

★ TEXAS

# TRAVEL LOG

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- ★ Wildflowers get spotlight in events, guide and magazine
- ★ Garner State Park secures more land, popular Old Baldy bluffs
- ★ Bastrop named among distinctive destinations by National Trust for Historic Preservation



Amarillo's American Quarter Horse Hall of Fame & Museum showcases 16 spectacular saddles in the exhibit *Art of the Western Saddle: A Celebration of Design, Style and Grace*.

creativity, as well as a sign of wealth and status.

"We are so lucky to have this rich, varied and aesthetically beautiful jewelry collection at the El Paso Museum of Art," says museum Director Michael Tomor, Ph.D. "It's a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to see this exhibit without traveling."

Highlights of the exhibit include works from the ancient world, such as two pendants in the form of rams' heads demonstrating the development in multicolored glass production by the fifth century B.C.E. and the Plique-a-jour enamel and sapphire pansy brooch created by renowned Art Nouveau designer Rene Lalique. One of the most admired objects in the collection is a bracelet from Olbia (present-day Ukraine) in the first century B.C.E., which is decorated with gold granulation and set with colorful gemstones backed with gold foil.

Treasures from the Renaissance era and early centuries B.C.E. Egypt and Greece are represented, as well as items like the 19th-century imperial, ceremonial Chinese headdress with designs of phoenixes, butterflies and peaches crafted of gilded silver, kingfisher feathers, silk thread, pearls, rubies and glass beads.

The Walters collection is the most wide-ranging collection of jewelry assembled by a private collector in

## AGELESS ARTISTRY

**T**HE SADDLE has served its purpose for the American cowboy in form and function, but a new exhibit at **Amarillo's American Quarter Horse Hall of Fame & Museum** is showcasing the **art form and craftsmanship** involved with the exhibit *Art of the Western Saddle: A Celebration of Design, Style and Grace*.

This celebration of the Western saddle focuses on the unique design, craftsmanship and grace involved in merging silver, gold and leather. That spotlight shines on 16 saddles from private collections and museums across the country.

"The exhibit is so impressive, it took me off guard," says Amarillo Convention and Visitor Council Director of Communications Eric Miller.

Longtime western journalist and historian, William Reynolds curated the exhibit based on his award-winning book, "The Art of the Western Saddle," which was named the American Horse Publication's

Equine Book of the Year in 2004.

The American Quarter Horse Hall of Fame and Museum Director Ross Middleton says, "This exhibit brings together some of the finest examples of this genre of saddlery ever assembled."

The saddle had to be light, durable and fitted to keep the rider on board all while not impeding the horse's movements. The saddle horn also had to be strong enough to withstand the weight and strength of an 800-pound roped steer. Beyond mastering that function, saddle makers were also charged with personalization that included embellishments and artistry.

The Autry Center of the American West, Buffalo Bill Historical Center, Carriage and Western Art Museum of Santa Barbara, The Museum of the Cowboy, National Cowboy and Western Heritage Museum, and several individuals helped with this exhibit.

For more information, call (806) 376-5181 or visit [www.aqh.halloffame.com](http://www.aqh.halloffame.com).

**T**HE EL PASO Museum of Art is one of a few museums worldwide, and the only venue west of the Mississippi, to present **Bedazzled: 5,000 Years of Jewelry**, which features more than 150 unique pieces like Mesopotamian stone pendants, ancient Roman snake bracelet, ceremonial Chinese headdress and Tiffany & Co. diamond necklace. The masterpieces and hidden treasures, from the Walters Art Museum in Baltimore, will be on view from March 27-July 25.

With examples from 3,000 B.C.E. through the early 20th century, the exhibit explores the evolution of techniques and materials used to make the jewelry. It also demonstrates the importance of jewelry as an expression of

This 1st Century Greek bracelet from the Olbia Treasure is one of the many pieces featured in the *Bedazzled* exhibit in El Paso.

PHOTO COURTESY OF THE WALTERS ART MUSEUM COLLECTION.





the United States. Henry Walters (1848-1931) purchased many of the jewelry objects from various cultures and over five millennia, significantly expanding the efforts of his father, William T. Walters (1819-94), a railroad magnate in Baltimore who started the collection.

For more information, call (915) 532-1707 or visit [www.elpasoartmuseum.org](http://www.elpasoartmuseum.org).

**T**HE HOUSTON Museum of Natural Science looks beyond the illusions and secrecy to bring an exhibit that spotlights the art and science of magic, with *Magic: The Science of Wonder*.

The exhibit, which opened Feb. 26, examines how science and magic are intertwined through more than 100 artifacts, feature film and video clips of famous magicians, as well as guest illusionists' live performances.

"In a way, it's science that gives us the language to experience wonder. It's the head-on collision of the two that inspires an unexpected feeling within. That's what magic is all about for me," says Scott Cervine, guest curator of the Houston Museum of Natural Science. "It's no accident that magic's greatest innovators are often inventors or scientists first, who then become smitten with their own feeling of amazement and want to share it with a larger audience."

Visitors will see fire-eating torches, Harry Houdini's water escape trunk, Harry Blackstone's "Zig Zag Girl" prop, and props from other top magicians like Doug Henning and Penn & Teller.

*Magic: The Science of Wonder* showcases some of the earliest magicians, from the first century A.D. through today.

Exhibit areas include Hall of Principles and Women of Magic, as well as a live theater — quintessential magician's stage setup — built especially for this showcase. There also is a life-size replica of magician Alexander Herrmann's private train car that he used, along with his wife, to travel from town to town with his shows. Interested visitors can experience a mock séance led by the spirit of Adelaide.

The exhibit runs through Sept. 6. The museum recommends purchasing tickets online, as they are expected this exhibit to be popular.

For more information, call (713) 639-4629 or visit [www.hmns.org](http://www.hmns.org).

TADDO PHOTO



Spring is around the corner and the Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center is geared up for Wildflower Days celebrations.

## TRAVEL NEWS

**A**USTIN'S Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center is geared up to welcome spring blooms with **Wildflower Days** — a lineup of art, gardening and other public events beginning March 15. Events include *The Serendipity of Wildflowers 2010* photo exhibit, co-presented by *Texas Highways* magazine and Canon from May 3-9.

With a favorable amount of rain soaking drought-ridden landscapes, wildflower season is expected to be especially healthy this year, including a nice yield of bluebonnets, mountain laurel, redbud, Mexican plum and many other native plants.

The Wildflower Days celebration begins with the Artists & Artisan Festival (March 13-14); Spring Plant Sale & Gardening Festival (April 11); Wildflower Gala (April 30); *The Serendipity of Wildflowers 2010* photo exhibit; and Gardens on Tour of five public and private native plant gardens plus the Wildflower Center (May 8).

The Center also features a special Web cam — [www.wildflower.org/bbcam](http://www.wildflower.org/bbcam) — focused on a bluebonnet

patch, where site visitors can watch as the state flowers grow and bloom.

For information, call (512) 232-0100 or visit [www.wildflower.org](http://www.wildflower.org).

**T**EXASCAMPGROUNDS.COM has been revamped to make the task of finding a campground faster and easier for camping enthusiasts.

The most obvious change is an increase in the use of photos and tabs, which make the Web site more visually appealing while minimizing the need for scrolling.

"These changes and enhancements make the information easier to digest," says Brian Schaeffer, executive director and CEO of the Texas Association of Campground Owners.

The redesign, which coincides with the introduction of a new Texas Campgrounds logo, includes a new search function that shows listings of parks based on their distance from specific cities or points of interest. Photos, if available, also are included in the listing.

"More information is given to the consumer faster with this redesign," Schaeffer says.

"You can't ever lose sight of the

fact that it's a competitive world," Schaeffer says. "I think the traveler is becoming more sophisticated. We compete for tourism money. People have choices. If they go to hotel Web sites or other travel venue Web sites, we want to be able to stack up against those sites."

**S**OUTHWEST Airlines' "Bags Fly Free" policy has proven financially sound, as it has netted the Dallas-based company \$100s of millions in revenue from passengers.

CEO Gary Kelly said Bags Fly Free doesn't account for all that shift, but he had no doubt that it has played a major part.

Kelly said his airline is taking customers away from other carriers. Traffic grew even as Southwest offered fewer flights. He gave some of the credit to Southwest's heavily advertised bags-fly-free policy.

Other airlines began charging for checked luggage in 2008 when fuel prices rose, a plan Southwest opted against.

Today, it's the only large U.S. carrier that lets customers check two bags for free. Other airlines maintained the fees after fuel prices dropped. JetBlue passengers can still check their first bag free.

"It was something that just fell into our laps," Kelly says. "That is why you see traffic growth at Southwest at the same time that we're actually reducing capacity."

"I think it's hundreds of millions of dollars of benefits that we are getting by customers voting to come to Southwest Airlines," Kelly says.

If the trend continues, Kelly says Southwest might finish 2010 with revenue that can "even surpass the revenues we had in 2008."

## IN THE RANKS

**A**CCORDING to Priceline.com, Austin was among the top 20 most-booked Valentine's destinations. The online travel booking engine sorted more than 30,000 trip requests for the holiday weekend and found Austin came in as the 17th most-requested destination.

San Antonio was the only other city on the list at 24.

New Orleans topped the list, possibly in part to its proximity to Mardi Gras, Presidents Day and the Saints winning the Super Bowl.



**T**HE GRAND HYATT DFW and The Houstonian Hotel, Club & Spa came in at No. 5 and 9, respectively, on TripAdvisor.com's list of the top 25 hotels in the United States.

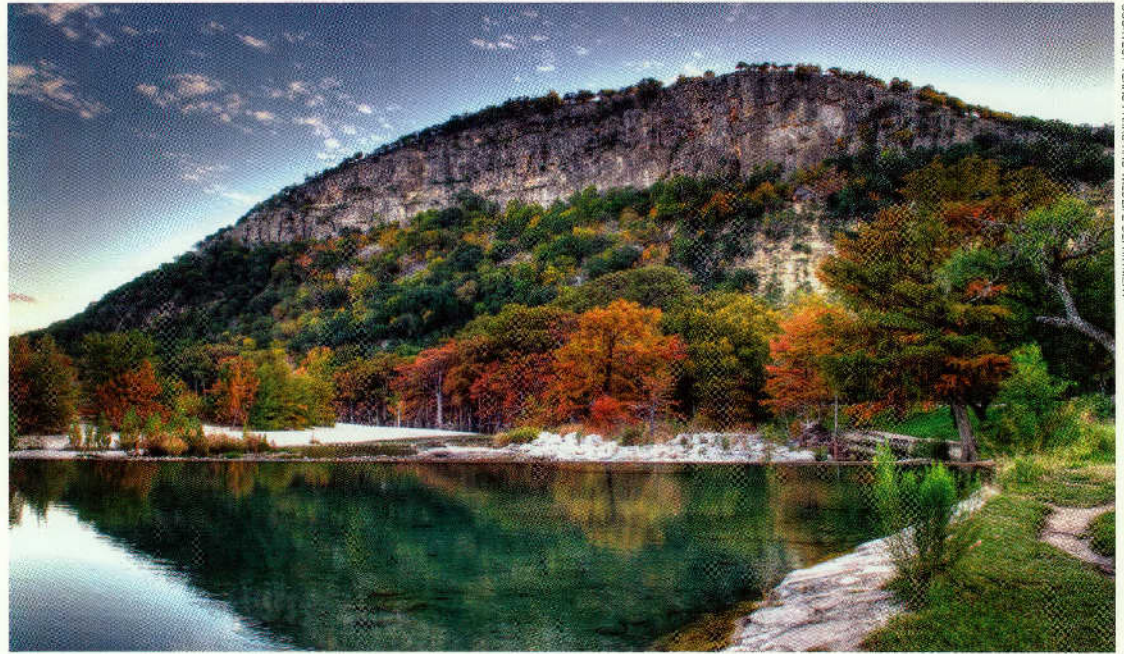
The ranking is based on reviews and opinions of more than 30 million travelers who use the free site. TripAdvisor's travel reviews are mostly provided by its users.

**O, GIMME LAND**

**V**ISITORS to Garner State Park in Concan have often enjoyed scenic views of the Frio River from a rocky bluff known as Old Baldy. Unbeknownst to most, though, that tract of land has mostly been privately owned property — until now.

The park is adding a 177-acre tract that includes the well-known bluffs, as part of a land deal with conservation-minded landowner, Barbara Muennink. This land is part of property that has been in the Muennink family for more than 80 years. Though the Muennink family has never restricted public access to the bluffs — which offer great views of the Frio River — they are selling the land at a bargain price in hopes of keeping the land in its natural state.

Located at the southernmost end of the park, the property also includes a hiking trail that climbs the 400-foot river bluff and an additional 210 feet of riverfront property — something



Land acquisition increases Garner State Park by 177 acres, including the bluffs known as Old Baldy, shown here.

that will be enjoyed by the park's annual average of 40,000 visitors.

The Texas Parks and Wildlife Commission approved the acquisition at its Jan. 28 meeting. Funds for the acquisition come from money allocated by the 81st Texas Legislature and a matching grant from the National Park Service's Land and Water Conservation Fund.

When this land deal is finalized, Garner State Park will encompass nearly 1,600 acres.

For more information, call (830) 232-6132 or visit [www.tpwd.state.tx.us/spdest/findadest/parks/garner](http://www.tpwd.state.tx.us/spdest/findadest/parks/garner).

**B**ASTROP recently joined other notable Texas towns after being named one of the National Trust for Historic Preservation's 2010 Dozen Distinctive Destinations. The designation showcases vacation destinations that offer unique cultural and recreational experiences, often at a fraction of the price.

David Brown, executive vice president of the National Trust for Historic Preservation, says that, with an emphasis on places that combine vibrant street life and a well-preserved past, this year's list is more than just charming small towns with gallery-strewn streets — though there are plenty of those. He adds the list is targeted to travelers seeking an authentic American experience, and not just a theme-park version.

Bastrop, nominated by Bastrop Main Street, was selected for its unique place in Texas history, its well-preserved and vibrant downtown, its rich and varied calendar of annual events, and its proximity to the Lost Pines natural region.

Noted highlights included the Bastrop County Historical Museum, the annual Yesterfest festival, Bastrop Opera House, Bastrop and Beuscher state parks, El Camino Real de los Tejas National Historic Trail, the Colorado River that runs through downtown, more than 15 restaurants and Downtown Bastrop with an array of shopping in historic buildings.

"The city of Bastrop is remarkable for its vibrant, walkable downtown, distinguished architecture, celebrated

cultural diversity, and a population devoted to protecting its character," says Richard Moe, president of the National Trust for Historic Preservation. "Bastrop embodies everything that a distinctive destination should be, and I hope many will take the opportunity to visit when our annual National Preservation Conference takes place in Austin in October 2010."

Bastrop joins Texas' other Distinctive Destinations, including Fort Davis, Fort Worth, Fredericksburg, Galveston and New Braunfels.

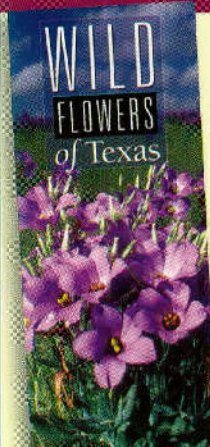
**INDUSTRY INSIDERS**

**T**HE MCKINNEY Convention & Visitors Bureau awarded its 2010 Tourism Partner of the Year to business developer Don Day who has "taken an active role in encouraging (visitors) to return to McKinney again and again through his business development on our historic downtown square," says MCVB Executive Director Diann Bayes.

Day, who lives in the McKinney Historic District, helped develop the downtown district by buying and renovating structures like the Old County Jail and an old house on Church street, then converting them into restaurants.

He also purchased the old McKinney Opera House, which he transformed into the Grand Hotel and Ballroom, complete with its own restaurant. He also acquired other properties and opened a home/bath/kitchen shop and an Italian restaurant. He has plans for a gelato shop.

**WILD FOR FLOWERS**



**G**ET READY for the wildflower extravaganza with Texas Department of Transportation's *Wildflowers of Texas* guide and *Texas Highways* magazine's annual wildflower issue.

The colorful guide helps identify native Texas plants like the Indian blanket, blue-eyed grass, lantana and the pink evening primrose. For a free copy, send a request to Wildflowers of Texas Guide, P.O. Box 149249, Austin, TX 78714-9249 or call (800) 452-9292.

The April issue of *Texas Highways*, on newsstands by mid-March, will be especially colorful this year. "Experts are predicting a bounty of blooms this year, so we've expanded our wildflower special with 22 pages of jaw-dropping spring scenes that illustrate four flowery road trips recommended by our friends at the Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center," says Managing Editor Jill Lawless.



## TEXAS TRIVIA

Although so many Texas towns are rich with Christmas activities, one city has the official designation as Christmas Capital of Texas. Can you name it?

This past holiday season (and every other) makes it clear that Texas has no shortage of seasonal festivities. Any city you visit can offer an array of choices, but Grapevine successfully bid to hold the official title based on its annual collection of 1,400 holiday events. The events, also collectively known as Christmas Capital of Texas, run a 40-day course beginning Nov. 1. Events include Christmas on Main, Parade of Lights, North Pole Express from the Grapevine Vintage Railroad, Great Wolf Lodge's Snowland, Twinkle Lights Boat Parade and Gaylord Texan Lone Star Christmas ICE! event, as well as animated Victorian characters throughout the city, carriage rides and the Christmas Gnome Village and the North Pole Polar Bear display.

## TEXAS TRIVIA

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## TEXAS TRAVEL INFORMATION CENTERS

VISITOR NUMBERS as of January 31, 2010-

TRAVEL CENTER	Month Visitors	Percent Variation*	Year-to-Date Visitors	Percent Variation*
AMARILLO	5,039	-2.19	5,039	-2.19
ANTHONY	6,884	-20.44	6,884	-20.44
CAPITOL	5,257	-0.04	5,257	-0.04
DENISON	17,847	-13.48	17,847	-13.48
GAINESVILLE	21,339	+3.90	21,339	+3.90
LANGTRY	3,685	-11.93	3,685	-11.93
LAREDO	9,249	-12.63	9,249	-12.63
ORANGE	28,898	-17.29	28,898	-17.29
TEXARKANA	15,745	-11.91	15,745	-11.91
VALLEY	34,741	+2.50	34,741	+2.50
WASKOM	26,448	+3.51	26,448	+3.51
WICHITA FALLS	8,392	-22.29	8,392	-22.29
<b>CENTER TOTALS</b>	<b>183,524</b>	<b>-7.34</b>	<b>183,524</b>	<b>-7.34</b>

\* Compared to last year

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

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