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TEXASTM

HIGHWAYS

DECEMBER 2013



The TRAVEL MAGAZINE of TEXAS

HOLIDAY ESCAPES

RIO GRANDE VALLEY,
MARATHON, SAN ANTONIO,
GUADALUPE MOUNTAINS,
GRAPEVINE, AND MORE ...



The Countdown

One year ends. Another year begins. Whether you're a philosopher or a partier, it's a time to consider your options. Celebrate? Contemplate? There's not a wrong choice.

For *Texas Highways*, 2014 is an important milestone because it marks 40 years since this monthly became a travel magazine. That transition took place in 1974. Before that, *Texas Highways* was, as its name literally suggests, more about the highways themselves. As Editor Frank Lively (whose first and last names could be adjectives for his own views) suggested at the time, Texans are amazingly loyal to their state and they want to know more about it. Fortunately for us today, Frank and company did a great job in those early years and attracted an abundance of loyal readers. In fact, some of those folks are still reading *Texas Highways* today.

How will the magazine celebrate its birthday? We started the anniversary celebration a little early with a complete redesign, which premiered a few months ago in the September issue. At that point, we said the celebration should continue throughout 2014, and one way we're making that happen is with a monthly countdown to our readers' choice for favorite travel destination in the state.

**Win a
Fredericksburg
prize package.
Details on
page 11.**

The voting is now over. Early results have included a bundle of surprises. One was the number of handwritten notes we received. When we started the process, I'd have wagered that we'd receive mostly online votes through social media and email, so I'm glad I didn't place a bet on it. After all, the vast majority of reader comments these days come to us via Facebook. But we've received hundreds of votes written with some fascinating personal details.

Regardless of how the final tally comes in, the one absolute conclusion is that *Texas Highways* readers genuinely love this state and want to share their opinions.

We're going to start sharing the winners in the January issue; it is safe to say you will see a few unexpected results throughout the year. For example, I was genuinely amazed at the out-of-the-way places—and even individual buildings and businesses—that are all-time favorite destinations for some of *Texas Highways*' readers.

Stay tuned for 2014. You'll learn about even more intriguing places to travel in the Lone Star State.

Charles Lohrmann, Publisher



WHERE TO FIND US

Drop us a line anytime at letters05@texashighways.com.
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WHERE WE'LL BE NEXT MONTH:

The results are in,
so join us in
January for the
kick-off to 2014's
Texas Top-40
countdown
of *TH* readers'
favorite destinations.

We'll also go
fly-fishing in Sattler,
explore the Panhandle's
Dust Bowl era,
and discover hidden
gems at the Texas
Challenge geo-
caching mega-event.

Then, spend a
winter weekend in
Boerne, sip hot
Dr Pepper in Waco,
and daytrip to
Nacogdoches, too!



Any tips on these spots?
Let us know on Facebook
or Twitter



WINTER WONDER ISLAND



Galveston is the 'Winter Wonder Island' of Texas, offering visitors more than 1,000 magical holiday events to enjoy during the holiday season. This tropical island is home to breath-taking beaches and one of the largest collections of well-preserved Victorian architecture in the country, bringing together the enchantment of traditional holiday merriment and the benefits of island weather. Galveston is home to nationally recognized holiday events, including the Victorian festival Dickens on the Strand and Festival of Lights at Moody Gardens.

visitors can access a downloadable "passport" to keep track of the island's many events.

When visiting Galveston Nov. 16 through Jan. 4, visitors can get their passport stamped at five or more participating holiday events and attractions to be eligible for numerous giveaways, including a Cruise for 4 on the Carnival Magic. Up to three stamps can also be earned for overnight stays at Galveston accommodations venues.



This year, spending the holidays in Galveston has even more benefits with the second annual Passport to Holiday Magic celebration, where



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Lasers, Lights & Magic in the Park

Visit downtown Galveston to enjoy Lasers, Lights, and Magic in the Park, a part of Galveston's Passport to Holiday Magic!

Enjoy the enchantment as Saengerfest Park (2302 Strand) becomes a winter wonderland complete with music, visits with Santa at his workshop, and a holiday themed synchronized laser and light show.

FREE FESTIVITIES

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SANTA ON THE STRAND

1 – 5pm

Nov. 30 – Dec. 1, Dec. 14 – 15, Dec. 21 – 22

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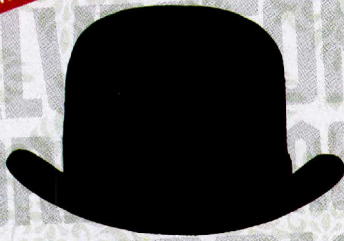


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Dec. 6, 2013

Santa's Market

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Visit With Santa

Church Cantatas

Dec. 6 - 8, 2013

Historic Homes Tour

Dec. 7 & 8, 2pm - 6pm

Tickets \$ 20

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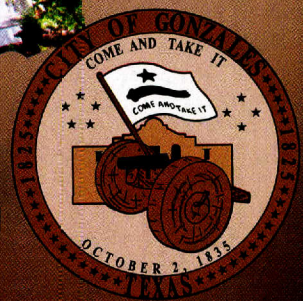
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DECEMBER 2013

The **PEOPLE**, the **PLACES**, and **WIDE-OPEN SPACES** of 

FEATURES

38 *Big Bend Winterland*

Desert hikes, thermal springs, and spicy chili are just a few of the enticements that make Big Bend a white-hot winter destination.

Text and photographs by
E. DAN KLEPPER



46 *The Woodlands' Wonderland*

Christmas in The Woodlands is tailor-made for family holiday magic, from sugary treats to ice-skating and, of course, Santa Claus.

Text by JENNIFER BABISAK
Photographs by J. GRIFFIS SMITH

52 *Los Algodones*

Explore the history and sites of the Rio Grande Valley's Civil War cotton times, when "white gold" ruled the day.

Text by TOM FORT
Photographs by ERICH SCHLEGEL



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EVENTS

Dec 2-31 Starlight Village (Christmas decorations) - **Odessa**
Dec 6-7 Community Christmas Lighting & Fireworks/Parade - **Pecos**
Dec 6-7 Mountain Country Christmas Bazaar - **Alpine**
Dec 6-29 Christmas at the Mansion, Museum of the SW - **Midland**
Dec 7 Frontier Christmas! - **Fort Davis**
Dec 7 Sounds of the Season: Holiday Spectacular - **Midland & Odessa**
Dec 15 Tour of Historic Homes - **Alpine**

Dec 26 Christmas Parade & ARMM Open House - **Ft. Stockton**
Dec 28 "Sounds Modern" at Chinati Foundation - **Marfa**
Dec 29-30 Moscow Ballet's Great Russian Nutcracker - **Midland & Odessa**
Dec 30 Ballroom Marfa New Year's Silent Film with Live Score - **Marfa**
Dec 31 Hotel Limpia's New Year's Eve Bash - **Fort Davis**
Jan 10-11 Pecos County Livestock show - **Ft. Stockton**
Jan 17-18 Reeves County Jr. Livestock Show, Sale & BBQ - **Pecos**

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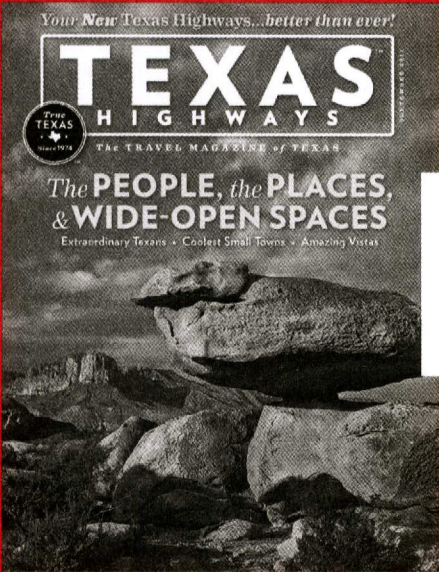
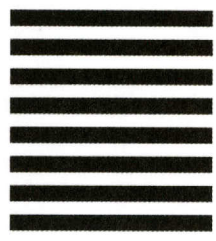
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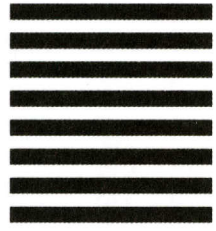
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DECEMBER 2013

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ON OUR COVERS

FRONT: The 72-foot Port Isabel Lighthouse was built in 1852. Visitors can climb its 75 stairs for a view of the Texas coast, including South Padre Island. Photo © Erich Schlegel

BACK: The Ice Rink at The Woodlands beckons skaters of all skill levels during the holiday season. Photo by J. Griffis Smith



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Senior Editor Lori Moffatt
Associate Editor Matt Joyce
Editorial Coordinator Cindy Newsom
Contributing Editors
Erin Inks, Julie Stratton

Photography Editor J. Griffis Smith
Contributing Photographers
Michael Amador, Kevin Stillman,
Will van Overbeek
Video Producer Chris Lewis

Art Director Jane Wu
Associate Art Director Kirsti Harms

Web Editor Lois M. Rodriguez
Digital Art Director Matt Wetzler

Marketing Manager Cindy Leffingwell
Operations Manager Deborah Follien
Advertising Coordinator Lupe Valdez
Account Services Raquel V. Sanchez
Administrative Assistant Ana Alvarez

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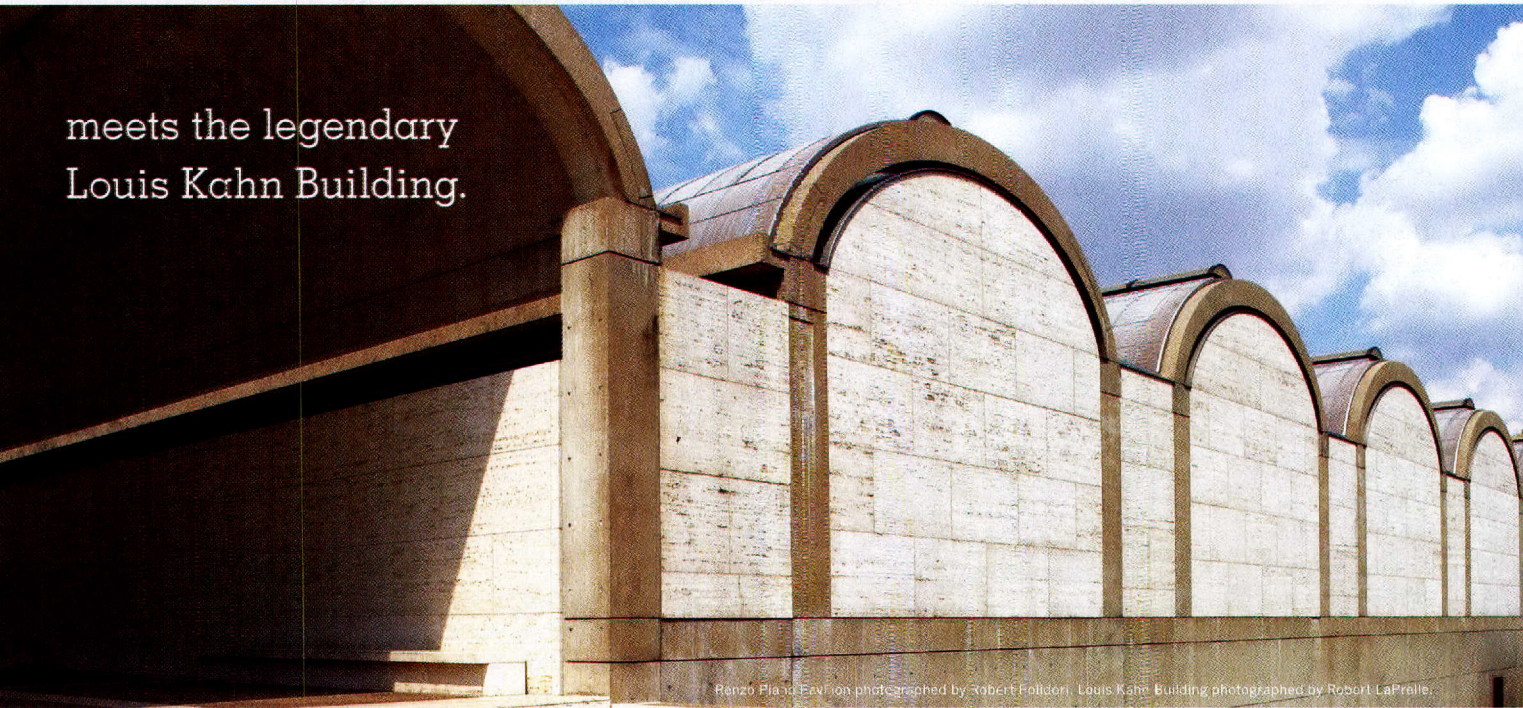
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Renzo Piano Pavilion photographed by Robert Holldorf. Louis Kahn Building photographed by Robert LaPralle.

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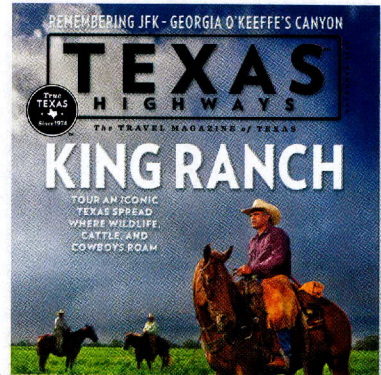
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MERGE

GOT SOMETHING TO SAY?

In the November issue: Georgia O'Keeffe and Palo Duro Canyon; what's not to love?

ADDIE R. CAMPAIGNE, TH Facebook Fan



OUR FAVORITE SOCIAL MEDIA OF THE MONTH...



TH always provides great ideas of places to travel and see for myself. One area I really like is Big Bend, including Alpine and Fort Davis.

Barry Thormahlen

Love, love, LOVE the September piece on "Extraordinary Texans!" Bluebonnets and the Big Bend are incredible, but what makes Texas great is her people. Keep this coming!

Doug Baum



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Some Things You Never Forget

Regarding JFK memories [November]: The day John F. Kennedy was assassinated, this 25-year-old Texan was living in Pomona, California. I was watching my black-and-white TV as the whole tragedy unfolded right before my eyes. Lee Harvey Oswald had murdered President Kennedy from the sixth floor of the Texas School Book Depository. Two days later, I watched live again as Jack Ruby shot and killed Oswald as he was being transferred to another, more secure jail facility in Dallas. This event, along with the moon landing, rates as the most important in my life, just as I'm sure it has in the lives of many Americans—especially if viewed live as happened with me.

BUCK BUCKNER, Montgomery

The 1960 presidential election was the first election I can remember. JFK could motivate the nation through his electrifying speeches. I

remember the classic inaugural speech, addressing the nation during the Cuban Missile Crisis, and of course his speech at the Berlin Wall. Despite the tragic day at Dealey Plaza, the legacy of Camelot lives on!

BILL KELLY, McDade

Stamp of Approval

The November issue stirred good memories. Gene Fowler's "Souvenir" article caught my eye with the colorful reproductions of the Centennial stamps. I visited the Centennial several times in the summer of 1936.



READERS RECOMMEND

At Your Service

My sister and I had the pleasure of eating at The Texas Tea Room in Carthage. The food and service were great. If you're lucky, Peta will be your server. She was a delight and pointed out things on the menu we might have missed. We encountered good food and people who loved what they were doing!

DOLORES CRANE

The Texas Tea Room is at 100 E. Sabine St., 903/693-8689; www.thetexastearoom.com.

We went to a rehearsal dinner at Brewster's Pizza in Wimberley. What a delightful experience—a family-owned and -operated facility that was only made more interesting by the wait staff. They were all sons and daughters of the owners. And yes, they have a brewery, as well.

BILL GOSSETT

Brewster's Pizza is at 9595 Ranch Road 12, Ste. 10, 512/847-3299; www.brewsterspizza.com.



WE WANT TO HEAR FROM YOU! Send feedback and recommendations to: Texas Highways, Box 141009, Austin 78714-1009. Email: letters05@texashighways.com.

WHERE IN TEXAS ARE YOU?



I was interested in the exhibits at the Hall of State, the new cars circling the lagoon in front of the Art Museum, the Texas Rangers headquarters, and the replica of the Jersey Lilly.

And Aaron Nelsen's King Ranch tour reminded me of a tour I took decades ago. Since then, it is obvious that the King Ranch has expanded opportunities for visitors way beyond the simple, self-guided auto tour (map provided) that I recall. That map of the "Loop Road" featured 14 points of interest that apparently included most of the important sites. Not quite the more inclusive, personal tour the Nelsen family enjoyed, but I'm glad I had the experience.

PAUL HUDGINS, Lake Dallas

Who's That Lady?

Concerning the October issue: zombies, ghost stories, cemeteries, and haunted mansions. Yet, the most frightening photo of all was found on page 75 (Day-tripper). I would seriously not want to run in to the "lady in white," even in broad daylight. I am still having nightmares.

ROGER ESTES,

Albuquerque, New Mexico

Great Stays

Upon reading Matt Joyce's article on the Hotel Settles [August], I immediately booked a room. It was a great decision. The Settles is a fantastic historic hotel that compares well with the other historic hotels in Texas in which I have stayed (Limpia, Menger, Gunter, Hotel Paisano, Gage, St. Anthony). The room was plush and very comfortable and the restaurant was great.

TOM McANINCH, Longview



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Go to texashighways.com/contest to name this park, and you could win a Fredericksburg prize package.

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- Two tickets to the "Texas White House," the LBJ Ranch House at the Lyndon B. Johnson National Historical Park
- Two tickets to the Pioneer Museum
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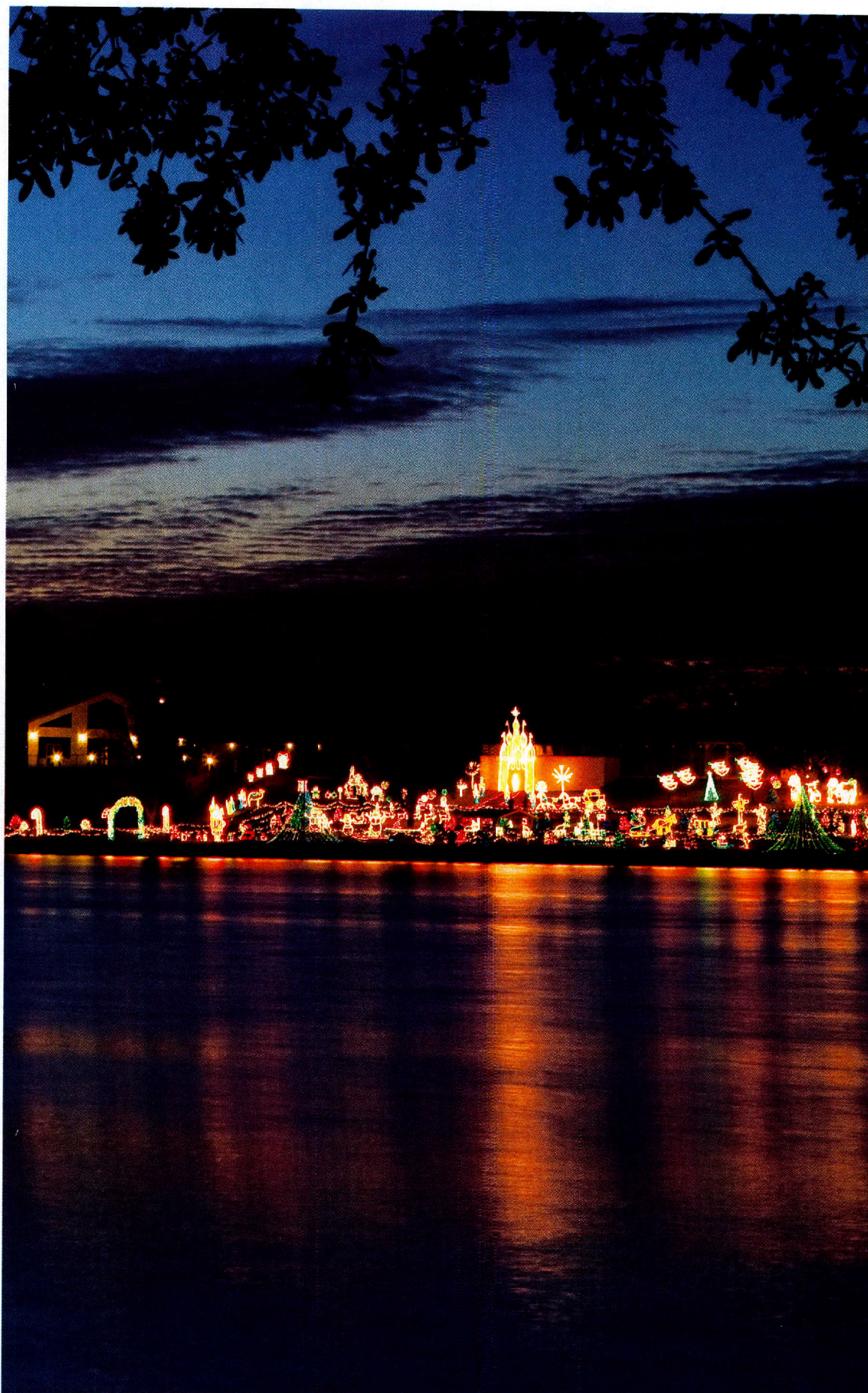


Hill Country

From November 22-January 1, the Marble Falls Walkway of Lights transforms the shoreline of Lake Marble Falls into a trail of twinkling sculptures, trees, and winter scenes. From US 281 in Marble Falls, turn west onto Second Street, then south onto Main Street. Follow the road to Lakeside Park. To obtain the view across Lake Marble Falls, from US 281, turn west onto FM 2147.



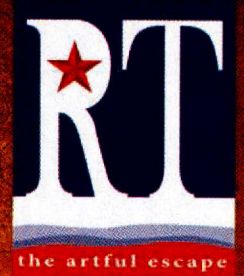
For a list of holiday light trails, visit texashighways.com/scenic.



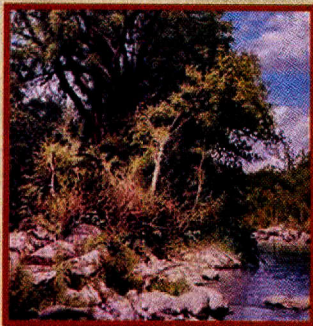


ROUND TOP

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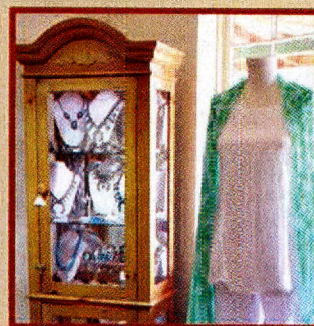
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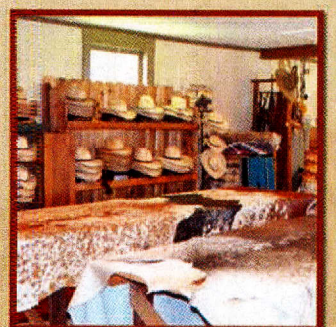
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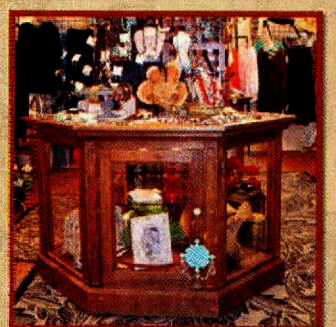
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TEXAS FAMILY

Austin, Je T'aime

AUSTIN WITH A FRENCH ACCENT

text by PAULA DISBROWE



PÉTANQUE, ANYONE?

The pétanque court at Justine's Brasserie offers patrons a chance to try their hand at tossing boules.



BONJOUR AUSTIN

Justine's Brasserie, at left, and the French Legation Museum, above, are natural stops on a Franco-ophile's tour of Austin.

IT ALL STARTED WITH A TRIP GONE AWRY. MY mom scheduled a much-anticipated French getaway to Paris with an old friend, and then, late in the game, her friend pulled out. But the romantic, Kir Royale and back-alley bistro dreams had already taken hold—staying home in suburbia was not an acceptable alternative. She needed a plan B fast, and luckily, I knew just what to do.

Several years ago, I spent time cooking at an arts foundation in the south of France. During my stay, I took the high-speed train to Paris and met my mom for her first trip there. We sipped *vin rouge* on the steps of the *Sacré Coeur* basilica, ate our weight in cheese, and meandered through museums and manicured gardens. I was confident that I could rustle up the key ingredients to that certain *je ne sais quoi* in my hometown of Austin.

Full disclosure: It helps to be married to an extraordinarily talented baker—my husband, David Norman, is the head baker at Easy Tiger Bake Shop & Beer Garden and makes, by many accounts (obviously mine is biased), the best croissants and baguettes around. So it was a given that each morning had to include one (or two) of his amazing *pain au chocolat*—

i
FRENCH CONNECTION
Interested in French culture? Many cities have cultural exchange groups, such as the Alliance Française d'Austin, www.afaustin.org.

rich, flaky layers of pastry encasing silky, bittersweet chocolate. It's hard to imagine a more compatible partner for strong *café crème*.

One of my favorite things about Paris is the long walks and the opportunity to absorb the pulse of the city through its sights and smells—the entertaining parade of people, fashion, and poodles. In Austin, one of the best places to get such a fix is the gravel trail around Lady Bird Lake. So on most mornings, my mother and I followed our pastries with a stroll at the lake. The trail—well worn by spandex-clad runners, strollers, and mountain bikes (not to mention lots of dogs)—is the best place I know to witness Austin's quirky, diverse, and vibrant culture.

Another highlight of our time in Paris was sipping Sancerre wine and

snacking on *croques madames*, ham-and-cheese sandwiches topped with béchamel sauce, baked, and garnished with an egg (sans egg, it's called a *croque monsieur*). I knew we could get a fix for both at Arro, which serves country-style French food in a casually hip setting. Think French onion soup, roasted fish with petite ratatouille, and a killer bread and cheese program. Arro's all-French wine list and selection of seasonal desserts round out an experience that's the next best thing to a bistro table alongside the Seine.

Picnics are among our favorite French memories—al fresco meals eaten on park benches alongside museums and manicured gardens. I knew just where to recreate the scene—the historic French Legation Museum, set in an 1841 house built for a French diplomat. The museum's lovely, stone-framed park offers two-and-a-half acres of grass, native hardwoods, and manicured gardens to

the public (open 1-5 p.m. Tuesday-Sunday). You can also get a history lesson: Trained docents lead 45-minute tours of the historic house throughout the day. The French Legation is a bastion of the Alliance Française d'Austin, which hosts rousing games of pétanque (a form of boules where players toss metal balls alongside a small wooden ball called a *cochonnet*) with a potluck buffet the second and fourth Sunday of every month. I packed simple ham sandwiches and a bar of fancy chocolate, and we enjoyed a lazy afternoon under a live oak.

In true French style, we needed a bit of pampering before our final night on the town. A French pedicure at Away, the spa at the W Austin Hotel, did the trick. The hip, lavender-scented setting, array of candy-colored polishes, and bottomless glasses of champagne, sipped while our feet were kneaded and calves were scrubbed, prepared us for the most convincing French scene in town—dinner



MAKE IT!

Go to texashighways.com/family for recipes for French onion soup and Brie en Croûte (great for holiday buffets!) from the *Cooking with Texas Highways* cookbook.

at Justine's Brasserie. The pitch-perfect bistro pours flawless French 75's (a mix of gin, lemon juice, and champagne) and serves old-school classics like escargot in parsley butter sauce and *steak frites*. You'll even find beret-clad artists playing boules in the courtyard.

For good measure, we threw in an *April in Paris* screening at home, and *canelé* lessons (a hands-on demo of how to make the custardy pastries scented with beeswax) from her baker son-in-law. We may have missed seeing a few iconic landmarks (the silhouette of the Eiffel Tower at dusk, for instance), but I'm certain we convinced my mother that Austin has its own irresistible *joie de vivre*. ★

Celebrate Christmas in Orange, Texas

Shangri La Botanical Gardens and Nature Center

- 2111 W. Park Avenue
- **Members-Only Christmas Lighting**
December 12, 2013; 6:00 – 8:00 p.m.
- **Lighted Evening Christmas Strolls**
December 12, 13 and 14; 19, 20 and 21; 26, 27 and 28, 2013; 6:00 – 8:00 p.m.
- **Dreaming of a Green Christmas**
December 14, 2013; 10:00 a.m. – 4:00 p.m.

Stark Museum of Art

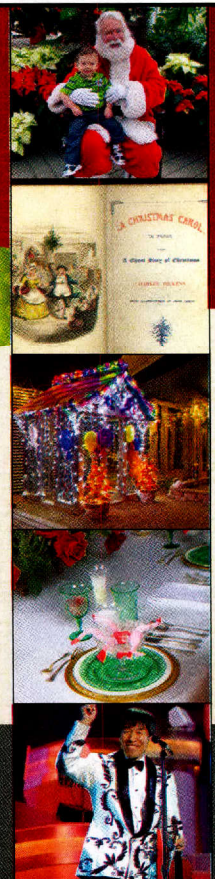
- 712 Green Avenue
- **Treasured Possessions - A display of Medieval Books of Hours**
On view through January 11, 2014

The W.H. Stark House

- 610 W. Main Avenue
- **Delight in Elegant Holiday Scenery**
Tours available Tuesdays through Saturdays

Lutcher Theater

- 707 W. Main Avenue
- **Christmas with Shoji Tabuchi**
December 14, 2013; 7:30 p.m.



Find yourself at the **STARK** Cultural Venues

For details, visit www.starkculturalvenues.org.

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Molten, Magical Moments

CREATE YOUR OWN HAND-BLOWN GLASS ORNAMENTS IN GRAPEVINE

text by
Paula
Disbrowe



THE SAME THING HAPPENS EVERY year, usually the weekend after Thanksgiving: We unfurl the Christmas lights, unearth our box of ornaments from the garage, begin unwrapping decorations—and a flood of memories washes in. Each piece has a story. There are the Texas-themed ornaments we bought in Gruene several years ago—a Texaco gas pump, an armadillo in a stocking cap, and various *El Día de los Muertos* skeletons. A construction-paper heart lacquered with glitter that suspends a photo of our daughter, then 2, now 6. Then there’s the vintage-style pretzel ornament purchased after pancakes along San Antonio’s glittering River Walk.



VETRO GLASS-BLOWING STUDIO & ART GLASS GALLERY

(701 S. Main St., #103 in Grapevine) offers opportunities to make your own ornaments starting November 29 through the month of December. Call 817/251-1668; www.vetroartglass.com.

Few things evoke more nostalgia than Christmas ornaments. Our family accumulates more each year, whether we need them or not. And as the tree branches bend with an increasing number of decorations, ornaments mark the passing years with sweetness and sparkle. Having a soft spot for such things, I was excited to learn that we could make our own ornaments at a glass studio in Grapevine. It sounded like a holiday souvenir too good to pass up.

Glass artist David Gappa founded Vetro Glassblowing Studio & Fine Art Gallery in 1999. It’s located in Grapevine’s historic district, just off the parking lot for the Grapevine Vintage Railroad, which makes regular sightseeing runs to the Fort Worth Stockyards, some 21 miles west. Over time, David has cultivated a team of artisans who perform their craft in Vetro’s state-of-the-art working studio. When you visit the studio, the banter and energy of the young, animated staff make it immediately clear that they get a kick out of educating people about their work.

Vetro offers two “make your own ornament” packages: one for children (\$30) to help create an ornament (the best part for my kids was choosing their colors) and an “extreme ornament making” option for older kids and adults (\$45), which allows for more hands-on participation.

The process basically goes like this: Patrons pass through the gallery (a showcase and gift shop of Vetro’s ornaments, vases, and dishware) and into the studio. The flicker of flames visible from the oven’s small, square opening and the clank of iron tools give the space the feel of a medieval workshop—for good reason. “The art of glass has changed very little since the 15th Century,” David

explains. "A glass blower from that time could come into our studio and use all of the same tools. The technology has advanced the machines, but the basic methods are exactly the same."

To make my ornament, a Vetro artisan first heated an iron blowpipe inside a 2,400-degree furnace, and then dipped the pipe into molten glass (kind of like dipping a stick in a honey jar). Next, I rolled it in the colors (crushed metals and sand) of my choice. Then I rotated the pipe (quickly and evenly so it didn't drip) until the material collected into an even ball. Then I let the trained gaffers blow into the vessel, creating a perfect sphere with a bubble of air inside. Finally, the bulb was clipped off, a hook was added, and then it was transferred to a 900-degree oven called an annealer, which cooled the glass over 12 to 14 hours. This step was crucial—if we had left the bulb at room temperature, it would have gone into thermal shock and exploded.

David has been allowing customers to participate in his profession for about 10 years. "There has been such a demand from patrons who want to be part of our world, even for a brief moment," he explains. The other reward is less tangible. "It's incredible to see the same families returning year after year," David says.

For my kids, the holidays are about anticipation (counting down the doors on our Advent calendar, for instance). Since we had to wait for our treasures to cool before taking them home, it was all the more exciting to unwrap our ornaments and behold the spectacular streaks of color and light. Our time at Vetro taught me that the craft of glass blowing is a medium that most people take for granted. "Working with glass is an ethereal experience," David says. "You have a hand in manipulating heat, and guiding that molten medium into a thing of beauty. We can't touch it, so we mold with tools and breathe life into its form."

Now that I know how the process works, my ornament is more than a souvenir; it's a reminder of a precious morning with my young children, and of the timeless beauty and art of glass. ★

Amarillo by Evening



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Symphony of the Hills
 Dec 5-Symphonyofthehills.org

The Christmas Spirit
 Dec 6- 8/Point Theater - HCAF.com

A Christmas Carol
 Dec 6-21/Playhouse2000.com

Tribute to Tammy Wynette
 Dec 15/Callouxtheater.com

KERRVILLE
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Canine Culture

A SPACE FOR DISCERNING DOG LOVERS

text by Anthony Head

WE BROUGHT HOME A new puppy this summer. Pepper is a rambunctious Lab and Border collie mix who enlivens the energy of our house to immeasurable levels. And after a couple of months, I needed a break. With Pepper on my mind, it felt like a good time to revisit the Dog Museum at Antiquibles Antique Mall in Elm Mott, located about five miles north of Waco, just off Interstate 35.

When I arrive, Barbara Hays, who owns both the store and museum with her husband, David, tells me that despite ongoing interstate construction between Dallas and Austin, this summer was Antiquibles' best in years—which, in turn, introduced more people to the Dog Museum.



THE DOG MUSEUM

opens 10 a.m.-5:30 p.m. every day except Easter, Thanksgiving, and Christmas. Free admission. The museum is on the east access road of I-35 at Exit 345, Elm Mott. Call 254/829-1921; www.antiquibles.com.



“But, it’s still quite a big draw on its own,” Barbara says of the museum, as she walks me toward the back of the massive but orderly antiques warehouse. Consisting of about 1,000 square feet, the Dog Museum is framed by dark-wood and glass cabinets holding thousands of canine statues, curios, collectibles, and other objets d’art. It is a colorful, whimsical world, mostly in miniature, where dogs dress as sailors, firemen, and King Henry VIII. Some boxers are boxing. Some poodles canoodling. Some dogs pose *au naturel*—standing, running, dozing—while others look back through the glass with the same take-me-home eyes as you’d see at a county kennel.

The collection covers more than two centuries of dog art, depicted as jewelry, salt-and-pepper shakers, buttons, and doorstops. Clearly, our canine companions have always been enduring subjects for folk art, like the life-size terracotta bull terrier, a handsome fellow from the 1930s that Barbara purchased in London and says is one of her favorite pieces; or the bronze statue of a monkey riding atop a greyhound, which is both amusing and a bit affecting. “I got that piece from London, too,” she explains. “It’s from the 1870s, and I learned that back in the day, the sport of dog racing used monkeys for riders.”

Despite the enormity of the collection (self-described as “the world’s largest public exhibition of dog items”), the museum is curated with care and vision. It’s been a long time in the making, too: Barbara and her husband began collecting dog memorabilia in 1967 and have traveled to 23 countries looking for more. Many items represent global canine fondness: dog-head pipes carved of Turkish meerschaum; tiny figurines made of colorful Murano Italian glass and Zsolnay porcelain from Hungary; and a hand-hammered copper relief sculpture of hunting dogs chasing a wild boar, which, Barbara says, was formerly on display at Orly International Airport in Paris.

One case holds several sculptures from a series that German artist Helmut

Consisting of about 1,000 square feet, the Dog Museum is framed by dark-wood and glass cabinets holding thousands of canine statues, curios, collectibles, and other objets d'art.

Diller created during the mid-1900s for the Italian woodcarving company Anri. With loving attention to accuracy, Diller hand-carved dogs in various states of repose. "These carved wood pieces are truly beautiful with their detail," Barbara says. "My husband carves, and so I guess I have a special appreciation for them."

I've always considered the museum's 18th-Century French rifle to be among the best of its treasures. The polished hardwood body is fitted with a flintlock and finished with a hand-carved dog head for the stock. "We took it to *Antiques Roadshow*, and they said it's definitely from the 1700s and was probably

made for someone special," Barbara says, noting that the value is unknown.

The collection also represents dogs in American culture with antique signs and vintage merchandise from Greyhound Bus Lines and Buster Brown Shoes, as well as collectible figures of comic-strip icons like Snoopy and Pluto. On a previous visit to the Dog Museum, in 2010, I noted the absence of Cassius Marcellus Coolidge's kitschy yet classic "dogs playing poker" paintings. Barbara responded that she was obviously familiar with them but not in any hurry to acquire one. When I again bring this up during my recent visit, she points out a framed lithograph titled *One to Tie, Two to Win*. It depicts a baseball game, but the players and spectators are all dogs. "Everyone has dogs playing poker," Barbara says. "I've got dogs at a baseball game, in its original frame. That's more rare."

The original painting, I learned, was

commissioned by Red Seal Tobacco in 1909, and Coolidge later painted the "dogs playing poker" series. But before I leave, Barbara admits that she does, in fact, possess one of the poker series—a variation included on a 1974 Shiner Bock calendar that depicts the dogs drinking Shiner beer. It remains upstairs in her office, though, along with another 1,000 pieces she's acquired for the museum. "I guess I could bring it out, but, honestly, I've hesitated to put it up. It's just so common."

Truth be told, it would be hard to find space to display it. With more than 7,000 pieces to see, the museum is already packed to the ceiling. What I *didn't* find, appropriately enough, was any piece that said, "No dogs allowed." And as it happens, there's no sign like that at Antiquibles, either. Barbara tells me that well-mannered dogs on a leash are allowed. Which means that for my next trip to the museum, I plan to bring Pepper. ★



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Green jays live year-round at the Sabal Palm Sanctuary, which is home to Texas' last remaining stand of original Sabal palm forest.



The Birds *and the Trees*

SABAL PALM SANCTUARY'S LESSON IN SOUTH TEXAS

text by **Matt Joyce**

TO SEE SOUTH TEXAS IN ITS NATURAL state and how the Rio Grande Valley looked before it was cut into farms and cities, you've got to travel to the state's southernmost tip. Here, on the bank of the once-mighty river, you'll find the last remaining stand of original Texas Sabal palm trees, one of only two palm species native to Texas.

The 30 verdant acres of old-growth forest are the cornerstone of the Sabal Palm Sanctuary, a 527-acre reserve on the outskirts of Brownsville. The sanctuary provides an opportunity to explore a vestige of the palm forest ecosystem that once flourished on 90 square miles along the meandering Rio Grande.



SABAL PALM SANCTUARY

is at 8435 Sabal Palm Road in Brownsville. Entry is \$5 for adults and \$3 for children. Call 956/541-8034; www.sabalpalm-sanctuary.org.

Along with four miles of hiking trails, the sanctuary is home to the 1892 Rabb Plantation home, and most famously, a remarkable population of birds. About 85 percent of the sanctuary's 6,000 annual human visitors come during the non-summer months, when northern bird species also flock to the Valley and its moderate climate (the only subtropical environment in Texas). The sanctuary offers birding and history tours on Saturdays from November to April.

"Different species move through and utilize the sanctuary for different



BIRD CAM

Keep an eye on the sanctuary's birds via a live camera at www.sabalpalmsanctuary.org/feedercam.

reasons. Some are stopping by to refuel here; some are nesting here," says naturalist Seth Patterson, an employee of the Brownsville-based Gorgas Science Foundation, which operates the sanctuary. "We get rarities here pretty commonly."

The sanctuary is home to birds that venture no farther north than extreme South Texas, such as the green jay, the chachalaca, the buff-bellied hummingbird, and the groove-billed ani. It also attracts northern birds that make their winter habitat among the palms, including various warblers, red-shouldered hawks, northern harriers, and redhead ducks.

During a visit in August, the feeders

and water basins at the mouth of the forest hopped with activity. In the span of a few minutes, callers included a green jay, a black-crested titmouse, a long-billed thrasher, olive sparrows, doves, and an eastern cottontail rabbit.

The Rabb Plantation home, a brick-and-wood, Queen Anne-style home at the sanctuary's entrance, once served as headquarters for a sprawling agricultural operation. The Gorgas Science Foundation reopens the home as a visitor center on November 17, 2013, following a \$250,000 restoration project. Here you'll find knowledgeable staff members, educational displays about local birds and wildlife, and mosquito repellent to keep the ubiquitous insects at bay.

Foundation CEO Larry Lof says the house helps tell the story of agriculture in the region, and its influence on the natural environment. Frank Rabb was one of the first businessmen to pump

water out of the Rio Grande for irrigated farming in the 1890s, finding that the riverbank's alluvial soils were well-suited for crops like corn, cotton, sorghum, and sugarcane. While Rabb and other farmers cleared much of the original palm forest, the remaining stand of old-growth Sabal palms survived, most likely because the ground was uneven and tough to clear. Within Rabb's lifetime, the "palm jungle" had become a local tourist destination—and marked for preservation.

"Frank Rabb was on one hand part of the instrument of the forest's loss, but on the other hand, he was instrumental in keeping the last piece," Lof says. "For us, the house is such an integral part of telling this bigger story."

The sanctuary's hiking trails branch to the east and west of the entry road. Wide, flat trails, wooden benches spaced along the route, map posters, and placards identifying flora and fauna make


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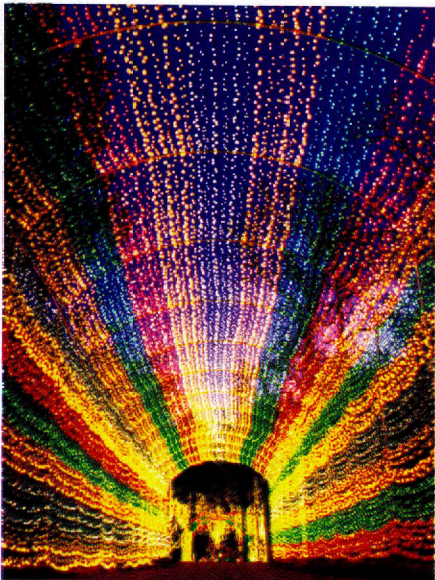


City of Odessa Parks and Recreation Department

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TEXAS WILD



RABB PLANTATION

The newly re-stored 1892 Rabb Plantation home reopens as the Sabal Palm Sanctuary visitor center in November.

for an educational walk that's as easy as you wish to make it.

On the west side, the Forest Trail bisects the old-growth forest, where the Sabal palms tower over a thick understory made up of Texas ebony, huisache, and other plants. When walking the path, one of the first things you'll notice is the ring of the cicada's song, which is interrupted only by chirping birds. The undergrowth is a swarm of rustling activity as cicadas, birds, and hispid cotton rats flit about the vegetation and racerunner lizards skitter off the trail. Patches of sunlight peek through the canopy, but it's hard to imagine navigating the forest without a trail.

The Forest Trail intersects the Resaca Loop Trail, which circles a small lake that was once part of the Rio Grande before the river changed course more than a century ago. During these days of drought, the sanctuary pumps river water into the resaca to enhance wildlife habitat. A wooden, octagonal bird-blind on the resaca provides a shady spot to sit and watch as birds fish and sun.

On the eastern half of the sanctuary, the trails are more exposed, passing through native trees that were planted in 1990 as part of a reforestation effort. The trail joins a dirt road—patrolled by U.S. Customs and Border Protection SUVs—and crosses a levee, dropping

down to the Rio Grande. A wooden deck overlooks the olive-green waters of the river—about 30 yards wide here—and the steep bank on the Mexican side. On this day, a fat Texas indigo snake wound its way through the murky water.

Along with the occasional Border Patrol sighting, the biggest reminder of international politics is the 20-foot-tall border fence just north of the sanctuary. The caliche road that enters the sanctuary passes through an opening in the fence, and sometimes, would-be visitors simply turn around in trepidation, Patterson says. The construction of the fence was part of the reason the National Audubon Society, the owner of the property, decided to close the sanctuary in 2009. After 18 months closed to the public, the sanctuary reopened in 2011 under management of the Gorgas Science Foundation.

"A lot of people drive up to the border fence, and they're hesitant to drive through it," Patterson says. "We get a lot of calls from people who are stopped at the fence. Public perception has been tough. We're trying to help that out and put up more signage to curb that hesitation."

It's certainly safe to visit the sanctuary, and well worth the trip south. After all, the border fence has no bearing on the birds. ★

PLATES

EAT + DRINK + TRAVEL

EAT

Eyes on the Pies

MARBLE FALLS SERVES UP SLICES OF HEAVEN

text by MICHELLE BURGESS



PETITE PERFECTION

Pecan, cherry, and walnut mini-pies win raves at Main Street Coffee.



PIE-TOPIA

Left, at The Sportsman's Cafe, the most requested pie is the Nutty Jeff Davis, a bourbon pecan pie.

Above, the Blue Bonnet Cafe's meringue pies have pleased diners since 1929.

A

S A TEXAN EXILED FOR 14 years to Arizona, I feel fortunate to have found decent barbecue, chicken-fried steak, and—halfway through my time there—even Blue Bell ice cream. There was no Tex-Mex, though. And, unfortunately, there was a shocking dearth of pie.

Well, the *right* pie, that is. Chess. Buttermilk. Sweet potato. All manner of fried pies. Pecan pie made by someone who knows how to pronounce *pecan*.

So, in addition to all of the other reasons I was glad to move home, good Texas pie was a welcome comfort upon my return. I'm sure it's the same for displaced New Englanders who miss their apple pie with cheddar, or a waylaid Midwesterner yearning for a slice of brown-sugar Hoosier pie.

It got my attention then, when I stumbled across a lively Facebook debate about which Hill Country eatery offers up the best slice. Dozens of folks advocated for their favorites, from Royers in Round Top to the Coffee Kup in Hico and Lost Maples

Marble Falls stood out for its status as home to three spots garnering multiple mentions in a lively Facebook debate about pie.

Cafe in Utopia. (Incidentally, those three bastions of baked goods make a nice pie-slice shape when plotted on a map.) Dozens of restaurants scored at least one mention in the informal poll.

Within this upper echelon of pie peddlers, the city of Marble Falls stood out for its status as home to not one, not two, but *three* spots garnering multiple mentions. It will shock no one who knows desserts that the venerable Blue Bonnet Cafe remains the undisputed king of Hill Country pie. There's no telling how many wedges have been consumed in the wood-paneled dining room, or whole pies taken home, in the nearly 84 years that Blue Bonnet has dished out traditional home cooking from a squat, white building on US 281.

John Kemper, who owns Blue Bonnet with his wife, Belinda, says that the café's best-selling varieties—pecan,



MAKE IT!

Chocolate-pecan! Sweet-potato!
Texas Buttermilk! Pie recipes at
texashighways.com/eat.

coconut cream, and coconut meringue—also happen to be his personal favorites. But you can't go wrong with any of Blue Bonnet's 15 varieties, even the sugar-free apple version. Blue Bonnet's slices stand out because they are the epitome of classic. The coconut meringue, for instance, is a sky-high confection with a firm, sweet base that practically bursts with coconut flakes.

The most exotic pie on the menu is probably German chocolate, but even that is not anything fancy—not much fancier, at least, than the simple fruit, chocolate cream, or peanut butter selections. They're all just unassuming and tasty, the way good pie should be.

That simplicity is also a hallmark of The Sportsman's Cafe, situated 15 miles east of downtown on FM 1431 toward Lago Vista and Jonestown. The Sportsman's ample menu features hearty breakfasts and burgers, chicken-fried steak, and catfish—all meals that will fill you up. It would be a pity, though, not to leave room for dessert.

The Sportsman's offers at least eight pies every day, and when they're gone, they're gone. When adding a pie to his roster, owner Charles Garner and his baker, Christie Edwards, work together to tweak their own old family recipes. The results speak for themselves. "We try really hard to get it right," Charles says, "and we've been happy to get lots of compliments."

Three of The Sportsman's pie varieties are especially unusual. The Elvis, a peanut-butter-and-banana concoction, is a steady seller, as is the crunchy-sweet Caramel Apple. But the most-requested pie, and Charles' favorite, is the Nutty Jeff Davis, a bourbon pecan pie with minced nuts and a delicate sugary crust, similar to that of a crême brûlée, that forms on top during baking. Impossibly rich and delectably textured,

the Jeff Davis avoids being too sweet thanks to bourbon in both the pie itself and the whipped cream on top. The Jeff Davis takes pecans to a whole other stratosphere of flavor.

Marble Falls' final notable pie destination is smack-dab in the middle of town. Open since August 2012, Main Street Coffee has already accumulated a following of loyal regulars. Situated in a 1920s house and furnished with quaintly mismatched tables, Main Street Coffee serves a variety of specialty tea and coffee drinks, plus quiche, sandwiches, and panini for breakfast and lunch.

What pleases and surprises owner Elaine Johnstone is not that the fledgling café has been so well-received but that it has been singled out for pie. Main Street's drink menu is fairly extensive, but its pie list is limited to three pies at a time—cherry, walnut, pecan, and seasonal varieties—and they are minis. Versions of Elaine's Czech grandmother's pie recipes, the saucer-size pies are big on flavor. The nut varieties are dense and not too sweet, so that the focus is on the chopped pecans or walnuts. That attention to quality, combined with their petite size, make Main Street's mini pies a perfect accompaniment to a cup of coffee or a latte.

So if Marble Falls is on your itinerary, enjoy your good fortune. As you sidle up to the table, keep in mind these words, attributed to Yogi Berra: "Cut my pie into four pieces," he said. "I don't think I could eat eight." ★

MARBLE FALLS PIE TOUR

The **Blue Bonnet Cafe** is at 211 US
281 in Marble Falls. Call 830/693-2344;
www.bluebonnetcafe.net.

The **Sportsman's Cafe** is at 14426
E. FM 1431 in Marble Falls. Call
830/693-0605.

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Hot Chocolate *with a Kick*

HUGO'S RESTAURANT IN HOUSTON SPICES UP THIS CLASSIC WINTER BEVERAGE

text by **Lori Moffatt**

I'VE GOT A SOFT SPOT IN MY HEART FOR Hugo's, the decade-old restaurant in the heart of Houston's hip Montrose district that has helped awaken palates raised on Tex-Mex to the complexities of interior Mexican fare. Hugo's is where I first encountered Oaxacan-style, pan-sautéed grasshoppers (served with avocado, tomatillo salsa, and mini corn tortillas), and where I discovered the smoky allure of artisan mescal. Over the years and in the course of many visits, I've enjoyed the restaurant's braised pork shoulder with mashed plantain bananas (\$22), its amazing lentil



MAKE IT!

Mexican drinking chocolate recipe at texashighways.com/drink.

cakes with strips of fire-roasted chiles (\$8), and its roasted red snapper *a la Veracruzana* (\$22), the latter a tangy fish dish prepared with tomatoes, olives, and capers. I like the historic yet somehow modern feel of the restaurant itself, too: Designed in 1925 by Austrian architect Joseph Finger (who also designed Houston's Art Deco City Hall and many other structures throughout the city), the building is now blanketed in decades of ivy. Inside, exposed rose-colored brick, butter-colored walls displaying vintage matador paintings, and a polished-concrete bar stocked with spirits and wines from throughout the world make Hugo's a topnotch spot for a meal or \$5 margaritas during happy hour.

But I'm here at Hugo's to taste the renowned hot chocolate—a rich and fragrant cup that speaks volumes about Latin American culture. Like corn, tomatoes, vanilla, and chiles, chocolate is native to Latin America—and it's difficult to imagine Mexican food without it. When barely sweetened, its earthy and slightly bitter flavor adds depth to countless versions of Mexico's iconic *mole* sauce (usually made with chiles, nuts, and chocolate), and of course it's the star ingredient in various cakes and ice creams.

The word "chocolate" is said to derive from the Náhuatl words for fruit (*xocoltl*) and water (*atl*). Chocolate served as currency throughout pre-Hispanic Mexico, and the basic process for making chocolate from cacao beans hasn't changed much since Spanish conquistador Hernán Cortes reportedly enjoyed it with Aztec leader Moctezuma in 1519.

At Hugo's, Chef Hugo Ortega and his brother Ruben, the restaurant's pastry chef, make 60 to 75 pounds of chocolate each week using cacao beans imported





CHOCO-LICIOUS!

Chefs Hugo and Ruben Ortega make their own chocolate for this triple-threat dessert: churros (pastries similar to funnel cakes), a scoop of house-made chocolate ice cream, and a cup of hot chocolate.

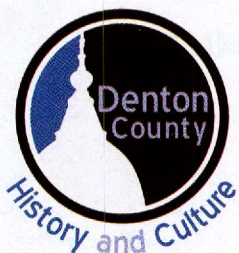
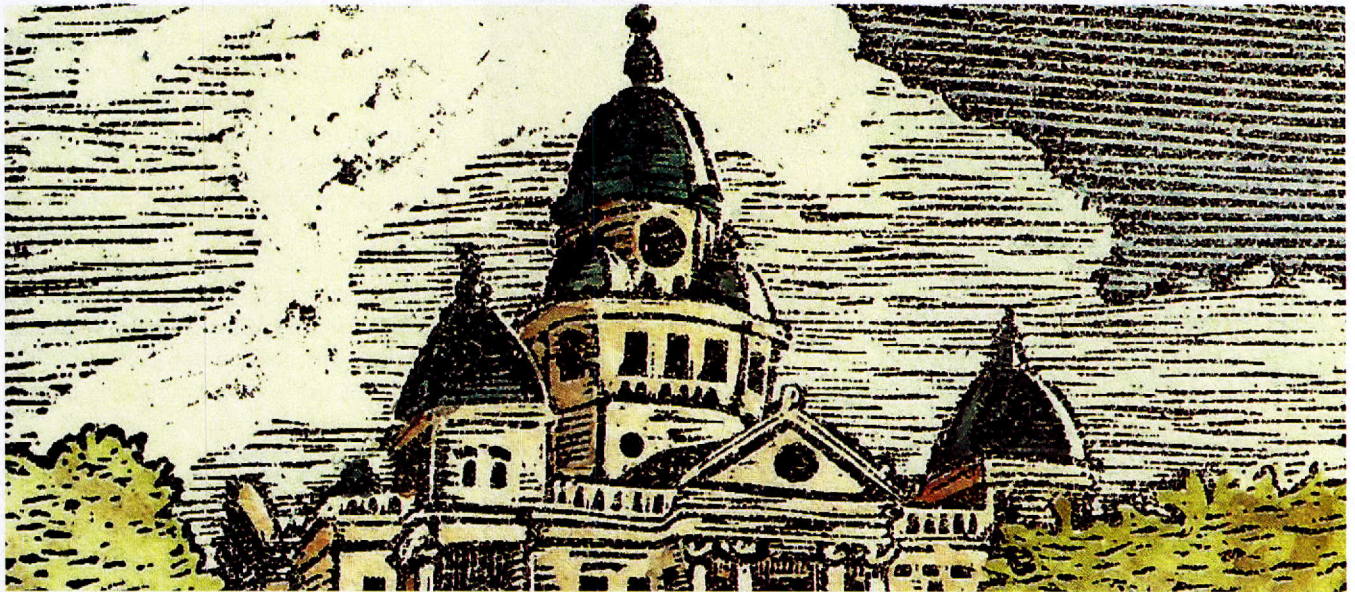
from the Mexican states of Tabasco, Veracruz, and Oaxaca. “At first, people thought we were crazy to make our own chocolate, but the process is simple,” says Ruben. “We toast the cacao beans on a griddle called a *comal* until they pop like corn; that’s the sign they’re

getting toasty. Then we pass them through a rustic stone grinder that we brought from Oaxaca—and then we add vanilla, sugar, and cinnamon. Then we grind it again.” The result, a viscous yet slightly crunchy, almost-black paste, is then pressed into round wooden

molds for use in the restaurant. Hugo’s also sells its chocolate tablets (\$8 for enough to make five cups of hot chocolate) for home use.

I can’t imagine that hot chocolate is a popular item on the restaurant’s summertime menu, but the Ortegas assure me that it is. “We have it on our dessert menu year-round,” Hugo says. “We serve it with *churros* [think funnel cakes, but in strips] and ice cream, which we also make ourselves.” Of course, you can also order a simple cup of hot chocolate (\$3.50), and during the restaurant’s popular Sunday-brunch buffet (\$29), a simmering clay pot of hot chocolate tempts diners as part of a sweets spread that also includes flan, bread pudding, and *pastel de chocolate al chipotle*, a dark-chocolate cake infused with the smoky heat of chipotle peppers.

“Growing up in Mexico City, we’d often go visit our grandmother, who lived in the mountains between Oaxaca



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Hugo Ortega's newest venture, a Mexican seafood restaurant called **Caracol**, should be open by press time. Chocolate will play a supporting role there, too.

and Puebla," says Hugo. "I can see her making chocolate on a *comal*, and then grinding it by hand, and that black, saucy paste coming from the beans. She sold her chocolate in the market, just the way the Aztecs used to do."

With 500 years of chocolate history on my mind, I dunk the crunchy end of a hot *churro* into my cup of chocolate. Dessert-sweet and rich with whole milk, fragrant with cinnamon and vanilla, and frothy on top, it tastes like an exotic chocolate bar melting on my tongue. "At home, you can make it with water instead of milk," says Ruben with a wink. "But it won't be nearly as good."

So back home in Austin, I wait impatiently for the first cool snap in October to try to approximate the Hugo's hot chocolate experience. I bring five cups of milk to a gentle simmer, unwrap my chocolate tablet, and let it dissolve in the hot milk. With a blender, I could make the chocolate frothy, but a whisk is handy and works almost as well. Served in petite coffee cups, it's a satisfying, sweet end to a meal. With a bit of Kahlúa, it's a sophisticated night-cap—chocolate with a kick.

I imagine Moctezuma—allegedly no stranger to post-prandial pleasures—would approve. ★



HUGO'S

is at 1600 Westheimer Rd. in Houston. Hours: Mon-Thu 11-10, Fri-Sat 11-11, and Sun 10-9. Sunday brunch runs 11-3. Happy hours from 2-6 Mon-Fri. Complimentary valet parking. Call **713/524-7744**; www.hugosrestaurant.net.

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TIED AND TRUE

Tamales are iconic fare for the holidays. Here, Lisa Hernandez samples a pumpkin version from the restaurant Paloma Blanca.

It's a Wrap!

SAN ANTONIO'S TAMALES! FESTIVAL

text by **Lori Moffatt**

THE FIRST THING YOU SHOULD know about San Antonio's Tamales! festival is that it's not only about tamales. In fact, like most events that take place at the city's vibrant and rapidly evolving Pearl Brewery complex, Tamales!—now in its fourth year—presents the ultimate combo platter of food, music, dance, and people-watching, all with a festive and easygoing vibe that somehow recalls a small-town carnival.

In Texas and throughout most of Mexico and Latin America, tamales—bundles of masa (a dough made of corn) and savory or sweet fillings most often steamed in corn husks or banana leaves—are symbolic of the Christmas holidays. They're traditionally eaten on Christmas Eve after a labor-intensive

assembly process. "It's hard work, but I find it relaxing," says Gloria Solis, who teaches a tamales-making workshop at San Antonio's Witte Museum in November. "We get all of our friends and family together, and everybody pitches in while we reminisce about the year before."

During the festival (Dec. 7 this year), that friendly energy also permeates the Pearl, a 22-acre site in a nook of the San Antonio River that for more than a century housed some of the city's most successful breweries. Wandering beneath strings of colorful *papel picado*—paper folk art traditional to Mexico—a dad hoists his young son onto his shoulders for a better view of a mariachi ensemble dressed in black and gold. Couples sit at red café tables, unwrapping tamales and toasting with plastic cups of Modelo Especial. A convivial queue of tequila-tasters snakes its way from the Pearl's restored Stables building, which housed the brewery's draft horses in the late 1800s.

Fest-goers chow down on all manner of novel festival fare—*tres leches* cake, spicy corn cups, bowls of *posole* and *chile con carne*, chalupas piled with beans and cheese, cinnamon-sprinkled *buñuelos*, kettle corn. And the people watching can't be beat: A woman in flamboyant Christmas couture pushes a cart full of tail-wagging, costumed chihuahuas, who seem oblivious to their feather boas and miniature velvet top hats. "I never let my babies go out of the house naked," she tells me, then disappears into the crowd.

No disrespect for the corn dog or other stick-impaled delights, but tamales may be the ultimate fair food. Not only are they simple to eat while walking, pushing a stroller, or guiding an easygoing dog through the crowd, but they're virtually waste-free, since their "wrappers" are biodegradable. With more than 40 vendors and 25,000 festival-goers, though, that's a lot of corn husks and banana leaves.

Brenda Tellez of Tellez Tamales says she brings 400 dozen tamales to the festival each year—chicken, pork, bean,



TAMALES!

takes place this year on Saturday, December 7, from noon to 6 p.m. Admission and parking are free; most tamales cost \$1 or \$2. Most of the Pearl's restaurants and shops are open during the event, as is the Pearl's weekly Farmers Market (9 a.m.-1 p.m.). See www.atpearl.com.

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plus jalapeño-spiked versions of each—and she usually sells out. “Ours are traditional, made-by-hand tamales, from recipes passed down from my grandparents,” she says. “There are so many different kinds of tamales here; I love going around to all the booths and trying the different types.”

Indeed, there are tamales made with pork, chicken, beef, and beans. There are chicken *mole* tamales, poblano-cheese tamales, black-bean tamales with *queso fresco*. There are sweet tamales made with pumpkin and pineapple, coconut, cream cheese and strawberries, and cinnamon and pecans. “Sometimes I hear people say, ‘Oh, I don’t like tamales,’” says Michelle Mañon, whose company, Tamahli, offers dozens of different versions that represent the different culinary traditions of Mexico—including a pumpkin-raisin version that’s delicious for breakfast. “But there are so many different kinds!”

“In the northern parts of Mexico, it’s common to use corn husks as the wrapper,” says Johnny Hernandez, whose restaurant La Gloria was one of the Pearl’s first eateries. “But along the coastline, bananas grow well, so banana leaves are the wrap of choice.”

Besides the chance to taste the culinary heritage of Mexico and Latin America, here’s another reason to check out the fest: It’s a great introduction to some of San Antonio’s most popular and respected restaurants. Next time I’m in the city, I’ll make a point to visit Paloma Blanca, whose pumpkin-pineapple creation opened my eyes to the delights of sweet tamales. Nelly Mendoza introduced her mother’s recipes from Veracruz when she joined the restaurant 11 years ago, and she also came up with the restaurant’s increasingly popular gluten-free menu. “We make pork tamales year-round, but during the whole month of December, we make four to five different kinds, including vegetarian versions,” says Nelly.

Bundles of deliciousness, just in time for the holidays: When it comes to tamales, you’ve got the whole package. ★

HOLIDAY MAGIC
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A Trip to Drip

WINERIES, AN OLIVE ORCHARD, AND A REENERGIZED
ENTERTAINMENT DISTRICT IN DRIPPING SPRINGS

text by DALE WEISMAN

D

RIPPING SPRINGS, MY OLD FRIEND, I THOUGHT I knew you. After years of rolling through town on US 290, I pegged Drippin' as a no-nonsense farming and ranching community striving to preserve its "Gateway to the Hill Country" identity next door to Austin.

Times are changing in Dripping Springs, however, and recently I've discovered a lively and quirky side to the town that I never knew existed.

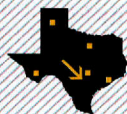
Named for a natural spring that still feeds a creek along Mercer Street, Dripping Springs reveres its 1850s pioneer roots and celebrates its frontier heritage during the annual Founders Day Festival in April and the Fall Fest Pioneer Days in September. Long known as an "eat-stay-love" wedding destination and a base for Hill Country outdoor recreation, Drippin' has also become a magnet for makers of



DRIPPING SPRINGS

For information about visiting Dripping Springs, including lodging, call the Dripping Springs Chamber of Commerce and Visitors Bureau, 512/858-4740; www.drippingspringstx.org.

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**MERCER
STREET DANCE**

The new Mercer Street Dance Hall caters to two-steppers in a restored barn building in Dripping Springs.

Dripping Springs' playful, two-stepping personality really comes alive on Mercer Street, the town's historic heart and blooming entertainment district.

craft beer, wine, and spirits, as well as a worthy destination for bon vivants and two-steppers.

Foodies "make the trip to the Drip" to savor an eclectic mix of casual and chef-inspired dining and the annual Dripping with Taste Wine, Food & Arts Festival in September. And the town's upstart KDRP public radio station keeps it hip and country in the spirit of Willie Nelson's first July 4th picnic, which was held at a nearby ranch 40 years ago.

Dripping Springs' playful, two-stepping personality really comes alive on Mercer Street, the town's historic heart and blooming entertainment district. "People are waking up to Mercer Street," says Tara Tetreault, a co-owner of Sacred Moon Herbs, a gift and herb shop that's one of more than 30 locally owned businesses along Mercer.

"Somebody popped the cork, and it started flowing around here," adds Billy Garza, a country musician who calls Dripping Springs home. Billy and his acoustic band, the Hill Country Ramblers, perform every Tuesday night at the Barber Shop, a brewpub that enlivened the Mercer Street scene when it opened in early 2011. The town's first freestanding bar, the Barber Shop has mostly Texas craft beers on tap, including tasty stouts, IPAs, and porters brewed by bar owner John McIntosh.

The bar building's last incarnation in the 1980s was indeed a barbershop, and so the name stuck. The building began its life in 1924 as the Crenshaw Texaco Station and remained a gas station until 1960. These days, the Barber Shop beckons patrons with its rustic limestone façade, striped barbershop sign, garage memorabilia, beer garden, and dominoes and darts.

Merry and Bright

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"This has become a gathering spot in the afternoons and evenings where people meet their neighbors and enjoy a better sense of community," John says.

The Barber Shop's *Cheers*-like "where-everyone-knows-your-name" atmosphere also flows two doors down at The Dudley's Wine Bar and Tap Room, which opened in early 2012. Serving more than 50 different wines by the glass and also beer on tap, Dudley's entertains patrons with live music, karaoke, and zany theme nights.

"This is as 'old Austin' as it's going to get anywhere," says Adam Dudley, Austin émigré and impresario of good times. Smiling like a benign Rasputin with a bushy salt-and-pepper beard, Adam greets every patron by name. "Strangers come in here all the time and walk out as friends," adds Adam. "It's all about having a good time."

Adam's welcoming vibe echoes down the street at the Mercer Street Dance Hall, which opened in February. Popular country bands like the Derailers, Two Tons of Steel, and the Cornell Hurd Band pack the 5,000-square-foot dance hall with hundreds of two-steppers and Western Swing dancers, transforming once-sleepy Mercer Street into a happening place on Thursday, Friday, and Saturday evenings.

Mercer Street Dance Hall embodies a dream-come-true

**HILL COUNTRY
RAMBLE**

Billy Garza and the Hill Country Ramblers perform Tuesday nights at the Barber Shop brewpub.

for owners Nick and Gay Dotin, and their daughter Shelby. A longtime bass player, Nick also worked as a carpenter and general contractor until the physical toil took its toll. Following his family's encouragement, Nick leased a vacant barn downtown and used his carpentry skills to finish out the cavernous metal-sided building in the down-home style of a traditional Hill Country dance hall.

"Gruene Hall was my biggest model for the dance hall," says Nick, who has played at the iconic New Braunfels venue many times. "As a musician, I know what I like in a dance hall when I perform, and my sound system is designed for dancers to hear great music and not get blown away."

Avid country dancers from Dripping Springs and Austin also gather at Drippin' Dancin', held the second and fourth Sunday night of the month at The Barn at Bell Springs, a wedding and special events destination north of town on scenic Bell Springs Road.

Country musician Alex Dormont and his wife, Grace, began Drippin' Dancin' at a Mercer Street restaurant several years ago and moved it to The Barn in late 2011. A bass and fiddle player, vocalist, and bandleader in the Western Swing tradition of Bob Wills, Alex has been a staple in the Austin-area country-music scene for more than 20 years. Nowadays, he mixes it up at The Barn and other venues with his two bands, the Hot Texas Swing Band and Dripping Springs All-Stars.

"We've built a family-friendly community of dancers who have become friends through the Drippin' Dancin' venue," says Alex. "I love dancing and playing at dances, and as long as people come here to dance, we'll keep this going."

Just up the road from The Barn, winemaker Nate Pruitt has cultivated a delightful wine tasting and live music scene at Bell Springs Winery, one of Dripping Springs' newest wineries and a stop along the Dripping Wine Trail, a tour of three area wineries.



The Dudley's Wine Bar and Tap Room is one of many local establishments breathing new life into historic Mercer Street in downtown Dripping Springs.

Visitors flock to the tasting room to sample and buy four types of Texas olive oil, fine Italian balsamic vinegars, and olive oil-based spa products. Many high-end restaurants and hotels in Texas serve John's premium blends, which are also shipped to customers through the olive company's adopt-an-olive-tree program and online store. Each April, the olive company celebrates in style during its annual Texas Hill Country Olive Festival.

With its nearby attractions for foodie tourists and revitalized Mercer Street downtown entertainment district, Dripping Springs is savoring the good life like neighboring big-city Austin, while preserving its small-town heritage.

"Drippin' is doing everything to hold on to its culture and local character," says Adam Dudley. "Look at how much fun and history we have just off the main highway right along Mercer Street." ★

"We're all about good wine, fine cuisine, and the outdoors," says Nate, a California native and software executive who has been making wine for more than 15 years.

On weekend afternoons, scores of wine lovers, some arriving in sleek winery-tour limos, sample Nate's delicious reds and whites inside the tasting room, kick back on the shady deck and lawn, and enjoy live acoustic music by local artists.

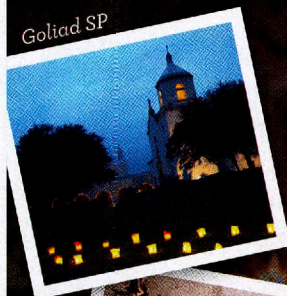
A short drive from Bell Springs Winery on West Fitzhugh Road, John Gambini's Texas Hill Country Olive Company produces cold-pressed premium extra-virgin olive oil from handpicked olives grown on his family-owned orchard and other orchards. The olive company is the fruition of a dream that began for John and his family more than 20 years ago. "We wanted to create the romance of the olive industry in the Hill Country," says John, who co-owns the company with his brother-in-law, Rick Mensik.

A native Texan with deep Sicilian roots, John established the olive company and farm in 2009. A certified organic commercial olive orchard, the farm has 16 acres planted with five varieties of olive trees. "Our limestone

soils and climate in this area of Texas are similar to the olive-growing regions of Sicily and Tuscany," says John. A centerpiece of the farm is the Texas Olive Store, a tasting room facility that evokes the Old World traditions of the world's top olive-producing nations, Spain and Italy.

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Text and photographs by
E. DAN KLEPPER





'The arrival of winter in Texas forecasts a far gentler season than do the snowdrifts and icy blasts common in the northern regions of the country.

The approach of a Texas winter brings with it mesquite smoke above Hill Country chimneys, migrating sandhill cranes over the Panhandle plains, and blue northers churning coastal bays. Our winter's mild frost still reminds us that seasons do change in Texas; without an occasional freeze and its icicles, our memories of past summers might not seem so sweet. Fortunately, Texas also offers the ideal antidote for those prone to the winter blues—a vacation in the remote Big Bend Country, where warm afternoons and crisp nights are common from December to February.

In the small community of Marathon, considered the gateway to the Big Bend, the Marathon Motel & RV Park serves as a reliable introduction to Big Bend in the winter. The motel anchors the west end of the town, which was established as a ranching settlement and railroad shipping point in the late 19th Century. Built in the 1940s and updated and renovated a few years ago, the motel makes good on its tagline, "Sunsets, Stargazing, and Storm Chasing—We've Got the Sky for You."

Marathon, along with the rest of the Big Bend region, guarantees some of the darkest skies in the continental United States, and the motel grounds—surrounded by a vast, grass-rich basin and low-desert mountains—offer unobstructed views for witnessing the galaxy's antics. The motel's adobe-walled courtyard, complete with landscaped gardens, features a community fire pit where guests gather each evening to share stories and watch the night skies.

After a night or two in Marathon, take a 45-minute drive south to Big Bend National Park for a day

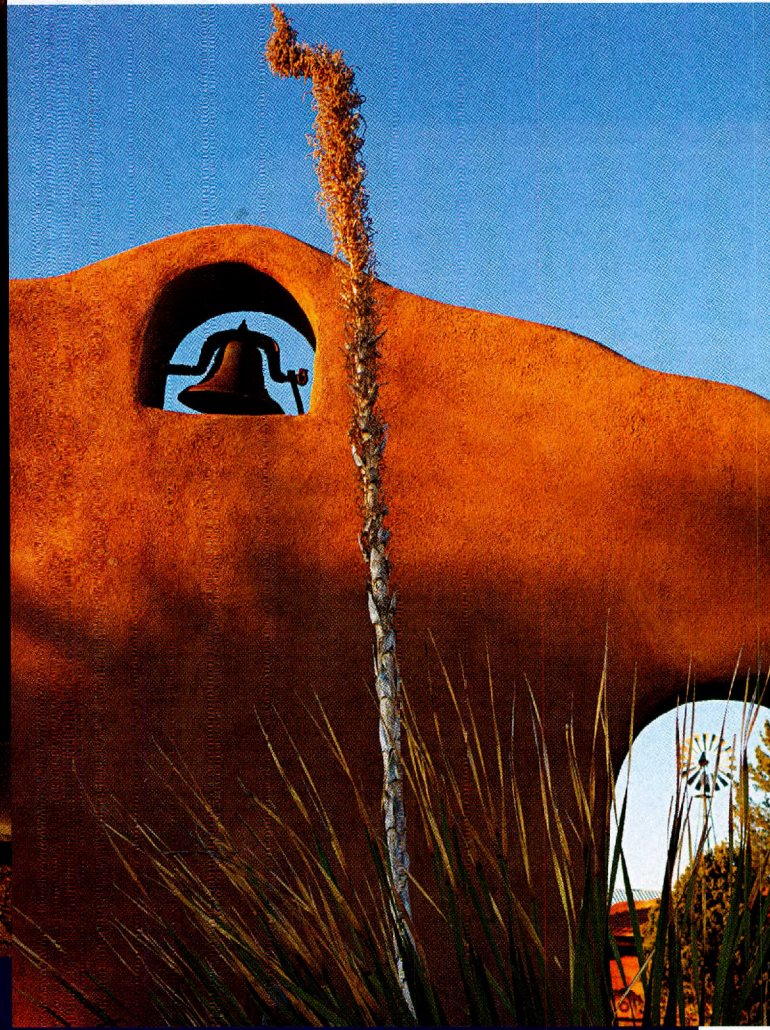
of hiking across the state's largest expanse of rugged winterland. The national park, at more than 800,000 acres, encompasses mountain ranges and desert valleys where wildlife, including Peregrine falcons and the occasional cougar, make their home. Explore the Chihuahuan Desert lowlands via the Devil's Den trail (a wild trek along the edge of a deep, narrow canyon) and the popular Grapevine Hills Trail, where volcanic boulders perform a balancing act. Or continue upward to the park's Chisos Basin, where, at 5,400 feet in elevation, you'll find a simple motel called the Chisos Mountains Lodge. Here, creature comforts meet black bears and backpackers.

The Basin, a topographic depression in the Chisos Mountains, is the starting point for some of the park's preeminent hiking trails; adventurers can choose from multiple short day hikes and overnight routes, all threading through forests of pinyon pine and alligator juniper, up and over igneous rimrock, and across meadows of grama grass and agave. Two of the Basin's most popular attractions are the South Rim Trail, an all-day trek with hawk-eye vistas southward into Mexico; and the winding Window Trail, a 5.6-mile hike alongside the Basin's Oak Creek.

If trail snacks and camp food aren't enough to restore your reserves after a day of hiking, try a meal at the Chisos Mountains Lodge Restaurant, which opens for breakfast, lunch, and dinner (and also prepares box lunches). Dinner features entrées like grilled rib-eye, roasted pork loin, and sautéed shrimp with shallots over pasta. The lodge also features a gift shop, as well as a small grocery store in

EXHILARATING VIEWS AND MORE

await throughout the Big Bend (above). Right, clockwise from top left: Terlingua's Long Draw Pizza offers cold beer and artisan pizzas. In Marathon, the Marathon Motel's adobe architecture and central firepit create a warm sense of community.



The location, known as Boquillas Hot Springs, offers dreamy views of the almost-9,000-foot limestone escarpment of Mexico's Sierra del Carmen range across the river.



case you need more sunblock or trail eats for the next day's hike.

For an unusual wintertime adventure, catch an early dinner, grab your bathing suit, and drive east to the Panther Junction Visitor Center, then south along the Rio Grande Village Drive to the Hot Springs Road turnoff. Although the turnoff road is usually passable, avoid it when it's wet and make sure your vehicle has high clearance. (A four-wheel-drive vehicle isn't typically necessary, though.) Park in the designated lot, then follow the Hot Springs Trail past rock ruins. The ruins are the remains of a grocery store/post office and a row of motel-like rooms built by Big Bend settler J.O. Langford in the early 1900s. Langford established a trading post near the hot springs for wagon traffic crossing the river between Mexico and the United States, and he later ran a health resort to take advantage of the hot springs' salubrious properties.

Continue along the trail to the remains of Langford's stone bathhouse, a small, square, hand-constructed foundation filled with water located just above the Rio Grande. A spring with temperatures hovering around 105 degrees Fahrenheit emerges near the center of the pool, where a soft, silt bottom provides a comfortable seat for stretching out and relaxing against the rock ledges. The pool is shallow, but with a little effort you can lie back and submerge up to your neck, or simply sit along the ledges and soak your feet. The location, known as Boquillas Hot Springs, offers dreamy views of the almost-9,000-foot limestone escarpment of Mexico's Sierra del Carmen range. Catch it at sundown and watch the orange light of dusk set the white cliffs aflame.

A well-deserved good night's sleep no doubt follows, so return to the Basin (drive carefully as desert snakes, coyotes, and owls also travel after dark)



HOT SPRINGS ETERNAL

What put the "Hot" in the Boquillas Hot Springs? See texashighways.com/webextra.



and nestle into a sleeping bag at the Basin campground or, if you prefer creature comforts, enjoy a cottage or motel room at the Chisos Mountains Lodge. The lodge's Roosevelt Stone Cottages, built of native materials in the 1930s by the Civilian Conservation Corps, represent an authentic slice of early 20th-Century Big Bend history. These five cottages take advantage of the inspiring Chisos Basin panorama, including the view through the "Window," an opening in the Basin's walls that frames the desert landscape below. Morning or evening, the unparalleled vista through the Window is reason enough to make a trip to the Big Bend an annual tradition.

Winter in the Big Bend also signals the advent of a weekly farmer's market in Terlingua—the desert "ghost town" community a few miles west of the national park—where fresh, locally grown produce, handmade crafts, a campfire, and live music create a festive "green" scene for residents and visitors. The market is sponsored by the Terlingua Community Garden, a loose coalition of Terlinguans dedicated to providing local organic food to the community. The market occurs

COLORS OF THE BIG BEND

Boquillas Hot Springs soothes visitors with 105-degree water and spectacular views. Terlingua's farmer's market runs October through March. Yucca punctuates the desert landscape with dramatic spikes and flowers.



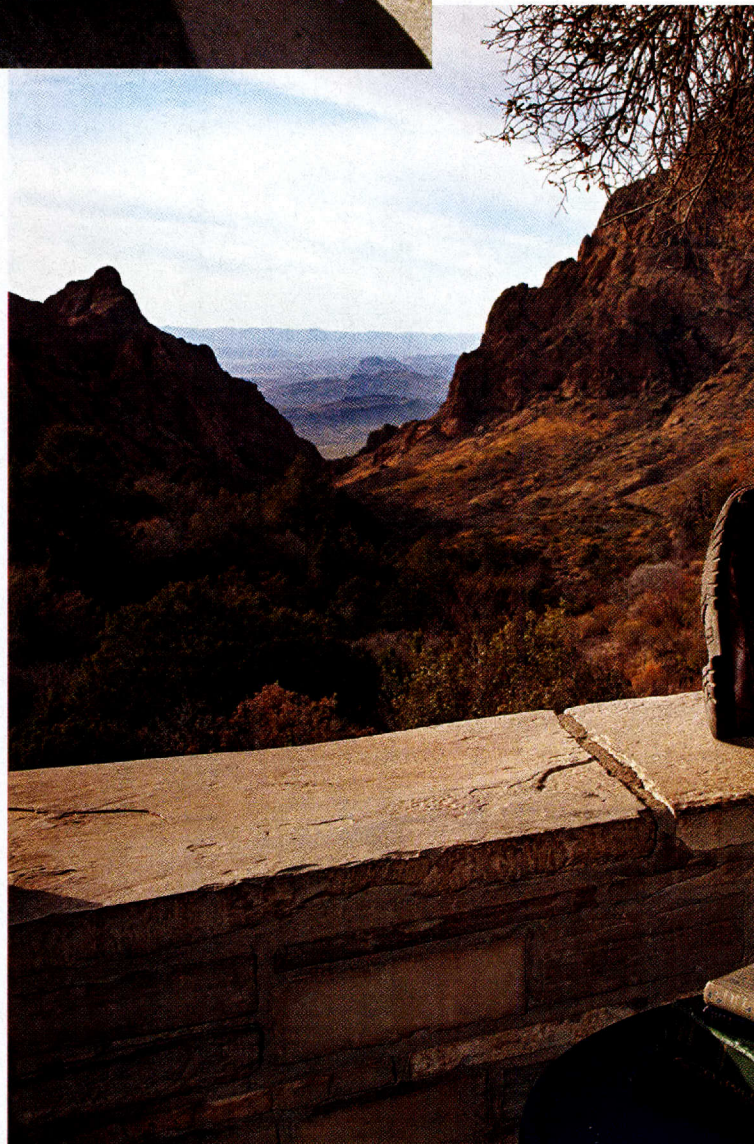
After grazing on some homegrown greens at the farmer's market, try a hearty bowl of Terlingua chili from the nearby Starlight Theatre Restaurant & Saloon.

CHILI AND CHILL
The menu at Terlingua's Starlight Theatre Restaurant & Saloon includes hearty meat dishes (try the spicy chili), plus several vegetarian options. Reserve cabins at the Chisos Mountains Lodge well in advance.

between 10 and 2 every Saturday from October 19 to March 30 beneath the Community Garden's generous shade shelter, which you'll find between the historic Terlingua cemetery and the parking lot of the Starlight Theatre Restaurant & Saloon.

A Terlingua ghost town mainstay for decades, the Starlight is currently in the hands of chef Diego Palacios, whose robust menu serves plenty of creative meat dishes, including wild game such as antelope and wild boar, as well as vegetarian options like garden burgers. Carnivores should try Chef Palacios' pork medallions in chipotle reduction sauce (\$17.95) or throw the diet out the window and dig in to the Diego Burger (\$19.95)—a pound of beef, four strips of bacon, cheese, and two fried eggs with grilled onions and pickled jalapeños, with fries. You'll need to work that one off, so stick around and burn some calories by toe-tapping to live performances by regional musicians or migrate out the door to the porch, where impromptu jam sessions often coalesce around sundown.

The warm glow of a winter sunset in the Big Bend always seems to chase the chills away, so be sure and see one from the region's ideal sundown location—the Big Hill in Big Bend Ranch State Park. To get there from Terlingua, drive west along FM 170 (the "River Road") into the park, then stop at the Barton Warnock Visitor Center to pick up a permit. (If you arrive after hours, you can drop the park entrance fee into the Iron Ranger at the parking lot.) Then continue west, through





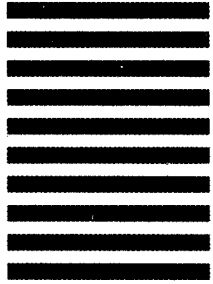
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SAVINGS CERTIFICATE

the resort community of Lajitas, past an abandoned film set known as the Contrabando Movie Set, and onward to the steep incline just past a roadside picnic area called "The Teepees." Continue up the incline, then pull into the small parking area next to the row of boulders and the interpretive sign just over the top of the hill. Don't forget the parking brake!

From here, an expansive view of the Rio Grande valley advances before you, the rugged cliffs of Mexico on one side and the tumbling Bofecillos Mountains on the other. Below, the river slips gently through the landscape, a sliver of mercury in the winter's dusk. Suddenly, the sun tips the horizon and the afternoon light settles, tinting the bluffs and basins like drifting chaffs of wheat. Nearby, in the moist shadow of a yucca, green sprouts portend an early blooming desert marigold, proving that spring in the Big Bend is just around the corner. ★

"The best thing about winter destinations out here," says writer and Big Bend resident E. Dan Klepper, "is the ease of finding one to claim for your own."



ESSENTIALS BIG BEND WINTER

For general information about the Big Bend area, see the website of the Brewster County Tourism Council, www.visitbigbend.com.

For details about **Marathon**, see www.marathontexas.com.

The **Marathon Motel & RV Park**, 701 US 90 in Marathon. Call 866/386-4241; www.marathonmotel.com.

For information about **Big Bend National Park**, call 432/477-2251; www.nps.gov/bibe.

Chisos Mountains Lodge and Restaurant is in the center of the national park. Make lodging reservations well in advance of your visit; call 432/477-2291; www.chisosmountainslodge.com.

Learn more about the **Terlingua Community Garden and Farmer's Market** here: www.terlinguagreenscene.com.

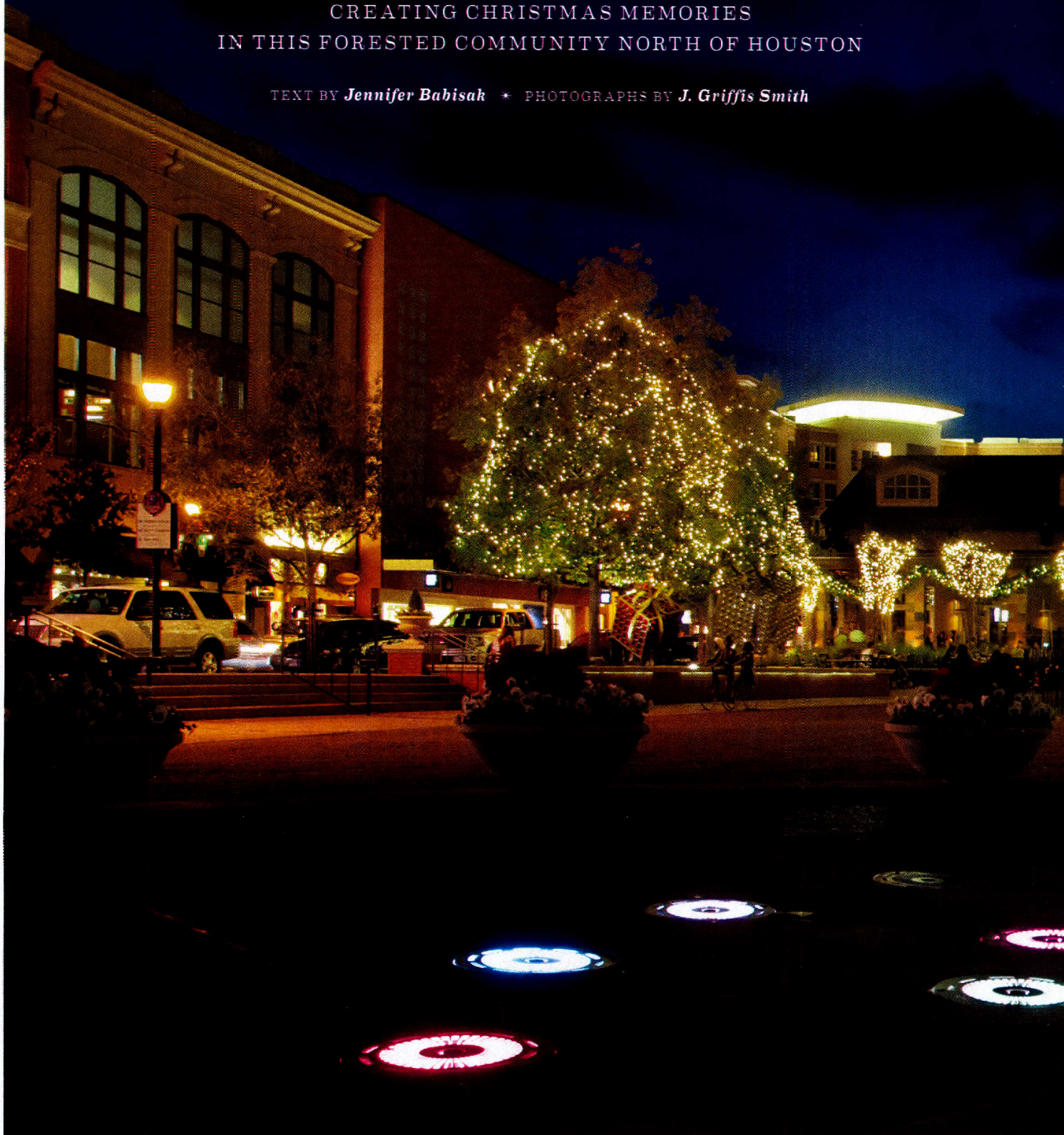
The **Starlight Theatre Restaurant & Saloon**, 631 Ivey Road in Terlingua. Call 432/371-3400; www.thestarlighttheatre.com.

For information about **Big Bend Ranch State Park**, call 432/358-4444; www.tpwd.state.tx.us/state-parks/big-bend-ranch.

the Woodlands' wonderland

CREATING CHRISTMAS MEMORIES
IN THIS FORESTED COMMUNITY NORTH OF HOUSTON

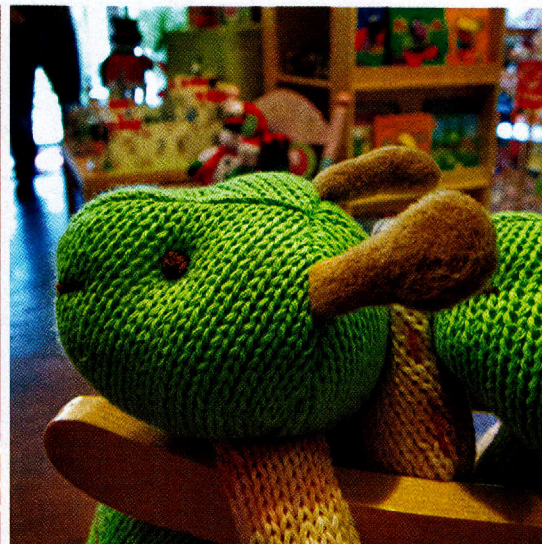
TEXT BY *Jennifer Babisak* * PHOTOGRAPHS BY *J. Griffis Smith*





DECK THE HALLS

The 70-foot Market Street Christmas Tree dazzles passers-by with evening light performances.



Each year the hectic pace of the holiday season takes me captive, rendering the days between Thanksgiving and New Year's a breathless sprint devoid of their supposedly inherent joy. Every year I vow to change things the next go-round—to shop earlier, do less, enjoy more. So last December, my husband, Matt, children (Caleb, Madi, and Esther), and I took a drastic approach to carving serenity from the holiday chaos: We shoved the entirety of our to-do list to the side (even skipping Christmas-play rehearsal) and embarked on a weekend getaway to a purported winter wonderland, The Woodlands.

We chose our lodging, The Woodlands Resort, based not on its location within 23,000 acres of forest nor for its luxurious suites, but solely because of its special holiday breakfast offerings. So the morning after our arrival, we hurried to the much-anticipated Breakfast with Santa, held in the resort's dining room. Winding our way past several Christmas

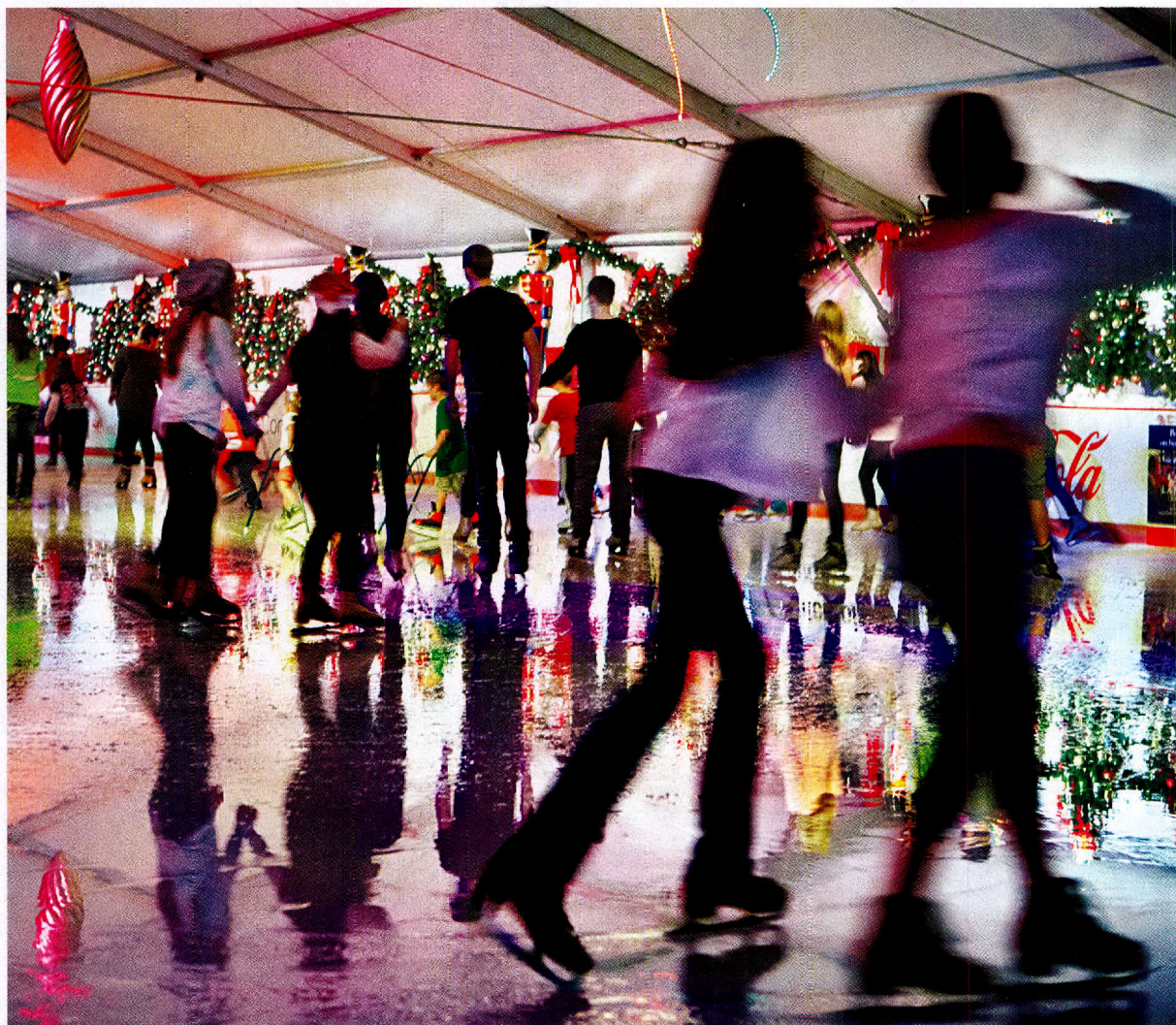
We shoved the entirety of our to-do list to the side (even skipping Christmas-play rehearsal) and embarked on a weekend getaway to a purported winter wonderland, The Woodlands.

trees—dazzlingly decorated with flowing red ribbons and golden ball ornaments—we encountered elegantly appointed tables dripping with sugary confections. The older kids flocked to the waffle station, piling their waffles with sprinkles, M&Ms, chocolate chips, and whipped cream. Esther favored the martini glasses filled with layers of yogurt, granola, and fresh berries, while Matt and I honed in on the protein options—custom-made omelets, eggs Benedict, and breakfast meats aplenty. Sitting down with our stacked plates, we peered through the dining room's floor-to-ceiling windows to take in the tranquil view of the resort's pine-bordered lake and golf course.

While Matt and I watched Esther, Caleb and Madi eagerly waited in line for a turn to sit upon jolly St. Nick's

MERRY AND BRIGHT

Facing page: Enchanted with Santa at The Woodlands Resort, gift wishes granted at Tinsley's Treasures, and sweet tooth satiated at Frost Bake Shoppe. Right, the 7,600-square-foot Ice Rink welcomes skaters of all skill levels.



lap and confide their heartfelt wishes. Toward the end of the meal, the Ice Princess—an ethereal vision with tiara-adorned platinum hair and a fur-trimmed, pink-taffeta ball gown—called all children to the restaurant's lobby, where she performed a magic show. She led the children in chants of “1, 2, 3, Hocus Pocus” as she pulled one trick after another from her sparkly, purple magic suitcase, culminating in her pulling an adorably fluffy white rabbit named Sugar Bunny from a wooden train. The children then lined up to stroke the rabbit's silky fur while beaming for the camera.

With Christmas cheer (and plenty of sugar) coursing through our veins, we drove about a mile to Tinsley's Treasures Toy Shop to look for a few special gifts. The shop, located on the campus

of the private Paddington British Storybook Garden School, carries European specialty toys and clothing. As we stepped into the charming cottage, owner Nicolette Cullen-Hardwicke's British hospitality became apparent in the offer of complimentary tea and cookies. Browsing in the soothing space, decked out in pastel colors and boasting a whimsical chandelier with a dancing harlequin rabbit, I admired gifts for the children like wooden toy castles, cloth ballerina dolls (hand-picked by Hardwicke, a former professional ballerina), and Paddington Bear raincoat-and-wellies sets. My eyes were getting ahead of my wallet, though, so we stepped outside to the grounds and followed the flagstone path into the Discovery Garden. While I sat and sipped my tea, the kids romped through a labyrinth

and raked sand in the Zen Garden.

In our newfound state of Zen, we sought out another low-key activity, a tour of The Woodlands Town Center (the area's central shopping, dining, and entertainment district) aboard a Woodlands Waterway Cruiser. As we cruised the 1.4-mile-long Woodlands Waterway in the glass-topped boat—the windows open on this sunny December day—Captain Ron pointed out interesting sites like the Byzantine glass mosaic murals designed by Houston artist Dixie Fried Gay lining the walls under the Waterway Avenue Bridge. We passed the Cynthia Woods Mitchell Pavilion, and Captain Ron mentioned that Frank Sinatra performed for the amphitheater's opening weekend in 1990.

During our tour, the kids spotted The Ice Rink, touted as the largest seasonal



WATER AND LIGHTS

Glass-topped Waterway Cruisers ply the 1.4-mile Woodlands Waterway. Winter Wonderland's two acres of twinkling displays.

ice rink in the Southwest. A tented enclosure shields the 7,600-square-foot main rink, which opens each holiday season. Bordered by oversized nutcrackers and miniature Christmas trees, the rink beckons skaters of all ability levels, with helmets and skate trainers available for rent and a special area where young children can practice unencumbered by their older peers. Though we achieved more slipping and sliding than gliding, the kids delighted in the opportunity to attempt such a quintessential winter sport in spite of our balmy Texas weather.

Ready for a lunch break, we made the five-minute drive to Hubbell & Hudson Kitchen. This upscale market—sister to The Woodlands' full-scale gourmet Hubbell & Hudson Market—offers more than 200 wines, a selection of fresh produce and specialty foods, and a counter-service eatery serving a variety of gourmet fare. “We’ve become a real community hangout,” said General Manager Amy Birdwell.

Matt and I opted for the Build Your Own Burger: My custom creation included a cheddar and jalapeño-laden cowboy patty sandwiched between ciabatta slices with a side of Parmesan truffled fries. The kids squealed over their all-beef hot dogs atop buttered challah buns.

Though Kitchen offered a tempting array of artisan chocolates and fresh-baked goods, we couldn’t pass up the opportunity to visit a dessert locale that recently gained fame with

As we cruised the Woodlands Waterway in the glass-topped boat, we passed the Cynthia Woods Mitchell Pavilion. Captain Ron mentioned that Frank Sinatra performed for the amphitheater’s opening weekend in 1990.

an appearance on Food Network’s “Cupcake Wars.” We stepped into the decadent world of Frost Bake Shoppe, and true to its name, the cupcake shop glimmers with steel tables, metallic chairs, ice-blue walls, and light fixtures dripping with crystals. Though I wanted to try a seasonally flavored cupcake like egg nog or candy cane, the confections looked too rich to tackle alone. So Matt and I split a vanilla cupcake topped with a rich swirl of chocolate icing and a candied Christmas tree while the kids dug into a cookies ‘n’ cream version.

Next, we made our way to Waterway Square, a one-acre plaza featuring rushing waterfalls and dancing fountains choreographed to the melody of holiday songs. As evening approached, a caroling quartet—outfitted in Dickensian costumes—led the gathered crowd in song. The sweet strains lulled most of the audience into jovial relaxation, lounging about on blankets, partaking of picnics, and sipping the

complimentary hot chocolate from a nearby drink station. However, I knew my girls were itching to dance, and when the carolers broke into a high-spirited rendition of "Jingle Bells," Madi and Esther could sit still no longer. They jumped to their feet, leaping and pirouetting to the tune, and begged me to join them. I gave in, of course, and the three of us grasped hands and whirled about until our cheeks were rosy and our heads spinning.

Just steps from the festivities of the Square, we found La Lupita, a traditional Mexican restaurant proclaiming the motto "No Tex. Just Mex." We sat on the covered patio, which is perched directly above the waterway. Our table's waterside location gave us unobstructed views of the glowing blue lights lining the Waterway Avenue Bridge and the twinkling trees along the water's banks.

As we munched on housemade chips and dips, including pico de gallo and tomatillo salsa, we saw Captain Ron cruising down the waterway, waving to us while educating a new crowd of tourists. I chowed down on my favorite traditional Mexican dish, *sopes* (thick tortillas topped with chicken, chorizo, and *Cotija* cheese served atop banana leaves), while Matt opted for the Tacos Campechanos (a mix of flank steak and chorizo in corn tortillas) and the kids feasted on *crema*-topped chicken taquitos.

After dinner, making our way toward the shops of Market Street, we walked through the two acres of twinkling lights called Winter Wonderland. Here, brightly colored bulbs form the shapes of toy trains, teddy bears, and giant candy canes, and the kids gasped in wonder as they took in the fantastical creations. We heard a soft whinny behind us and turned to see one of Town Center's many mounted patrol officers astride a chocolate mare. When the kids giggled and reached out their hands toward the gentle steed, the officer guided the horse over and allowed them to stroke its coarse hair.

Reaching Market Street's Central Park, we found a grassy expanse surrounded by high-end shops and restaurants like Jasper's (acclaimed chef Kent Rathbun's "gourmet backyard cuisine" venture) and the only Tommy Bahama Island (retail and restaurant combo) in Texas. The whole area was dominated by the 70-foot-tall Market Street Christmas Tree, aglow with 25,000 lights and topped with a towering eight-pointed star. Couples posed in front of the colorfully lit tree, and parents struggled to snap Christmas-card-worthy photos of their wriggling children. Swarms of children rendered the lawn abuzz with activity as strangers united over games of touch football and tag.

But all activity ceased and hundreds of startled faces turned skyward as the booming first notes of "Deck the Halls" brought the tree to life. For this performance, which occurs every half-hour,

the tree's lights flash in pulsating bands of red, gold, and green, keeping time with classical and contemporary instrumental tunes. And for the performance's five-minute duration, all was still, with young and old alike mesmerized by the magic of dancing lights.

We, too, found magic in The Woodlands, the wonder of exchanging stress for revelry and the gift of undistracted time to peek into our children's hearts as they took in the sights and sounds of Christmas. Looks like the makings of a new Christmas tradition. ★

"Discovering Hubbell & Hudson Kitchen has hampered the efficiency of our many treks along I-45," says Jennifer Babisak.

"Now we almost always detour into The Woodlands for gourmet eats." Photo Editor Griff Smith enjoyed visiting with Santa at The Woodlands Resort. "I got everything on my wish list last year," he says.



ESSENTIALS THE WOODLANDS

For more on holiday events and attractions in The Woodlands, contact The Woodlands Convention and Visitors Bureau, 877/963-2447; www.thewoodlandscvb.com. Following are sites in the story:

LODGING

The Woodlands Resort, 2301 N. Millbend Dr., 800/433-2624; www.woodlandsresort.com. Breakfast with Santa, Dec. 7 & 14; reservations recommended (281/364-6292).

SHOPPING AND ATTRACTIONS

Tinsley's Treasures Toy Shop, 2010 Sawdust Rd., 281/292-7818; www.paddingtonbritishschool.com.

The Woodlands Waterway Cruiser, www.visitthewoodlands.com.

The Ice Rink, northeast corner of Lake Robbins and Six Pines Dr., 281/419-5630; [\[icerink.com\]\(http://icerink.com\). Open Nov. 16-17, 2013, and daily Nov. 23, 2013-Jan. 20, 2014.](http://www.thewoodlands</p>
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Waterway Square, www.waterwaysquare.com.

Winter Wonderland, northeast corner of Lake Robbins and Six Pines Dr.; www.thewoodlandscvb.com/ww. Open Nov. 23, 2013-Jan. 20, 2014.

Market Street, 281/419-4774; www.marketstreet-thewoodlands.com.

RESTAURANTS

Hubbell & Hudson Kitchen, 4526 Research Forest Dr., 281/203-5650; www.hubbellandhudson.com/kitchen.

Frost Bake Shoppe, 6777 Woodlands Pkwy., Ste. 304, 281/298-7474; www.frostbakeshoppe.com.

La Lupita, 20 Waterway Ave., 832/510-2111; www.lalupita-restaurant.com.



LOS ALGODONES



THE 'COTTON TIMES' OF THE
RIO GRANDE VALLEY'S CIVIL WAR ERA

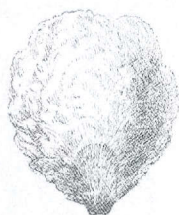
Text by TOM FORT
Photographs by ERICH SCHLEGEL



The Rio Grande Legacy exhibit, Museum of South Texas History

Some 150 years ago,

as civil war consumed the United States, trains of canvas-covered wagons rolled across Texas from the Brazos Valley south to the Rio Grande Valley and the Mexican border. They carried bales of cotton, nicknamed “white gold” because of its status as the industrial world’s most valued raw material. While the Civil War unfolded mostly on eastern battlefields, a frenzied cotton trade in South Texas drew the conflict into the Rio Grande Valley, where relics of the turbulent era are still visible today.



In April, Palmito Ranch Battlefield National Historic Landmark will host volunteers to help clean up the site for its annual “Park Day,” which also includes a history symposium. The specific date will be announced in early 2014.

The bloody American conflict didn’t reduce demand for southern cotton at textile mills in places like England, France, and even New England. In return, the Confederacy’s cotton exports financed its war effort, supplying Rebel armies with imported guns, ammunition, swords, uniforms, and accouterments far beyond what limited Southern industry could produce. To squelch the trade, and hopefully shorten the war, the Union established blockades along the Gulf Coast, pushing foreign ships to seek ports free of interference. They found them at Texas’ southernmost tip—the destination of southbound wagons on the “cotton road.”

“Anyone hoping to better understand the Civil War in Texas will want to visit the Rio Grande Valley,” says Jerry Thompson, a history professor at Texas A&M International University and co-author of *Civil War and Revolution on the Rio Grande Frontier*. “Called the ‘cotton times’ by residents living on the Rio Grande frontier, such communities as Brownsville, Rio Grande City, Laredo, and Eagle Pass all prospered during the war as thousands of bales of cotton were taken across the river into Mexico from as far away as Arkansas and Louisiana.”

PALMITO RANCH

The last battle of the Civil War took place near Brownsville at Palmito Ranch, which is now a National Historic Landmark.



A good place to start exploring the Rio Grande Valley's Civil War history is on US 77, which roughly follows the cotton road as it unrolls south from Victoria to Kingsville and beyond. Wagon trains found a welcome stop west of Kingsville at Captain Richard King's Santa Gertrudis Ranch. A staunch Confederate and former Rio Grande steamboat captain, King had strong connections to the cotton trade. His ranch provided the cotton freighters with hospitality and a place to sleep. Though King's wartime ranch house is long gone, the modern King Ranch still welcomes travelers

with tours that include the bridge site where Civil War cotton wagons crossed Santa Gertrudis Creek.

Nearing the Rio Grande, some cotton wagons headed to Port Isabel, which was then a haven for cotton traders because the U.S. Navy's attempts to blockade the port were weak. Under sail or steam, blockade-runners threaded the channel between Padre Island and Brazos Santiago Island, and anchored off Port Isabel. Crewmen unloaded cargoes for Confederate Texas—arms, military gear, and civilian goods—and repacked the ships' holds with cotton

bales. Small boats, known as lighters, shuttled between the wharves and ships in the Laguna Madre, ferrying crates and bales. Late in 1863, Union forces occupied the town—then known as Point Isabel—halting its cotton trade until the next summer, when resurgent Rebels drove out the Federal forces and the blockade-runners returned.

Today, the historic Port Isabel Lighthouse is open as a state historic site. Visitors can climb the lighthouse's winding iron stairway to an observation platform, where Confederate lookouts once trained spyglasses on Navy





THE KING'S SALT

La Sal del Rey lake, above, was a valued source of salt during the Civil War. Opposite, the Stillman House Museum in Brownsville.



Mexico remained neutral in the American Civil War and refused to intervene in the Confederate cotton trade across the Rio Grande. As Mexico fought to oust French Imperial forces during the same time period, it benefitted from trade activity at ports in Matamoros and Bagdad.

blockade ships and runners arriving with more goods. Nearby, the Port Isabel Historical Museum and Treasures of the Gulf Museum chronicle local history ranging from 13th-Century Spanish shipwrecks to the U.S.-Mexican War and the Civil War.

Just over the Queen Isabella Memorial Causeway is South Padre Island. At the island's southern tip, Isia Blanca Park overlooks Brazos Santiago Pass, where ships and fishing boats now follow the ghostly wakes of long-forgotten blockade-runners.

While some cotton wagons turned east to Port Isabel, others rumbled on to Brownsville, the cotton trade's financial nerve center and gateway to Mexico—which remained neutral in the American Civil War. Across the river in Mexico were Matamoros and its nearby port of Bagdad, a ramshackle village on the south bank of the Rio Grande that flourished briefly as a primary destination for outbound Confederate cotton. Foreign ships anchored in waters off Bagdad could load cotton without interference by the U.S. Navy.

At the trade's height, teamsters shouted, mules brayed, and oxen bawled as cotton wagons jammed Brownsville's

streets. The activity converged on the riverfront at Levee Street, where hand-pulled ferries and puffing steamboats carried cargo across to Matamoros. On Levee Street's north side, shipping offices, warehouses, and saloons overlooked the muddy river landing. Today, Levee Street is still a business district, but it's mostly high and dry: The fickle Rio Grande shifted away long ago.

Elsewhere in Brownsville, remnants of Civil War times are palpable. Enter the brick Stillman House Museum on East Washington Street, and step back in time. Victorian rugs, curtains, and period antiques recall the 1850 home's first occupant, financier Charles Stillman, who partnered in steamboating with Mifflin Kenedy and Richard King. Together, the trio dominated the wartime cotton trade. Today, the Brownsville Historical Association oversees the Stillman House Museum and the adjacent Brownsville Heritage Museum, which display artifacts from the city's Civil War years, including military relics from the Confederate and Union troops that alternately occupied Brownsville.

On the city's southeast side sprawled Fort Brown, an Army post established in



THE PORT ISABEL LIGHTHOUSE

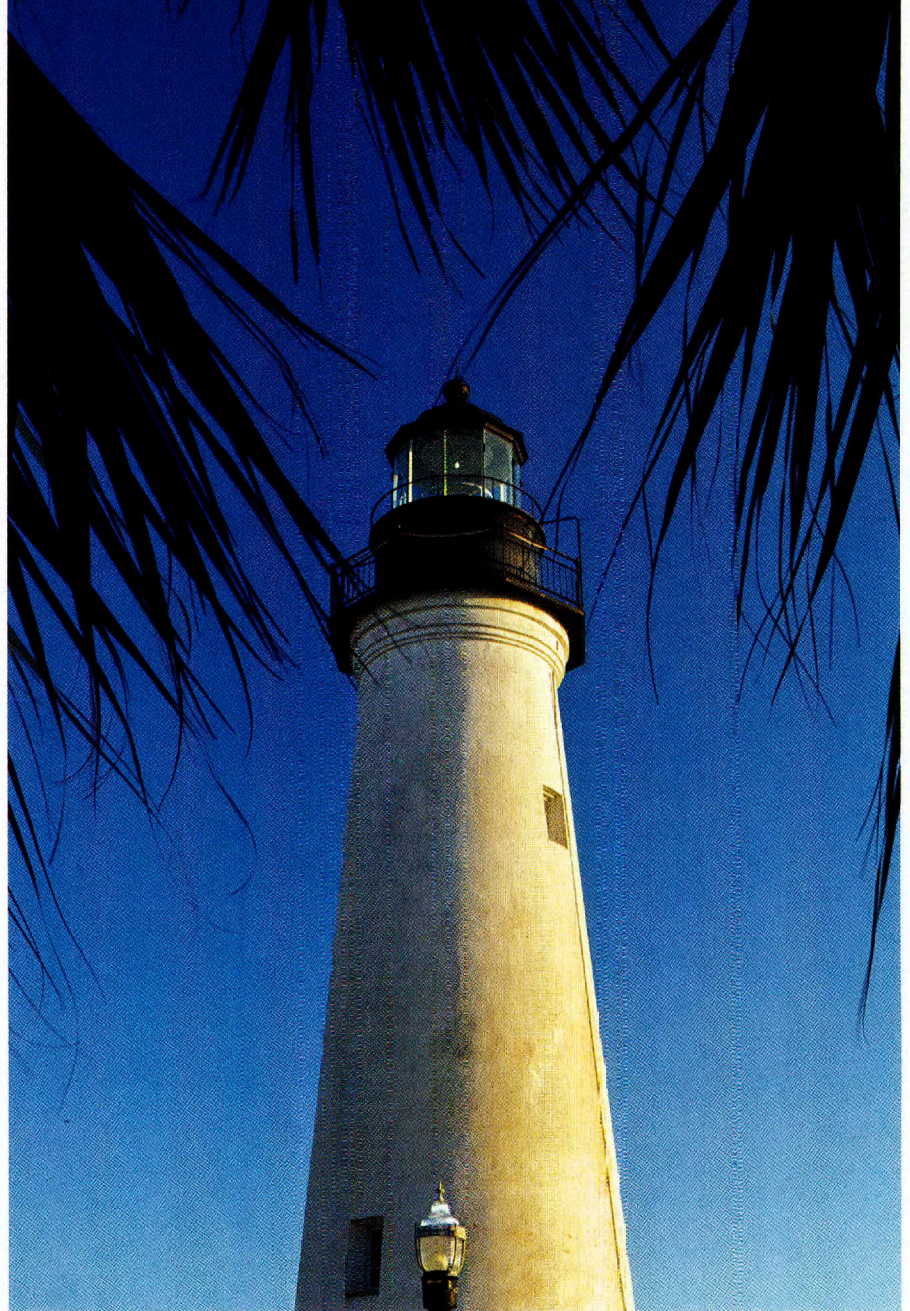
*gives visitors the same
vantage point that Confederate
lookouts had in the 1860s.*

1846 at the beginning of the U.S.-Mexican War. Confederate and Union forces both occupied the fort at different points of the Civil War, and in 1863, retreating Rebels burned it down. Rebuilt later, Fort Brown today houses Texas Southmost College and the University of Texas-Brownsville. No Civil War-era buildings remain.

Seeking to close river crossings and end the cotton trade, Union forces invaded the Rio Grande Valley in November 1863. Blue-clad troops gathered at Brazos Santiago Island and marched on Brownsville. The outnumbered Confederate forces withdrew, and frantic townsfolk crossed into Mexico. Old Glory waved again over Fort Brown's charred remains.

The Federals soon marched west along the road connecting river settlements from Brownsville to Rio Grande City. Used heavily by the Army, it was called the Military Highway; today, most of it is US 281, but signs along the road still bear the old name. Moving up the Valley, the "Yanks" seized hand-pulled ferries at Edinburg (now called Hidalgo), Rio Grande City, and Roma. Meanwhile, Union cavalry ranged north and west, raiding distant ranches, including King's Santa Gertrudis, and taking livestock to feed Union ranks.

Union cavalry also targeted La Sal del Rey salt lake in Hidalgo County, north of modern-day Edinburg. Salt was a valuable preservative and a trade item. Confederates mined salt from the lake and hauled the crystals to San Antonio and Brownsville by pack mules and oxcarts. Union forces destroyed the salt works early in 1864, but mining resumed after Confederate forces retook the Valley later that summer. The Confederates also used camels—left over from the Army's Camel



Corps experiment at Camp Verde—to transport the salt. Though well-suited to their task, camels were not popular in the city of Brownsville, which passed an ordinance to keep the temperamental beasts off city streets.

Today, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service oversees La Sal del Rey as a wildlife refuge and heritage site. Salt deposits whiten the shoreline of the 530-acre lake, while the protected waters and surrounding scrub make the site popular for migratory waterfowl and wildlife like deer and javelina.

About 18 miles south of La Sal del Rey, a state historical marker on the courthouse lawn in Edinburg relates the salt lake's wartime role. Edinburg

is also home to the Museum of South Texas History, which explores Rio Grande Valley history with exhibits ranging from the fossils of a prehistoric mammoth to the daily tools of Spanish colonials and the Rio Grande's riverboat era, including the Civil War. In one exhibit, visitors can board a re-creation of an 1860 steamboat with a theater partly enclosed by cotton bales; within, a lively program recounts the riverboat days. Nearby, a hotel façade displays Civil War-period firearms, sabers, and cannon balls. Of special interest are china fragments, bottles, and other artifacts from the site of Bagdad.

The Union's stop-the-cotton strategy flopped. As crossings into Mexico closed

near the mouth of the Rio Grande, the wagon trains simply took their cotton to crossings farther west at Laredo and Eagle Pass; once across, they headed back east to Matamoros and Bagdad. But the extra distance raised transport costs, along with prices for imported goods. Retaking Brownsville became a Confederate priority.

In May 1864, the Rebels gained a foothold in Rio Grande City, where Confederate forces under the direction of Colonel Santos Benavides and Colonel John Ford retook Ringgold Barracks (later named Fort Ringgold), a military installation built at the end of the U.S.-Mexican War to safeguard citizens from border violence. These days, the Rio Grande City Consolidated Independent School District occupies the post grounds, including the restored Commandant's Quarters, an 1860 structure with broad porches that has the distinction of being the Rio Grande Valley's only surviving military structure from the Civil War era.

The Commandant's Quarters is home to a museum that focuses on Fort Ringgold history from its founding in 1848 to its closing in 1944. Period uniform replicas combined with original U.S. cavalry equipment give a vivid picture of military life on the border during a turbulent era. Among the exhibits is one about the famed "Buffalo Soldiers," African-American troops who manned Ringgold and other remote outposts in the decades after the Civil War and the end of slavery.

From Ringgold Barracks, Ford and Benavides pursued the Federals east along the Military Highway. The Rebels won a battle at the small ranching community of Las Rucias—now recognized by a state historical marker. Weeks later, the Confederates reentered Brownsville, which had been evacuated by Union troops, and the city's cotton trade sprang back to life.

A stalemate set in as the battle-weary sides continued to fight occasional skirmishes, far from the Civil War's decisive events back east. But despite the news of Confederate General Robert

E. Lee's surrender in April 1865, the war raged on in the Rio Grande Valley as Ford refused to concede defeat and sought to protect the cotton trade. In May, a Union force again marched west toward Brownsville. At Fort Brown, Ford rallied his remaining forces and galloped east, and hit the Federals at Palmito Ranch. The Civil War's last battle was a Confederate victory.

Now under National Park Service management, the Palmito Ranch Battlefield National Historic Landmark opens for special occasions only. A marker on Texas 4 east of Brownsville describes the event and provides an elevated viewpoint of the battle area. Visitors can see the original wartime road that crosses the undeveloped brush country.

The war's end brought a stop to the

Rio Grande Valley cotton trade, and the once-profitable river commerce stagnated. U.S. troops rebuilt and reoccupied Fort Brown and Ringgold Barracks, bringing a long-term Army presence to the border. As the Civil War era faded into memory, those who lived through it recalled the excitement of *los algodones*—"the cotton times." ★

Tom A. Fort, senior historian at the Museum of South Texas History in Edinburg, has been digging into the Civil War on the Rio Grande and other chapters of Rio Grande Valley history for more than 30 years. Austin-based freelance photographer Erich Schlegel's career has taken him around the globe, but he got his start in the Rio Grande Valley at The Brownsville Herald.



ESSENTIALS RIO GRANDE VALLEY

The Rio Grande Valley's role as a cotton-trading hub during the Civil War is remembered at sites throughout the region. Sites in the story follow:

King Ranch Visitors Center, 2205

Texas 141, Kingsville. Call 361/592-8055; www.king-ranch.com.

King Ranch Museum, 405 N. 6th

St., Kingsville. Call 361/595-1881; www.king-ranch.com/museum.html.

Port Isabel Lighthouse State Historic

Site, 421 E. Queen Isabella Blvd., Port Isabel. Call 956/943-2262; www.tpwd.state.tx.us/state-parks/port-isabel-lighthouse.

Port Isabel Historical Museum and

Treasures of the Gulf Museum, 317 E. Railroad Ave., Port Isabel. Call 956/943-7602; www.portisabelmuseums.com.

Isla Blanca Park, 33174 State Park Rd. 100,

South Padre Island. Call 956/761-5493; www.co.cameron.tx.us/parks/isla_blanca.htm.

Stillman House and Heritage Museum,

1325 E. Washington St., Brownsville. Call 956/541-5560; www.brownvillehistory.org/Stillman_House_Museum.html.

Fort Ringgold, 1S Fort Ringgold, Rio

Grande City. To arrange a visit, contact the Rio Grande City School District superintendent's office in advance. Call 956/716-6702; www.fortringgold.org. Historic trolley tours also visit the fort. Call 956/487-3476; www.rgcedc.org.

La Sal del Rey lake, on Texas 186, about 3.5 miles east of its intersection with US 281.

Call 956/784-7500; www.fws.gov/refuge/Lower_Rio_Grande_Valley/visit/la_sal_del_rey.html.

Museum of South Texas History, 200 N.

Closner Blvd., Edinburg. Call 956/383-6911; www.mosthistory.org.

Palmito Ranch Battlefield National

Historic Landmark, on Texas 4 (Boca

Chica Blvd.) about 15 miles east of Brownsville. Battlefield info available at the site on radio station 1610 AM. www.thc.state.tx.us/preserve/projects-and-programs/military-sites/palmito-ranch-battlefield-national-historic-landmark.



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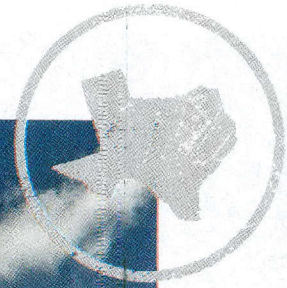
Monument to Texas

THE HISTORY AND CIVICS OF A TEXAS CAPITOL TOUR

text by GENE FOWLER



UNDER THE DOME
The lone star on the ceiling of the Capitol dome is 218 feet above the rotunda's terrazzo floor.



HERITAGE OF SYMBOLISM

At left, the granite Confederate Soldiers monument. At right, San Jacinto is one of 12 battles commemorated on the south foyer floor.

APPROACHING THE AWE-INSPIRING Texas Capitol, I always feel a little small—but in a good way. Walking up the steps of the massive edifice of Sunset Red granite quarried in Marble Falls, I feel part of something greater than myself. I feel keenly that as a citizen and voter, I am a significant, albeit tiny, cog in the great wheel of government that affects our lives on a daily basis.

The feeling can be a little overwhelming, frankly, especially once you step inside the 1888 building and begin to see its historic treasures and the breathtaking rotunda that seemingly ascends into the near heavens. Fortunately, a knowledgeable corps of tour guides stands ready to lead visitors through the 125-year-old Italian Renaissance Revival statehouse, sharing information both fundamental and arcane.

For insight into the Capitol and its collection, I recently joined one of the free 40-minute tours offered throughout



Find information about Capitol tours at www.tspb.state.tx.us/SPB/Plan/Tours.htm.

the day. We met in the Capitol's southern foyer, where our guide introduced us to dramatic artworks on the walls and floor. One monumental painting by William Henry Huddle portrays Alamo volunteer David Crockett, and another Huddle work, measuring about 8-by-11 feet, depicts a captive Santa Anna brought before General Sam Houston after the Battle of San Jacinto. Our guide pointed out the Cherokee blanket on which the wounded Houston reclined, noting that Houston lived with the Cherokee for a time as a young man and later advocated for Native American rights.

Passing from the foyer to the rotunda, we walked past life-size Italian-marble statues of Houston and Stephen

Walking up the steps of the massive edifice of Sunset Red granite quarried in Marble Falls, I feel part of something greater than myself.

F. Austin, the “Father of Texas,” both sculpted by Elisabet Ney, a German artist who immigrated to Texas in 1872.

In the magnificent rotunda, we crane our necks to see a lone star on the ceiling of the dome, 218 feet above. Our guide used the “seals of Texas” on the floor to illustrate a thumbnail sketch of the state’s history. Installed on the rotunda floor during the Texas Centennial in 1936, the terrazzo seals represent the six sovereign nations whose flags have flown over the vast landmass north of the Rio Grande.

Our guide started with the Spanish seal, explaining that Spaniards first set foot in Texas in 1519, followed by the French, whose expedition arrived in 1685 under the leadership of explorer René Robert Cavelier, Sieur de la Salle. France, however, had not near the influence on Texas as Spain. Ultimately,

the population of New Spain rebelled against the motherland in 1821, birthing the Republic of Mexico. With an eagle clutching a rattlesnake and perched on a prickly pear cactus, the Mexican seal illustrates an Aztec legend of the founding of Mexico’s capital.

The seal of Texas, the new republic that formed in 1836 after the Texans revolted against Mexico, contains a live-oak branch and an olive branch. Rounding out the six, the United States seal stands for Texas’ admittance to the Union as the 28th state in 1845, and the Confederate States seal, which sports a portrait of George Washington, represents the state’s rebellious hiatus from the United States from 1861 to 1866.

Around the rotunda’s circular walls, and climbing up a couple of ringed floors, portraits of former Texas governors and Republic of Texas presidents gaze silently upon the energized crowd milling about. Two of the state’s chief executives have been women—Miriam “Ma” Ferguson and Ann Richards. Ferguson was elected in 1924, not long after women gained the right to vote, and again in 1932. Governing was a Ferguson family tradition, as “Ma” followed her husband, Governor James “Pa” Ferguson, into the office after “Pa” was



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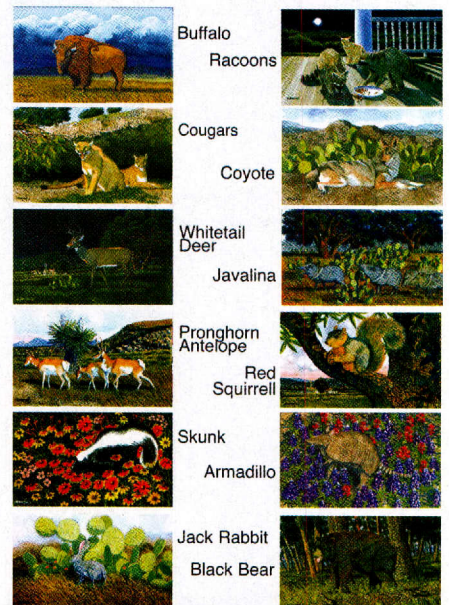
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AN ARCHEOLOGICAL WONDER

Wilson Pottery is on exhibit at Sebastopol. See these historic and rare pieces from one of the first post-Civil War businesses owned by freed slaves in Texas.

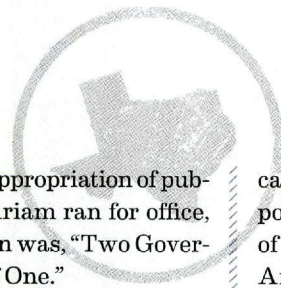


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impeached for misappropriation of public funds. When Miriam ran for office, her campaign slogan was, "Two Governors for the Price of One."

Up a grand cast-iron staircase, we entered the Senate Chamber. Original 1888 walnut desks sit in the chamber, microphones inserted in their former inkwells. Our guide explained that Texas has 31 senators who serve four-year terms. Each senator represents 820,000 Texans, and the lieutenant governor presides over the body. Senators vote by hand—one finger for yes, two for no, and three for "present not voting."

Portraits in the chamber include a painting of Stephen F. Austin, one of only a few he ever posed for. Another painting captures the stern visage of Mirabeau B. Lamar, second president of the Republic of Texas, who moved the

capital from Houston to Austin. Other portraits present the inspiring images of Barbara Jordan, the first African-American female Texas senator and later U.S. congresswoman, and Lyndon Baines Johnson, the only president born, raised, and formally educated in Texas.

Dawn at the Alamo, a dramatic painting by Henry Arthur McArdle, also hangs in the Senate chamber, along with his *Battle of San Jacinto*. An Irishman born in 1836, McArdle spent decades researching his subjects after arriving in Texas. His Alamo painting, which is about 15 feet across and nine feet tall, depicts a frantic battle scene, including the ghostly figure of James Bowie waving his famous blade.

Our guide then led us across the building to the House of Representatives



SAM I AM

Sculptor Elisabet Ney unveiled this life-size, marble statue of Sam Houston in the south foyer in 1903.



Chamber. The largest room in the Capitol, the chamber accommodates 150 representatives elected for two-year terms. The representatives' original 1888 oak desks include an electric voting system that was installed in 1922. Behind the Speaker's dais hangs the actual battle flag, depicting the lady of liberty, from the 1836 Battle of San Jacinto, where Texas achieved its independence from Mexico. Portraits in the chamber include one of Sam Houston and his ubiquitous Cherokee blanket; an 1820s likeness of James Bowie, the oldest portrait on exhibit in the Capitol; and a portrait of Hunt County native Audie Murphy, the most decorated veteran of World War II. Murphy later became a movie star and portrayed himself in the 1955 autobiographical film, *To Hell and Back*.

Pointing out the chamber's 1890 and 1891 chandeliers, our guide explained that the Capitol is believed to be among the first buildings in Austin to be electrified. Before descending a flight of stairs to the Capitol's underground extension, we paused to admire the fine oak carving throughout the statehouse, and the brass handles and door hinges outfitted with lone stars and the state

Installed on the rotunda floor during the Texas Centennial in 1936, the terrazzo seals represent the six sovereign nations whose flags have flown over the vast landmass north of the Rio Grande.

seal. Our guide also filled us in on the Capitol's origins, recounting how Texas traded three million acres in the Panhandle to a syndicate of Chicago developers to build the Capitol—a \$3.7 million construction project that took seven years. The Panhandle land became the world's largest fenced cattle ranch of its time, the XIT.

The four-story extension is a marvel unto itself, considering it's completely *underground*. At 666,955 square feet, the extension is twice the size of the Capitol building. The lower two floors hold parking, and the upper two provide office space for two-thirds of the state's legislators, along with conference and

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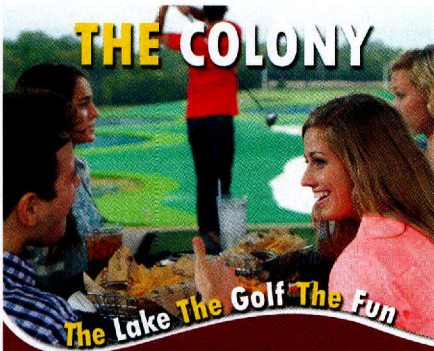
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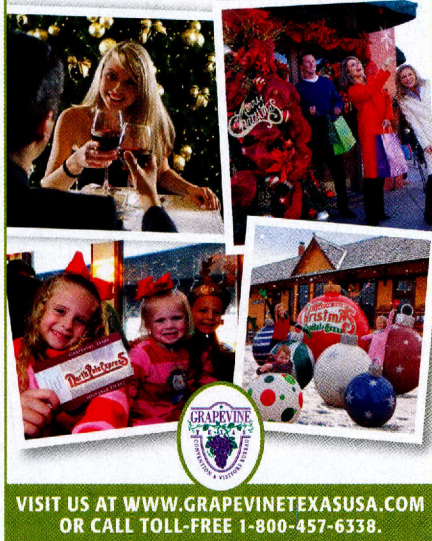


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Completed in 1993, the extension features some of the same design elements as the original Capitol, including Sunset Red granite interiors and terrazzo flooring.



committee rooms, an auditorium, a gift shop, and a café that's open to the public. Completed in 1993, the extension features some of the same design elements as the original Capitol, including Sunset Red granite interiors and terrazzo flooring.

As the tour drew to a close, the group paused beside a sunken rotunda, open to the sky, that echoes the 1888 rotunda. We turned to gaze upward, looking through a skylight to see the northern face of the 300-foot-tall Capitol dome, topped by the 16-foot-tall Goddess of Liberty. Beholding the sight, the tour group's oohs and aahs recalled the words spoken by Temple Houston, Sam Houston's son, at the Capitol dedication in 1888:

"This building fires the heart and excites reflection in the minds of all. ... It would seem that here glitters a structure that shall stand as a sentinel of eternity. ... Texas stands peerless amid the mighty and her brow is crowned with bewildering magnificence!" ★



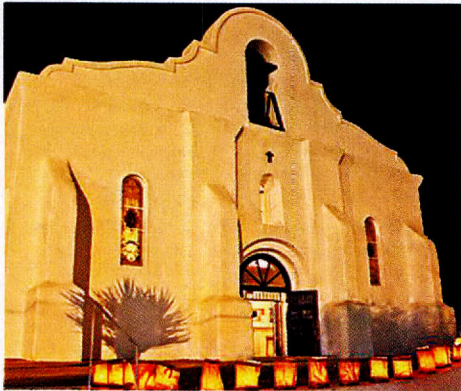
THE CAPITOL VISITORS CENTER,

located in the old General Land Office building on the southeast corner of the Capitol grounds, houses a museum, a gift shop, and a TxDOT Travel Information Center. www.tspb.state.tx.us/CVC/home/home.html.

EVENTS

WANT MORE? GO TO THE EVENTS CALENDAR AT www.texashighways.com.

December's travel spotlights:



BIG BEND COUNTRY > San Elizario

The Southwestern Spirit

On the Rio Grande near El Paso, the historic presidio town of San Elizario offers a Southwestern take on the holiday season with a ChristKindle Market featuring local artists and vendors December 6-8. On December 21, glowing luminarias at San Elizario Presidio Church and the Historic District set the scene for a traditional *Las Posadas* reenactment of Mary and Joseph's search for shelter on the eve of Jesus' birth. www.sanelizariohistoriccourtdistrict.com.

HILL COUNTRY > Fredericksburg

Weihnachten in the 'Burg

Known for German heritage, shopping, and wine, Fredericksburg is a natural fit for celebrating the holidays. On December 6, peruse arts and crafts at St. Nikolausmarkt at Marktplatz and ogle the lighted Christmas parade on Main Street. (Don't miss the 26-foot-tall spinning German pyramid and the ice-skating rink at Marktplatz.) On December 7, tour holiday-decked historic homes featured in the Pioneer Museum's 56th Annual Holiday Home Tour. www.visitfredericksburgtx.com/holiday.



PRAIRIES AND LAKES > Fort Worth GULF COAST > Houston

Art to the Bone

Mexican printmaker José Guadalupe Posada's drawings—including whimsical and biting depictions of cartoonish skeletons, known as *calaveras*—left a recognizable mark on Mexican art and popular culture. To commemorate the 100th anniversary of his death in 1913, the Amon Carter Museum of American Art in Fort Worth and the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, are featuring exhibitions of Posada's artwork and influence. www.cartermuseum.org; www.mfah.org.

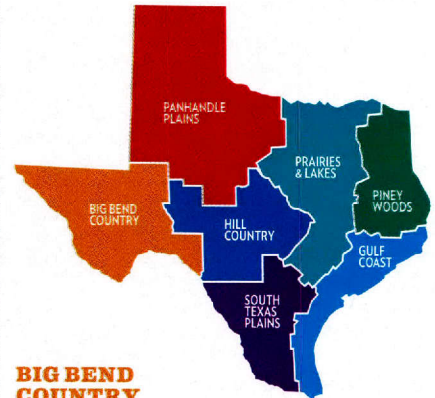


PRAIRIES AND LAKES > Dallas

Anatomical Safari

The name pretty much says it all for the Perot Museum of Nature and Science's *Animal Inside Out* exhibit. From the producers of *Body Worlds*, the traveling exhibit showcases "plastinated" animal bodies—fluids removed and replaced with plastic—without their skin, hide, or feathers. The result is a remarkable perspective on the anatomy of more than 100 specimens, from a giraffe to a reindeer, an octopus, and an ostrich. Open through February 17. www.perotmuseum.org.

PHOTOS: (from top) Courtesy El Paso Mission Trail Association; Kevin Stillman; La Gran Calavera de Emiliano Zapata, from *Monografía: Las obras de José Guadalupe Posada, grabador mexicano*, published by Mexican Folkways, Mexico City, c. 1911-16, printed 1930, The MFAH, gift of Frank Ribelin; Jason Janik.



BIG BEND COUNTRY

ALPINE: Tour of Historic Homes December 15. www.historicalpine.org 432/837-8813

DEL RIO: Christmas Under the Stars December 13. Whitehead Memorial Museum. 830/774-7568

FORT DAVIS: Frontier Christmas December 6-7. www.fortdavis.com 432/426-3015

FORT STOCKTON: Christmas Parade December 6. www.fortstockton.org 432/336-2264

MIDLAND: William Reaves Fine Art Holidays December 5-11. www.haleylibrary.com 713/521-7500

MIDLAND: Christmas at the Mansion December 6-29. Museum of the Southwest. www.museumsw.org 432/683-2882

MONAHANS: Christmas and Chili Market December 7. www.monahans.org 432/943-2187

MONAHANS: Tour of Homes December 14. www.monahans.org 432/943-2187

ODESSA: 'Tis Christmas Holiday Bazaar December 1. Ector County Coliseum 432/366-3541

ODESSA: Starbright Village December 2-31. McKinney Park. www.odesa-tx.gov

ODESSA: Christmas Time Celebration: Antique Toys

December 6-7, 13-14, 20-21, 27-28. www.whitepoolhouse.org 432/333-4072

ODESSA: *Inner Vision: The Sculpture of Michael Naranjo* December 13-31. www.noelartmuseum.org 432/550-9696

VAN HORN: Lighted Christmas Parade December 14. www.vanhorn-texas.org 432/283-2682

GULF COAST

BAYTOWN: Christmas Parade December 5. www.baytown.org 281/420-6597

BAYTOWN: Christmas on Texas Avenue December 7. www.christmas-on-texas-avenue.com 281/674-5163

BEAUMONT: John Jay French Museum Candlelight Tour December 1. www.jjfrench.com 409/898-0348

BEAUMONT: Very Merry Main Street Market December 5-8. www.juniorleaguebeaumont.com 409/832-0873

BEAUMONT: Holiday Open House December 14. McFaddin-Ward House. www.mcfaddin-ward.org 409/832-1906

BROWNSVILLE: Holiday Village December 1-January 1. www.holidayvillage.cob.us 956/546-2646

CLUTE: Christmas in the Park December 5-7. 979/265-8392

CORPUS CHRISTI: Mexican Folk Art from

the *Boeckman Collection*
December 1-29. Art
Museum of South Texas.
361/825-3500

DEER PARK: Reindeer Park
December 6-7. [www.deer
parktx.gov/recreation](http://www.deer
parktx.gov/recreation)
281/478-2050

DEER PARK: Market Days
in Deer Park December 21.
[www.deerparktx.gov/
recreation](http://www.deerparktx.gov/
recreation) 281/478-2050

EL CAMPO: KCS Holiday
Express Train Rides
December 3. [www.elcampo
chamber.com](http://www.elcampo
chamber.com) 979/543-2713

EL CAMPO: Christmas Mall
December 7-8. [www.
elcampochamber.com](http://www.
elcampochamber.com)
979/543-2713

FREEPORT: Holiday on the
Brazos December 5. [www.
freeport.tx.us](http://www.
freeport.tx.us) 979/233-6061

GALVESTON: Dickens on
The Strand December 7-8.
www.dickensonthestrand.org
409/765-7834

GALVESTON: Holiday in
the Park December 14-15, 21.
Saengerfest Park.

HOUSTON: Christmas
Cruises Along the Buffalo
Bayou December 6-7, 13-14,
21. www.buffalobayou.org
713/752-0314

HOUSTON: Lunch with an
Astronaut December 6, 13,
20, 27. www.spacecenter.org
281/244-2100

HOUSTON: The Heritage
Society's Annual Candlelight
Tour December 14-15.
www.heritagesociety.org
713/655-1912

INGLESIDE: Renaissance
Faire December 14-15.
www.inglesidetxchamber.org
361/776-2906

KEMAH: Jingle on the
Boardwalk December 7.
www.kemahboardwalk.com
877/285-3624

KEMAH/SEABROOK:
Christmas Boat Lane Parade
December 14. [www.clear
lakearea.com](http://www.clear
lakearea.com) 281/488-7676

KEMAH: New Year's Eve
Family Celebration
December 31. [www.kemah
boardwalk.com](http://www.kemah
boardwalk.com)
877/285-3624

LEAGUE CITY: Holiday
Magic December 1-21.
Various venues. [www.
leaguecityholidaymagic.com](http://www.
leaguecityholidaymagic.com)

PALACIOS: Christmas
on Main December 7.
www.palacioschamber.com
361/972-2615

PALACIOS: Seaside Holiday
December 7. Luther Hotel.

www.palacioschamber.com
361/972-2615

PEARLAND: Hometown
Christmas Festival
December 6-7. [www.
pearlandparks.com/
christmas_festival.html](http://www.
pearlandparks.com/
christmas_festival.html)
281/412-8906

PORT ARANSAS:
Carolers Afloat/Boat
Lighting Parade December 7.
www.portaransas.org
361/749-5919

PORT ARTHUR:
Lighted Cultural Parade
December 14.
409/983-8105

RICHMOND: Candlelight
Tours of the Historic John M.
Moore Home December 6-7.
www.fortbendmuseum.org
281/342-6478

ROCKPORT: Rockport
Tropical Christmas
Festival December 7.
www.rockport-fulton.org
361/727-2158

ROCKPORT: Lighted Boat
Parade December 14.
www.rockport-fulton.org
361/463-1193

ROSENBERG: Christmas
in Rosenberg December 7.
www.ci.rosenberg.tx.us
832/595-3525

SAN BENITO: Longest
Lighted Christmas Parade
and Bazaar December 14.
www.cityofsanbenito.com

SPRING: Home for the
Holidays in Old Town Spring
December 1-21.
www.oldtownspring.com
281/353-9310

VICTORIA: Christmas
on the Square and Market
Day December 14.
www.victoriatx.org
361/485-3200

HILL COUNTRY

AUSTIN: Chuy's Christmas
Parade December 1.
www.chuysparade.com

AUSTIN: Blue Genie Art
Bazaar December 1-24.
www.bluegenieartbazaar.com

AUSTIN: Luminations
December 14-15.
www.wildflower.org/events
512/232-0100

AUSTIN: Armadillo
Christmas Bazaar
December 17-24.
www.armadillobazaar.com

BANDERA: Shopper's
Jubilee December 6.
[www.banderabusiness
association.com](http://www.banderabusiness
association.com)
830/796-4447

BANDERA: Cowboys on
Main December 7, 14, 21, 28.
[www.banderatexasbusiness.
com/cowboys-on-main.htm](http://www.banderatexasbusiness.
com/cowboys-on-main.htm)
800/364-3833

BANDERA: Christmas
Caroling Bandera Style
December 21. Longhorn
Saloon. 832/922-8337

BOERNE: Dickens on Main
December 6-7.
www.dickensonmain.com
830/248-1601

BOERNE: Oma's Christmas
Craft Fair December 7-8.
www.kcfa.org
830/249-2839

BOERNE: Cowboy
Christmas at Enchanted
Springs Ranch December 21-
22. [www.enchantedsprings
ranch.com](http://www.enchantedsprings
ranch.com) 830/249-8222

BRADY: Christmas in
the Heart December 6.
www.bradytx.com
325/597-3491

BROWNWOOD:
Lighted Christmas Parade
December 5. [www.southside
brownwood.com](http://www.southside
brownwood.com)
325/646-0844

BROWNWOOD:
Christmas Under the Stars
Festival December 6-7.
www.visitbrownwood.com
325/646-9535

BUDA: Buda Fest
December 7-8.
www.budafest.org
512/422-7863

BURNET: Christmas Trail
of Lights December 1-31.
www.cityofburnet.com
512/756-6093

BURNET: Main Street
Bethlehem December 6-8,
13-15. [www.fbcburnet.org/
mainstreetbethlehem.htm](http://www.fbcburnet.org/
mainstreetbethlehem.htm)
512/756-6033

BURNET: Christmas at
Old Fort Croghan
December 14.
www.fortcroghan.org
512/756-8281

CASTROVILLE: Old-
Fashioned Christmas
December 6-7.
www.castroville.com
830/538-3142

DRIPPING SPRINGS:
Christmas on Mercer Street
December 7.
[www.cityofdrippingsprings.
com](http://www.cityofdrippingsprings.
com) 512/858-4725

FREDERICKSBURG:
Pearl Harbor Day
Observance December 7.
www.pacificwarmuseum.org
830/997-8600

FREDERICKSBURG:
The Christmas Journey
December 13-14.
[www.bethanyfredericksburg.
com](http://www.bethanyfredericksburg.
com) 830/997-2069

FREDERICKSBURG:
The Auslander Winter Music
Festival December 26-31.
www.theauslander.com
830/997-7714

FREDERICKSBURG:
Candlelight Tour at the
Pioneer Museum
December 28. [www.pioneer
museum.net](http://www.pioneer
museum.net) 830/990-8441

FREDERICKSBURG:
New Year's Eve USO-Style
Hangar Dance December 31.
830/997-9990

GEORGETOWN: Holiday
Home Tour December 14-15.
[www.georgetownheritage
society.com](http://www.georgetownheritage
society.com) 512/869-8597

GRUENE: Christmas Market
Days December 7-8. [www.
gruenemarketdays.com](http://www.
gruenemarketdays.com)
830/832-1721

GRUENE: Town Lighting
and Pony Express Ride
December 7-12.
www.gruenetexas.com
830/629-5077

HUTTO: Olde Town
Christmas Fair December 14.
www.huttox.gov
512/759-4029

INGRAM: Art Mart
December 1-19.
www.hcaf.com
830/367-5120

JOHNSON CITY:
Hill Country Christmas
Lights Display December
1-January 1. [www.hillcountry
christmaslights.com](http://www.hillcountry
christmaslights.com)
512/955-1706

JOHNSON CITY: Lights
Spectacular, Hill Country
Style December 1-January 1.
www.johnsoncity-texas.com
830/868-7684

KERRVILLE: Kerrville
Art Club Show and Sale
December 5-January 5.
www.kacc Kerrville.com
830/895-2911

KINGSLAND: Kingsland
Christmas December 6.
www.kingslandchamber.org
325/388-6211

LLANO: Llano Christmas
Market Day, Culture Club
Home Tour, and Lighted
Christmas Parade
December 7.
325/247-5354

LLANO: Snow Day
December 14.
325/247-5354

LUCKENBACH:
New Year's Eve Celebration
December 31.
www.luckenbachtexas.com
830/997-3224

MARBLE FALLS:
Walkway of Lights
December 1-January 1.
www.marblefalls.org
830/693-4449

NEW BRAUNFELS:
Wassailfest December 5.
www.nbtexas.org
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www.thewittlifecollections.txstate.edu 512/245-2313

SAN MARCOS: Sights and Sounds December 4-7.
www.sights-n-sounds.org
512/393-8400

SAN SABA: Mill Pond Park Christmas Lights Spectacular December 1-31.
www.sansabachamber.com

SAN SABA: Christmas Sip and Stroll Lighted Christmas Parade December 14.
www.sansabachamber.com
325/372-5141

SATTLER: Canyon Lake Christmas Parade December 14.
www.cnoonions.com
830/964-2461

STONEWALL: LBJ Tree Lighting December 15.
www.tpwd.state.tx.us/state-parks/lyndon-b-johnson
830/644-2252 ext. 222

TAYLOR: Christmas Bazaar and Parade of Lights December 7.
512/352-6364

TAYLOR: Christmas Homes Tour December 14-15.
www.taylorchamber.org
512/352-3463

UVALDE: Briscoe Ranch Barbecue Cook-Off December 13-14.
830/591-7351

WIMBERLEY: Emily Ann Trail of Lights December 1-31.
www.emilyann.org
512/847-6969

WIMBERLEY: Winter's Eve December 14.
www.wimberleymerchants.com 512/847-3333

PANHANDLE PLAINS

ABILENE: City Sidewalks December 3. Downtown.
325/677-2281

ABILENE: Craftapalooza and Junk Market December 7.
www.montagefestivals.com 405/596-1687

AMARILLO: Christmas in the Gardens December 1-14.
www.amarillobotanicalgardens.org 806/352-6513

AMARILLO: Electric Light Parade December 6.
www.centercity.org 806/372-6744

AMARILLO: Christmas Open House December 6-7.
www.panhandleplains.org
806/651-2244

ANSON: Texas Cowboys' Christmas Ball December 14.
www.ansoncowboys.com

christmasball.com
325/823-2159

BIG SPRING: Lighted Christmas Parade December 7.
www.bigspringherald.com 432/263-7331

BIG SPRING: Drive-Through Nativity December 13-15.
www.nazfamily.com

CANADIAN: Christmas in Canadian December 5-7.
www.canadiantx.com
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EDEN: Christmas on the Square December 5.
www.edentexas.com
325/869-3336

GRAHAM: Christmas Stroll and Lighted Parade December 5.
www.grahamtchamber.com 940/549-3355

HENRIETTA: Clay County Christmas December 7.
www.hccchamber.org
940/538-5261

LUBBOCK: Candlelight at the Ranch December 13-14.
www.nrhcc.ttu.edu
806/742-0498

POST: Lighted Christmas Parade December 7.
www.postcitytexas.com
806/495-3461

POST: Post City Trade Day December 7.
www.postcitytexas.com
806/559-0835

QUANAH: Christmas Festival, Lighted Parade, and Winter Fest December 7.
www.quanahnet.com
940/663-2222

QUANAH: Polar Express December 21. 940/663-5272

RANGER: Nighttime Lighted Christmas Parade December 6. 254/647-3340

SAN ANGELO: Christmas at Old Fort Concho December 6-8.
www.fortconcho.com 325/657-4441

SAN ANGELO: Art Walk December 19.
www.downtownsanangelo.com/artwalk.html
325/653-3333

SANTA ANNA: Christmas Under The Mountain December 7.
www.santaannaedc.org
325/451-0445

SNYDER: Big Country Christmas Ball December 14.
www.westtexasrehab.org
325/660-8338

SWEETWATER: Tex-Mex Barrel Races December 7-8.
www.sweetwatertexas.org
575/390-5504

VERNON: Christmas on the Western Trail December 7.
940/552-6274

WICHITA FALLS: ElectricCritters December 1-21.
www.riverbendnaturecenter.org
940/767-0843

WICHITA FALLS: Fantasy of Lights December 6-January 1.
www.mwsu.edu/fantasy
940/397-4352

PINEY WOODS

CENTER: Santa's Christmas Parade December 7.
www.shelbycountychamber.com
936/598-3682

COLDSRING: Christmas Home Tour December 8.
936/653-4487

COLDSRING: Christmas on the Square December 14.
www.coldspringtexas.org
936/653-2184

CONROE: Conroe Christmas Celebration December 14.
www.cityofconroe.org 936/522-3900

GILMER: Yulefest December 7.
www.gilmerareachamber.com
903/843-2413

GLADEWATER: Christmas Tyne in Gusherville December 2.
www.gladewaterchamber.org
903/845-5501

HENDERSON: Christmas Home Tour December 6-7.
www.visithendersontx.com
903/657-5528

JACKSONVILLE: Christmas Parade December 5.
www.jacksonvilletexas.com
903/586-2217

JEFFERSON: Rail of Lights Christmas Train December 5-8, 12-15, 19-22.
www.railoflights.com
866/398-2038

JEFFERSON: Candlelight Tour of Homes December 5-7, 12-14.
www.jeffersontexas.candlelightourofhomes.com
903/665-7064

JEFFERSON: Rail of Lights New Year's Train December 26-29, 31.
www.railoflights.com
903/665-6400

LIBERTY: Country Christmas December 3.
www.libertydaytonchamber.com
936/336-5736

MAGNOLIA: Hometown Christmas December 14.
www.magnoliathistorical.society.com 281/356-1488

MARSHALL: Wonderland of Lights December 1-31.
www.visitmarshalltexas.org
903/702-7777

MOUNT PLEASANT: Christmas on the Square December 7.
www.mpcity.net
903/575-4000

NACOGDOCHES: Nine Flags Festival December 1-14.
www.nineflagsfestival.com
888/653-3788

ORE CITY: Yulefest December 7. 903/968-4142

SHEPHERD: Blue and White Christmas December 7.
936/628-3890

TEXARKANA: Main Street Texarkana Christmas Parade December 2.
www.mainstreettexarkana.org

THE WOODLANDS: Winter Wonderland and the Woodlands Ice Rink December 1-January 20.
www.holidayinthewoodlands.com 877/963-2447

TYLER: *Celebration of Life and Death: Selections from the Boeckman Collection of Mexican Folk Art* December 1-January 19.
www.tylermuseum.org
903/595-1001

TYLER: A Victorian Christmas at the Goodman December 12.
www.parksandrec.cityoftyler.org

TYLER: Holiday in the Park and Bazaar December 13-14.
www.parksandrec.cityoftyler.org 903/531-1214

PRAIRIES AND LAKES

ARLINGTON: Christkindl Market December 1-22.
www.arlingtonchristkindl.com
817/265-7721

ARLINGTON: Holiday Lights Parade December 7.
www.holidaylightsparade.com 817/265-7721

BASTROP: River of Lights December 1-31.
www.lostpineschristmasbastrop.com
512/303-0558

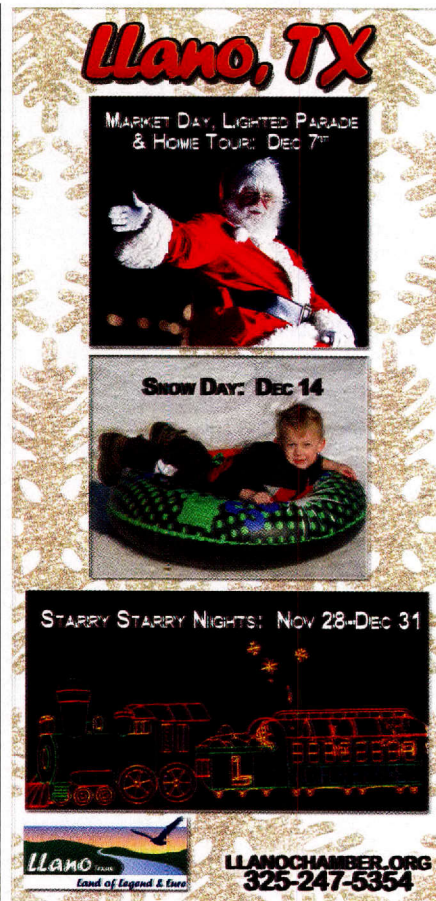
BASTROP: Christmas in the Pines Lighted Christmas Parade December 14.
www.bastropdba.org/christmas

BELLVILLE: Small-Town Christmas December 6-7.
www.smalltownchristmas.org
979/865-3407

BELTON: Old-Fashioned Christmas December 14.
www.downtownbelton.com
254/939-5699

BOWIE: New Year's Eve Dance December 31.
940/872-0077

BRENHAM: Christmas Stroll and Lighted Parade December 6.
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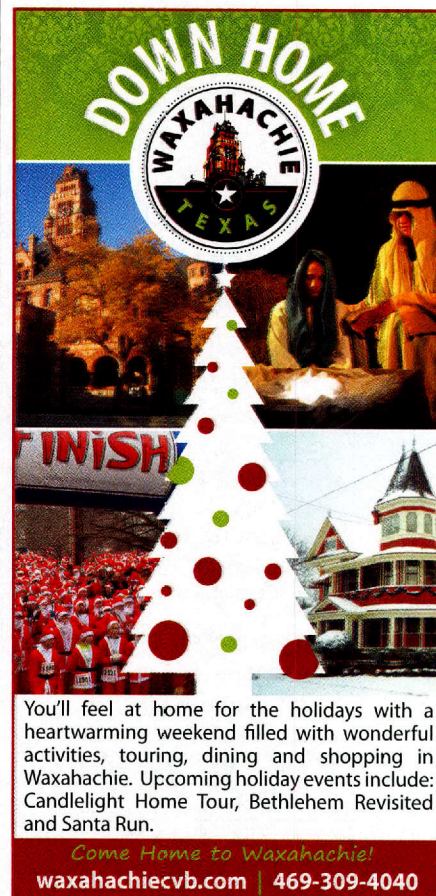
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BURTON: Christmas at the Depot and Country Homes Tour December 8. www.burtonheritagesociety.org 979/353-0050

CAMERON: Christmas Parade December 5. www.cameron-tx.com 254/697-4979

CARROLLTON: Candlelight Christmas on the Square December 6-7, 13-14, 20-21. 214/483-6000

CHAPPELL HILL: Holiday Home Tour December 14. www.chappellhillmuseum.org 888/273-6426

CLARKSVILLE: Christmas Parade and Lighting of the Square December 7. www.rediverloc.com 903/427-2645

CLEBURNE: Whistle-Stop Christmas Light Display December 1-31. www.cleburnechamber.com 817/645-2455

CLEBURNE: Candlewalk Tour of Homes December 7. www.cleburnechamber.com 817/645-2455

CLIFTON: Norwegian Country Christmas Tour

December 7. www.cliftontexas.org 800/344-3720

COLLEGE STATION: Christmas at the Creek December 6-7. www.cstx.gov/christmas

COMANCHE: Old Cora's Christmas December 6-8. www.comanchechamber.org 325/356-3233

COPPERAS COVE: Krist Kindl Markt December 6-8. www.copperascove.com 254/547-7571

CUERO: Christmas in the Park Lighted Driving Tour December 1-January 1. www.christmasincruero.com 361/275-8178

CUERO: Santa's Christmas Bazaar December 7. 361/277-3854

DALLAS: Orna ment Extravaganza December 1-31. www.kittrellriffkind.com 888/865-2228

DALLAS: *Jim Hodges: Give More Than You Take* December 1-January 12. www.dma.org 214/922-1200

DALLAS: Children's Medical Center Holiday Parade December 7. www.childrens.com/parade 214/456-8378

DALLAS: *Infinity of Colors* December 7-January 24. www.dallascultrure.org 214/670-8749

DECATUR: Moonlight Madness December 7. www.decaturtx.com 940/627-3107

DENISON: Historic Christmas Tours December 7. 903/465-2720

DENTON: Holiday Lighting Festival December 6. www.dentonholidaylighting.com

ELGIN: Holiday by the Tracks December 7. www.elgintx.com/holiday 512/281-5724

ENNIS: Christmas Parade of Lights December 5. 972/878-4748

FARMERS BRANCH: Christmas Tour of Lights December 1-30. www.fbspecialerevents.com 972/919-2620

FARMERS BRANCH: Christmas Tree Lighting December 7. www.fbspecialerevents.com 972/919-2620

FERRIS: Christmas on the Square December 7. 214/245-8520

FLATONIA: Wonderful Winter Wine Walk December 6.

www.flatoniachamber.com 361/865-3920

FLATONIA: Christmas in Flatonia December 7. www.flatoniachamber.org 361/865-3920

FORT WORTH: Gift of Lights at Texas Motor Speedway December 1-January 5. www.giftoflightstms.com 800/788-9627 ext. 200

FORT WORTH: *The Age of Picasso and Matisse: Modern Masters from the Art Institute of Chicago* December 1-February 16. www.kimbellart.org 817/332-8451

FORT WORTH: Christmas in the Stockyards December 7. www.fortworth.com 817/625-9715

FRISCO: Christmas in the Square December 1-January 5. www.frisco-square.com/cits 972/668-3065

GARLAND: Christmas on the Square December 5. www.visitgarland.gov 972/205-2750

GONZALES: Stars in the Village December 6-7, 13-14. www.gonzalestexas.com

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THE TRAVEL MAGAZINE OF TEXAS

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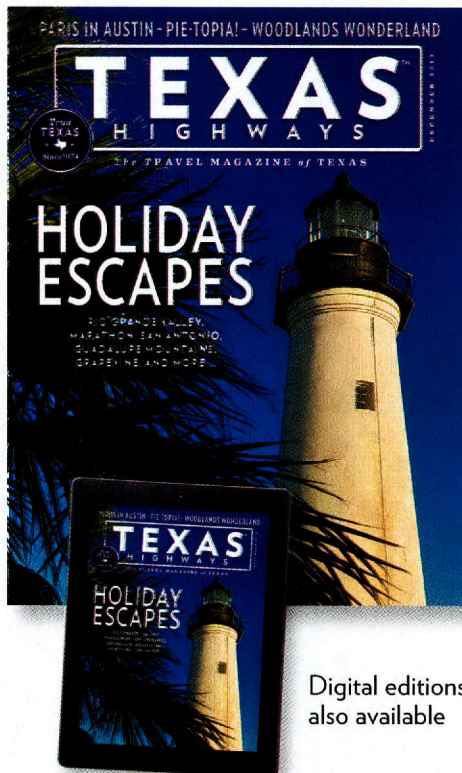
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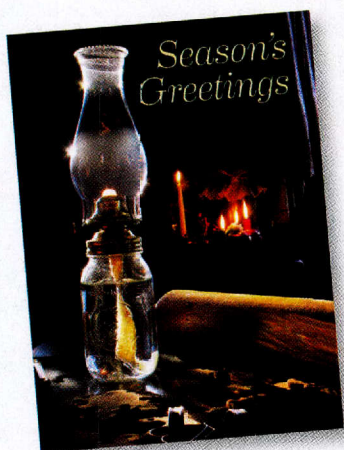
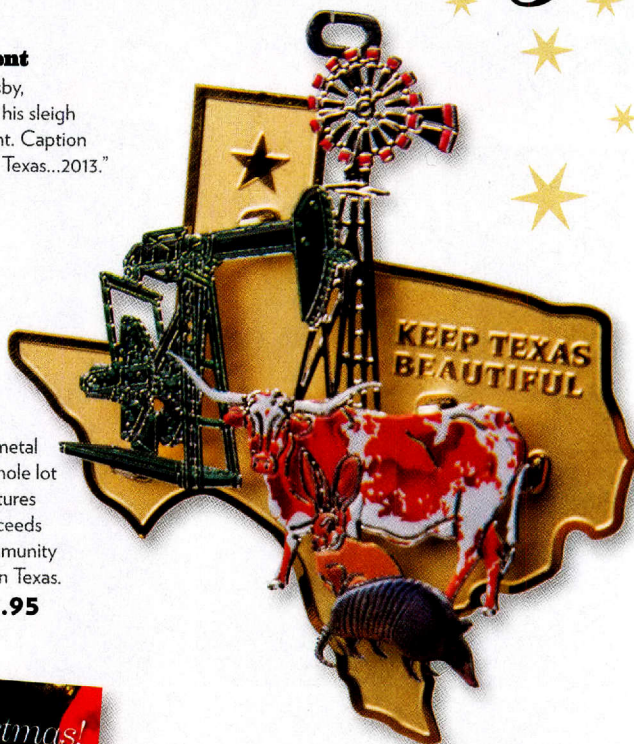


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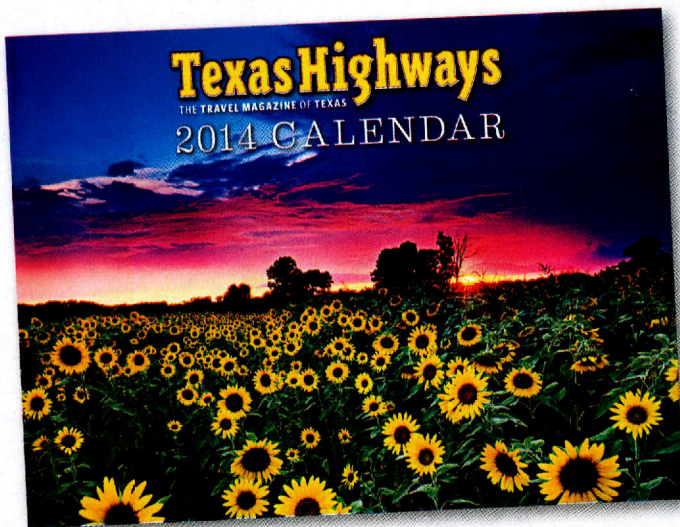


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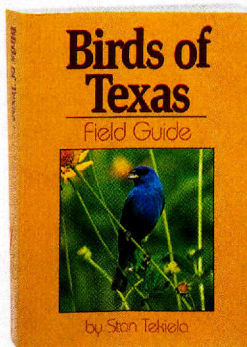
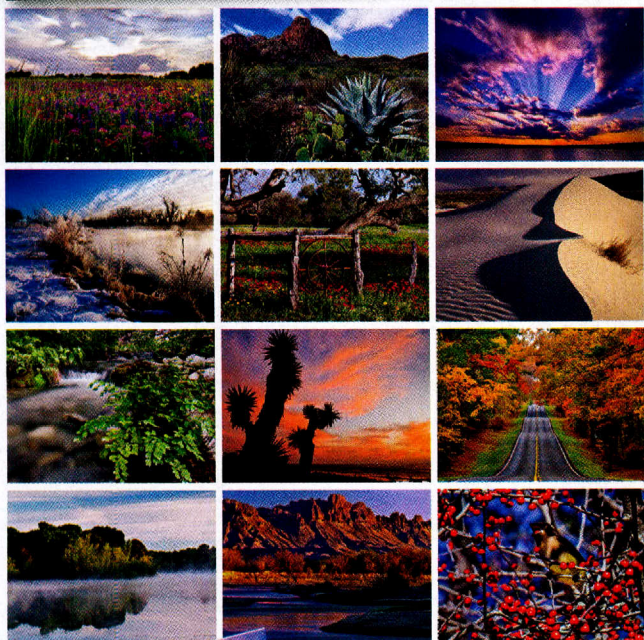
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Birds of Texas
Field Guide

Birds of Texas Field Guide

By Stan Tekiela

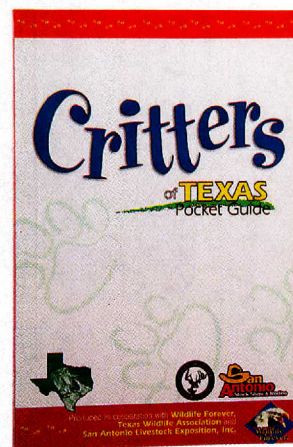
Identify and learn about Texas birds with this easy-to-use format. Using a color guide, you will be able to locate 170 species of birds found in Texas. The full-page, color photos include insets of winter plumage. Each fact-filled page includes regional maps, distinctive characteristics and nesting habits. 4 1/2 x 6 inches, 414 pages, paperback.

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Pocket Guide

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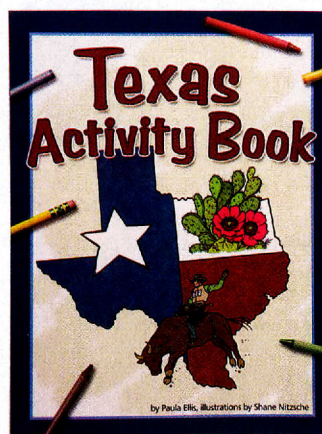
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Texas Activity Book

By Paula Ellis and Shane Nitzsche

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She can keep her purse off the floor, out of her lap and securely in sight while dining out. This sturdy handbag hanger with Texas Star design opens to hang her purse from the table top. It magnetically closes to a handy 1.25-inch diameter for easy storage. 1.6-ounces.

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TEXASTM
HIGHWAYS

The TRAVEL MAGAZINE of TEXAS

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GONZALES: Winterfest Tour of Historic Homes December 7-8. www.gonzalezestexas.com

GRANBURY: Candlelight Tour of Homes December 6-8. www.granburysquare.com 817/573-5299

GRAPEVINE: ICE! and Lone Star Christmas December 1-January 4. www.gaylordtexas.com 817/410-3185

GRAPEVINE: Light Show Spectacular December 1-January 5. www.grapevine.texasusa.com 817/410-3185

GRAPEVINE: Christmas on Main December 1, 6-8, 13-15. www.grapevinetexasusa.com 817/410-8135

GRAPEVINE: North Pole Express December 1, 6-8, 13-15. www.gvrr.com 817/410-3185

IRVING: City of Irving Holiday Extravaganza December 7. www.irving.texas.com 972/721-2501

JEWETT: An Old-Fashioned Christmas December 14. www.jewetttexas.org 905/626-4202

JOSHUA: Christmas Parade and Tree Lighting December 7. www.joshua.chamber.org 817/556-2480

LA GRANGE: Schmeckenfest December 5. 979/968-3017

LA GRANGE: Trail of Lights December 6-7, 13-14, 20-21. www.tpwd.state.tx.us/state-parks/monument-hill-kreische-brewery 979/968-5658

LOCKHART: A Dickens Christmas in Lockhart December 6-7. www.lockhartchamber.com 512/398-2818

LULING: Lighted Yule Trail December 1-January 1. www.lulingmainstreet.org 830/875-3214

MARLIN: Marlin Then and Now December 7-8, 14-15. 254/803-2366

MCKINNEY: Holiday Trail of Lights December 14, 20-21. www.heardmuseum.org 972/562-5566

MESQUITE: Christmas on the Square December 3. www.realtexasflavor.com

MESQUITE: Christmas in the Park December 5-7. www.cityofmesquite.com/pard 972/216-6260

MESQUITE: Mesquite ProRodeo Winter Classic December 27-28. www.mesquiteprodeco.com 972/285-8777

PALESTINE: Holiday Happenings in Palestine December 1-29. www.palestinetexas.net 903/729-3014

PALESTINE: "The Polar Express" Train Ride December 1-30. www.texasstater.com 903/683-3451

PLANO: Dickens in Historic Downtown December 6. www.planoparks.org 972/941-7250

ROUND TOP: Christmas in Round Top December 7. www.roundtop.org 979/249-4042

ROUND TOP: Historical Society Christmas Tour of Homes December 7. www.roundtophistoricalsociety.org 979/249-5058

ROUND TOP: Christmas in Winedale: 19th Century Folklife Fest December 14. www.cah.utexas.edu 979/278-3530

SALADO: Christmas Stroll December 6-8, 13-15. www.salado.com 254/947-5040

SAN FELIPE: Christmas Caroling Hayride and Breakfast with Santa December 14. 979/885-3613

SEALY: Fantasy of Lights December 6-7. www.sealycommunityfoundation.org 877/558-7245

SHERMAN: Winter Waterfowl at Hagerman NWR December 14. www.friendsofhagerman.com 903/786-2826

SHINER: Christmas in the Park December 5. www.shinertx.com 361/594-4180

SMITHVILLE: Festival of Lights December 7. www.smithvilletx.org 512/237-2313

SULPHUR SPRINGS: Christmas Comes to Town and Lighted Parade December 6. www.visit.sulphurspringstx.org 888/300-6623

TEMPLE: Christmas Parade and Tree Lighting December 2. www.ci.temple.tx.us 254/298-5440

THE COLONY: Holiday in the Park and Parade of Lights December 7. www.visitthecolonytx.com/events 972/625-1106

THE COLONY: The Colony Christmas Spectacular December 7-January 4. www.visitthecolonytx.com 972/625-1106

TRENTON: Trenton's Country Christmas

December 14. Email: todd@leonardisd.net

WACO: Homestead Craft and Children's Fair December 1. www.homesteadheritage.com 254/754-9600

WACO: Waco Wonderland December 1-7. www.waco-texas.com 254/750-8610

WACO: Christmas on the Brazos Home Tours December 1-15. www.historicwaco.org 254/753-5166

WAXAHACHIE: Christmas Market and Gift Show December 6-7. www.waxahachiejls.org 972/938-3434

WAXAHACHIE: Bethlehem Revisited December 6-8, 13-15. www.waxahachievb.com 972/937-2390

WAXAHACHIE: Candlelight Home Tour December 7-8, 14-15. www.waxahachievb.com 972/937-2390

WEATHERFORD: Holiday Open House at Chandor Gardens December 14. www.parkercountyheritagesociety.com 817/613-1700

WEIMAR: Down-Home Christmas December 5. www.weimartexas.org 979/725-9511

WEIMAR: Christmas Homes Tour December 8. www.weimartx.org 979/725-9511

WHITNEY: Christmas Bazaar and Lighted Christmas Parade December 14. www.lake.whitneychamber.com 254/694-2540

WILLS POINT: Christmas on the Bricks December 7. www.willspointchamber.com 903/873-3111

SOUTH TEXAS PLAINS

BEEVILLE: *Modern Classics: Christopher St. Leger, Ellen Tanner and Jean Carruthers Wetta* December 1-28. www.bamtexas.org 361/358-8615

BERCLAIR: Berclair Mansion Holiday Tours December 1, 8, 15, 22, 29. 800/248-3859

EAGLE PASS: Christmas/Festival de Luces December 6. 830/773-4343

GOLIAD: Mission History in Lights Exhibit December 1-31. 361/645-3405

GOLIAD: Christmas in Goliad December 6-7. www.goliadcc.org 361/645-8767

PLEASANTON: Second Saturday Artwalk December 14. www.artonmaingallery.net 210/550-2102

SAN ANTONIO: Mariachi Vargas Extravaganza December 1-7. www.mariachimusic.com 210/225-3353

SAN ANTONIO: *Alamo Origins: The Birth of Spanish Texas* December 1-31. www.thealamo.org

SAN ANTONIO: *Onstage! Costume Design and the Theatre* December 1-January 5. www.mcnayart.org 210/824-5368

SAN ANTONIO: *CS! The Experience* December 1-January 26.

www.wittmuseum.org 210/357-1910

SAN ANTONIO: Fiesta de las Luminarias December 6-8, 13-15, 20-22. www.thesanantonio.riverwalk.com

SAN ANTONIO: Tamales! At Pearl—A Holiday Family Festival December 7. www.atpearl.com/calendar/tamales

WESLACO: Mid-Valley Lighted Christmas Parade December 19. www.weslaco.com 956/969-0838

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FOR A FREE PRINTED COPY of an even more detailed, quarterly schedule of events, write to *Texas Highways* Events Calendar subscriptions, Box 149249, Austin 78714-9249. Or, call 800/452-9292 from anywhere in the U.S. or Canada, between 8-6 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 highway conditions, and send brochures (including the official Texas State Travel Guide and map, accommodations guide, and quarterly *Texas Highways* Events Calendar).

TO SUBMIT EVENT INFORMATION: www.texashighways.com and go to Events, Submit Event Listing; e-mail: texasevents@txdot.gov; or mail: *Texas Highways* Events Calendar, Box 141009, Austin 78714-1009. Listing deadlines: Spring (Mar, Apr, May) Dec 1; Summer (Jun, Jul, Aug) Mar 1; Fall (Sep, Oct, Nov) Jun 1; Winter (Dec, Jan, Feb) Sep. 1.

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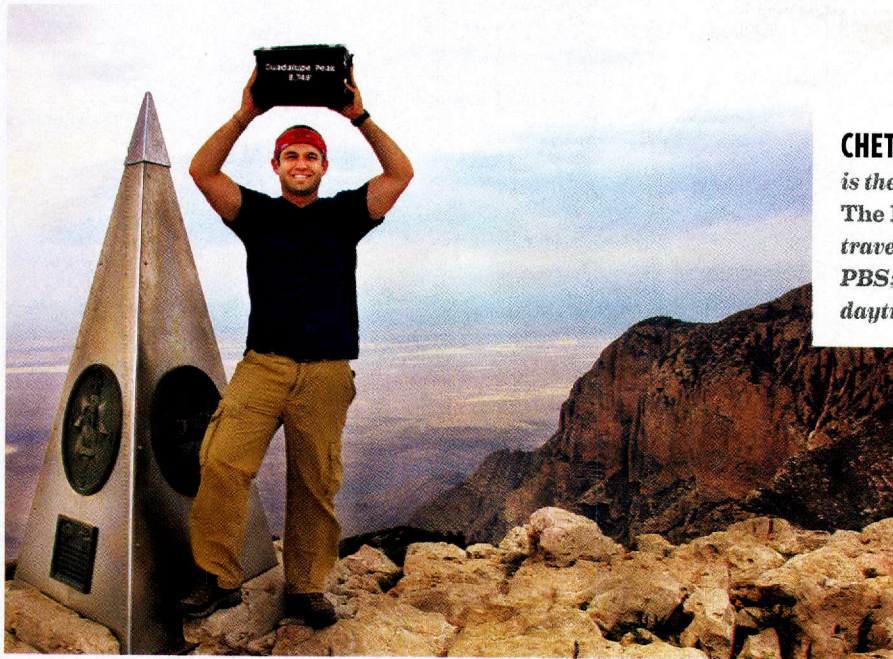
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the Daytripper™

WITH CHET GARNER



Trippin' the *Top of Texas*

Most of my day trips consist of a handful of museums, a bit of outdoors, and lots of great food. But then there are the trips that take me into the remote reaches of Texas; to places without restaurants and streetlights but riddled with adventure. My recent journey was of this kind, as I set out with friends to summit the highest point in Texas: Guadalupe Peak.

8:00 A.M. We pulled into **Guadalupe Mountains National Park** as the sun crested Texas' tallest mountain range. We could have spent hours at the visitor center learning about the ecology of this unique range, but our adventure awaited us. After a quick check-in with the park rangers, we were out the door.

8:30 A.M. We arrived at the trailhead and did our final gear check. Backpack, food, first-aid kit, toilet paper, and—most important—water! There's no available water on the trail, so we squeezed in every drop we could carry from the camp faucet and hit the trail. Roughly four miles ahead and 3,000 vertical feet above was our final destination.

9:00 A.M. Only a half-hour in and I already felt exhausted. It was obvious that the oxygen at 6,000 feet above sea

level is much less than back home in Central Texas.

9:30 A.M. Another half-hour and I already felt better. I was finally able to look up from my feet and notice the vegetation of the Chihuahuan Desert. Among the typical prickly pear cacti was an amazing Texas madrone, which looked as if someone had covered its trunk and limbs in bright red paint.

12:00 P.M. The elevation rose and our surroundings changed drastically as rocks and cacti gave way to grasslands and towering pines. It was incredible to think that we were still in the desert, and that this entire mountain range used to be an underwater reef.

12:30 P.M. We crested a rise and suddenly we were standing behind "El Capitan."

As awe-inspiring as this formation is from the road, it was twice as stirring to look down upon its grandeur. After catching my breath, I looked to my right and there it was: Guadalupe Peak.

CHET GARNER
is the host of
The Daytripper®
travel show on
PBS: www.the-daytripper.com.

1:00 P.M. The last stretch of trail seemed twice as long as the entire hike before it. But finally, after hours of hiking thousands of vertical feet, we reached


the summit of **Guadalupe Peak**. Suddenly, I was standing on the **TOP OF TEXAS** at a magnificent 8,751 feet. The spot is marked by an obelisk honoring the stagecoach drivers who once delivered the mail through this rugged land.

1:15 P.M. For the first 15 minutes, my friends and I didn't say a word. To the north, I could see Bush Mountain and Shumard Peak, the second and third highest points in Texas. To the west I could see the park's vast salt flats. And to the south, I could see more of Texas than my eyes and heart could contain.

2:00 P.M. After an inspiring hour, we decided to start our descent. The entire way down we chatted about the climb, the view, and where we were going on our next adventure.

5:00 P.M. We arrived at our car and shed our hiking boots. For dinner, we would head south to Van Horn. But for the time being, we were content to lie on the ground and bask in our glorious feat.

Reaching the top of Texas requires stamina and an entire day to accomplish, but it's worth every rocky step. While our highest peak may not be as tall as Mount Everest, the view and the feeling you get staring out across Texas is just as epic. So, whether you follow my footsteps or forge your own path, I hope to see you on the road. ★

 **Contact Guadalupe Mountains National Park at 915/828-3251; www.nps.gov/gumo. Always check ahead for weather and trail conditions.**



The Sound of Silence

SHARING THE BEAUTY OF TRUE SOLITUDE

text by **Barbara Rodriguez** illustration by **Michael Witte**

I GREW UP IN A FAMILY DEVOTED TO ROAD-trips, but they were not just a vacation thing. Weekends often found us heading out to nowhere in particular, assured that my mother or father would find something of interest to share with us along the way.

I'm remembering those days as my husband and I travel with our eight-year-old son, Elliott, for a weekend of apple picking in orchards around Lubbock. It's a long trip from Fort Worth to the Caprock, but one that soothes me. When civilization drops away and the world becomes a bigger, quieter place, I sigh with contentment.

As we continue our journey, a high-stepping roadrunner paces us when, just past Duffy's Peak, I remark that listening to the silence is what makes the wide-open spaces of Texas so special to me. Elliott says he just doesn't get it. I order the car pulled over. "You need to be still and listen," I say to my son. He screws up his face and closes his eyes for about 10 seconds. His eyes pop open and he says he doesn't know what it is he hears. "That's silence," I tell him.

"But how can you hear silence?" he wants to know. I say: "Well, because it really isn't silent. It's full of all sorts of sounds you can hear for the first time because of all the sounds you aren't hearing." My explanation leaves him shaking his head.

At a scenic overlook on a very empty Farm Road 211, he comes up with the solution. "Leave me here," he says. "Alone."

We negotiate terms that will allow him the illusion of being alone in the wilderness. He will take a seat at the edge of the turnout, and we will climb in the car and pull out of the stop, but only a short distance. We will still be able to see him.

We cut the engine and Elliott turns to face the wide-open expanse. With no machine or human, nor even a power line or train track in his sightlines, he will have the sense he is alone among the red rocks and sailing hawks. I am only 20 feet away from him, but something about his little back framed by so much open space makes my heart beat a bit faster. We sit and watch him as he sits and watches. Ten minutes pass very slowly. No other car passes. He never looks back. He never

Silence is full of all sorts of sounds you can hear for the first time because of all the sounds you aren't hearing.

stirs. Then, in a completely unexpected gift, two deer jump the fence just feet from him. We all shake our heads as if waking from a dream.

"Wahoo!" Elliott shouts as we roll in to pick him up. "Let's do it again!" ★

Find Babs Rodriguez's full adventure at texashighways.com/matters.



RearVIEW

ONE LAST THOUGHT

“When it’s Christmas time in Texas
It’s a very special time for me
In Texas we’ll go swingin’ ’round
the Christmas tree
Dancin’ to a Christmas melody”

—“When It’s Christmas Time in Texas,”
lyrics by Benny McArthur

CANDLELIGHT AT THE RANCH draws visitors to Lubbock’s National Ranching Heritage Center December 13-14. PHOTO BY: Kevin Stillman

To order a print of this photograph, call 866/962-1191, or visit www.texashighwaysprints.com.

