Recreation Area, formed in 1969 after construction of the dam along the Rio Grande, encompasses the U.S. portion of the lake and its 547 miles of Texas shoreline, including several thousand acres of adjacent lands. Anglers and boaters make up a majority of the million-plus visitors each year. On most summer afternoons, jet skis and speedboats hashtag the water's surface while bass boats putter in and out of the coves. The lake's scalloped shoreline rises and falls with the weather, submerging acres of desert plant life after a monsoon season or revealing bone-white stumps during drought.

Amistad's vast open water is easier crossed with a motorboat, and sudden weather changes can make navigation difficult even under plenty of horsepower. (Paddlers typically stick to the coves and upper river regions where waters are more negotiable.) Thunderclouds can develop abruptly over the lake or are borne along by swift-moving storm fronts, shattering a placid afternoon with high-voltage strikes and sheets of rain-fall. For weather watchers, the view from Amistad's Diablo East picnic shelters includes a generous expanse of lake, the Union Pacific Railroad bridge along the horizon, and bright limestone cliffs nearby. Once a storm passes and day settles to dusk, tranquility returns as boats come in to dock, their navigation lights mesmerizing like satellites crossing an obsidian sky.

Swimming also tops recreational activities, especially for locals who drive the gravel Viewpoint Road to reach the Diablo East swimming pier. On warmer weekends, crowds are especially drawn to the camping and picnic areas at the paved Governors Landing, located

**“There’s no boundary here. We share the same water on the surface and underground.”**

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beneath the Herbert C. Petry Bridge spanning the Devils River arm of the lake along US 90. The highway bridge parallels the handsome Union Pacific Railroad bridge, which carries trains across a quarter-mile of water. Its six metal trusses on concrete piers arc above the reservoir like taut bows that sling curved shadows onto swimmers like Jeremy Vera, a native of Del Rio now living in San Antonio. "I've been coming here since I was a kid," he says. "This is a great place to swim, especially for kids because it's pretty shallow."

Today's visitors are just the latest in the region's 10,000-year history of human migration, which began at the end of the last ice age. Starting about 4,000 years ago, hunter-gatherers left a record of their occupation in the form of pictographs. By creating brushes from plant fibers and hair and pigment from ground minerals, plants, and animal fat, these ancient humans illustrated their earthly lives and spiritual pursuits across the region's rock surfaces and shelters. Several sites are accessible by boat as well as at nearby Seminole Canyon State Park and the White Shaman Preserve, the state's premier rock art shelter, where tours are offered by the Witte Museum Rock Art Foundation.

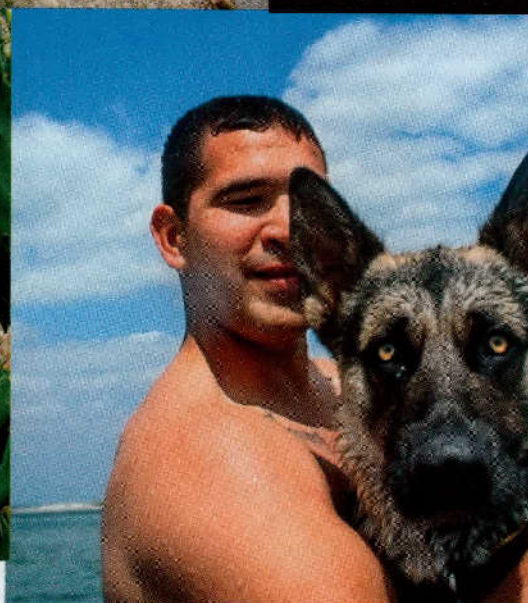
Within the recreation area's borders are land-based amenities like hiking and birding trails, group campgrounds, boat ramps, marinas, restrooms, docks, and fish-cleaning stations, representing a considerable recreational foundation dependent on a limited national park staff.

Although operating costs have increased over time, Amistad's funding has remained relatively flat, and repairs and concessions contracts for two of the park's marinas have been on hold since 2014. By contrast, the Southwinds Marina is a bucolic bit of shoreline off Spur 349 managed by nearby Laughlin Air Force Base. The marina amenities are available to members of the military, veterans, and their families, although the boat ramp is open to the public.

"The military and law enforcement provide a buffer for the recreation area, helping to keep us safe," says Greg Garetz, Amistad's Chief of Interpretation and Resource

**CLOCKWISE FROM**

**TOP:** Governors Landing at Amistad Reservoir; lake visitor Jeremy Vera and his dog, Gunner, prickly pear cactus.



**BORDER EMBRACE**

Presidents Dwight D. Eisenhower and Adolfo López Mateos are credited with naming Amistad Reservoir during a 1960 border summit, which is commemorated every October with a *Fiesta de Amistad* parade and *Abrazo* (Embrace) ceremony where Texas and Mexico meet on the reservoir dam.



Management. The region is a federally designated high-intensity drug trafficking area, although no Amistad visitor has yet been a victim of border-related crimes. "If a visitor sees something unusual, they should leave the area and then call the sheriff's department," Garetz says. "But between our own rangers, Border Patrol agents, Texas Parks and Wildlife game wardens, and local officers, we've pretty much got a law-enforcement presence around all the time."

Amistad's biologists are more focused on preventing the spread of invasive species while protecting and conserving natives like monarch butterflies and an endangered bird, the interior least tern, an unusual summer resident of Amistad Reservoir. The smallest member of the gull family, the tern is gray and white with a bold black streak across its head; makes squeaky, zipper-like calls; and dives into the water to snatch fish with its sharp, corn-yellow beak.

To help them keep track of Amistad's natural world, Howard and her staff rely on other scientists and agencies such as the Texas Speleological Society and the San Antonio Zoo. Howard also stays in touch with her neighbors across the border. "A lot of our concerns are the same," she says.

Howard often turns to social media to swap information, particularly when monitoring endangered species. "The monarch butterfly migrates between the U.S. and Mexico," Howard says, "so we use Facebook as a collaborative tool for raising awareness about the migration and to track the butterflies' progress across the borderlands."

On an unseasonably cold and windy Amistad day this past spring, chilly temperatures kept picnic areas unoccupied while white caps emptied the lake of boats. The Diablo East swim dock, poking into its sheltered cove, drew only two anglers, friends stationed at opposite ends of the T-shaped pier. Back to back, the anglers cast to opposing shorelines—one to the north while the other released south. Yet their movements synchronized, slicing through the blustery fray in pursuit of the same thing. **L**

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# Falling for Snow

Where to find your white Christmas in Galveston and Grapevine

By Cynthia J. Drake

**S**ome called it a miracle: For a couple of hours across a wide swath of Texas last December, people could legitimately sing along to “Let It Snow! Let it Snow! Let it Snow!”

There was snow on the beach in Galveston, and 7 inches fell on cactuses in Corpus Christi. Someone made a snowman at the Alamo, and *The New York Times*, *Newsweek*, and *The Guardian* all reported on the weather phenomenon. Children who had never seen snow walked around with their heads thrown back and tongues poked out, tasting the frozen flakes and giddy with the possibility of school cancellations.

Snow may not be guaranteed from year to year, but you’re sure to find some frozen fun at these destinations—even if Mother Nature doesn’t cooperate.

## 1 Galveston

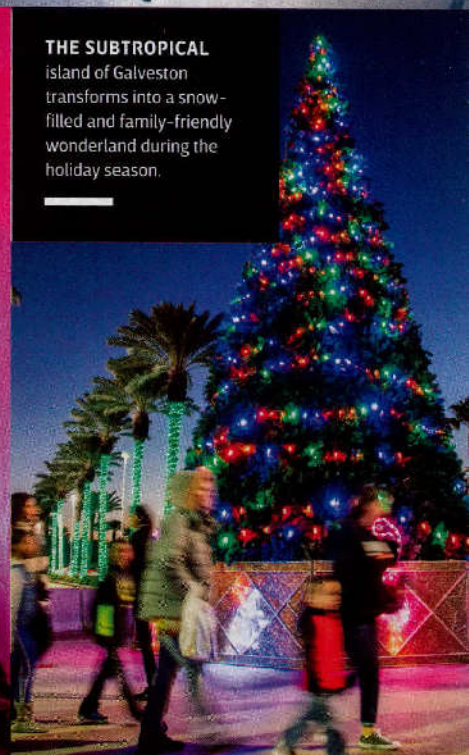
► **Ice Land at Moody Gardens:** Visitors follow a winding pathway through icy tunnels and enchanting ice-created wildlife tableaux in a 28,000-square-foot tent next to the Moody Gardens Hotel, Spa & Convention Center.

The sculptures are carved by artisans from Harbin, China, home of the world’s largest ice festival and sculpture competition. The ice, glistening in vibrant hues, is colored with a mixture of milk and tempera paint and frozen into blocks. The artists then use chainsaws and chisels to create these frigid artworks. This year’s theme is “Pole to Pole,” with life-sized glossy penguins and polar bears.

There’s also a bar and a slide made of ice in the structure, which is kept at 9 degrees for three months and is designed to withstand hurricane-force winds. Visitors can borrow coats but should bring some gloves and wear closed-toed shoes to



**THE SUBTROPICAL**  
island of Galveston transforms into a snow-filled and family-friendly wonderland during the holiday season.



**WINTER WONDER**  
Find holiday festivities in Galveston and Grapevine.



ensure maximum warmth. Outside, a 1-mile trail of lights winds around the iconic Moody Gardens pyramids, where the holiday fun continues with an ice-skating rink and outdoor arctic slide. Walk through the light trail while munching some kettle corn, and enjoy the contrast of the frozen chill of Ice Land with subtropical Galveston breezes.

Nov. 17-Jan. 6 at Moody Gardens, One Hope Blvd. 409-744-4673; moodygardens.com/holiday\_season

► **Dickens on the Strand:** This Victorian-themed extravaganza is worthy of Scrooge and his Cratchit pals. Wear your finest Victorian garb to the parade, listen to holiday handbells, sing along with roving





## They Came and Went

### Recent major snowfalls in the Lone Star State:

#### Dec. 7-8, 2017

A wintry mix combined with a strong cold front creeps across South and Central Texas, depositing an inch of snow in Corpus Christi and 2 inches in Victoria.

#### Dec. 26-28, 2015

A West Texas blizzard blankets nearly half the Lone Star State in snow, devastating cattle and dairy operators in the Panhandle.

#### Feb. 23-24, 2010

Widespread snow falls mostly east of I-35.

#### Feb. 11-12, 2010

Several inches of snow blanket the northern half of the state.

#### Dec. 24-25, 2009

Over a foot of snow falls in many areas between Dallas and Lubbock.

#### Dec. 24-25, 2004

The Victoria Christmas snowstorm produces 12.5 inches of snow—a historic record. The only Texas city ever to receive more snow in a single holiday season was Amarillo, with 21.2 inches in 2000.

carolers, and slip back in time at the Strand Historic District, a national historic landmark.

Nov. 30–Dec. 2 in downtown Galveston. [galvestonhistory.org/events/dickens-on-the-strand](http://galvestonhistory.org/events/dickens-on-the-strand)

## 2 Grapevine

### ► Christmas Capital and Scuba

**Santa:** This suburb of the Dallas–Fort Worth Metroplex has good reason to call itself the Christmas Capital of Texas. Holiday spirit oozes through downtown with glittering storefronts, an idyllic main street with a town tree, a gazebo showered regularly with artificial snow, millions of lights, and a cozy Christmas train that ushers hundreds of kiddos to the North Pole to see Santa every holiday season.

Nearby at the Grapevine Mills mall, there's even a scuba-diving Santa Claus at SEA LIFE Aquarium. Santa swims at regularly scheduled times inside the tank with fish floating by and holds up a sign to let each child know if they've been naughty or nice.

Parade of Lights, Dec. 6 at 7 p.m., downtown Grapevine; [grapevinetexas.com/christmas-capital-of-texas](http://grapevinetexas.com/christmas-capital-of-texas)

► **ICE! at Gaylord Texan:** This sprawling resort becomes a Christmas gala each year with the ice sculpture extravaganza ICE! and holiday decor around every bend of its replica San Antonio Riverwalk. Before each tour of ICE!, a brief video explains how the sculptures are made (as in Galveston, Chinese sculptors hand-carve these works). Visitors are then fitted with long, insulated coats available in kids' and adult sizes. As music fills the air, revelers make their way through the frozen wonderland, and the daring stop to ride ice slides, while others kick back with a frosty beverage at the bar.

Add-on tickets are available for purchase for tubing down a set of thrilling indoor snow slides or testing one's accuracy at throwing snowballs. All around is honest-to-goodness snow, made right in Texas.

Nov. 9–Jan. 1 at 1501 Gaylord Trail. 817-778-1000; [gaylordtexas.com](http://gaylordtexas.com)

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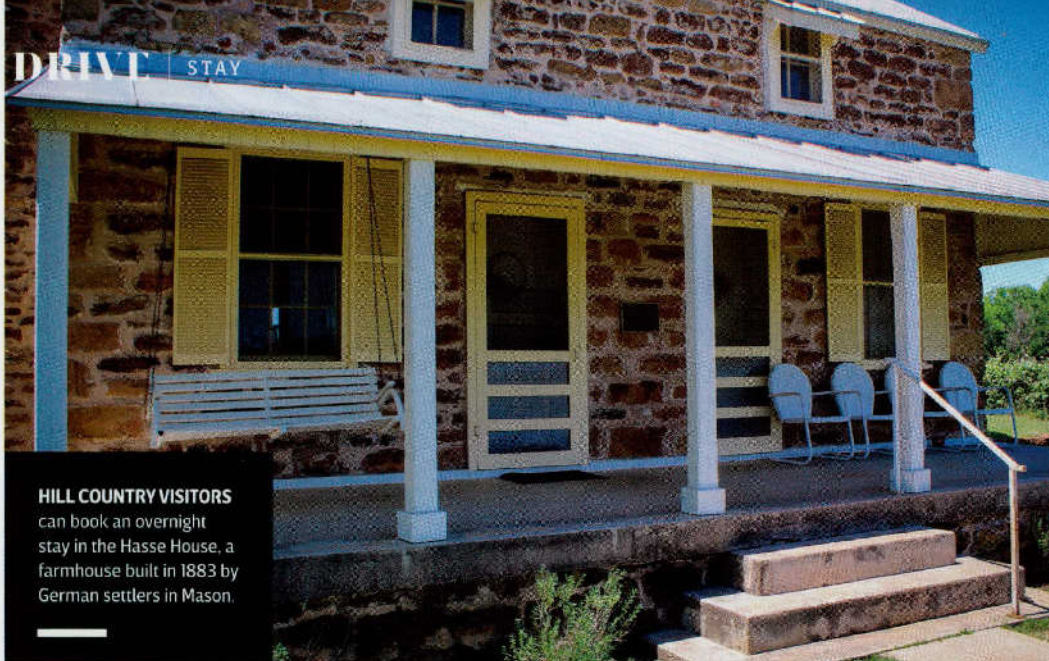
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**HILL COUNTRY VISITORS**

can book an overnight stay in the Hasse House, a farmhouse built in 1883 by German settlers in Mason.

# Homes for the Holidays

To simplify the season, gather with family under someone else's roof

By Melissa Gaskill

**W**hen grandma wakes up on a deflated air mattress and half the cousins are banished to the kids' table, Christmas might be too crowded. Enter the home rental, where extended family can gather under one roof, everyone has a bed, and the dining table is big enough for all. For something even more special, look for houses that pack history in locations featuring plenty of festivities and activities, helping to create lasting memories—the perfect gift for the entire family.

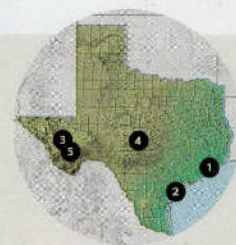
## Hill Country Holiday

Come December, lights line the photogenic Mason County Courthouse and the shops around its square. Many of those shops also decorate their windows and plan special events for the holidays—red wine and chocolate tastings, music, and sales to name a few. Nearby, lights also adorn the ornate, historic Seaquist Mansion every evening. Locals appreciate the town's low-key approach to the holidays, and families looking for a quieter, less-hectic time will, too.

The Hasse House, a German-style rock farmhouse built in 1883, is a little slice of peace on Earth. Its wide front porch faces a 320-acre pasture bordered by tree-lined Willow Creek and a 2-mile trail for exploring. Inside, the house retains original pine floors, and its stone walls bear photos of the first owners, Heinrich and Fredericka Hasse, and their descendants, down to the great-great-grandchildren who still own it.

The kitchen, which gained running water and electricity in the 1940s, has plenty of space for holiday meal-making and a shelf with a variety of games and puzzles to enjoy on the large table. The circa-1890 Art Methodist Church across the road held services in German until 1937, but families attending this year's Christmas Eve service will hear it in English.

On the square in Mason, Lea Lou Co-op serves build-your-own pizzas, salads, and gourmet sandwiches in a spacious old storefront, and Murphy Creek Cellars offers a wide selection of Texas wines and wine-related gifts. The restored Odeon Theater shows movies Friday through Monday



## More Houses with History

1

### Galveston

The **Belle of Ball Street** survived the infamous 1900 hurricane and features a grand staircase, soaring ceilings, and balconies on all three floors, not to mention a dining table that seats up to 16 people. Built in 1894. Sleeps 16 for \$325-\$450 per night; vrbo.com

2

### Rockport

The two-story **R.H. Wood House** overlooks the harbor from the Heritage and Cultural Arts District. Walk to the beach or lounge around an outdoor kitchen and heated pool. Built in 1868. Sleeps 13 for \$483; vrbo.com

3

### Fort Davis

Sit by original brick fireplaces or take in views of Sleeping Lion Mountain from the front porch under century-old pines at the **Webster House** a couple of blocks from dining and shopping. Built in 1898. Sleeps 8 for \$158; homeaway.com



evenings and hosts live music some Saturdays. Restored officer's quarters at Fort Mason house a mini-museum, and the stone building's breezeway has one of the best views of the festively lit town. *Fröhe Weihnachten!*

**4** **Hasse House** sleeps six from \$150 per night; [airbnb.com](http://airbnb.com)

### Yule out Yonder

The incredibly dark night skies, on-site telescope, and four chimneys at the Star Gazer's Inn, a 137-year-old adobe hacienda, inspire a new family tradition—watching for Santa's sleigh.

Lawrence Haley built this house and ran sheep on some 50,000 acres here in the shadow of Cathedral Mountain, the southern tip of the Glass Mountains near Alpine. Haley never married and left the property to his foreman, George A. Brown, grandfather of current owner Tracey Reider.

A rock wall and oak trees surround the four-bedroom home (plenty of beds for all the kids), and 15-foot ceilings plus doors and windows between all the rooms—remnants of the days before air conditioning—create a spacious feel and make for epic games of hide-and-seek. One of the best features, though, is a long, wide screened porch with a fireplace and view. You could spend the entire holiday sitting there, leaving only for nightly forays onto the lush lawn to gawk at the stars—and for meals, of course.

Christmas in nearby Alpine officially kicks off in early December with a lighted parade, hayrides, and shopping specials, followed by a Christmas bazaar the following weekend. Trees along the railroad track and historic Holland Avenue sport lights, as do many local businesses, Sul Ross State University, and historic Murphy Street across the tracks. There, the 1886 Hotel Ritchey recently reopened as the Ritchey Wine Saloon and Beer Garden, where a wraparound porch offers a great place from which to view all the festivities. Or to watch for Santa.

**5** **Star Gazer's Inn** sleeps 10 from \$250 per night; [homeaway.com](http://homeaway.com)

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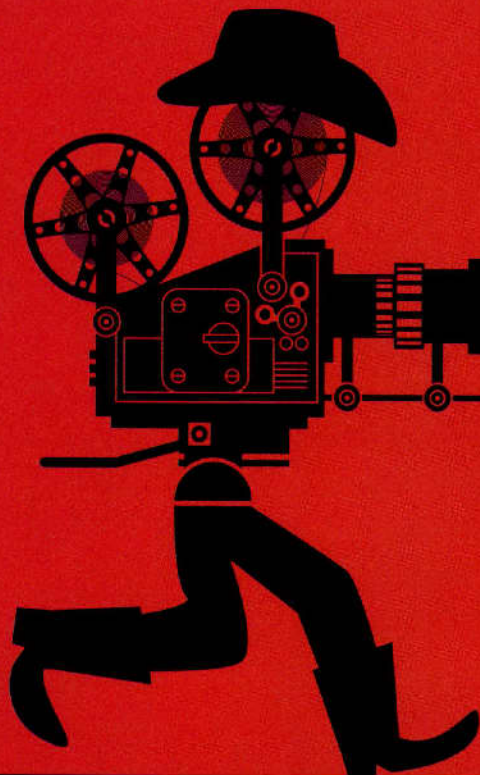
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# TEXAS

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For more information about Thin Line Fest visit [thinline.us](http://thinline.us)



# Mission: Goliad

Comfort food, country dancing, and camping revive this revolutionary town

By Wes Ferguson

**San Antonio**  
1.75 hours

**Austin**  
2.25 hours

**Houston**  
2.5 hours

**Dallas**  
5 hours



**R**emember Goliad? It's one of the oldest towns in Texas, originating in 1749 as a Spanish colonial mission and presidio where the San Antonio River flows through gently rolling coastal plains a little more than 45 miles inland from San Antonio Bay.

People still come to Goliad to pay their respects to the hundreds of Texian rebels who surrendered in battle during the Texas Revolution in 1836 and were executed on Palm Sunday, a day of infamy rivaled only by the fall of the Alamo. But Goliad is far from stuck in the past. Visitors who venture off the main highways will find a bustling downtown centered around an idyllic courthouse square with more restaurants, nightlife options, and shopping than one might expect for a town of less than 2,000 people.

"Remember Goliad!" became a rallying cry of the Texas Revolution. More than 180 years later, a weekend in Goliad is not so easy to forget, either.



# Friday



**4 P.M.**  
**Holding Down the Fort**

Goliad boasts a couple of motels and places to camp, but only one of the town's lodging options routinely appears on lists of the state's most unusual getaways: the officers' quarters at Presidio La Bahía, the historic fort the Spanish built on a hill above the southern bank of the San Antonio River. Unlike the courthouse square, which is easy to drive past, you can't miss the presidio. Facing US 183, the fort's old stone walls form a defensive bulwark against drivers heading north toward Austin or south toward Refugio. The presidio's walls are grayed by time, and they protect a chapel made of the same stone—where Mass has been celebrated nearly every Sunday since 1779.

An engaging museum also lies behind the presidio walls. Operated by the Catholic Diocese of Victoria (as is the presidio itself), the museum tells a more complex-than-expected story of early Texas, including the surrender and massacre of General James Fannin's men in 1836. The museum also displays plenty of colonial artifacts from cannon balls to pottery of Native American, Mexican, and English origins, along with a cracked 1796-era church bell in the chapel.

When the last visitor leaves and the museum locks up for the day,

overnight guests have free reign of the wide, grassy lawn behind the presidio's walls. Folks have been known to bring a Frisbee or catch a sunset next to a cannon.



**7 P.M.**  
**Southern Comfort**

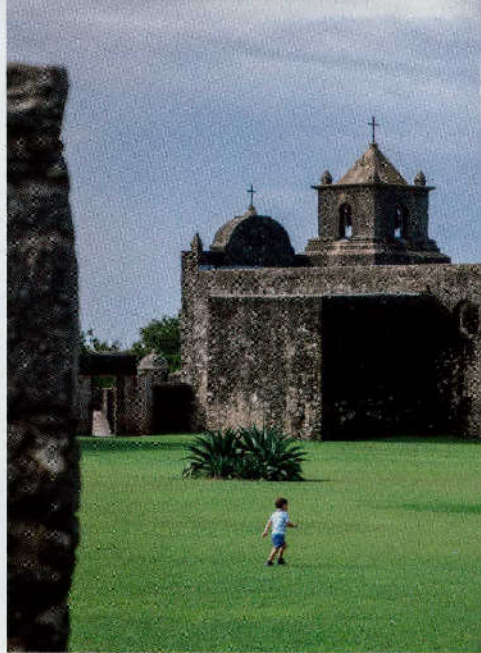
The quarters are equipped with a full kitchen, but it's easier to stroll eight minutes to La Bahía Restaurant, a Tex-Mex and Southern-food institution since 1946. The restaurant closed a decade ago when the original owners, Neuranía and Esmel Rubio, retired. But Julio Dorantes Sr., a close family friend and former cook at the restaurant, partnered with the Rubios' heirs to reopen the place about five years ago. Dorantes runs the kitchen, and his son, Julio Jr., manages the front of the restaurant. "He wanted to make sure it all tastes the same," the younger Julio says.

Traditional Tex-Mex plates like chalupas and carne guisada share menu space with steaks, hamburgers, and fried fare—all recipes from Neuranía Rubio, known in the community as Mrs. Ronnie. "People see fried chicken on the menu, and they're like, 'That doesn't sound like it should be allowed in a Mexican restaurant,' but they just cooked what they ate at home," Julio says. "Those are her recipes, from enchiladas to chicken-fried steak."



**8:30 P.M.**  
**Finding a Rhythm**

If not too slowed down by plates of comfort food, consider a drive to Schroeder, a German settlement that is home to the second-oldest dance hall in Texas. Opened in 1890, Schroeder Dance Hall hosts dinners and country dances on Friday and Saturday nights in a big barnlike structure with a smooth oak dance floor.



**CLOCKWISE FROM TOP:** Overnight guests at Presidio La Bahía have free reign of the lawn behind the fort's walls; the presidio's chapel is one of the oldest operating churches in the country; at the second-oldest dance hall in Texas, Schroeder Hall, patrons can do-si-do to live music; a cannon defends the presidio's western bastion.



-  STAY
-  EAT & DRINK
-  SHOP
-  EXPLORE





After a night of do-si-doing, retreat to the presidio, where the guestbook in the officer's quarters is filled with stories recounting bumps in the night and supposed encounters with ghosts. The only other visitor on a recent stay, however, was a calico cat seeking a scratch behind her ears.

## Saturday

### 9 A.M. **Goliad's Roots**

Following a bring-your-own breakfast in the officer's quarters and a cup of coffee enjoyed from a presidio lookout, head 1.6 miles north to Goliad's main square. The centerpiece is the Goliad County Courthouse, a gorgeous 1894 Second Empire-style spectacle of blue Muldoon sandstone with red stone trim and slate roofs.

Among the square's most charming touches are the many sprawling live oak trees. When widening its streets, the town simply paved around several of them. Then there's the Hanging Tree on the courthouse's north lawn, an old oak where frontier justice was meted out for nearly a quarter century in the 1800s.

### 1 P.M. **Rooting Around**

Hanging Tree Antiques sits just across the courthouse on the same block as the Empresario Restaurant, a Western-style place that serves up juicy steaks; as well as Mattie's Bakery and Cafe, which occupies the front part of an old movie theater and offers a variety of enticing desserts in addition to a lunch menu that includes green-chili chicken melts. Around the block, Blue Quail Deli also draws raves for its paninis.

Next door to Mattie's is Square Gallery, which offers a trove of art

in a building that for many years housed a jelly canning operation. "We have a very eclectic place here," co-owner Kathy Bates Johnson says.

A shopper's jaunt around the square turns up more second-hand stores with a plethora of antiques and oddities, like The Looking Glass. For folks interested in the area's post-colonial history and ranching heritage, the Market House Museum has amassed an assortment of artifacts in a red wooden structure built in 1871 for vendors to sell their meat and produce, later serving as a firehouse until 1964.

### 5 P.M. **Night-Life Stampede**

On July 4, 1976, a cattle drive through Goliad commemorating the region's ranching history infamously broke into a stampede through the town square, with 100 Longhorns charging at holiday onlookers as they ran for safety. Now visitors are stampeding to the square for nightspots like Mustang Cantina, a dinner-and-drinks joint with high-class Western flare. The cantina courtyard also blends modern elegance with nostalgia in the form of a huge, restored Durham tobacco mural on one of its brick walls. Nearby, Rudy's on the Run serves Tex-Mex, Southern fare, and hamburgers. The Commercial Street Bar is another fine watering hole with live music and draft beers and wine, or you could shoot a round of pool at The Dawg House, an unassuming hangout.

### CAMP OUT

**Goliad State Park & Historic Site**—188 acres on the San Antonio River along the southern edge of Goliad—offers 58 multiuse sites for RV and tent camping. 361-645-3405; [tpwd.texas.gov/state-parks/goliad](http://tpwd.texas.gov/state-parks/goliad)



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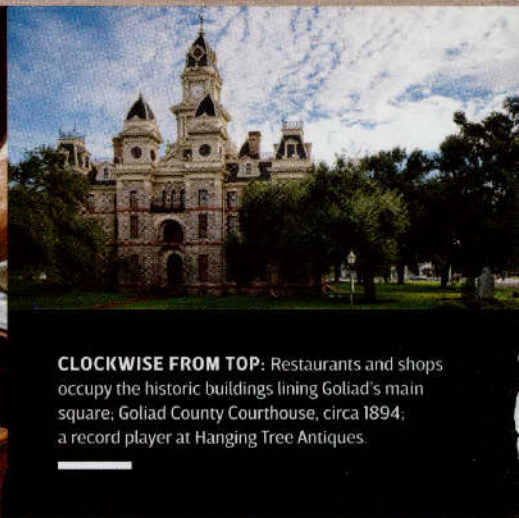
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## GETAWAY | GOLIAD




**CLOCKWISE FROM TOP:** Restaurants and shops occupy the historic buildings lining Goliad's main square. Goliad County Courthouse, circa 1894; a record player at Hanging Tree Antiques.

## Sunday

### 10 A.M. **Back to Nature**

Situated between the presidio and the square is Goliad State Park and Historic Site, with hike-and-bike trails, fishing, and Mission Espíritu Santo, another Spanish Colonial-era mission restored by the Civilian Conservation Corps in the 1930s. Visitors can ring the church bell or contemplate the mysterious skull-and-crossbones stone inlay marking the "door of death" once used during funerals. The park also offers a paddling trail, which meanders 6.6 miles through quiet pools and riffles on the San Antonio River.

Goliad was originally known as La Bahia, a name borrowed from the presidio. In 1829, the Mexican government renamed the settlement Goliad, a phonetic anagram of Hidalgo, to honor the father of the Mexican Revolution, priest Miguel Hidalgo.

Today in Goliad, old vaqueros belly up to chicken-fried steaks next to out-of-towners nursing craft beers. Folks in blue jeans and cowboy boots swing to country-and-western tunes in a dance hall named for German settlers, and an ancient Spanish presidio looms from a hill above the highway. As for the Hanging Tree, thankfully it hasn't been in use since 1870. 





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Or use the order form in this issue  
 on page 80.





# The Experiential Gift Guide

.....

Texas offers an extraordinary array of adventures worth traveling for— for those who aim to collect memories instead of things. Ditch the socks and the gadgets, and instead wrap up one of these **10 unforgettable experiences** for the holiday season.









# A Train Trip Across Texas

Various locations. 800-872-7245; [amtrak.com/giftcards](http://amtrak.com/giftcards)

THERE'S NO DENYING THE ROMANCE OF THE OPEN RAILROAD. While automobiles and airplanes long ago displaced train travel, Amtrak's three Texas routes offer a chance to travel the state as our grandparents did last century. If you know someone who would appreciate a nostalgic break from highways and airports—or simply an alternative way to get home for a holiday visit—an Amtrak gift card could be just the ticket.

Amtrak's Sunset Limited train makes multiple stops on its east-west trek across southern Texas, part of its route between New Orleans and Los Angeles. The Texas Eagle cuts from Texarkana to San Antonio, and the Heartland Flyer chugs back and forth between Fort Worth and Oklahoma City. The Sunset and Eagle offer sleeping, dining, and sightseeing cars, and all three provide coach seating and café cars. Ticket prices vary widely, from \$30 for a coach seat from Austin to Fort Worth to \$500 for a bedroom car from Texarkana to El Paso.

Perhaps the best part is the locomotive engineer handles the driving. Travelers are left at ease to read, nap, stretch their legs with a walk to the café, or strike up a conversation with fellow passengers as they take in the Texas countryside from a railroad perspective—verdant agrarian scenes, desert expanses, trackside industrial yards, and the occasional rodeo arena.

—Matt Joyce







# Yoga and Welding

Austin. 512-608-2058. [designbuildadventure.com/camps](http://designbuildadventure.com/camps)

ASSUMING THE LOTUS POSITION and fusing molten metals are two opposites that attract in the one-day yoga and welding workshop hosted in Austin by Design Build Adventure, the design practice of Jack Sanders, a community-minded artist whose projects include the El Cosmico campground hotel in Marfa. For \$225, a dozen participants can get their minds right with a morning yoga session in service of getting their hands dirty in the afternoon scouring a scrap yard for material to cut and sand, and later weld

together. The goal is to create an object inspired by a yoga pose, but really it's about nudging people out of their comfort zones. Be prepared: Sessions end with a show-and-tell. But rest easy: there are also cold beers and street tacos. This course returns in March, but it's one of three such workshops Sanders offers, including Camp Heavy Metal, an advanced welding session, in April, and Camp Butch, a collaborative project, or "Doonanny," with Alabama folk artist Butch Anthony, in December. —Michael Hoinski





# Underground Sounds

Boerne. 830-537-4212; [cavewithoutaname.com](http://cavewithoutaname.com)

EVEN IF YOUR FRIENDS ARE HUGE MUSIC FANS with the means to fly out to scenic venues, they've probably never been to a true underground concert, with a year-round temperature of 66 degrees. The Cave Without a Name, a clandestine moonshine locale during Prohibition and open to the public since 1938, hosts monthly live music events 11 miles northeast of Boerne. There are 126 steps down to The Throne Room, where the magic takes place among stalactites, flowstones, and natural drapery, so they'll get some cardio, too.

The bookings are of the neoclassical, seasonal, and acoustic variety—no one wants to haul amps or drums up and down 126 steps—plus cellos and violins seem to fit better in a setting where nobody has ever had to ask for more echo. Playing Jan. 19 is Neo Camerata of Dallas, who performed Elvis Costello's *The Juliet Letters* to cave raves in early 2018. Tickets are \$30 in advance.

—Michael Corcoran

TO:  
**The  
Melomaniac**







## Treetop Tranquility

Utopia. 830-966-8733; treehouseutopia.com

JUST 80 MILES WEST OF SAN ANTONIO, Treehouse Utopia allows guests to relax in the tree-tops in one of four adults-only luxury treehouses. With air-conditioning, speedy Wi-Fi, and multiple porches, these tranquil lodgings are a step above (literally, they're a few steps above the Sabinal River, a crystal-clear swimming hole that attracts all types of wildlife). Each treehouse (\$475 to \$525 a night) has its own theme: the Biblioteque contains a carefully curated library; the walls of the Chapelle are adorned with antique Catholic stoles; the Carousel incorporates repurposed carousel parts; and the two stories of the Chateau are connected by a spiral staircase.

—Julia Jones







## Gourmet Glamping

Wimberley. 970-445-2033; [collectiveretreats.com](http://collectiveretreats.com)

IN APRIL, COLLECTIVE RETREATS, a boutique glamping resort company, opened its first Texas location in Wimberley on 20 acres of the 225-acre Montesino Ranch. It's a blend of ultimate comfort, high design, and spectacular views of the Hill Country's natural wonders. It's also a place where every meal is worth getting excited about. At breakfast, guests dig into complimentary, made-to-order dishes like chorizo-and-egg tacos or buttermilk pancakes while watching the morning fog lift from the rolling, lush farmland. For lunch, chef Steph Immel packages a gourmet picnic-in-a-box. After heading into town to explore (a concierge can assist in arranging bespoke experiences), guests head back to the retreat for a four-course dinner in the open-air lodge. Since Immel sources ingredients and prepares meals daily, reservations should be booked at least 48 hours in advance—she whips up something new almost every evening, and menu items have included wild boar medallions over cauliflower puree and roasted okra, 16-ounce prime rib with cheesy, crispy potatoes, and coconut flan for dessert. Before retiring to a well-appointed canvas safari tent with king-size bed, wood-stove heater, and en suite bathroom (\$350 to \$550 a night), guests cap the day with gourmet s'mores around the campfire.

—Kimya Kavehkar





## Private Two-Step Lessons

Austin. 512-646-2698 or 512-339-9391; godancestudio.com

YOU MEET A LOT OF FRIENDLY FOLKS in Texas' historic dance halls, as my sweetheart and I have discovered while two-stepping across the state. Not too long ago, after cutting a rug to a country song, I felt a tap on my shoulder. It wasn't a prospective partner looking to cut in.

"Honey," this stranger asked, "mind if I give you some advice?"

She was not the first dance-hall darling to share her unsolicited wisdom with us. We really needed a remedial lesson in this most basic of traditional dances. So we booked a private tutorial from Beth Strickland, who gives two-step and swing lessons for an annual dance hall tour organized by the nonprofit Texas Dance Hall Preservation. Strickland also teaches at Go Dance, a brightly lit Austin studio (40-minute private lessons start at \$69) where my wife, Laura, and I met her one evening.

Strickland snapped her fingers as we stepped to her beat. She placed my hands where they were supposed to be and kept a close but forgiving eye on my footwork. To align ourselves through turns, we pretended to push grocery carts. Soon she had us two-stepping at a socially acceptable level. I even gave Laura a semi-successful spin.

"When you go out and take a lesson at a public dance hall," Strickland later told us, "they're there to entertain you. They're there to teach you a little something and get the floor moving. They're there to sell drinks and let people have a good time." In the studio, by contrast, our focus was educational.

"Now Wes, with more confidence, I want you to walk forward," Strickland instructed.

I did, and I will.

—Wes Ferguson





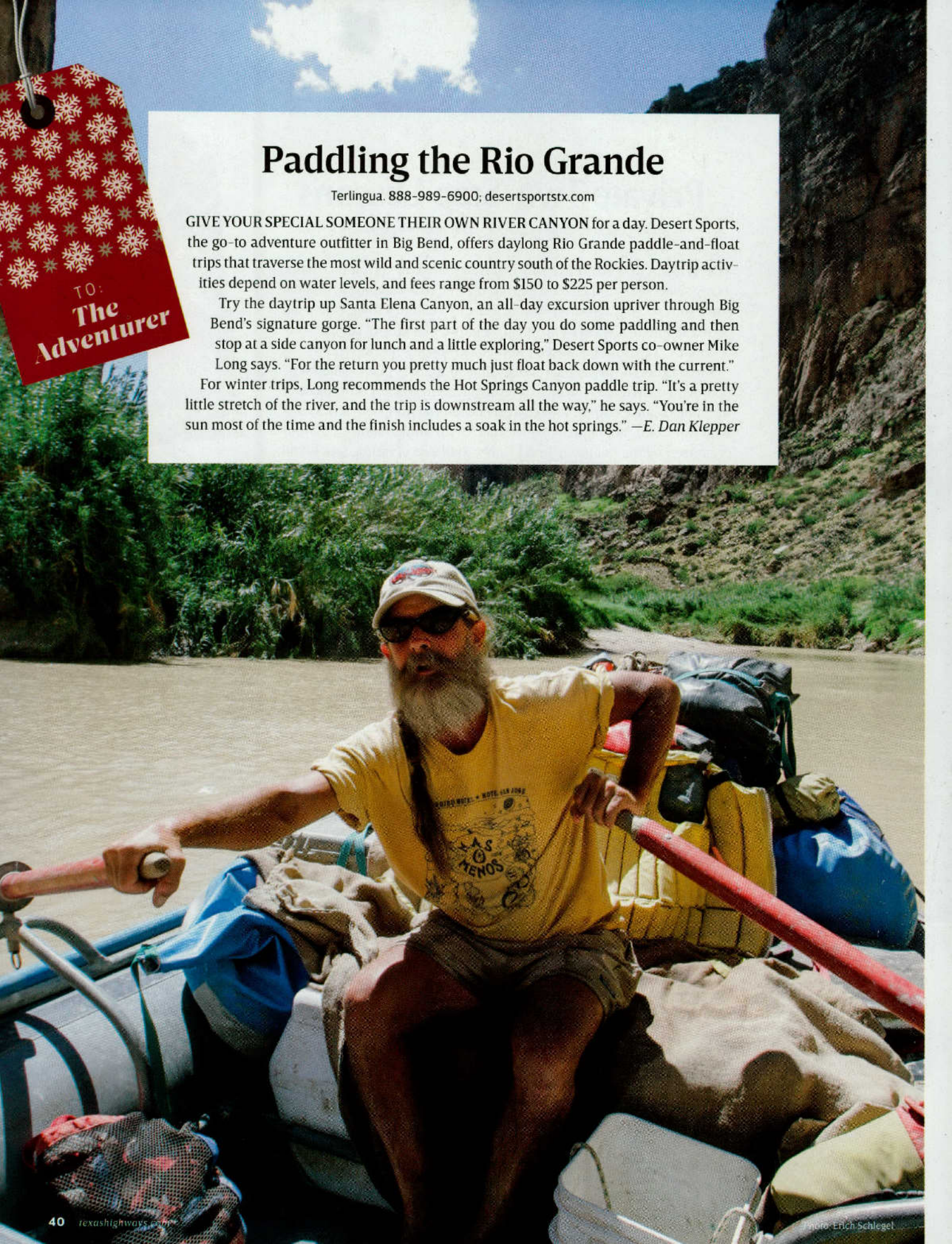
# Paddling the Rio Grande

Terlingua. 888-989-6900; [desertsportstx.com](http://desertsportstx.com)

**GIVE YOUR SPECIAL SOMEONE THEIR OWN RIVER CANYON** for a day. Desert Sports, the go-to adventure outfitter in Big Bend, offers daylong Rio Grande paddle-and-float trips that traverse the most wild and scenic country south of the Rockies. Daytrip activities depend on water levels, and fees range from \$150 to \$225 per person.

Try the daytrip up Santa Elena Canyon, an all-day excursion upriver through Big Bend's signature gorge. "The first part of the day you do some paddling and then stop at a side canyon for lunch and a little exploring," Desert Sports co-owner Mike Long says. "For the return you pretty much just float back down with the current."

For winter trips, Long recommends the Hot Springs Canyon paddle trip. "It's a pretty little stretch of the river, and the trip is downstream all the way," he says. "You're in the sun most of the time and the finish includes a soak in the hot springs." —E. Dan Klepper







## Guided Deep-Water Soloing

Various locations. 512-415-0804; [rock-about.com](http://rock-about.com)

**WANT TO GIFT SOMEONE WITH A JOLT OF ADRENALINE?** Consider a few hours scaling limestone cliffs on Lake Travis with an expert climber. Adam Mitchell of Rock-About Climbing Adventures sets up his students with climbing shoes, whisks them by boat to Pace Bend Park (or some other accessible-only-by-boat escarpment), then coaches them to channel their inner Spider-Man and inch up a slab of rock. The beauty of deep-water soloing, as it's called, lies in the forgiving landing pad below. Mitchell pre-scouts safe, obstacle-free locales, so when climbers take a tumble, they splash into cool, greenish-blue water instead of hitting bone-crunching terra firma. Trips cost \$95 per hour for a group of up to six people, with a three-hour minimum. —*Pam LeBlanc*

TO:  
*The Fearless*





## Golfing Like the Legends

Dallas. 214-670-7615; [golfcedarcrest.com](http://golfcedarcrest.com)

San Antonio. 210-262-5612; [alamocitygolftrail.com/brackenridge](http://alamocitygolftrail.com/brackenridge)

Houston. 713-862-4033; [houstonmunicipalgolf.org](http://houstonmunicipalgolf.org)

PLAY THREE HISTORIC TEXAS PUBLIC GOLF COURSES where bygone champions trod. Gift cards are available for Cedar Crest in Dallas, where charismatic Walter Hagen captured the 1927 PGA Championship; Brackenridge Park in San Antonio, site of Texas Open tournaments won by Sam Snead and Byron Nelson; and Memorial Park in Houston, where Arnold Palmer was victorious. The courses highlight a golden era of golf architecture; Cedar Crest and Brackenridge are faithful to century-old designs of the legendary A.W. Tillinghast.

Green fees with a riding cart range from \$28 to \$76. Instead of a single \$300 round at a resort course, play all three with money left over for golf caps, 19th-hole beverages, and a fabulous half-pound cheeseburger at Cedar Crest's grill.

—John Lumpkin







## Playing with Fire

Tomball. 281-734-0366; [threedimensionalvisions.com](http://threedimensionalvisions.com)

ORNAMENTS MAKE FOR PLEASING—if predictable—holiday presents. But why give one when you can give the gift of making one? For friends and family members with an artistic bent, a glass-blowing workshop can be a memorable experience, but there are only a handful of places in Texas that offer them to the public. One of those, Three Dimensional Visions in Tomball, has options ranging from \$60 for a 30-minute “Make a Something

Experience” to \$525 for a two-and-a-half-hour “Ultimate Glass Blowing Experience.” These sessions take place every Saturday and Sunday (except in August, when the studio undergoes routine maintenance). In the shorter sessions, participants can create their own ornament, glass flower, or small bowl; the longer ones come with more options, such as tall vases and large display bowls. Co-owner Sally Moore explains what makes the gift of glass blowing so unique: “In a matter of minutes you can shape and mold molten glass into an object and make a memory that will last forever.”

—Heather Brand









**WINTER SWELL**

SERIOUS SURFERS BRAVE THE CHILL TO RIDE TEXAS' BIGGEST WAVES

BY HEATHER BRAND

PHOTOGRAPHS BY KENNY BRAUN





People who visit the coast during the summer may think there's no surf in Texas, but that's because they haven't seen the waves of winter.

In late January through mid-February, storm-driven northerlies blow across the Gulf of Mexico, roiling the placid surf into choppy waves that can build to heights of 5 feet and taller. Offshore winds then polish these waves to produce smooth, jade-colored swells that build then break, curling in a clean line, row after row. For those willing to brave the chill, there are plenty of destinations along the 367 miles of the Texas coast to give off-season surfing a try.

"Most people are fair-weather surfers," says James Fulbright, proprietor of Strictly Hardcore Surf Specialties in Galveston. "There are 70 percent fewer surfers in the water in winter."

As a surfer with more enthusiasm than expertise, I find the big waves and sparse crowds of winter to be the perfect opportunity to practice my skills on the Texas coast. When conditions are right, no matter the temperature, the waves draw me to the beach just as strongly as its refreshing waters in the hot summer. And for those few brief moments that I catch a wave, it feels like I'm riding on top of the world. It's addictive. Just ask the surfers who venture time and again into the waves, regardless of the season.

## The Tip of Texas

Peter Davis, chief of the Galveston Island Beach Patrol, has been surfing Texas waters for more than 40 years. He often surfs on his home turf, but South Padre Island is his favorite destination. "The best surf spot in Texas is Isla Blanca Park at the south end of the island," he says, noting the waves are "pretty consistently big, beautiful, and well-formed."

Surf instructor Gene Gore, who owns and operates South Padre Surf Company with his wife, Rachel, agrees. "Isla Blanca is by far the best surf on the coast," he says. "It's

"If you catch South Padre Island on a really good day, you'll see why I love it here more than Hawaii. We have here what every surfer dreams of: no crowds, warm water, and good waves."

just magical. The way it's situated in the Gulf, it picks up any swell direction. If you catch South Padre Island on a really good day, you'll see why I love it here more than Hawaii. We have here what every surfer dreams of: no crowds, warm water, and good waves."

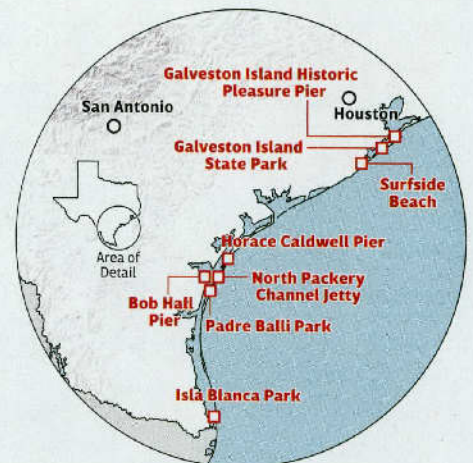
Although visitors swarm South Padre Island from spring break through summer and into fall, its beaches are practically vacant during the colder months. Even so, the water temperature in winter averages 60 degrees, significantly warmer than the seas off California and most of the East Coast during the same time of year. As a result, Gore gives surf lessons year-round.

The continental shelf is less shallow toward the southern tip of Texas, resulting in bigger wave formations, he says. Coupled with winter storms, that makes for perfect conditions. "A front will hit," he says, "and it will be crazy windy for a day or so. The waves will be building, and then, when the front passes and the wind turns offshore, it's game on. There are no crowds, and it's the biggest, best waves of the year."

## Corpus Cresting

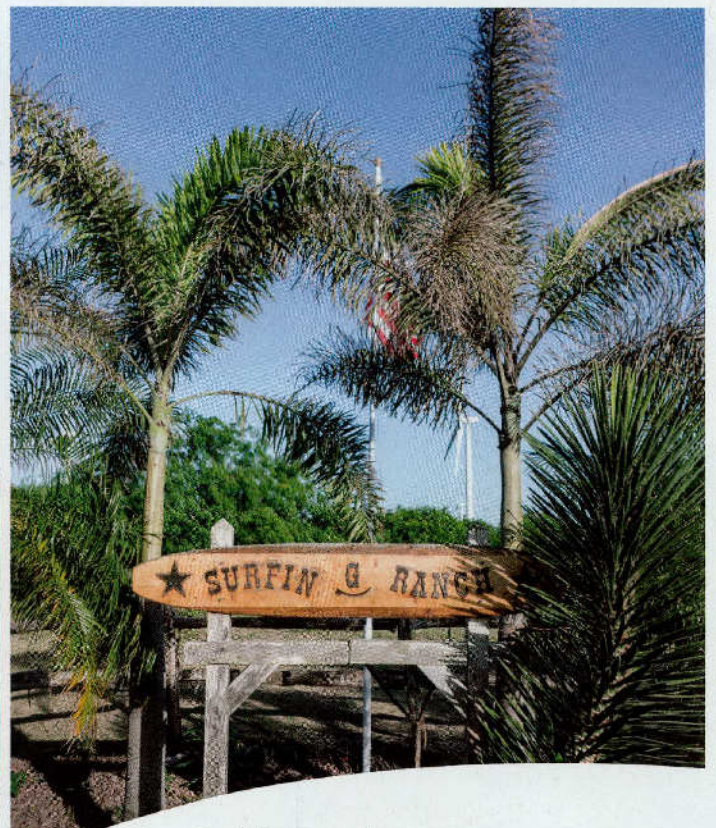
About 200 miles to the north of South Padre lies the next major surfing destination: the shoreline that connects Corpus Christi to neighboring Port Aransas.

In Corpus, Bob Hall Pier sometimes creates primo surf conditions. Structures like this one that protrude into the water



OPENING SPREAD: Gene Gore surfs on a board that reads "Family of the Sea" in Hawaiian. THIS SPREAD, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: Gore's daughter, Melia; the family's ranch near Laguna Madre; and his wife, Rachel, surfing at South Padre Island.





## Cold Weather Gear

With Gulf Coast water temperatures in the 50s and 60s during the winter, surfers rely on wetsuits to make surfing possible. Shops up and down the Texas coast rent wetsuit gear as well as surfboards and other necessities.





## Time It Right

Keep an eye on the forecast to catch the best waves. Online sources such as [magicseaweed.com](http://magicseaweed.com) predict waves around the world; closer to home, sites like Galveston's [g-townsurf.com](http://g-townsurf.com) post local reports and stream live surf-cam footage.





develop sandbars, and when a swell encounters these underwater ridges, it pushes upward to form a wave. Popular for fishing, the Bob Hall Pier reaches 1,240 feet into the Gulf, generating a terrific break.

Davis says a number of other spots also produce good waves along this stretch of coastline, especially the North Packery Channel jetty and Horace Caldwell Pier at the entrance to Aransas Pass.

## Surfside Swells

Farther up the coast, three jetties at the mouth of the Colorado River in Matagorda used to be popular places to catch waves, but in 2016, the county began enforcing a ban on swimming in the vicinity due to dangerous rip currents. Some intrepid surfers still venture to Matagorda's more remote beaches, using off-road vehicles to explore the undeveloped shoreline and set up camp in the shelter of the dunes.

For beginners, the beaches of Quintana, Surfside, and Galveston are better places to start. There, the shallow continental shelf creates a gentler wave, and water temperatures hover in the 50s during winter—not as warm as South Padre Island, but still comfortable enough when clad in a full suit of thick neoprene.

Quintana and Surfside flank the channel leading into Freeport Harbor. Twin jetties jut into the Gulf on either side: a swell from the east produces waves in Quintana; a swell from the south brings them to Surfside instead. Southern swells are more prevalent, so the name "Surfside" fits. Even in the depths of winter, on a good day it's not unusual to find 50 surfers floating patiently in the lineup, waiting for their turn to catch a wave. Yet the waters never seem crowded, and out-of-towners will encounter none of the aggressive "locals only" attitude found in other states.

## Island Breaks

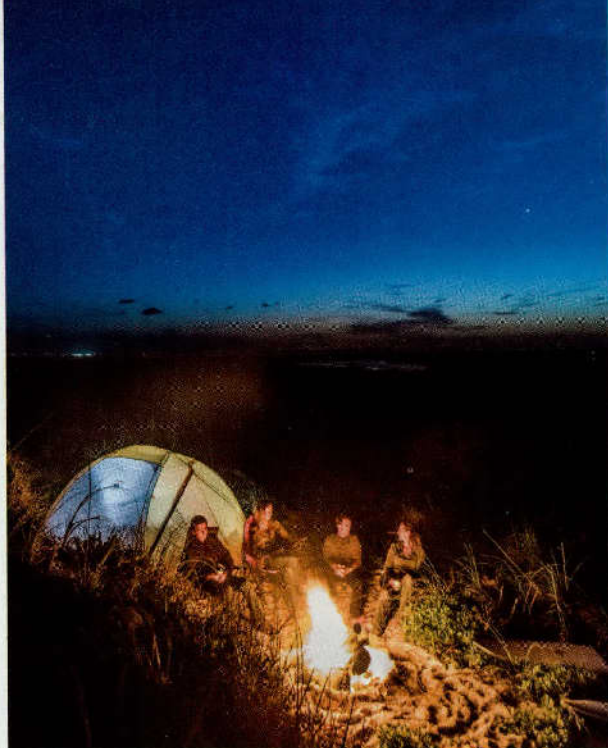
Galveston is the northernmost town in Texas where you can find consistent rollers. Located just an hour's drive from Houston, the island draws millions of beachgoers in the summer, with numerous surf shops catering to the crowds.

To protect the throngs of summer swimmers from May 15 to Labor Day, the island restricts surfboards and other hard-bottom vessels to certain "multiuse" areas. But during the rest of the year, its 32 miles of beaches are open for surfing, including at Galveston Island State Park, where campers can set up tents behind sand dunes a short walk from the waterline.

On the eastern end of the island, the seawall bristles with jetties and fishing piers, which create a series of breaks with varying characteristics. Surfers have traditionally

You can take surf lessons year round at South Padre Island, where the water temperature in winter averages 60 degrees, significantly warmer than the ocean off California.

FROM LEFT: Melia Gore checks the surf at daybreak on her quarter horse, Texas; the Gore family's campsite among South Padre dunes.



shown off their skills at the Galveston Island Historic Pleasure Pier at 25th Street and at rock jetties along the beach. At the 43rd Street jetty, C-Sick Surfin' offers lessons to aspiring surfers. "We have oodles of wetsuits, so as long as the ambient temperature is alright, we can teach lessons year-round," owner Brian Jarvis says.

Strictly Hardcore Surf Specialties—James Fulbright's shop on Avenue R—sits just a few blocks away from the 37th Street break, one of Fulbright's personal favorites. The longtime Texas surfer gets annoyed when he hears people say the state has no surf. Along with his own firsthand experience, he points to online videos showing wetsuit-wearing surfers carving up sizeable sets rolling in from the Gulf.

There is plenty of surf in Texas, as long as you go at the right time of year and keep a close eye on the surf forecast. You'll find off-season surfers are a small but welcoming tribe. Newbies to the sport—dubbed "kooks"—who might get pushed out of a lineup during the busier months find themselves encouraged and even cheered on by cold-weather veterans.

"In California, you can go to the beach every day and there's something rideable," Davis says. "But in Texas, a lot of things have to come together to make that happen. When they predict a swell here, everyone gets all fired up. When the magic does happen, it means that much more." And the magic more than likely occurs in winter. ■



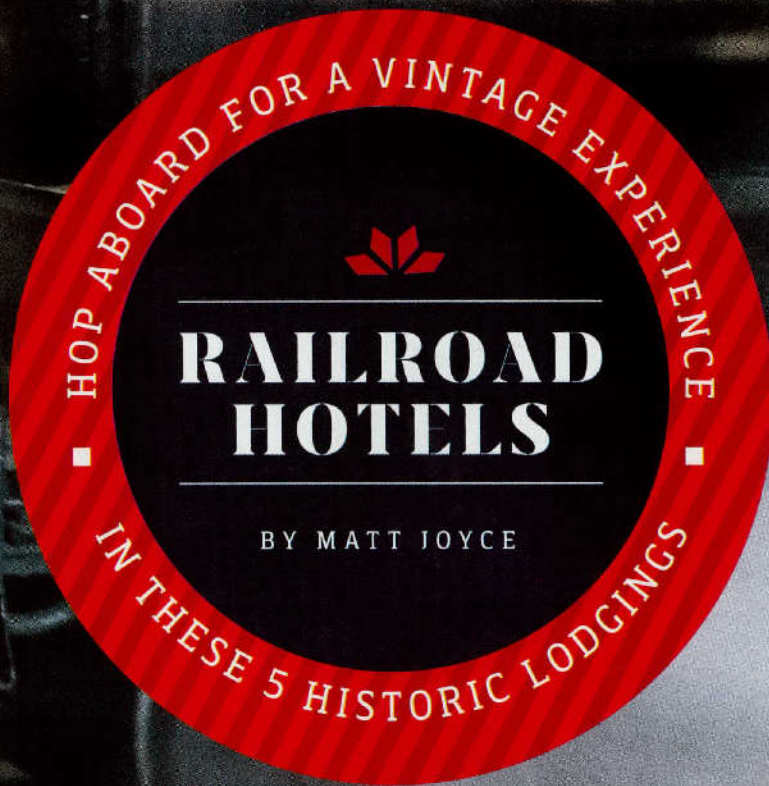


The Texas State  
Railroad's Polar Express  
Train Ride in Palestine



A vintage steam locomotive is shown in a dark, atmospheric setting. The word "POLAR" is prominently displayed in large, white, serif capital letters on the side of the engine. The locomotive's headlight and various mechanical details are visible, and the overall scene is lit with a cool, blue-toned light.

POLAR

A large red circular graphic with a white border and a white leaf icon at the top. The text inside the circle is white and arranged in a circular pattern around the central text. The background of the circle is a dark, textured red.

HOP ABOARD FOR A VINTAGE EXPERIENCE

■

**RAILROAD  
HOTELS**

■

IN THESE 5 HISTORIC LODGINGS



# There was a time

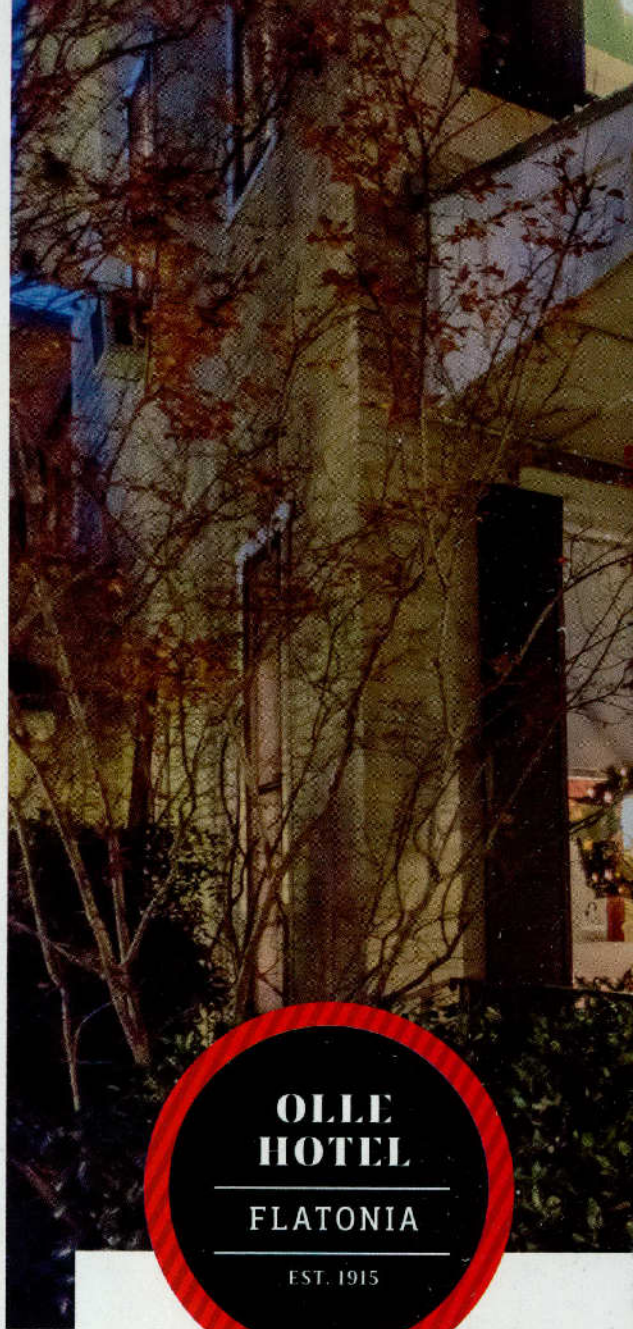
when going home for the holidays meant taking the train. Whether boarding a steam locomotive or the electric interurban, passengers who could afford a ticket enjoyed unheard-of advantages in speed and comfort over horse-drawn coaches and the earliest automobiles.

The service members, scattered family, and traveling salesmen who relied on trains needed places to eat and sleep, leading to a proliferation of railroad hotels in the early 20th century. While most of these hotels have been destroyed or repurposed, a handful across the state, mostly in small towns, preserve the railroad era, when a growing nation was still rooted in local character.

"I think people come here to capture what they feel might be happening in a little town, what they've lost in the big cities," says Jean Mollard, owner of The Redlands Hotel, which opened in 1915 in Palestine, steps from the International-Great Northern Railroad. "Visitors seem to appreciate getting up close and personal with the historical aspects of the building, and even the town."

Railroads hit their peak in Texas in the 1930s, and train travel flourished until the mid-1900s, when the state began paving rural roads and building the interstate highway system. Though Amtrak still operates three routes in Texas, train travel long ago became an afterthought to cars and airplanes.

Thousands of miles of railroads still crisscross Texas, however, and not far from the rumbling rails, these five historic railroad hotels keep their lights on, shining like locomotive headlamps down nostalgic tracks of the past.



**OLLE  
HOTEL**  
FLATONIA  
EST. 1915

LIKE COUNTLESS SMALL TOWNS, Flatonia was built specifically to serve one of the new railroads stitching their way across Texas during the late 19th century. But unlike most of those towns, more than a century later Flatonia has an original railroad hotel that keeps the coffee hot.

The Olle Hotel's two-story brick building was constructed as a residence in 1901 and converted into a hotel in 1915. In 1926 the Olle family bought the property, and for 40 years the watchful Agnes Olle (commonly known as "Mrs. Olle") ran the hotel as a boardinghouse for "drummers," traveling salesmen who rode the rails hawking the latest in gadgetry.





Owners Kathryn and Dennis Geesaman acquired the property in 2004 and took over a project to restore the hotel, which had been closed since Mrs. Olle's death in 1967. Although the 12 rooms now have their own bathrooms and TVs, the Geesamans retained historical features like transom windows, longleaf pine flooring, and in one room, hooks in the ceiling that Mrs. Olle used to hang her quilting projects.

In two rooms, water closets house the toilets, separated by a wall from the rest of the bathroom. Kathryn explains that in the old days, the first and second floors each had only one toilet and one bath; boarders would line up to use them. A room and meals cost \$1 a day, or \$1.50 for a bath with shared water (extra for fresh

water). Guests today have the luxury of a fresh-water shower, along with a hot breakfast and kolaches.

Regular passenger service stopped in Flatonina in 1949, but trains still pass through multiple times a day. Along the tracks, the historic Tower No. 3 recalls by-gone track-switching technology, and the Central Texas Rail History Center exhibits train models and local rail history.

With all this iron horse ambiance, local boosters are lobbying Union Pacific to allow Amtrak's Sunset Limited route to add a Flatonina stop. If their hopes come true, the Olle Hotel may once again serve passengers just off the train.

**The Olle Hotel, 218 S. Market Ave. Rates start at \$114. 361-772-0310; ollehotel.com**



## HOLIDAY EVENTS

### NOV. 30

Flatonina businesses open their doors after hours for the Wonderful Winter Wine Walk.



### DEC. 1

The Flatonina Civic Center hosts the Merry Market with shopping, homemade cookies and candy, and Santa Claus.

[flatoniachamber.com](http://flatoniachamber.com)







## SLATON HARVEY HOUSE

SLATON

EST. 1912



### HOLIDAY EVENT

DEC. 1

Slaton's annual Small Town Christmas features musical performances and decorated Christmas trees on the town square, along with train rides for children between the square and the Slaton Harvey House, where Santa Claus holds forth.  
[slatonchamberofcommerce.org](http://slatonchamberofcommerce.org)

SLATON WOULD HAVE LOST A VITAL link to its railroading history if it hadn't been for the quick action of a plumber and a history buff 28 years ago.

One day in 1990, a demolition crew was poised to tear down the vacant 1912 Harvey House building and called plumber Bill Burks to turn off the water. Burks alerted Almarine Childers, president of the Slaton Museum Association. Local lore holds that Childers, who has since passed away, stationed herself between the bulldozer and the dilapidated building until the operator cut the engine.

Today, the restored Slaton Harvey House welcomes visitors as a bed-and-breakfast and event venue harkening to the town's 1911 origins as a railroad division point and the bygone era when entrepreneur Fred Harvey's "eating houses" and hotels served passengers along the Atcheson, Topeka and Santa Fe Railway.

Slaton's Harvey House was a restaurant where passengers would debark for a sit-down meal before the train rolled on. The Fred Harvey Company famously staffed its establishments with "Harvey Girls," unmarried women recruited from the Midwest and East Coast for jobs out West.

"When people got off the train, they had 20 minutes to eat," says Jessica Kelly, the former B&B operations manager. "The conductor would telegraph food orders

from their last stop, so the meals would be ready when they got here. The Harvey Girls had to be fast and efficient."

The restored dining hall no longer has its original U-shaped counter, but the yellow stucco walls, decorative wooden paneling, and stained-glass windows reflect the original design. In one corner, the old newsstand displays vintage 1920s periodicals, cigars, candy, and postcards.

Upstairs, the apartments where the Harvey Girls once resided have been renovated into spacious guest rooms with modern amenities and some original features, such as tiled floor in the bathrooms and antique furnishings.

The Slaton Railroad Heritage Association maintains the building as a museum with artifacts and historic photos, including a Harvey Girl uniform, a telegraph machine, and a 1940 menu featuring fresh Spanish mackerel sautéed with lemon butter for 70 cents.

"Harvey House luxury was intended to inspire people to move West, which was the railroad's goal," Kelly says.

Thanks to the valiant stand by Burks and Childers, visitors can still get a feel for that luxury today.

**The Slaton Harvey House, 400 Railroad Ave. Rates start at \$125. 806-828-5900; [slatonharveyhouse.com](http://slatonharveyhouse.com)**



IN 1901, THE AUSTIN AND NORTH-WESTERN Railroad opened the Antlers Hotel on a bank of the Colorado River just above its confluence with the Llano River. The Antlers catered to tourists seeking a riverside resort in Kingsland, a town of a few hundred residents, while also renting rooms to railroad passengers traveling between Austin and Llano.

The rivers still draw visitors to the Antlers, although today Kingsland has more than 6,000 residents and sits on Lake LBJ, which was formed in 1951 and teems with motorboats and shoreline development. While the surroundings have changed, the Antlers retains a peaceful, timeless feeling, ringed by broad porches and looking out over 5 shady acres that lead to a lake-side park.

A mid-1990s restoration preserved the historical atmosphere of the Victorian rooms outfitted with antique furnishings and various artifacts of the inn's railroad history. The lobby still displays its original chalkboard train bulletin, and in the Kingsland Coffee shop—a former dining hall—a 1910 photograph captures the Antlers' staff in front of the hotel with small pecan trees

that now tower over the building.

The Antlers also offers lodging in several restored cabooses and cottages that once served the railroad, including a depot originally from Muldoon and an 1880s International-Great Northern Railroad coach that's been converted into an elegant space with a warm interior of wood and natural light.

The train theme continues at the Grand Central Café, which is set in a Queen Anne home. The café attracts diners not only for filling plates of chicken-fried steak and eggs benedict, but also because the house was the setting for the 1974 horror classic *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*. The Antlers' previous owners moved the home to Kingsland from Williamson County in the late 1990s to house the restaurant.

Owners Drew Gerencer and Rick Gregory say they acquired the Antlers in part to maintain the integrity and aesthetic of its historic grounds. As a result, this Kingsland retreat rolls into the 21st century, a reminder of railroad's romantic heyday.

**The Antlers Inn, 1001 King Court. Rates start at \$90. 800-383-0007; theantlers.com**



## HOLIDAY EVENTS

**DEC. 1**

Kingsland Christmas with Santa Claus at Kingsland Community Center

**DEC. 6**

Sip and Shop at Kingsland Community Center

**DEC. 8**

Christmas Gala with dinner and a big-band performance  
[kingslandcommunitycenter.org](http://kingslandcommunitycenter.org)

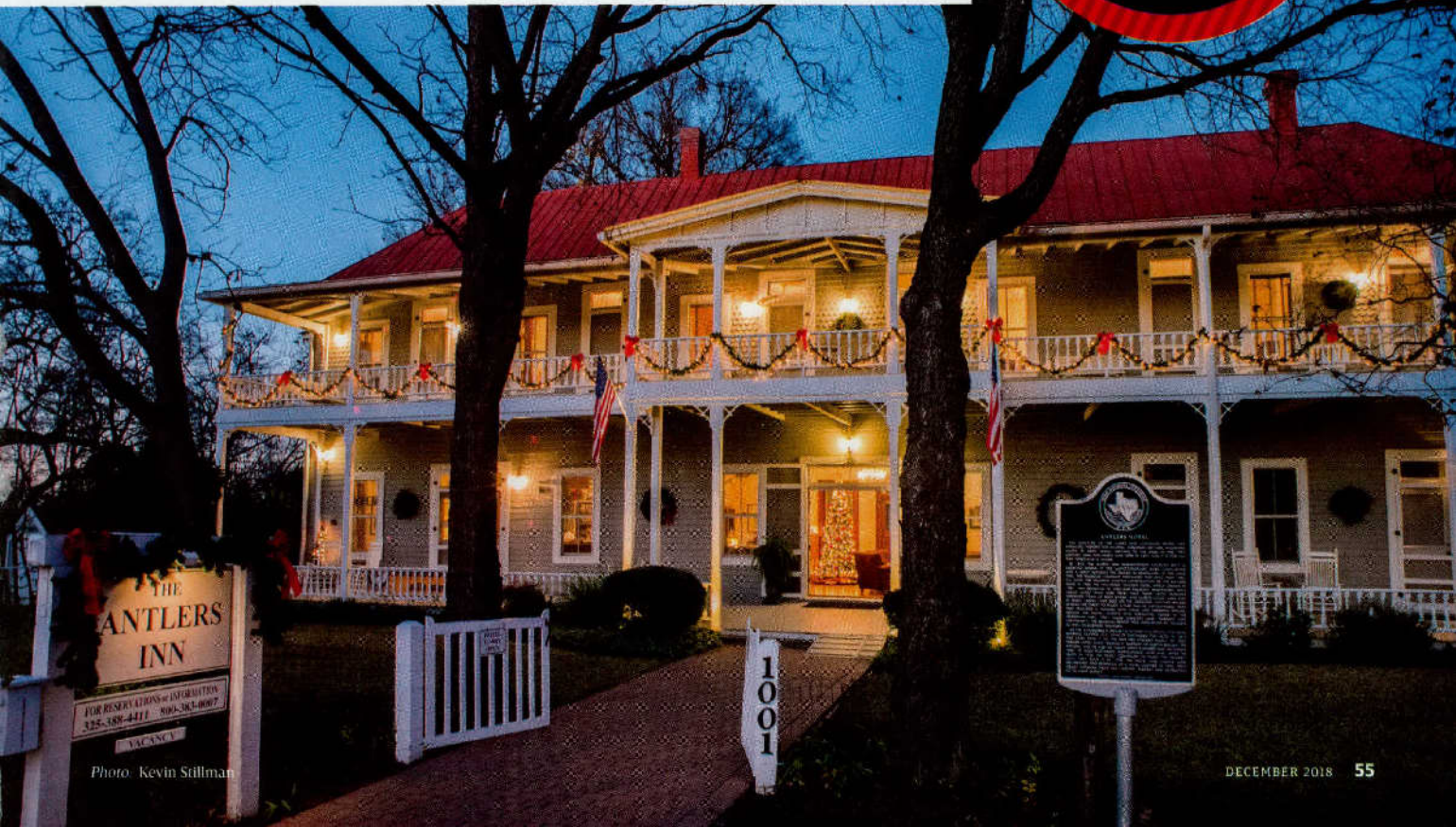
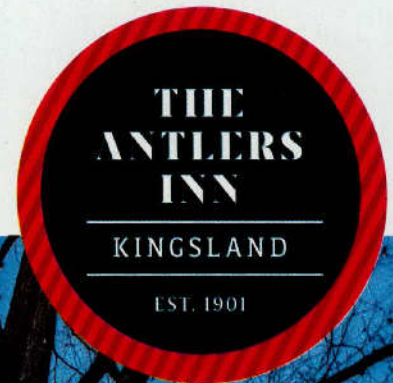


Photo: Kevin Stillman





## HOLLAND HOTEL

ALPINE

EST. 1908  
EXPANDED 1928



### HOLIDAY EVENT

DEC. 1

Alpine celebrates the season with a lighted parade, hayrides downtown, and a Santa Claus appearance at the courthouse gazebo. [visitalpinetx.com/events](http://visitalpinetx.com/events)



UNUSUAL IN TEXAS TODAY, THE HOLLAND Hotel in Alpine not only grew up along the railroad tracks but to this day still sits within a stone's throw of an active passenger depot. On the hotel's ground floor, the bay windows of the Century Bar look upon Holland Avenue and the railroad tracks that bisect the town. Every once in a while, you'll see passengers from the nearby Amtrak depot scurry by, seizing a moment to stretch their legs before jumping back on the train to chug across West Texas.

The Southern Pacific Railroad was Alpine's lifeline to the world when rancher John Holland built the Holland Hotel in 1908 to serve the cattle business and booming mercury mining industry. In 1928, his son, Clay Holland, hired influential El Paso architects Trost & Trost to design a renovation and expansion that created the hotel as we know it today.

It's not hard to imagine big-wheel cattlemen smoking stogies and sloshing scotch in the Holland's expansive lobby, which was restored in the 1980s to its Spanish stylings of stucco walls, wooden crossbeams, and glass chandeliers. During the railroad days, the Holland catered to

ranching businessmen, while on the other side of the tracks near the cattle shipping pens, the Hotel Ritchey served blue-collar cowboys, historian and archeologist David Keller says. The restored Ritchey now houses a bar and café.

"Alpine wouldn't have existed if it hadn't been for the Southern Pacific Railway," says Keller, who wrote *Images of America: Alpine*. "Any hotel from that early on, before cars supplanted railroads, was essentially a railroad hotel. Those structures are an integral part of the town's history; they give a sense of the town's character."

Alpine character runs deep at the Holland, where cowboys and businesspeople rub shoulders with tourists and Sul Ross State University students at the bar. In the guest rooms, artwork depicts Western scenes such as the desert mountains of Big Bend and cavalry outposts. And if you wait a few minutes, you're sure to hear the timeless rumble and blasting horn of an approaching train. Don't worry, the hotel provides earplugs on the bedside table.

**The Holland Hotel**, 209 W. Holland Ave. Rates start at \$120 for a standard room. 432-837-2800; [thehollandhoteltexas.com](http://thehollandhoteltexas.com)



**THE REDLANDS HOTEL HAS BEEN** through a lot in its 103 years, but you'd hardly know it when looking at its classical brown-brick façade in downtown Palestine. Built to serve railroad business, the Redlands opened in 1915, signaling Palestine's transformation from "rustic and uncouth" into "a modern city abreast of the times," according to a program from its grand opening.

The five-story, 86-room hotel boasted electricity and running water and even hosted the St. Louis Browns baseball team for spring training in 1916 and 1917. But such glamour couldn't overcome the economic turmoil of World War I. The hotel's board of directors found a redeemer, however, in the International-Great Northern Railway Co., which needed a new building for its local headquarters. After a hasty remodel, the building reopened in 1919 as an office for hundreds of railroad employees, a function it would serve until 1957.

Fast forward to 1976, the year Jean Mollard bought the dilapidated building with her husband and brother, who have since passed away, and embarked on a project to give the Redlands a new multipurpose life. Forty-two years later, Mollard runs the renovated Redlands as a hotel with 20 suites for overnight and extended stays

and retail space on the ground floor, including the Red Fire Grille eatery and bar.

"It wasn't a plan; it was a journey. We loved old buildings for what they were, and we would put up with the things that were wrong with them," Mollard says. "It all comes together when you respect the history."

Historical details, such as the hexagonal floor tiling and old elevator car, complement displays that recall Palestine's frontier railroad history with black-and-white photos and train memorabilia, such as the sheet music for "I Am Going to Take a Train to Dear Old Dallas Town."

During the holidays, the Redlands decorates each of its suites with Christmas trees and hands out gifts to the children of guests, many of whom have come for the Texas State Railroad's Polar Express Train Ride. In this way, Mollard says, the Redlands has come full circle to its original function of serving train business.

"It's very festive," she says. "It's just a different thing than checking into an impersonal hotel."

**The Redlands Hotel**, 400 N. Queen St. at the corner with Oak Street. Rates start at \$105. 800-550-5445; [theredlands.com](http://theredlands.com) 



## HOLIDAY EVENT

**NOV. 17-DEC. 27**

The Texas State Railroad offers Polar Express train rides on most dates with readings of *The Polar Express* children's book and a visit to the North Pole where Santa boards the train.

[texasstaterailroad.net](http://texasstaterailroad.net)

**THE  
REDLANDS  
HOTEL**  
**PALESTINE**

EST. 1915



Photo: Kenny Braun





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# PLATES



**THE MASA-AND-MEAT**  
bundles from Delia's in  
the Rio Grande Valley  
have become integral  
to the holiday season in  
South Texas.

---



# Wrapped in Love

Delia Lubin built her Rio Grande Valley tamale empire from humble beginnings

By Kelly Stocker

**I**t's the week before Christmas, and lines of people snake around a nondescript building in McAllen. Security guards direct traffic and monitor the throng, keeping a watchful eye out for any trouble. The crowd buzzes with excitement and impatience as it waits for one of the most important ingredients of Christmas in the Rio Grande Valley: tamales. And everyone knows you can't go wrong with Delia's.

Delia Lubin, the namesake of this holiday season staple, started her tamale empire—which includes six restaurants, a food truck, and a mail-order business—with just 5 pounds of *masa* and the need to provide for her young family.

Along with her husband and three daughters, Delia moved from Chicago to McAllen in the 1980s to be closer to family. Though the cost of living was lower in South Texas, wages were too. Not wanting to accept government assistance, Delia recognized she'd need to supplement the family income. So she looked to her past to shore up the future. As a child in Mexico, she'd taken part in many family *tamaladas*—gatherings of friends and relatives to cook tamales—a long, labor-intensive process. “I knew I needed to do something, and I honestly didn't know what else to sell. But I knew how to make tamales. I figured I'd make them like my mom used to,” Delia recalls.

Delia and her sister Maye made tamales the way their family had for years. They soaked the corn husks and ground chiles; they kneaded *masa* (corn flour dough) and marinated and stewed pork shoulder in a blend of secret seasonings. They crafted the tamales with the *sabor perfecto* they still strive for today—a firm yet silky *masa* stuffed with spiced and shredded pork.

The sisters wrapped their first 10 dozen tamales in aluminum foil, stacked them in a cooler, and started knocking on doors. The \$10 they made from that batch paid for the next. The proceeds from the second paid for the



**DELIA'S** pork tamales, one of the more popular selections, features shredded pork shoulder marinated and stewed in a secret blend of spices.


**DELIA'S** has six locations across the Rio Grande Valley. See Page 62 for addresses and phone numbers. [deliastamales.com](http://deliastamales.com)



third. And so it went, each consecutive effort funding the next. “It was challenging, going around like that,” Delia admits. “I was afraid that when I'd show up at the door, people wouldn't buy from me.” But, she adds modestly, “I was very blessed that everyone loved them.”

Delia and her then preteen and teen daughters Sofia, Laura, and Lorena worked together each day to cook, assemble, steam, and sell. Based on word of mouth, local businesses began requesting her tamales. She'd stop in regularly at the offices of attorneys, doctors, and insurance companies. After school, her daughters joined her on the route. “We'd ride with mom to the business, and when




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The Bullock Texas State History Museum is a division of the Texas State Preservation Board. Additional support for educational programming provided by the Texas State History Museum Foundation.

people put in their order, we'd run to the car to get it," Sofia remembers. "With us along, she could sell more quickly."

Delia's reputation found its way to Houston, where renowned Mexican restaurant Ninfa's contracted her to supply tamales. To meet production needs, Delia rented a south McAllen storefront in 1998 and hired family, friends, and neighbors to help. For dine-in, she added two tables and took cash and checks only. Despite minimal seating, Delia's did brisk business. At Christmas that year, the Lubins learned just how beloved their tamales had become when customers swarmed the restaurant in what Valleyites fondly remember as "the tamale riot."

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## Where to Find Delia's Tamales

All Delia's locations are open Mon-Sat 6 a.m.-8 p.m., Sun 7 a.m.-6 p.m.

3400 N. 10th St.,  
McAllen  
956-627-2532

4800 S. 23rd St., Suite 5  
McAllen  
956-630-3502

602 W. Griffin Parkway  
Mission  
956-584-5800

1501 E. Monte Cristo Road,  
Edinburg  
956-380-2700

2000 N. Jackson Road,  
Pharr  
956-783-7799

106 W. Nolana Loop,  
San Juan  
956-961-4565

If you plan on ordering Delia's for the holidays you can pick up a couple dozen frozen tamales from any store before Dec. 19. For fresh tamales, the last opportunity to place a large order is Dec. 13. They will be available for pick-up in the days leading up to Dec. 25. Online orders are prepared, frozen, and shipped to your home. [deliastamales.com](http://deliastamales.com)



**DELIA LUBIN**, 71, started her tamale business in the 1980s with her family, and now has six restaurants, with two more to come next year.

Over the last two decades, Delia has opened six fast-casual locations around the Valley, plus a food truck. She also launched a website, [deliastamales.com](http://deliastamales.com), for fanatics all over the country to order tamales shipped via FedEx. Delia's goes through a million pounds of chicken per year, sourcing many ingredients from the Rio Grande Valley region. And she's not finished growing yet. Two new storefronts are in the works in San Antonio and Weslaco for 2019, and Delia's is expanding its production space.

Despite numerous franchising offers, Delia's remains 100 percent family-owned, with Sofia serving as chief

**“I never imagined it could be what it is, but I've always made food with love.”**

operating officer, Laura as chief financial officer, and Lorena as human resources chief. As to why they've kept ownership so close, Sofia says, “We just feel more comfortable growing at a slower pace, and it helps us ensure the quality of our product.” She adds there might be the possibility of franchising once Delia's adds production capacity, but for now, it's all in the family.

When you walk into one of Delia's restaurants, it feels welcoming, the air redolent with fresh corn *masa*, garlic, onions, and roasting meats. The employees staffing the counter wait patiently while customers decide which of the 18 flavors they'd like to try. (The chicken and cheese and traditional pork are favorites.) On weekends, the restaurants fire up a *plancha* in the corner of the store and cook fresh tortillas for *menudo*, a Mexican beef tripe soup that's the only other item on the menu.



Tables fill with people from all walks of life—workers in paint-splattered jumpsuits, families crowded at the salsa bar, the lone worker with a laptop. “We wouldn’t dream of going anywhere else,” longtime McAllen resident Audrey Huston says. “In fact, whenever we visit family, we have to stock their freezer [with tamales]. I’m not sure if they want us to visit or if they just want Delia’s tamales,” she jokes while unwrapping a steaming jalapeño-and-cheese tamale.

Delia is taken aback by the success. “I never imagined it could be what it is,” she says. “But I’ve always made food with love. Also, I use the best ingredients, and I won’t ever change that.”

Though she spends less time in the kitchen now, Delia takes an active role in the business, dropping in on stores, spot-checking service, and taste-testing tamales. During December, when sales triple, Delia’s adds 50 temporary employees—and no one gets a break. That includes Delia herself, who spends every day working in the production facility.

“My mom has told us that if she passes away during peak season, we are forbidden to have a funeral until afterward because our customers need to be taken care of first,” Sofia says.

Delia’s tamales, for all their humble beginnings, have become more than the sum of their parts. Not just a lunchtime and holiday treat, the tamales are a cultural touchstone for Valley residents, intertwined with what it means to be from here. For her customers around the country, Delia’s provides a little piece of South Texas on their family’s table.

Now 71, Delia doesn’t plan on passively enjoying her success. “As long as God continues to give me the strength I will still work every day,” she says. **L**

### A HOLIDAY TRADITION

Although tamales are eaten year-round, they have come to be associated with Catholic holidays celebrated in Mexico, from Our Lady of Guadalupe Day on Dec. 12 through Three Kings’ Day on Jan. 6.

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**IN ADDITION TO** barbecue and homemade sides, Tejas Chocolate + Barbecue in Tomball also makes excellent craft chocolate in the form of truffles and bars.

# From Bean to Brisket

Chocolate and barbecue live in sweet-savory harmony in Tomball

By Mai Pham

**M**odern barbecue origin stories typically fall into two categories: that of the apprentice who struck out on his or her own, as in the case of Franklin Barbecue in Austin; or that of the backyard enthusiast who gained a cult following before opening a brick-and-mortar, as in the case of Gatlin's BBQ in Houston. They usually don't start with small-batch, artisanal chocolate sold at the local farmers market. But at Tejas Chocolate + Barbecue in Tomball, where a handmade chocolate shop is fused with a celebrated, hoppin' barbecue restaurant, it's a lot like what Forrest Gump's mama used to say: "Life is like a box of chocolates. You never know what you're going to get."

It all began as a passion project. In 2010, co-founder Scott Moore Jr. was at a crossroads in his career selling replacement parts for railroad freight cars. His business was failing, and he had to make a choice: either stay in the industry and find another job, or try something new and different at the age of 50. A self-professed "gourmet foodie type," Moore landed

200 N. Elm St., Tomball, 832-761-0670; tejaschocolate.com  
Open Tue-Fri 11 a.m.-6 p.m. and Sat 11 a.m.-5 p.m. (or until sold out).



## Six Things to Do in Old Town Tomball

When visiting Tejas Chocolate + Barbecue, take some time to check out Tomball's historic downtown. Tejas owner Scott Moore Jr. shares his recommendations.

1

Grab a beer at Tomball's newest craft brewery, **Fire Ant Brew Pub**.

2

Go antique shopping at stores like Granny's Korner and Vintage Station that sell everything from lighting to furniture and quilts.

3

Visit **The Railroad Depot, Plaza & Gazebo** to learn about railroad history and view the new model train on display.

4

Attend the free **German Heritage Festival**, which takes place in the spring (March 29-31) and includes beer, sausage, and entertainment.

5

Stop into **Caroline's Kitchen** for tamales, including the brisket and barbacoa tamales made with Tejas' meats.

6

Shop the **Tomball Farmers Market**, Tejas' former stomping grounds, on Saturdays from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m.



on the idea of chocolate-making after watching a TV program about the Brooklyn-based craft chocolate company Mast Brothers, and heard one of the owners declare, "We think every neighborhood should have a chocolate maker."

Intrigued, Moore, who lived in Spring at the time, began looking for a craft chocolatier nearby. His search came up empty. After further research, he discovered there were no bean-to-bar chocolate makers in the entire state at that time.

After sampling chocolate from small-batch American producers like Dandelion Chocolate in San Francisco and Amano Artisan Chocolate in Utah, Moore was hooked, despite not considering himself an avid chocolate fan. He invested \$1,000 to purchase the equipment needed to make chocolate, starting with raw cocoa beans, at home.

Production quickly got out of hand, prompting girlfriend and business partner Michelle Holland to ask him to move his hobby out of their house. This gave Moore the impetus to convert an old office space into a makeshift chocolate factory, which allowed him to produce on a larger scale. He and Holland began selling single-origin bars (chocolate made from beans that originate from one country or farm) for \$7 each at the Tomball Farmers Market.

The chocolate was so well-received, the duo eventually sold their goods wholesale to three Houston Whole Foods Markets and all nine Central Markets in Texas. Ultimately, the couple decided they preferred interacting with customers, so they began looking for a brick-and-mortar space.

Moore stumbled upon Hoffman House in Old Town Tomball. Built in 1907, it's Tomball's oldest building, but its 1,900 square feet exceeded their needs, and they weren't sure they could afford the rent on chocolate alone.

A fifth-generation Texan, Moore had grown up doing backyard barbecue, so he came up with the idea of selling barbecue in conjunction with his chocolate. Moore convinced his brother Greg, who had been working as a chef for years, to come on



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## PLATES

as partner and pitmaster, despite having no formal barbecue training. The brothers and Holland opened Tejas Chocolate + Barbecue in 2015.

Aside from classic offerings like brisket and beef ribs (the latter a Friday-and-Saturday special that almost always sells out), Tejas gets creative with its menu. Specialty cuts include pork belly and beef cheek, and daily specials make it imperative to stop in every day of the week. On Thursdays, pastrami brisket, pastrami beef ribs, and Reuben sandwiches have their day in the sun. A rotating selection of housemade sausages features flavors like Brisket and Blues, with brisket and blue cheese as a filling, or Sea Brisket, a boudin link made of lump crab, shrimp, and saffron.

Tejas also serves from-scratch sides like carrot soufflé and cornbread pudding. "At other places, the sides are an afterthought," Moore says. "We wanted to bring the sides to the forefront." Barbecue sauces include a traditional Mexican *mole* infused with Tejas' own chocolate.

The chocolate part of the business is still going strong, if not exactly in the way Moore originally envisioned. Though Tejas still makes single-origin dark chocolate bars, it has turned its focus to chocolate truffles, which come in close to 40 varieties ranging from single-origin, to Texas-themed flavors like margarita and pecan praline, to specialty flavors like cherries jubilee and matcha green tea.

After landing on *Texas Monthly's* coveted "Top 50 Barbecue Joints in Texas" list in 2017, Tejas had to double its production capacity to meet demand. With lines that continue to be long, it leased a small retail space next door that features counter-service barbecue to go.

While its barbecue may have brought the business statewide acclaim and plenty of customers, Tejas doesn't plan on abandoning its sweet roots anytime soon. "We used Texans' thirst for craft barbecue as a way to introduce them to craft chocolate," Moore says. "Our customers come in looking for the Texas trinity—brisket, ribs, and sausage—and then leave with a four-pack of truffles without realizing what happened to them." 🍷



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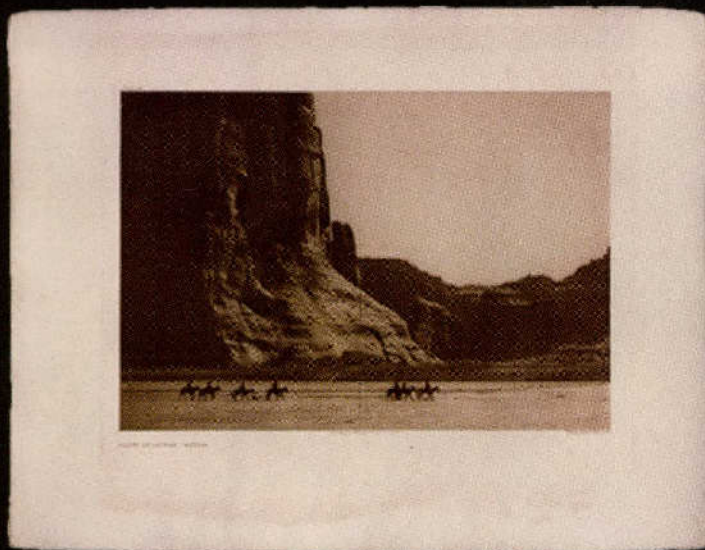
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Edward Sheriff Curtis (1868-1952), *Calson de Chelly - Navaho*, copyright 1904, photo gravure on paper, 18.25 x 22.375 inches. Purchase of the Nelda C. and H.J. Lutzer Stark Foundation, 2013, 2013.2.1.29





**THE FRUITCAKE** from Gladys' Bakery in Weimar received national attention in the late 1980s and early '90s after being featured on *The Tonight Show*.

# Nuts for Fruitcake

Defying the punchlines, Texas fruitcakes attract loyal fans and new customers

By Cynthia J. Drake

"It's a very simple cake: pecans, cherries, pineapples, and some really good batter to hold it together. That's what brings our customers back year after year."

**T**exans didn't invent the fruitcake, but in our state's tradition of braggadocio, we made it better (and bigger, in some cases). A holiday delicacy with a sometimes stodgy reputation—thanks in part to Johnny Carson's long-running gags in the 1970s and '80s—fruitcakes were imported to Texas in the 1800s by German immigrants who packed their original family recipes and brought them to their new home. Though the recipes stayed basically the same, the fruitcake benefited from one crucial Lone Star ingredient: fresh pecans.





2



3



1

In fact, in an effort to rebrand the fruitcake and distance it from being a corny punchline, it's often called Texas pecan cake now.

Any way you slice it, you'll find similar ingredients (pineapple, cherries, and dates, for example), but the nuts get top billing, and for good reason: Bite into a Texas-made fruitcake, and you'll find a dessert that has a lot more crunch. Here are three Texas bakeries making fruitcakes for the holidays—and year-round—that are no joke.

**1 Collin Street Bakery**  
CORSICANA

The oldest and best-known fruitcake manufacturer, with five North Texas locations, is also one of the nation's leading suppliers of the holiday confection. Founded in 1896 by German baker Gus Weidmann, Collin Street began to attract attention from visiting celebrities like John Ringling and Will Rogers during the Corsicana oil boom at the turn of the 20th century, spurring a mail-order business.

**AN ABUNDANCE OF PECANS** has come to define Texas fruitcakes. The fruitcake at Eilenberger's Bakery in Palestine is 90 percent pecans.

Photos: Brandon Jakobelt (1 and 3); Eric W. Pohl (2)



"We have this amazingly loyal customer base," says Hayden Crawford, a bakery partner and spokesman. "We have customers that put it in their wills that their estate has to buy our fruitcake and give it out as gifts."

To attract new generations of customers, the company markets its "pecan cakes," using the same tried-and-true fruitcake recipe, but without the vibrant-colored fruit that some find passé, and is also working on producing a fruitcake-inspired energy bar.

Crawford says much depends on branding: The company often informally surveys customers and has found that though most people say they don't like fruitcake, only a few have actually tried it before. "Just the name turned them off," he says. "It's pecans and fruit—what's not to like?"

## 2 Gladys' Bakery WEIMAR

Gladys Farek Holub certainly had a way of attracting attention to her business. Her fruitcake recipe, loosely based on her Czech heritage, made national news in the late 1980s and early '90s—and landed her on *The Tonight Show* with Johnny Carson and *The Late Show* with David Letterman—when she decided to bake a 150-pound fruitcake in the shape of Texas.

Holub's daughter Melissa Varley now runs the business. Though she doesn't produce the 150-pound cakes anymore, she still makes a 25-pound version.

"It's a very simple cake: pecans, cherries, pineapples, and some really good batter to hold it together. It's the cake

itself that is so good—that's what brings our customers back year after year," says Varley, who looks forward to chatting with long-time customers when they call in orders. (The bakery does mail-order business year-round.)

Varley says the success of her mother, now 84, was due in part to her outgoing nature. "She would always say, 'I might not be able to spell, but I can figure.'" And she was bold. "Mom even shipped one to the pope one year."

## 3 Eilenberger's Bakery PALESTINE

For 120 years, Eilenberger's Bakery has made fruitcakes using Fred H. Eilenberger's secret family recipe—it's kept in a vault—from Germany. Decorating the bakery walls are photos of Eilenberger with his horse-drawn carriage, which he drove to deliver bread from the same historic building since 1915.

The company has changed hands several times, and until recently, production had moved to Nebraska. Palestine-born entrepreneur Bill Jones purchased the company in 2013 and brought production back to the town, along with the original recipe. During peak production, Eilenberger's, which also does a brisk mail-order business, can make 1,000 fruitcakes per day.

"We're hand-done. We still do it the old-fashioned way, with [paper baking] liners," says Sharon Grizzle, marketing and sales director, noting that the recipe is 90 percent pecans. "People love it because when they slice it, they see nothing but nuts." **L**



### FRUITCAKE FINDS

- 1 **Collin Street Bakery**, 401 W. Seventh Ave., Corsicana, with other locations in Corsicana, Greenville, Waco, and Lindale. 800-475-3589; collinstreet.com
- 2 **Gladys' Bakery**, 3239 Dubina-Weimar Road, Weimar, is open Oct. 15-Jan. 10, Mon-Sat 8 a.m.-5 p.m. 800-725-5254; gladysfruitcakes.com
- 3 **Eilenberger's Bakery**, 512 N. John St., Palestine. 800-831-2544; eilenbergerbakery.com

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- C. Yellow Rose Patch \$42.00 Made in Austin by Die Trying 37770
- D. Lavender Bug Repellent \$10.00 Made by Somerset Lavender & Herb Farm in Fayetteville 40014
- E. Chiki-on-the-go Pack \$45.00 Made in Austin by Chiki Buttah Products 37775
- F. Luggage Tag \$24.00 Made in Dallas by Chickeeboom 37767



# TEXANA

## El Paso in Word and Song

Keep a little fire burning in El Paso

By Clayton Maxwell

**GOOD-BYE FELEENA**  
“Out in the West Texas town of El Paso, I fell in love with a Mexican girl.”

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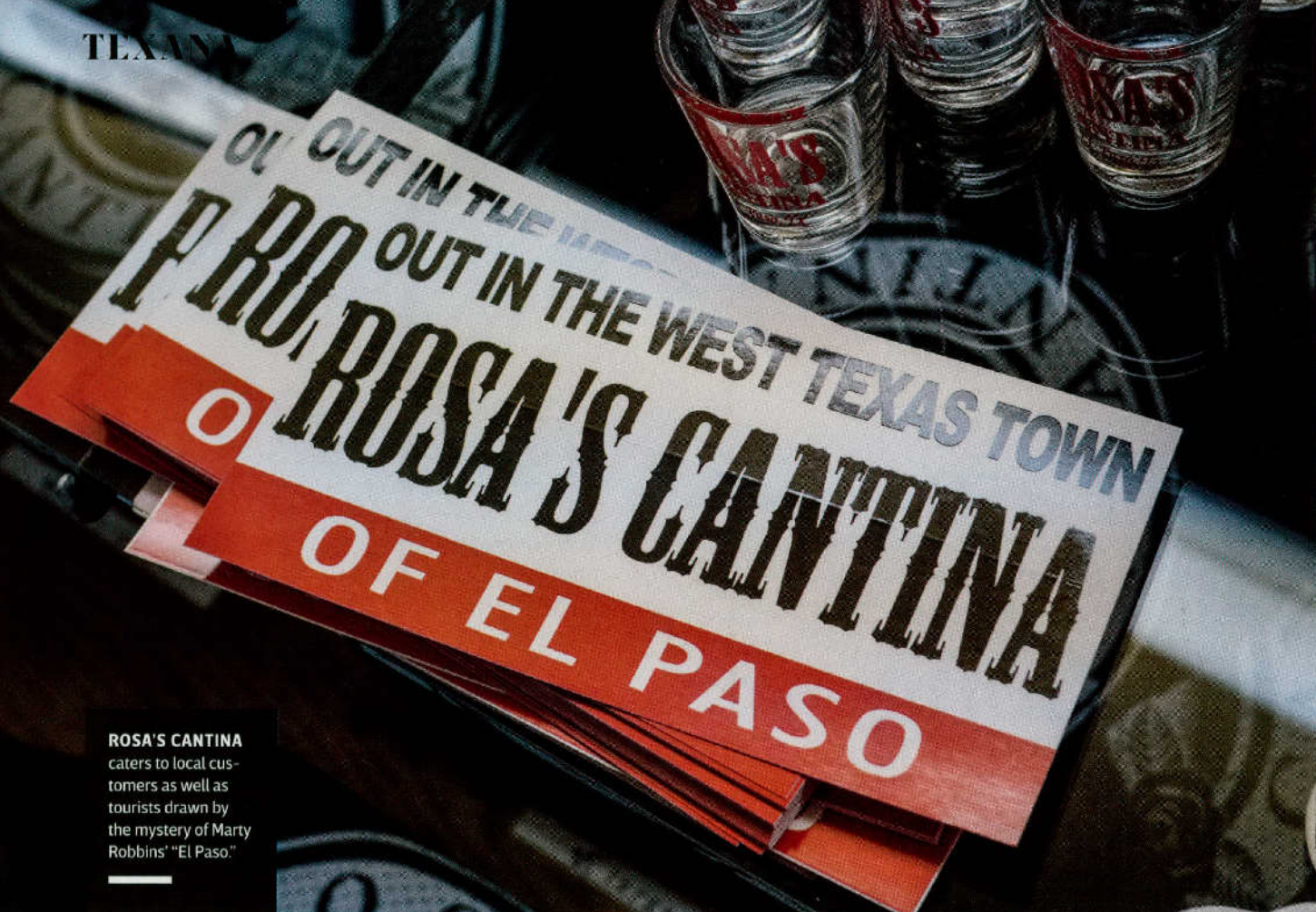
If you swing by Rosa's Cantina on the western edge of El Paso, mere minutes from “the badlands of New Mexico,” you will not find Feleena, the girl who drove a lovesick cowboy to his doom in Marty Robbins' famous ballad “El Paso.” But you will find friendly locals sitting at the bar with ice-cold Tecates. You will also find Robbins memorabilia adorning the walls—1970s album covers with the mustachioed musician in a denim shirt, for example, and a framed copy of the lyrics of “El Paso.” And when the bartender picks up that you are searching for traces of the legendary song, you might suddenly, without even asking, hear that familiar opening line float out from the jukebox, “Out in the West Texas town of El Paso...” Don't be surprised if you get goose bumps.

**OPINIONS DIFFER**  
on whether this is the Rosa's Cantina that inspired country singer Marty Robbins' “El Paso.”

---







**ROSA'S CANTINA** caters to local customers as well as tourists drawn by the mystery of Marty Robbins' "El Paso."

**Sometimes anything seems possible in El Paso. It's as if the border culture and desert spaces open wide the windows for writers, musicians, and artists.**

Rosa's Cantina, with its stone walls and twinkling lights, is both fact and fable. A glass case displays a black-and-white photo of the former owners who opened the bar in 1957, Beto and Anita Zubia, both of whom died in the 2000s, and beneath that is a glossy photo of Robbins. Whether this is *the* Rosa's Cantina immortalized in song remains a debate. "Yes," replies a waitress as she serves plates of Marty Robbins Burgers. "It's the original." No matter that a regular at the bar—an older fellow who grew up in the surrounding neighborhood known as Smelertown—whispers moments later, "I doubt that Marty Robbins ever came here."

That's the thing about legends, though, particularly in El Paso, a city brimming with them. Like the dark eyes of Feleena, they are wrapped in mystery. The yarn that Robbins wove in "El Paso"—which won a Grammy in 1960—lives in our collective imagination, no matter whether Robbins ever came to this bar or not. We want the cowboy's tale to be real—so much so that it has a life of its own. When

you open the cantina's guestbook, you'll see that Robbins fans from Belfast to Vancouver have darkened this cantina door, and, if you read through the lively comments section, you'll see that many a visitor wants to know, "Where's Feleena?"

Sometimes anything seems possible in El Paso. It's as if the border culture and desert spaces open wide the windows for writers, musicians, and artists. In Robbins' case, legend holds that he was gripped with a vision while passing through El Paso on a road trip and wrote the song in the back seat of a turquoise Cadillac while his wife, Marizona, drove the family back home to Phoenix. Then there's Jack Kerouac, who, in his 1958 novel *The Dharma Bums*, chose El Paso as the setting for a transcendental moment for his protagonist camping alone in the foothills: "What an amazing revelation!" Kerouac wrote. "I climbed up the arroyo so finally when I turned and looked back I could see all of Mexico, all of Chihuahua, the entire sand-glittering desert of it, under a late sinking moon that was huge and bright just



# WEST TEXAS ROAD TRIP



©Jennifer Boomer



MD

**MIDLAND**—Midland is a great place to eat, play, shop & stay as you explore West Texas! Midland International Air & Space Port is the closest commercial airport to Big Bend National Park. [visitmidland.com](http://visitmidland.com)

- Dec 18** - Christmas Music Celebration @ Petroleum Museum
- Jan 5-6** - Sesame Street Live @ Wagner Noël



O

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- Dec 1** - Parade of Lights @ Downtown Odessa
- Dec 10** - Christmas Wonderland Holiday Spectacular



FS

**FORT STOCKTON**—Lodging, Dining, Entertainment and History. Experience our Visitor Center, Historic Sites, Museum, Fort Grounds, Golf Course, and Unique Shopping, West Texas style. [historicfortstocktontx.com](http://historicfortstocktontx.com)

- Dec 1** - Christmas Parade
- Jan 13** - Pecos County Livestock Show



TS

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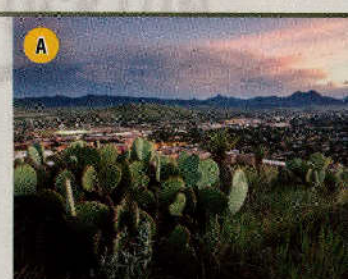
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- Nov 28-Dec 2** - Christmas in Alpine
- Feb 22-23** - 33rd Annual Texas Cowboy Poetry Gathering



A

**FORT DAVIS**—Experience the mile-high climate in the Texas mountains! Award-winning State and National Parks offer excellent nature activities and star gazing under the "Darkest Skies in North America"! [fortdavis.com](http://fortdavis.com)

- Dec 8** - Frontier Christmas - Parade & Photos with Santa



FD

**MARFA**—It defies easy explanation, yet any google search yields thousands of opinions. Marfa is tough to get to—tougher still to explain. But once you arrive, you get it. [visitmarfa.com](http://visitmarfa.com)

- Dec 8-9** - GIANT Christmas Market @ Hotel Paisano
- Dec 31** - New Years Eve Dance - Bobby Flores



MF





## El Paso Inspiration

Take a tour of El Paso literature and song:

**Rosa's Cantina,**

3454 Doniphan Drive.  
915-833-0402;  
facebook.com/pg/  
OriginalRosasCantina.

**Hotel Paso Del Norte**

(formerly the Camino Real), 101 S. El Paso St. Under renovation, the hotel is expected to reopen in February.  
915-534-3000;  
hotelpdn.com.

**Gardner Hotel,**

311 E. Franklin Ave.  
915-532-3661;  
gardnerhotel.com.

Have other ideas for places to visit on a tour of El Paso-inspired literature and song?

Chime in on social media: @texashighways.

**THE HISTORIC GARDNER HOTEL** has housed guests ranging from novelist Cormac McCarthy to bank robber John Dillinger (inset).



over the Chihuahua mountains." If you are open to it, El Paso rouses the spirit, or as writer Benjamin Alire Sáenz says of his hometown, "I just don't know anybody who's come here and hasn't gone, "Oh my God. I didn't know it was like this."

Perhaps the most enigmatic of El Paso-sparked epiphanies is that of Cormac McCarthy and his 2007 Pulitzer Prize-winning novel, *The Road*. McCarthy—who lived in El Paso for about 20 years before moving to New Mexico in the 1990s—is known for keeping to himself. He is so idolized by his readers and yet so private that one documentary filmmaker made a short film called *Cormac's Trash* about obsessed fans looking through his refuse for clues to the man behind the myth.

But in an uncharacteristic televised interview in 2007, McCarthy told Oprah Winfrey how the idea for *The Road* was born one night as he gazed out the window of what he called "the old hotel

in El Paso" while his son slept in the room behind him. As McCarthy tells it, he heard the "lonesome" trains go by and imagined fires in the nearby mountains—a moment that sparked what would become one of his most popular novels.

The question remains, however, as to which "old hotel" McCarthy was referring. Some believe it's the oldest still-standing hotel in town, the Paso Del Norte. This Henry Trost-designed icon of El Paso history, first opened in 1912, has seen it all: During the Mexican Revolution, El Pasoans gathered on its roof to watch battles across the border; seven U.S. presidents—from Taft to FDR and both Bushes—have stayed here. Seventeen stories tall, with panoramic views of the El Paso-Juárez region, it is quite possible that McCarthy was standing at a window here when his idea hit for *The Road*. Currently under renovation, the hotel is scheduled to reopen in February.



Another candidate for McCarthy's "old hotel" is the three-story Gardner Hotel on East Franklin Avenue, one of downtown El Paso's liveliest strips. Stepping into the lobby of the 1922 hotel, it's easy to imagine a gangster in a three-piece suit brandishing a pistol from the marble staircase. After all, the famous bank robber John Dillinger checked in to room 220 in 1934 under the alias John D. Ball. Maybe that's why movie director Sam Peckinpah asked to film scenes from the Steve McQueen movie *The Getaway* here. (The hotel declined; Peckinpah's plans called for blowing up the elevator.) When asked about the hotel's history, the front desk clerk notes, "Well, Cormac McCarthy wrote here. It's where he got the idea for his book *The Road*."

Ahhh, the misty, ambiguous nature of legends. Perhaps this is the "old hotel" McCarthy was referencing. McCarthy lived and wrote at the Gardner on and off for

years back when it was a single-room occupancy outfit. "I would say that Cormac first started staying here in the early to mid-'70s," owner Joe Nebhan says. "And I guess the last time he lived at the Gardner was in the early '80s when I took over. He wasn't there long after that. By then he'd gotten that MacArthur grant and could afford to rent a place. He was always a very nice gentleman."

The Gardner is no longer populated by struggling writers and the elderly; now rooms start at \$70, and a bed in the hostel dormitory is \$27. But Nebhan's recollections of its earlier days imply it would have been a fertile environment for a writer. "I started going there when I was 8 years old and my dad ran the place," says Nebhan, now in his 60s. "I thought I was a big shot by running the elevator. I got to meet some really neat people, like veterans from the Spanish-American War."

Even now the Gardner feels like the

setting of a McCarthy novel, and that's because it is. McCarthy mentions the hotel in the epilogue of the Border Trilogy (a series that includes *All the Pretty Horses*, *The Crossing*, and *Cities of the Plain*) when character Billy Parham, now an old man, lives at the Gardner before he is kicked out, meets a mysterious death-like character, and finally finds redemption.

While such mysteries linger like the final notes of "El Paso" drifting from the jukebox, it is clear that this border city has long stoked the flames of creative minds—and those flames are now an ineluctable part of the mythos of El Paso. Even the newer and shinier iterations of local culture foster this spirit, as evidenced at Hotel Indigo, where a print on the bathroom wall reads like a manifesto for travelers seeking this city's inspiration, words from none other than *The Road*: "Keep a little fire burning," McCarthy wrote, "however small, however hidden." **L**

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www.OceanStarOEC.com 409-766-7827



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GalvestonHolidayInn.com 409-740-5300



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GalvestonHilton.com 409-744-5000





## The San Luis Resort - Spa and Conference Center

Revel in winter cheer at The San Luis Resort on Galveston Island! The opulent, 16-story hotel is the ultimate retreat for the holiday season offering lavish accommodations, breathtaking Gulf views, unmatched service and the finest in award-winning dining. Guests can choose from an array of accommodations including VIP floors, the elite "Club Ten" and enhanced guest rooms. Tucked away in a secluded area of the property are The Villas at The San Luis Resort, five luxurious suites offering the outstanding services and amenities of an award-winning resort with the relaxed charm of a secluded hideaway. Head to The Cove, the hotel's luxurious pool and outdoor oasis, to bask in the sea air and enjoy panoramic views of the Gulf. Take a dip in the comfortable, climate-controlled pool or sip on cocktails by the fire pit in Adirondack chairs. The San Luis has an exciting line-up of holiday events including a fun-filled family breakfast with Santa on Sunday, December 16 and the hotel's famed Christmas Day brunch buffet complete with breakfast classics, holiday favorites and chef-curated selections. Celebrate the holidays in elegance and comfort at The San Luis Resort.

SanLuisResort.com  
800-392-5937



## Moody Gardens - Coolest Holiday Destination in the Southwest!

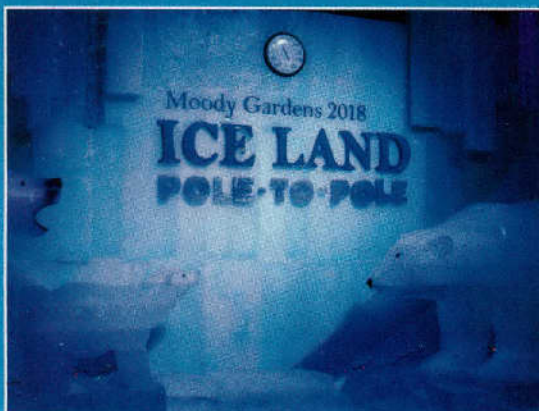
Enjoy eight holiday attractions at one venue. ICE LAND has a new theme for 2018, as an internationally-acclaimed team of master ice carvers has taken 2 million pounds of ice to create your festive journey from the North to South Pole. See polar bears, penguins, humpback whales, reindeer of course and much more! Glide down the giant glacier slide and enjoy a festive drink inside an igloo at Shiver's Ice Bar.

Next, you can enjoy a merry stroll through Festival of Lights with spectacular views of Galveston Bay as this mile-long trail through the property offers an outdoor ice rink and more than one million lights with scenes themed to holiday music. Fill the evening with holiday 3D films, Rudolph 4D Experience, the Arctic Slide, train rides, live entertainment, and festive food and holiday buffet options. Cirque Joyeux Dinner and Show offers an enchanting mix of fantastic food, circus and music December 21 - January 4.

The Moody Gardens Hotel offers a variety of holiday packages, including New Year's Palooza with fun activities for the entire family to enjoy with interactive games, food, music, and Fireworks VIP area as we ring in 2019 with a balloon drop at the stroke of 9 p.m.

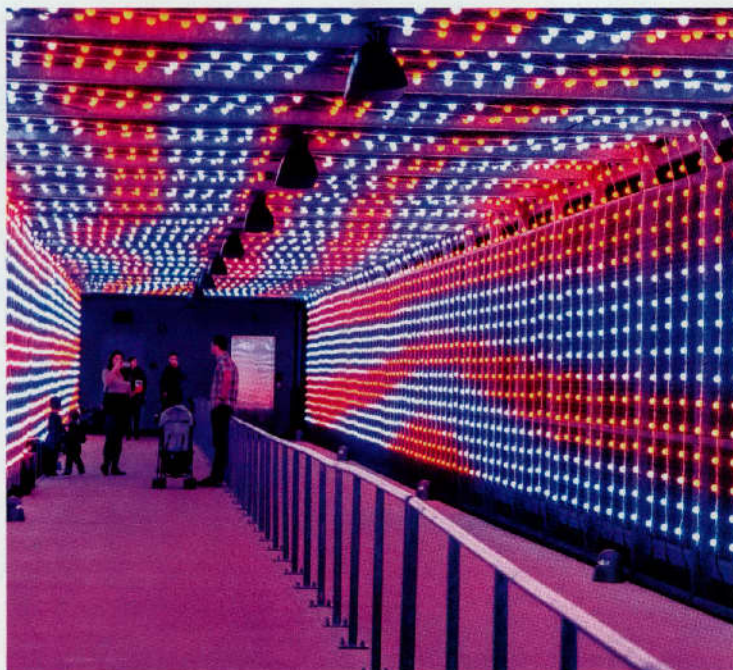
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For More Information: 409-744-4673  
Hotel Reservations: 409-741-8484  
[www.moodygardens.org](http://www.moodygardens.org)





# EVENTS



## COTA Lights Up

A few miles east of Austin, America's top racetrack dazzles with a new annual Winter Wonderland tradition

By Hannah Phillips

**Y**ou've rocked around the Christmas tree, but have you raced around the Christmas tree? Thanks to a new tradition at the Circuit of The Americas, you can now do both. Returning for its second year, Winter Wonderland at COTA offers a road-tested way to celebrate the holidays in Austin. For five weeks, COTA's Grand Plaza and surrounding grounds transform into an immersive experience after dark with a million lights, holiday music, visits with Santa, and food trucks. General admission tickets include access to a picturesque tunnel of lights, Santa's workshop, a live music stage, singing trees, and The Chinese Lantern Festival—reimagined with modern technology for a mesmerizing and colorful event that will immerse guests in the culture and arts of authentic China. Trips to the top of the North Pole, a petting zoo, and camel rides are offered for an additional cost. Round out the night with a spin around a giant skating rink on the floor level of the Austin360 Amphitheater.

### WINTER WONDERLAND AT COTA

Select dates, Nov. 23–Dec. 30  
Circuit of The Americas,  
9201 Circuit of The Americas  
Blvd., Austin.  
512-301-6600;  
[circuitoftheamericas.com/  
winter-wonderland](http://circuitoftheamericas.com/winter-wonderland)

## Arts & Culture

### CENTRAL TEXAS

#### Austin

##### Day of Tango Festival

Dec. 14–16

The eighth annual festival offers performances by international tango dance champions and instructors, plus live music from the famous Miguel Arrabal Tango Quartet. Interactive dance workshops, a free beginner's lesson, and Argentine milonga dances are among the event's cultural activities. Ben Hur Shrine Auditorium, 7811 Rockwood Lane; Esquina Tango, 209 Pedernales. 512-695-1024; [dayoftango.org](http://dayoftango.org)

#### San Antonio

##### Monarchs: Brown and Native Contemporary Artists in the Path of the Butterfly

Through Jan. 6

This exhibition takes the migration path of the Monarch butterfly as a geographic range and a metaphor. The butterfly crosses the U.S. border at its junctions with Canada and Mexico along the entire length of these conceptual divides—and the busiest path is through the center of the U.S. Artists in the exhibition take up the other meaning of the word "monarch"—an acknowledged ruler that is the head of a state or nation—to present the perspectives of people native to the Americas. Blue Star Contemporary, 116 Blue Star. 210-227-6960; [bluestarcontemporary.org](http://bluestarcontemporary.org)

#### Waco

##### Titanic: The Artifact Exhibition

Through Jan. 6

This exhibit takes a journey back in time to experience the legend of Titanic like never before. Galleries feature more than 200 real artifacts recovered from the ocean floor along with room recreations and personal stories, each highlighting a different chapter in the compelling story of Titanic's maiden voyage. Mayborn Museum Complex, 1300 S. University Parks Drive. [baylor.edu/mayborn](http://baylor.edu/mayborn)

### SOUTH TEXAS / GULF COAST

#### Houston

##### Disney's Beauty and the Beast

Dec. 8–23

This magical and moving tale of what it means to love and be human embodies the magic of the theatre. Theatre Under The Stars, 800 Bagby St. 713-558-8887; [tuts.com](http://tuts.com)

### NORTH TEXAS

#### Canadian

##### Sordid and Sacred: The Beggars in Rembrandt's Etchings

Through Dec. 22

This exhibit of original works by 17th-century Dutch artist Rembrandt van Rijn (1606–69) features 36 framed etchings created between 1629 and 1654. Highly regarded as one of the greatest visual artists in the history of art, Rembrandt produced 300 prints during his lifetime. The Citadelle Art Foundation, 520 Nelson Ave. 806-323-8899; [thecitadelle.org](http://thecitadelle.org)

#### Denton

##### Life Stories Told Through Quilts

Dec. 7–Feb. 15

This exhibit features the work of Barbara McCraw, a retired professor, pathologist, and master quilter whose pieces have been exhibited across North America and Europe. She has created quilts celebrating figures like Nelson Mandela, Bishop Desmond Tutu, and the Obamas. Her pieces are in numerous collections including the Smithsonian. Gough Gallery, Patterson–Appleton Arts Center, 400 E. Hickory St. 940-382-2787; [dentonarts.com](http://dentonarts.com)

## Food & Drink

### CENTRAL TEXAS

#### Uvalde

##### Briscoe Ranch Barbecue Cookoff at the Crossroads

Dec. 7–8

With average high temperatures in the mid-70s in December, cooking conditions are favorable for guests visiting the Crossroads of America. The cookoff is sanctioned by the



## WANT MORE?

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[texashighways.com/events](http://texashighways.com/events)

International Barbecue Cookers Association. *Uvalde County Fairplex, 215 Veterans Lane. 830-486-7055; uvaldebq.com*

### SOUTH TEXAS / GULF COAST

#### Clute

##### Elizabethan Madrigal Feast

Nov. 23-25, 30; Dec. 1-2, 6-9

Witness the majesty and pageantry befitting the court of Queen Elizabeth I at a spectacular holiday feast. Join the Earl of Warwick and his royal guests in the main hall of his castle for an exquisite meal and entertainment provided by the court's troupe of players, dancers, and singers. *Brazosport Center for the Arts and Sciences, 400 College Blvd. 979-265-7661; brazosportcenter.org*

## Music

### CENTRAL TEXAS

#### Austin

##### Trans-Siberian Orchestra in Concert

Dec. 20

This year's 20th anniversary tour, a presentation of TSO's unforgettable *The Ghosts of Christmas Eve*, features founder/composer/lyricist Paul O'Neill's timeless story of a runaway who finds her way into a mysterious, abandoned theater. *Frank Erwin Center, 1701 Red River St. 512-477-6060; uterwincenter.com*

#### Boerne

##### Concert in the Cave: Winter Solstice

Dec. 22

Enjoy an eclectic concert of holiday music celebrating the winter solstice, combining contemporary arrangements of traditional carols, soaring vocals, original acoustic music, and pulsing world-beat rhythms, performed on a mixture of ancient and modern instruments. *Cave without a Name, 325 Kreuzberg Road. 830-537-4212; visitboerne.org*

#### Mason

##### Gary P. Nunn in Concert

Dec. 29

The country singer—most known for "London Homesick Blues," the theme song for the *Austin City Limits* television show for more than 30 years—performs live. *Lea Lou Co-Op, 114 S. Live Oak St. 325-347-1234 or 325-347-5758; masontxcoc.com or facebook.com/lealoumason*

### SOUTH TEXAS / GULF COAST

#### Galveston

##### Jerry Jeff Walker in Concert

Dec. 8

One of the Lone Star State's most popular musical ambassadors returns to The Grand for his annual holiday season concert. This memorable evening is filled with heart-tugging ballads, spirited melodies, and down-home fun. *The Grand 1894 Opera House, 2020 Postoffice St. 800-821-1894 or 409-765-1894; thegrand.com*

#### Houston

##### The Commodores in Concert with The Temptations

Dec. 7

The legendary funk and soul superstars are headed to Houston. The members came together as students at the Tuskegee Institute and eventually opened for The Jackson 5 and were signed to the storied Motown Records after being discovered by founder Barry Gordy. With Motown, the Commodores sold more than 60 million records. *Arena Theatre, 7326 US 59. 713-772-5900; arenahouston.com*

## Seasonal Celebrations

### CENTRAL TEXAS

#### Austin

##### Trail of Lights

Dec. 10-23

Since it began in 1965, the Austin Trail of Lights has grown into one of Austin's largest events, attracting an average of 400,000 people per year. Every holiday season, Austin's iconic Zilker Park is transformed with more than 2 million lights, 65+ displays, 30 food trucks, three entertainment stages, and interactive experiences throughout the park. Some new highlights include a 13-foot illuminated carriage, 12 7-foot lighted guitars commemorating Austin's musical roots, and a 25-foot spiral holiday tree. *Zilker Park, 2100 Barton Springs Road. austintrailoflights.org*

#### Austin

##### Armadillo Christmas Bazaar

Dec. 13-24

The holiday marketplace celebrates 43 seasons of treating Texans and tourists to a festive, holiday shopping experience for 12 days and nights. This iconic cultural event features more than 175 contemporary touring artists, award winners, and local favorites. *Palmer Events Center, 900 Barton Springs Road. 512-447-1605; armadillobazaar.com*

#### Bandera

##### Cowboy Capital Christmas and Shoppers Jubilee

Dec. 7-8

Festivities include a parade down Main Street, lights and music from children's choirs during a living nativity, and a visit from Cowboy Santa. Bandera merchants are open late for holiday shopping, and the streets fill with strolling Christmas carolers, musicians, and cowboys. *Main Street. 830-796-3045; banderacowboycapital.com*

#### Bastrop

##### Lost Pines Christmas

Nov. 24-Dec. 23

From an old-fashioned Main Street Christmas to a dazzling nighttime holiday parade, food and wine events, and activities for the entire

family, Bastrop shares the season during this month-long holiday event. Downtown merchants offer extended shopping hours throughout the holiday season. *Various locations. lostpineschristmas.com*

#### Buda

##### Budafest

Dec. 1-2

The holiday season starts in downtown Buda with this 39th annual event. Explore the art market to find that perfect gift or add your own touch at Santa's Artisan Workshop. The night parade and fireworks sparkle with thousands of lights, and the Reindog Parade features dressed-up pups walking down Main Street. *Downtown, 303 Main St. 512-295-7170; budafest.org*

#### College Station

##### Christmas in the Park

Nov. 30; Dec. 1, 7-8

Two weekends full of holiday fun include old-fashioned hayrides, cookies and hot cocoa, live entertainment, a petting zoo, inflatables, real snow slides, and photos with Santa. Guests may bring their own refreshments. Coolers must be 48 quarts or smaller. Alcohol, glass containers, and pets are not allowed. Guests are allowed to bring their own cameras to take a photo with Santa for free. Food vendors are also available. Guests can continue the family tradition of viewing more than





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1 million lights that decorate the 47-acre park each evening starting on Thanksgiving and ending after New Year's. *Stephen C. Beachy Central Park, 1000 Krenek Tap Road, 979-764-3486; cstx.gov/christmas*

**Fredericksburg  
The Singing Christmas Tree**  
Dec. 15-16

Local volunteers present a one-hour concert standing on a 30-foot tall decorated and lighted Christmas tree. *Pioneer Museum, 325 W. Main St. 830-990-8441; pioneermuseum.net*

**Fredericksburg  
Luckenbach Christmas Ball**  
Dec. 22

Enjoy this annual holiday dance in a historic hall featuring musician Gary P. Nunn. *Luckenbach Texas Dance Hall, 412 Luckenbach Town Loop, 830-997-3224; luckenbachtexas.com*

**Fredericksburg  
Luckenbach New Year's Eve Celebration**  
Dec. 31

Usher in the new year with one heck of a party in a historic dance

hall featuring music by the Almost Patsy Cline Band. *Luckenbach Texas Dance Hall, 412 Luckenbach Town Loop, 830-997-3224; luckenbachtexas.com*

**Fredericksburg  
USO-Style Hangar Dance**  
Dec. 31

The Hangar Hotel hosts a New Year's Eve dance, with a percentage of the event's proceeds donated to USO Ft. Hood. The dance features big band music by Fredericksburg local Bill Smallwood and the Lonestar Swing Orchestra, swing dance lessons, a Champagne toast, a costume contest, a photo booth, party favors, and black-eyed peas. *The Hangar Hotel, 155 Airport Road, 830-997-9990; hangarhotel.com*

**Georgetown  
The Christmas Stroll**  
Nov. 30-Dec. 1

Begin the holiday season with this 38th annual event that includes a parade, visits with Santa, and a winter wonderland with a swing carousel and a Candyland obstacle course. Travel back in time to enjoy the re-enactment of life 2,000

years ago in Bethlehem Village, which includes a live manger. Shop a variety of downtown merchants plus more than 150 market vendors, and enjoy live music, performances by area schools and organizations, and a food court. *The Georgetown Square, 512-863-5598; thegeorgetownsquare.com*

**Gruene  
Holidays in Gruene**  
Through Jan. 1

This historic district hosts activities like the 17th annual Pony Express, where relay riders carry a "Christmas Greetings" message from the Governor of Texas; photos with Cowboy Kringle. Gruene's own brand of Santa; brass band street performances; and a New Year's Eve celebration at Texas' oldest dance hall. *Various locations. holidaysingruene.com*

**Johnson City  
Johnson City Lights Spectacular**  
Nov. 23-Jan. 6

The holiday season kicks off with the ceremonial lighting of the historic courthouse square, Memorial Park, and Pedernales Electric

Cooperative. Opening festivities include a street dance, a food court, an artisan craft fair, fireworks, and the Lighted Hooves & Wheels Parade. *Town Square, 830-868-7684; johnsoncitytexas.info*

**Johnson City  
Christmas Through the Years in LBJ Country**  
Dec. 8

This third annual event offers live holiday music by John Arthur Martinez; children's Texas frontier Christmas craft activities; a screening of *A Charlie Brown Christmas*; a chuckwagon cooking demonstration; cowboy singing, poetry, and storytelling; a Model T automobile exhibit; and lamplight tours of Johnson's boyhood home decorated for a 1920s Christmas. *Lyndon B. Johnson National Historical Park, 200 E. Elm St. 830-868-7128; nps.gov/lyjo*

**La Grange  
Schmeckenfest—Christmas Wassail Tasting Festival**  
Dec. 6

In its 11th year, this community event attracts visitors to the Square

**Christmas in Cuero**

**Christmas in the Park**  
Lighted Display  
Driving Tour  
Cuero City Park  
Thanksgiving - New Year's Day  
Free Admission • Donations Accepted

**Chisholm Trail Heritage Museum**  
Tour of Historic Homes  
December 1  
2-6 p.m.

**Christmas in Downtown**  
Santa's Workshop • Artificial Ice Rink  
Snowzilla • Bungee Bounce • Trackless Train  
Horse Carriage Rides • Entertainment  
Shopping • Artisans Market  
Dec. 7th & 8th

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to sample more than 25 different types of wassail (hot cider) made by various business owners and community leaders. The wassail competition brings the allure of the coveted honor of being named Schmeckenmeister—an honor which lasts until the next Schmeckenfest. Festivities begin with a Christmas parade and lighting of the county Christmas tree on the courthouse lawn, and continue with music, treats, children's activities, Schmecken-ball pit, Christmas cookie decorating, and a visit from Santa. *Fayette County Courthouse Square, 151 N. Washington St. 979-968-3017; visitlagrangetx.com*

#### Llano

##### **Starry Starry Nights Lighted Christmas Park**

Nov. 23-Dec. 31

Sip hot chocolate and stroll along the Llano River enjoying all of the displays that light up Badu Park. On Dec. 8, the park transforms into a winter wonderland of snowy fun, with provided sleds for the whole family to enjoy. 300 Legion Drive. 325-247-5354; llanostarrystarrynights.com

#### Marble Falls

##### **Walkway of Lights**

Nov. 16-Dec. 26

This free event features more than 2 million lights, 400 beautiful sculptures, photos with Santa, and more. *Lakeside Park, 305 Buena Vista Drive. 830-693-2815; marblefalls.org*

#### New Braunfels

##### **Christkindlmarkt**

Nov. 30-Dec. 1

The German heritage of the city is commemorated with this open-air Christmas market where visitors can enjoy German-inspired food, craft beer, and live entertainment. Shop for Christmas ornaments, toys, books, and more. Family friendly activities include face painters, a rock climbing wall, bungee trampolines, and walk-on-water balls. Parking and admission are free. *New Braunfels Conservation Plaza, 1300 Church Hill Drive. 830-542-8448; ckmbntx.org*

#### New Braunfels

##### **The Grand Ol' Christmas Show**

Dec. 5, 7

This variety show is a tribute to the original, traditional, old-fashioned "Christmas Show." Presented in the format of a live radio broadcast, it features American band Blue Water Highway, along with a 12-piece big

band, gospel choir, and notable Texas singers and entertainers.

*Brauntex Performing Arts Theatre, 290 W. San Antonio St. 830-627-0808; brauntex.org*

#### New Braunfels

##### **Wassailfest**

Dec. 6

The annual festival begins with the official toast to kick off the event and includes an evening of music, fun, food, great shopping, thousands of twinkling lights, and, of course, lots of free wassail to sample. *Main Plaza. 830-221-4000; nbtexas.org*

#### Round Top

##### **The Nutcracker Ballet**

Dec. 8

Round Top Festival Institute presents Tchaikovsky's classic holiday ballet. This year's production celebrates the 11th annual performance danced by Ovation Ballet Company, a youth ballet company in residency at Dancers Workshop in Austin. *Round Top Festival Institute, 248 Jaster Road. 979-249-3129; festivalhill.org*

#### Salado

##### **A Christmas Carol**

Nov. 30, Dec. 1, 7-8

Adapted for the stage by Harry Sweet, this classic play brings the audience into the Christmas spirit in a historic outdoor venue. Concessions are open for hot chocolate, funnel cakes, and other goodies. *Tablerock Amphitheatre, 409 Royal St. 254-947-9205; tablerock.org*

#### San Antonio

##### **Ford Fiesta de las Luminarias**

Nov. 30-Dec. 16

More than 3,000 luminarias light the San Antonio River. This centuries-old tradition—originally consisting of a candle set in sand inside a small bag—today features thousands of bags with flickering LED candles during nine nights over three weekends. *San Antonio River Walk. thesanantonioriverwalk.com/events*

#### San Antonio

##### **Ford Holiday Boat Caroling**

Nov. 30-Dec. 21

Four to six boats float on the river each night carrying a different group each hour performing live Christmas carols. More than 185 school, church, company, and civic choral groups participate each year. *San Antonio River Walk. thesanantonioriverwalk.com/events*

#### Sealy

##### **Fantasy of Lights**

Nov. 30-Jan. 2

The holly, jolly event includes a lighted parade, real snow, live music and entertainment, a barbecue cookoff, train rides, specialty booths, vendors, a 5K fun run, a petting zoo, and Santa Claus. *Abe and Irene Levine Family Park, 406 Main St. 979-885-3222; sealycommunityfoundation.org*

#### Stonewall

##### **LBI Tree Lighting**

Dec. 16

This 49th annual celebration offers carolers, a live nativity, Santa Claus, refreshments, and a spectacular tree lighting. *Lyndon B. Johnson State Park and Historic Site, 199 Park Road 52. 830-644-2252; tpwd.texas.gov/calendar/lyndon-b-johnson*

#### Waco

##### **Waco Wonderland**

Nov. 30-Dec. 2

Kick off the holiday season in downtown Waco where you'll find a Ferris wheel, live music, food, art vendors, carriage rides, visits with Santa, a holiday parade, and a snow hill for kids. *Heritage Square, 300 Austin Ave. 254-750-5627; wacowonderland.com*

#### Waco

##### **Dr Pepper Christmas**

Dec. 7

Bring the whole family for a holly, jolly good time filled with musical entertainment, Christmas crafts, and food. Santa makes an appearance. *Dr Pepper Museum and Free Entrance Institute, 300 S. Fifth St. 254-757-1025; drpeppermuseum.com*

#### Washington

##### **Christmas on the Brazos**

Dec. 8

Walk the candlelit paths at Barrington Farm and experience a Texas Christmas in the decade before the Civil War. Costumed interpreters bring holiday traditions to life with musket-fire, music, and dancing. Tour the historic home of the last president of the Republic, Dr. Anson Jones, as the family enjoys their Christmas gathering. Reservations are strongly encouraged. *Washington-on-the-Brazos State Historic Site, 23400 Park Road 12. 936-878-2214; visitbrenhantexas.com*

#### Wimberley

##### **Trail of Lights**

Nov. 24-Dec. 28

Stroll a walking path with more than 100 lighted exhibits with live

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entertainment and marshmallow roasting. *EmilyAnn Theatre and Gardens*, 1101 FM 2325, 512-847-2201; [emilyann.org](http://emilyann.org)

**Wimberley  
Blue Christmas**  
Dec. 15

This annual event features horse carriage rides, an ugly sweater contest, a roaring fire, local music groups leading carols, hot chocolate, Santa, and blue lights everywhere. *Blue Hole Regional Park*, 100 Blue Hole Lane, 512-660-9111; [facebook.com/blueholeregionalpark](http://facebook.com/blueholeregionalpark)

**NORTH TEXAS**

**Addison  
Vitruvian Lights**  
Nov. 23-Jan. 1

More than 1.5 million sparkling LED lights transform the park into a holiday wonderland. The lights remain on every evening, and every Saturday guests can enjoy live music, photos with Santa, an elf balloon artist, gourmet food trucks, desserts, and retail booths for gift browsing. *Vitruvian Park*, 3875

Ponte Ave. 800-233-4766; visit [addison.com](http://addison.com) or [vitruvianpark.com](http://vitruvianpark.com)

**Arlington  
Holiday in the Park**  
Nov. 16-Dec. 31

Celebrate the most magical time of the year with enchanting experiences that help create special family-fun outings. *Six Flags Over Texas*, 2201 E. Road to Six Flags St. 817-640-8900; [sixflags.com/over texas](http://sixflags.com/over texas)

**Arlington  
Enchant: The World's Largest  
Christmas Light Maze & Market**  
Nov. 23-Dec. 30

Enchant features an ice-skating rink and more than two acres of lighted Christmas mazes and displays. Enjoy winter-themed drinks while browsing through the vendor village and visit Santa with the kids. *Globe Life Park*, 1000 Ballpark Way, 866-760-8324; [enchantchristmas.com](http://enchantchristmas.com)

**Arlington  
Holiday Lights Parade**  
Dec. 8

Spend time with family and friends by setting up camp along the

parade route to enjoy hot chocolate and sounds of the season. The tree lighting follows the parade. *Downtown Holiday Light Parade*, [holidaylightparade.com](http://holidaylightparade.com)

**Big Spring  
Comanche Trail Festival of Lights**  
Dec. 2-25

The trail boasts more than a million lights. Visit the gift shop and mark your calendars for Santa's visits to the festival. *Comanche Trail Park*, 100 Whipkey Drive, 432-263-8235; [visitbigspring.com](http://visitbigspring.com)

**Dallas  
Zoo Lights**  
Nov. 16-Jan. 1

The zoo transforms into a winter wonderland with more than 1 million twinkling lights illuminating the zoo throughout the holiday season. *Dallas Zoo*, 650 S. R.L. Thornton Freeway, 469-554-7500; [dallaszoo.com](http://dallaszoo.com)

**Denton  
Wassail Weekend**  
Nov. 30-Dec. 1

The Denton Main Street Association merchants host this event during

the Friday of Denton's Holiday Lighting Festival and hold special tasting times again the day after. Wassail is an old English word for hot cider. Some downtown merchants stir up their best recipe to give free tastings for all ages during the city's annual holiday festivities. More merchants hold tastings that Saturday to win a coveted Wassail crown. Visitors are encouraged to taste the secret recipes of the warm holiday-spiced punch and then cast a vote for their favorite. *Downtown Denton Square*, 110 W. Hickory St. 940-349-8529; [dentonmainstreet.org](http://dentonmainstreet.org)

**Fort Worth  
Christmas in the Stockyards**  
Dec. 1

Start the holiday season with a Western twist and enjoy fun activities with the whole family including armadillo races, face painting, live Western music, story time with Mrs. Claus, photos with Santa, chuckwagon poetry, and a Western Christmas parade to end the evening. *Fort Worth Stockyards*, 131 E. Exchange Ave. 817-625-9715; [fortworthstockyards.com](http://fortworthstockyards.com)



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**Holiday at  
the Arboretum**

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**Featuring 12 Days of Christmas  
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in The DeGolyer House**

Elaborate 25-foot-tall Victorian gazebos, 500,000 holiday lights and over 500 creches from private collections never seen by the public on display in the elaborately decorated DeGolyer House. Also open Wednesday-Sunday evenings.

**The Dallas Morning News** **WFAA**

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The Dallas Arboretum is a non-profit organization supported, in part, by funds from Dallas Park & Recreation.



## Grand Prairie

### Prairie Lights

Nov. 22-Dec. 30

This annual holiday event runs nightly with a two-mile drive featuring 4 million lights and new custom displays. Carnival rides, a holiday show, and a walk-thru are included with entrance fee. Kids of all ages can enjoy carnival rides and a hot cup of cocoa in the Holiday Village. Lynn Creek Park, 5610 Lake Ridge Parkway. 972-237-4569; prairielights.org

## Grapevine

### Christmas Capital of Texas

Nov. 19-Jan. 1

With more than 1,400 events in over 40 days, Grapevine's charming Christmas setting makes the city a must-visit Texas destination of the season. Enjoy ICE! at the Gaylord Texan, Scuba Diving Santa at SEA LIFE Grapevine Aquarium, the North Pole Express on the Grapevine Vintage Railroad, millions of twinkling lights, enormous decorations, Christmas photo opportunities, and more. Various locations. 817-410-3185; grapevinetexasusa.com/ christmas-capital-of-texas

## McKinney

### Holidays at the Heard

Dec. 14-15

Guests can see lights and holiday decor along a half-mile nature trail. In keeping with the Heard's role as a nature preserve, this light display is designed to enhance rather than overpower the sanctuary's natural beauty. Take a photo with Father Christmas and Mother Nature in a festive setting, listen to live holiday music, and enjoy hot beverages and treats. Heard Museum, 1 Nature Place. 972-562-5566; heardmuseum.org/holidays

## Plano

### Lantern Light—A Victorian Holiday

Dec. 8

Stroll around four acres amidst the glow of lantern light and delight in wagon rides, historic demonstrations, storytelling by the North 40 Story Tellers, scrumptious treats, unique children's crafts, and a visit with Santa Claus. Tour the Great Depression exhibit and holiday décor in the Farrell Wilson House. Strolling carolers and school choirs are scheduled throughout the event in the Historic Pole Barn, presenting songs of the season. Heritage Farmstead Museum, 1900 W. 15th St. 972-881-0140; heritagefarmstead.org/events

## Richardson

### A Holiday Celebration of Hope and Unity

Dec. 11

Featuring the world-renowned Sonos Handbell Ensemble, famed mezzo-soprano Frederica Von Stade, and the Dallas Street Choir—which is comprised of those experiencing homelessness—this musical holiday show brings diverse inspirational talents to one concert. Eisemann Center, 2351 Performance Drive. 972-744-4650; eisemanncenter.com

## Wichita Falls

### MSU—Burns Fantasy of Lights

Nov. 19-Dec. 29

One of the largest holiday displays of its kind, this light show provides a festive holiday atmosphere on the Midwestern State University campus to serve as an outreach to the community, and to be a focal point for holiday activities in North Texas. The event draws about 200,000 visitors annually and is filled with individual displays that showcase characters from well-known children's stories, fairy tales, and holiday themes. Midwestern State University, 3410 Taft Blvd. 940-397-4972; fol.mwsu.edu

## EAST TEXAS

## Conroe

### Lake Conroe Christmas Boat Parade

Dec. 8

Have a boat? Decorate it and join the parade. Have a lakefront home? Throw a party, and have a merry time. Don't have a boat? Join in at the restaurants around the lake for their festivities and watch the parade. The event raises money for local kids in need. Lake Conroe Park, 14968 SH 105 West. 936-522-3500; livelakeconroe.com/christmasboatparade

## Marshall

### Wonderland of Lights

Nov. 21-Dec. 30

Millions of white lights illuminate the historic Harrison County Courthouse as downtown Marshall is transformed into a winter wonderland featuring two trains, a vintage carousel, real outdoor ice skating, and horse-drawn carriages. In the free Santa's Village, decorate a cookie, build a toy, and visit with the big guy himself. Live entertainment is featured nightly with special events on Saturdays. Downtown, 1 Peter Whetstone Square. 903-702-7777; marshalltexas.com

## THE DAYTRIPPER'S TOP 5

# Pflugerville

Pfantastic food and family fun

BY CHET GARNER



### Known for being stuck between a rock and a weird place

(Round Rock and Austin), Pflugerville may seem like just another suburb. But hidden among the urban sprawl is a small town full of budding entrepreneurs working to make this *pfunnily* named community a deluxe daytripper destination.

## 1 Brotherton's Black Iron Barbecue

The only thing that's traditional about this barbecue joint is the wood they use to smoke their meats (post oak). Everything else is way outside the fire box. Skip the three-meat plate and order one of its Texas-inspired sandwiches, such as the Reuben with smoked brisket pastrami and housemade sauerkraut, or the Vietnamese brisket banh mi with housemade kimchi. 15608 Spring Hill Lane, Suite 105. 512-547-4766; blackironeats.com

## 2 Central Texas BMX

This public bicycle motocross track is a collaboration with Travis County Parks to provide a place for newcomers and pros alike to push their biking limits with races and private lessons multiple times a week. I was nervous the first time I dropped down the 5-meter Olympic-style starting hill, but after a few laps, I was flying over obstacles and living out my childhood dream. 5001 Killingsworth Lane. 512-348-8269; centraltexasbmx.com

## 3 Spirit of Texas Distillery

The spirit of Texas is hard to describe, unless it's poured into a glass. Started by a couple of homebrewers with homemade stills, this distillery makes use of something Texas has plenty of—heat—to create top-shelf spirits that go down as smooth as Southern molasses. Visitors can get a tour and sample handcrafted cocktails. I highly suggest The Daytripper, made with single-malt whiskey, lemonade, and Texas blackberry juice. Of course, I might be a little biased. 1715 Dalshank St. 512-989-9292; spiritoftx.com

## 4 Taste of Ethiopia

Texas is known for its diverse food, but Ethiopian cuisine doesn't often make the list. Savory dishes ranging from chicken to lamb are served family-style on a huge platter and are traditionally eaten with only your hands and injera, a tortilla-like sour flatbread. The collage of colors and textures may look overwhelming, but trust me, your taste buds will thank you. 1100 Grand Avenue Parkway. 512-251-4053; tasteofethiopiaaustin.com

## 5 Heritage House Museum

If you're wondering how a town gets a name like Pflugerville, this museum can help. Named for German farmer Henry Pfluger, Pflugerville's farming roots run deep. Located in the home of Gottlieb Bohls—one of this town's founding fathers—this museum is filled with personal items and photos donated by local families. My favorite is a WWI helmet marked with a bullet hole through the middle. Luckily, this local boy survived to tell the tale. 901 Old Austin Hutto Road. 512-990-6377; pflugervilletx.gov/heritagehouse

Whether you follow my footsteps or forge your own path,  
I hope to see you on the road.

Chet Garner is the host of The Daytripper® travel show on PBS. To view the Pflugerville episode visit thedaytripper.com. Follow along on Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter @chetripper.



**DON'T SEE YOUR EVENT?** If you think your event might be of interest to *Texas Highways* readers, submit your information at [texashighways.com/submit-event](http://texashighways.com/submit-event)

**Palestine**

**Polar Express Train Ride**

Nov. 17-Dec. 27

Read along with the story as the historic steam train makes its magical round-trip journey from the Palestine Depot to the North Pole. Meet Santa and enjoy caroling, hot cocoa, treats, and gifts. *Texas State Railroad Depot, Park Road 70. 855-632-7729; texasstaterailroad.net*

**Tyler**

**Santa Land Drive-Through Christmas Park**

Through Jan. 4

Experience the sights and sounds of Christmas with more than 2.5 million lights. Attendees can take a ride on Santa's Trailer or remain in the warmth of their vehicles as they drive through Santa Land's 24 acres of unforgettable adventure designed for the entire family. Before leaving, guests can shop the 4,000-square-foot gift shop. *Santa Land, 11455 I-20 West. 903-882-1518; santalandtylertx.com*

**SOUTH TEXAS / GULF COAST**

**Goliad**

**Christmas in Goliad**

Nov. 30-Dec. 1

Attend a lighted parade around Goliad County. All floats are lighted and arrive from counties in the area. Santa rides in on a Longhorn, and children can have their picture taken on the steer. Live music accompanies shopping on Friday and Saturday with more than 100 craft vendors on the square. *Goliad County Courthouse Square, 127 N. Courthouse Square. 361-645-8767*

**McAllen**

**McAllen Holiday Parade**

Dec. 1

This award-winning parade is the largest illuminated holiday and helium balloon parade in the Lone Star State. The parade features more than 50 vibrant lighted floats, more than 30 larger-than-life inflatable character balloons,

marching bands, and a celebrity-filled lineup. *McAllen Veterans Memorial Stadium, 2001 N. Bicentennial Blvd. 956-681-1200; mcallenholidayparade.com*

**Brownsville**

**Zoo Nights and Lights**

Dec. 7-9

Live performances from local bands and choirs accompany dazzling displays of approximately 135 lighted animal and holiday fixtures along with 800 luminaria bags placed all around the zoo grounds. Admission is free with the donation of a new, unwrapped toy for the Toys for Tots campaign. *Glady's Porter Zoo, 500 E. Ringold St. 956-546-7187; gpz.org*

**Corpus Christi**

**Festival Navideño**

Dec. 8

Learn the Christmas traditions of different Hispanic cultures, join the Corpus Christi Mayor for the lighting of the Christmas tree, take a picture with Santa Claus, shop arts and crafts, and enjoy the kid's activities. *Heritage Park, 1581 N. Chaparral St. 361-879-0336; culturalhispaniccorpuschristi.org*

**Galveston**

**Winter Wonder Island**

Nov. 17-Jan. 6

Galveston becomes the "Winter Wonder Island" of Texas with more than 50 days of holiday events including Ice Land, a frosty playground featuring 2 million pounds of carved ice including a giant glacier slide; Festival of Lights, a mile-long trail featuring more than 1 million lights; and the 45th annual Dickens on the Strand, a holiday street festival in the style of Victorian London. *Various locations. galveston.com/holidaymagic*

**Galveston**

**All Is Calm: The Christmas Truce of 1914**

Dec. 9

This heartrending retelling of a powerful historic event recounts the astounding moment during World War I when Allied forces and German soldiers laid down their arms to celebrate Christmas Day 1914 together, sharing food and drink, singing carols, and playing soccer. *All is Calm* weaves first-hand accounts by World War I soldiers with patriotic tunes, trench songs, and Christmas carols. The Grand 1894 Opera House, 2020

Postoffice St. 800-821-1894 or 409-765-1894; [thegrand.com](http://thegrand.com)

**Houston**

**Zoo Lights**

Nov. 17-Jan. 13

Every winter, the Houston Zoo and its more than 6,000 animals get that festive feeling when the park undergoes its annual holiday makeover with more than 2 million lights—a 15-mile display of eco-friendly LED lighting. Visitors can enjoy festive carols, hot chocolate, and Holly Berry: a 1958 Cadillac with a lightshow set to music. A 33-foot-tall Christmas tree adorned with colorful decorations provides the ideal backdrop for holiday selfies. *Houston Zoo, 6200 Hermann Park Drive. 713-533-6500; houstonzoo.org*

**La Marque**

**Magical Winter Lights**

Nov. 16-Jan. 6

This 52-day festival is one of the largest holiday lighting events in the Houston area and the largest lantern festival of its kind in the U.S. The festival features eight themed sections including the festival's newest sections: The Ice and The Sea. The Ice section features a second magical castle and shows guests what it is like living in the Ice Sisters' world. The Sea takes visitors to an undersea world filled with coral, fish, mermaids, and hungry sharks. The festival also includes a Holiday Market Square, plenty of photo opportunities with appearances by the Ice Sisters and Santa Claus, nightly acrobatic performances, authentic arts and crafts created by skilled Chinese artisans, amusement rides and games, and an expanded dinosaur exhibit complete with dinosaur rides. *Gulf Greyhound Park, 1000 FM 2004. 888-560-5853; magicalwinterlights.com*

**Richmond**

**Children's Campfire Christmas**

Dec. 14

Participate in fun Christmas crafts, take a hayride through the park, and sing Christmas songs around the campfire. *George Ranch Historical Park, 10215 FM 762. 281-343-0218; geogeranch.org*

**Rockport**

**Tropical Christmas**

Dec. 1

Celebrate the season with food, vendors, arts and crafts, entertain-

STATEMENT OF OWNERSHIP, MANAGEMENT, AND CIRCULATION (required by 39 USC 3685) filed September 4, 2018, for *TEXAS HIGHWAYS* magazine, publication number 3857-70, published monthly, 12 issues annually for an annual subscription price of \$24.95, by the Texas Department of Transportation, P.O. Box 141009, Austin, Travis County, Texas 78714-1009, contact person Sabrina Ballesteros, telephone 512-486-5881, located at 150 E. Riverside Drive, Austin, Travis County, Texas 78704, Publisher: Andrea Lin, P.O. Box 141009, Austin, Travis County, Texas 78714-1009, Executive Editor: Emily Stone, P.O. Box 141009, Austin, Texas 78714-1009.

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I certify that the statements made by me above are correct and complete. Signed: Andrea Lin, Publisher 09/04/2018

I certify that all information furnished on this form is true and complete. I understand that anyone who furnishes false or misleading information on this form or who omits material or information requested on the form may be subject to criminal sanctions (including fines and imprisonment) and/or civil sanctions (including multiple damages and civil penalties).





ment, games, and Santa Claus. Along with the evening festivities, enjoy an illuminated land parade, the lighting of the Christmas tree, and fireworks. Rockport Harbor Area, 101 Seabreeze Drive. 361-727-2158

**South Padre Island  
Holiday Sand Castle Village**  
Nov. 30–Dec. 16

Celebrate Christmas the South Padre Island way: with holiday-inspired sand sculptures built by talented sand artists—from a sand snowman to Sand-ta. South Padre Island Convention Centre, 7355 Padre Blvd. 956-761-3000; [sopadre.com](http://sopadre.com)

**South Padre Island  
Lighted Boat Parade**  
Dec. 1

Enjoy a cool winter breeze and watch as boats of all sizes cruise by decorated in their holiday finest. South Point Marina, 500 S. Point Ave. 956-761-5467; [sopadre.com](http://sopadre.com)

**Sugar Land  
Sugar Land Holiday Lights**  
Nov. 23–Jan. 1

Enjoy views of more than 2.5 million lights, Santa Claus every night, holiday treats and shopping vendors, and more. Constellation Field, 1 Stadium Drive. 281-240-4487

**WEST TEXAS**

**El Paso  
WinterFest**  
Nov. 18–Jan. 6

The Downtown Arts Festival Plaza and surrounding areas come to life with lights, food, holiday shopping, festivities, and the coolest thing of all: an outdoor ice-skating rink near the Plaza Theatre. Downtown. [epwinterfest.com](http://epwinterfest.com)

**Midland  
Christmas Wonderland Holiday Spectacular**  
Dec. 10

This holiday show features glittering costumes, a dazzling cast, and the highest kicking chorus girls this side of the North Pole. Santa and his merry helpers embark on an unforgettable nostalgic journey with favorite holiday tunes like "White Christmas," "Winter Wonderland," "Have Yourself a Merry Little Christmas," "The Christmas Song," and "Jingle Bells." Wagner Noël Performing Arts Center, 1310 N. FM 1788. 432-552-4452; [wagnernoel.com](http://wagnernoel.com)

**Midland  
A Very Electric Christmas**  
Dec. 29

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**San Angelo  
Concho Christmas Celebration**  
Nov. 30–Dec. 31

The 25th annual celebration and Tour of Lights has grown into a 2.5-

mile drive along the banks of the Concho River featuring more than 3 million twinkling lights. The month-long holiday event consists of a live nativity scene, the community tree lighting ceremony, the Lights of Christmas parade, a bicycle ride with Santa; a walk/run event; the annual Tuba Christmas concert, an FM radio broadcast, and an extraordinary light show. Concho River, Downtown, West First Street, and Park Drive. 325-944-4444; [conchochristmascelebration.com](http://conchochristmascelebration.com)

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For a free printed copy of an even more detailed, quarterly schedule of events, go to [texashighways.com/freepubs](http://texashighways.com/freepubs); write to Texas Highways Events Calendar, P.O. Box 149249, Austin, TX 78714-9249; or call 800-452-9292 from anywhere in the U.S. or Canada, between 8 a.m.–6 p.m. Central.

For Texas travel questions, call 800-452-9292 to reach a TxDOT Travel Information Center, where a professional travel counselor will provide routing assistance, advise you of road conditions, and send you free brochures (including the official Texas State Travel Guide, the Texas Official Travel Map, and the quarterly Texas Highways Events Calendar).

To submit event information, visit [texashighways.com/submitevent](http://texashighways.com/submitevent).

**Listing deadlines:**  
Spring (March, April, May): Dec. 1  
Summer (June, July, Aug.): March 1  
Fall (Sept., Oct., Nov.): June 1  
Winter (Dec., Jan., Feb.): Sept. 1.



JUNE							2019
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OPEN ROAD | continued from Page 15

there for the throngs of point-and-click day trippers.

In Terlingua, I enjoy surprisingly good brisket at the Starlight Theatre and head to my shelter as the fading sun spills pink across the horizon. I'm staying at a place called Nuevo Terlingua, a serious upgrade from the previous night, with glossy cement floors and chic desert design. The piece de resistance is an outdoor bathtub hidden behind a stone wall.

When it is good and dark, I pour liquid soap under the running water till the porcelain bath piles with foam, and I slip inside. A few hours up the road, McDonald Observatory is one of the best spots in the country for stargazing. I feel the cool breeze against my skin as I trace patterns in the sky: Orion's Belt, the Big Dipper, the stories that once organized the world. The stars are so bright they pulsate, like pinholes punched into black velvet. In my many years of wandering, rarely have I enjoyed a moment this pure—nothing between me and eternity.

**I WAKE UP EARLY** the next morning and watch a millipede slither across the floor as the Keurig brews my coffee. I slide a piece of paper underneath the little guy, and he rolls up into a ball as I place him on the front porch. By the time I lug my suitcase out an hour later, he's on his way to somewhere else, just like me.

I drive up State Highway 118 and west on US 90 to Marfa, the trendiest part of West Texas. I eat avocado toast at a spot where two would-be models talk about a killer party the night before. A British woman enters in a mesh body suit, and I struggle not to stare, though I suppose staring is the goal of that get-up. I enjoy Marfa, a quirky little town, but it's starting to feel less like a part of Texas rediscovered and more like a section of Brooklyn relocated. Sometimes I want to interrupt the day-drinking and vintage shopping and ask: Do you people have jobs?

I'm not complaining that Marfa is overrated; I'm complaining that the rest of West Texas is underrated. Take Alpine, for instance, a 25-mile drive east. I arrive

to downtown Alpine shortly after dark. I park easily on the street and join a friend at a down-home bar, The Ritchey, where patrons unwind on the back patio with craft beers. We venture upstairs into a room that looks like a library, where we sit on velvet couches for nearly two hours without anyone bothering us. Heaven.

We get to talking about highway travel. My friend asks if I've driven River Road. I confess I've never heard of it. "You can't go home without driving River Road," she insists, so I quickly shift my itinerary to accommodate one final trip that she will join me on. It is not lost on me that the most spectacular part of my journey is neither planned nor my idea.

River Road refers to the part of FM 170 that stretches between Lajitas and Presidio along the Texas-Mexico border. It is a grand roller coaster that is so no-joke my stomach drops out twice as we crest a hill, a moment of perilous hangtime before my eyes find the road again.

We pull into a scenic overlook and walk to the crumbling cliff's edge and peer down to the Rio Grande, muddy and slow-moving in the heat of the afternoon. How much hope and grief and controversy had swirled in those waters, and how small it is up close.

"Hi Mexico," my friend says, waving to the mountains.

"Hi Mexico," I say, and wave, too.

What I love about West Texas is the way it connects you to something beyond yourself. To the country you live beside. To the earth, the mountains, the stars.

Probably what bothered me most about growing up in Texas was the idea that being here meant one thing about me—that I looked and sounded a certain way, voted a certain way, thought a certain way. But this state is totally unpredictable. There are just so many of us here.

Back in the car, I crank Merle Haggard as we barrel down the highway together, singing along as our Topo Chicos rattle in the cup holders. As much as I have gained from solo travel, I think I prefer when someone else is along for the ride. It has been a long and lovely trip. There's only one thing left to do—head home. **L**





# The Hostess with the Mostest

Checking in with taste-making Austin hotelier Liz Lambert

By Michael Hoinski

**P**enny the Chihuahua greets visitors with an inspection sniff outside the elevator leading to Bunkhouse, the Austin-based hospitality company owned by Odessa native Liz Lambert. From the third-floor workspace, windows overlook South Congress Avenue, home to Lambert's Hotel San José and Jo's Coffee. Lambert opened both establishments roughly 20 years ago, transforming this once-seedy thoroughfare into a hot spot for tourists and locals alike.

Ephemera tacked on Lambert's office wall documents her story. There's an early sketch of El Cosmico, the trailer and teepee grounds in Marfa that she opened in 2009. There's a thank-you note from *New York Times* columnist Maureen Dowd after a stay at San José.

**"Our approach thus far is opening hotels that matter, that become part of the fabric of the neighborhood."**

There's also a composite illustration of a sensuous woman rendered in a psychedelic swirl. "This is a spirit image for the Magdalena," Lambert says.

The Magdalena, a 95-room hotel scheduled to open in late 2019 a block off South Congress, is Lambert's latest offering in a portfolio that extends beyond Texas. The list includes the Austin Motel and Hotel Saint Cecilia in Austin, Hotel Havana in San Antonio, Phoenix Hotel in San Francisco, and Hotel San Cristóbal in Baja California, Mexico.

Lambert's properties are known for being anti-cookie cutter. Her artistic flair and calculated approach to the guest experience are known to attract the cultural elite. Houston natives Beyoncé and her sister Solange Knowles famously stayed in one of El Cosmico's restored Spartan trailers in 2012, posting glamorous images along the way.

In some cases these encounters have led to lasting friendships—whether with actress Connie Britton, whom Lambert trades stories with about Odessa and *Friday Night Lights*, or musician and actress Carrie Brownstein, who officiated Lambert's wedding. That's the life of the hostess with the mostest.

**Q:** How did you get into the hotel business?

**A:** I used to be a lawyer. From the University of Texas law school I went to New York, where I was a trial lawyer in the district attorney's office. In the mid '90s, after a couple years there, I came back to Austin. Then I worked at the attorney general's office here, but I decided that I wanted to do something different. I would hang out at the Continental Club, and there was a little motel across the street—the San José Motel at the time. At that point it was seafoam green and probably hadn't had a renovation since the early '70s. I finally worked up my courage one day to ask the owners if they would ever be interested in selling it—kind of on a whim. And it just happened serendipitously that they were about to put it in the newspaper for sale.



**Q:** *What was your vision?*

**A:** I was just going to redo the rooms and keep going on about my business. But it turned out there was no way to attract people who wanted to stay in a cheap motel because those people were all along the highway, at the Motel 6 and stuff. And so to do a cheap renovation room by room was tough because the kind of clientele that we had at the time were people who were down on their luck, or people who were living outside of the law a little bit. I realized I had to shut the doors and do a bigger renovation to reset everything. It was a lot more than I had initially thought I was going to do, so I was almost an accidental motelier.

**Q:** *What's your hospitality philosophy?*

**A:** Our approach thus far is opening hotels that matter, that become part of the fabric of the neighborhood. Something that the locals like as much as a traveler would. Something that's not trendy, or that doesn't need to be redone and reimaged every few years, but something that becomes more interesting the longer it is in a place—and the more layers that accrue. So, I guess it's to build meaningful places. I'm from West Texas, and to me a hotel was always part of the community. My granddad was a rancher, so he did a lot of his business in hotel lobbies.

**Q:** *What was it like growing up in Odessa?*

**A:** I lived through that oil boom in the '80s. I grew up in the world of Pop Warner football and malls and driving the car around on a Friday night and going to the Taco Villa and, you know, the Permian Panthers.

**Q:** *Where did you get the idea for El Cosmico?*

**A:** It was a business model that allowed us to expand and contract. So, if there were a thousand people in town, they could all stay there if they wanted because they could camp. And

then if nobody was in town, you could contract a bit. It can adjust to what the town needs because it can be either super busy or crickets. I also realized one of the magical things about being in Marfa, in Far West Texas in general, was being out under the night sky and the stars.

**Q:** *Why is Marfa a cool place to visit?*

**A:** It has great bones of beautiful bungalow houses. It's temperate. It's the high desert. Cool nights in the heat of Texas. I think a lot of people are drawn to kind of the myth of the American West. We have *Giant*. So I think it's all of those things. I think you probably wouldn't have Marfa the way it is today if it weren't for Donald Judd, the artist. He was a big influence on so much—where art and architecture and design all come together.

**Q:** *There's always someone taking a selfie with the "I love you so much" mural at Jo's Coffee. What's the story behind it?*

**A:** An ex-girlfriend of mine painted it. It came about because we were in a fight. I was having lunch down the street, and she came by in broad daylight and just tagged the building. I didn't notice it until the next day when I was coming down Congress. Our head of maintenance called me and said, "Don't worry; we're just about to get this." And I'm like, "No, leave it for the day. Just leave it for a couple of days because it's such a nice message." And then it took on a life of its own. I swear you can't drive by that corner without somebody taking a picture. People have gotten married underneath it.

**Q:** *Are you concerned that the new Magdalena Hotel will contribute to overdevelopment on South Congress?*

**A:** The fact that South Congress has become such a desirable place to shop or eat or drink means inevitably that rents are going up. And so that means that all the charming things that made South Congress great, funky, and

bohemian—all of those small businesses are in the fight for their lives to be able to pay rents. Rents are becoming so expensive in this town that some of the very people who make this an incredible place to live are being priced out of living in Austin. It's heartbreaking because it's changing the fabric of the place. But look, you can't stop change. You can try to influence it. I changed the San José, and a lot of people told me at the time, you're going to displace all these folks living there. And that was true. I tried to do it the best way I could.

**Q:** *What are some hotels outside of your own that you adore?*

**A:** We took a trip a few years ago to two places that I really love on the Amalfi Coast—a hotel called Il San Pietro from the 1970s and one called Le Sirenuse from the 1950s. They're the kind of places that have just been layered and layered upon, and it's a moment in time. I want to see everything [New York hotelier] Sean MacPherson does right when it opens. I love his eye for detail and his thoughtfulness of lobbies.

**Q:** *When you book a trip, what's on your checklist for a hotel?*

**A:** I am impossible. There are so many things I want—room service for the most part. I want a place that's interesting. It has to be thoughtful—somebody has thought about the bed I am sleeping in and whether I can get a decent cup of coffee in the morning. That can go from 2-star to 5-star. It does not have to be expensive or have been around a long time. It's the location, and it's the point of view of the place as well. My wife thinks I'm a terrible person to travel with in some regards because I can't stop. I can't turn the OCD off. I'm a critic, for sure, but I'm also a huge fan. **L**

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# VINTAGE



## Capital City Christmas

1947

**A**ustin had a population of about 115,000 when photographer Neal Douglass took this picture of Congress Avenue looking north to the Texas State Capitol on New Year's Day 1947. The streetscape has changed over the past 71 years, and Austin has grown 10-fold to about 1 million people. But the electric Paramount Theatre sign, which was replaced in 2015, and the State Capitol building, which was completed in 1888, still anchor the storied strip. **R**

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