

★ TEXAS

TRAVEL LOG

INSIDE:

- ★ Big Bend National Park visitors boost economy, support jobs
- ★ Houston's new soccer stadium unveiled for May season opener
- ★ Resources help appreciate, find wildflowers now in full bloom
- ★ Brownsville adds new "Wow!" aspect to branding campaign



© PAUL HESTER

TRAVEL NEWS

TO MARK National Travel Tourism Week May 5–13, Texas will join the nation's travel industry on May 8 for Travel Rally Day, as the industry unites to showcase the impact that travel has on local workers, businesses and economies.

NATIONAL TRAVEL & TOURISM WEEK MAY 5 - 13, 2012

The goal of Rally Day—themed “Vote Travel”—is to unite a community's travel workers and supporters to present the message that travel matters to the nation and to local communities.

Many parks, communities and industry organizations across the state will participate in various ways.

Texas Department of Transportation's Travel Information Center in Waskom is the host site for this year's May 8 Travel Rally Trade Show, made up of area and state

travel industry partners and leaders.

The day will be packed with entertainment provided by the Texas Country Music Hall of Fame and the Alabama-Coushatta tribe, as well as safety demonstrations and live longhorn exhibits.

Games and activities planned including a fishing rod casting contest, horseshoe tournament, scavenger hunt for school groups, door prizes and drawings.

During Mother's Day weekend (May 12-13), Texas Parks and Wildlife Department will host a celebration of picnics in parks at Brazos Bend State Park in Needville.

Texas Historical Commission is reopening the Magoffin Home in El Paso on Saturday, May 12. On Sunday, May 13, visits will be free.

Tourism is a multi-billion dollar industry, generating \$800 billion in the United States and \$57.5 billion in direct travel spending in 2010. The money that visitors spend on goods and services translates into jobs for Texans and excise tax money from the sale of those goods and services for state and local government.

For more information, visit www.votetravel.org.

ASIA TEXAS Society Board of Directors' efforts to help the 16-year-old organization thrive are coming to fruition with the opening of the new, Yoshio Taniguchi-designed, Asia Society Texas Center in Houston. A free open house and First Look Festival, featuring music, acrobatics, art exhibitions, storytelling and building tours, are set for April 14–15.

Geared toward helping bridge gaps in understanding among people, leaders and organizations in the United States and Asia, the Center will foster enhanced dialogue, creative expression and new ideas in the areas of arts, culture, policy, business and education.

The \$48.4 million facility takes its place in Houston's vibrant Theater District, joining internationally recognized museums like the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston and Contemporary Arts Museum Houston, as well as performing arts organizations and education centers.

For Taniguchi, who is best known for his expansion and renovation of the Museum of Modern Art in New York, the Asia Society of Texas Center is his first free-standing building in the United States. He incorporated Jurassic-era limestone from Ba-

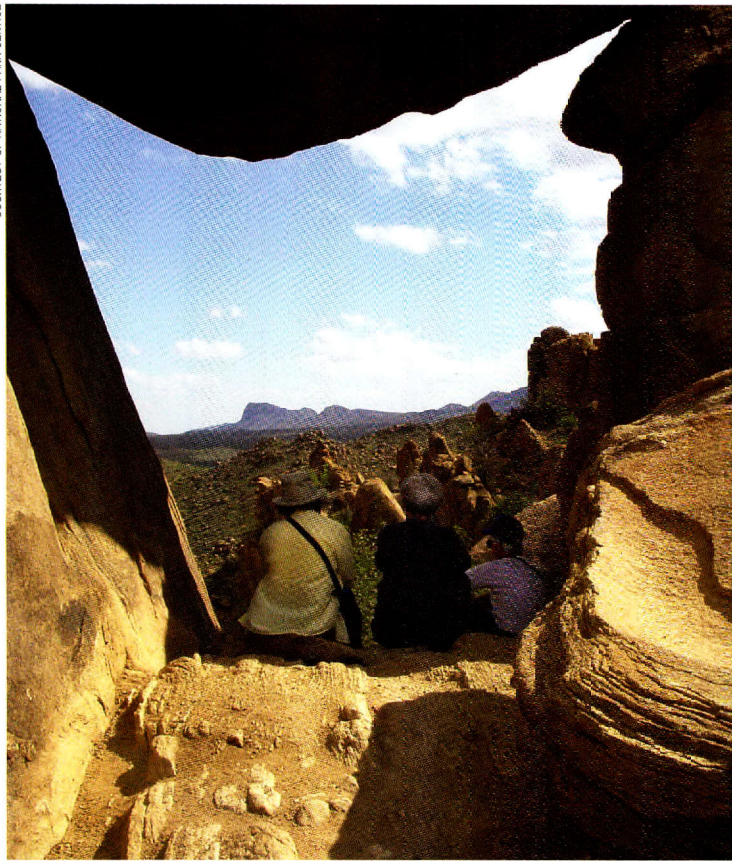
Houston's new Asia Society Texas Center is Tokyo-based architect Yoshio Taniguchi's second international commission.

varia for exterior and interior walls, Basaltina Italian stone floors and Appalachian white oak wood for flooring, and American Cherry wood for paneling. The Favez Sarofim Grand Hall paneling comes from a single, 100-year-old North American cherry tree.

Along with the Grand Hall that greets visitors, the 39,000-square-foot facility includes the 273-seat Brown Foundation Performing Arts Theater. The theater offers acoustics that place it in contention with Houston's best mid-sized venues for performances. Other highlights are the Louisa Stude Sarofim Gallery, the adjacent Allen Sculpture Garden and the Edward Rudge Allen III Education Center.

Jeffrey Brown, a writer for *Texas Architect Magazine*, says, “The dazzling display of what every architect aspires to do is all the more admirable in the restraint Taniguchi has shown here. His gift may well be in the balance of high craft and knowing what to not detail.”

COURTESY OF NATIONAL PARK SERVICE



Visitors to Big Bend National Park contribute to the local economy with direct spending and job creation.

Grand opening weekend entertainment includes a 14-member troupe that demonstrates traditional Japanese fire-fighting techniques via acrobatics, Aboriginal Australian tales laced with sounds of the didgeridoo, Sufi music, and a Mountain Music Project that pairs Nepalese folk musicians and Appalachian bluegrass performers.

The First Look Festival also will include the unveiling of artist Lee Ufan's *Relatum* work commissioned especially for the Allen Sculpture Garden. It also marks the opening of the *Treasures of Asian Art: A Rockefeller Legacy*, an exhibition of 60 masterpieces from the Mr. and Mrs. John D. Rockefeller 3rd Collection at the Asia Society Museum in New York.

Cell phones may be used as an audio guide.

The Faye Sarofim Grand Hall and the North Gallery of the Asia Society Texas Center will feature works by pan-Asian artists borrowed from private and public collections across the state.

For more information, call (713) 496-9901 or visit www.asiasociety.org/texas.

A NEW National Park Service report shows that 366,269 visitors in 2010 spent \$16,121,000 in Big Bend National Park and in communities near the park. That spending supported 241 jobs in the local area. In addition, overnight stays in Big Bend National Park totalled 175,574 for 2010.

"The people and the business owners in communities near national parks have always known their economic value," says Bill Wellman, park superintendent. "Big Bend National Park is clean, green fuel for the engine that drives our local economy."

Most of the spending/jobs are related to lodging, food and beverage service (52 percent); followed by other retail (29 percent); entertainment/amusements (13 percent); gas and local transportation (7 percent); and groceries (2 percent).

The figures are based on \$12 billion of direct spending by 28.7 million visitors in 394 national parks and nearby communities and are included in an annual, peer-reviewed, visitor-spending analysis conducted by Dr. Daniel Snydes of Michigan State University for the National Park Service.

Across the U.S., local visitor spending added a total of \$31 billion to the national economy and supported more than 258,000 jobs, an increase of \$689 million and 11,500 jobs from 2009.

THE HOUSTON Dynamo will play their first game in their new, soccer-specific stadium on May 12, the opener for the 2012 season.

The state-of-the-art, open-air BBVA Compass Stadium features 22,000 seats and is designed to host Major League Soccer and international soccer matches as well as additional sporting and concert events. This makes it Major League Soccer's first soccer-specific stadium in a city's downtown district.

Its addition makes it a neighbor to other showcase Houston attractions including Minute Maid Park, the Toyota Center, George R. Brown Convention Center and Discovery Green.

The stadium also will host Texas Southern University football, concerts and boxing matches, among other events.

For more information, call (713) 276-GOAL or visit www.HoustonDynamo.com.

BROWNSVILLE is growing into its new branding campaign—WOW! Always A Fiesta—launched in February.

Brownsville Convention & Visitors Bureau President and CEO Mariano "Bean" Ayala says this new campaign is aimed at drawing the kind of attention New Orleans gets. There, he says, it seems like something's always going on, even outside of Mardi Gras.

Ayala says he wants people to see the city that way—that there's "always a fiesta." Plus, there's the added "wow" factor. Big events like the Latin Jazz Festival and Air Fiesta help stir up a buzz.

"We are a city that has, for the longest time, been promoted as 'On the Border, by the Sea' and now we're adding 'WOW,' and its accompanying slogan 'Always a Fiesta' to augment that," Ayala told the *Brownsville Herald*.

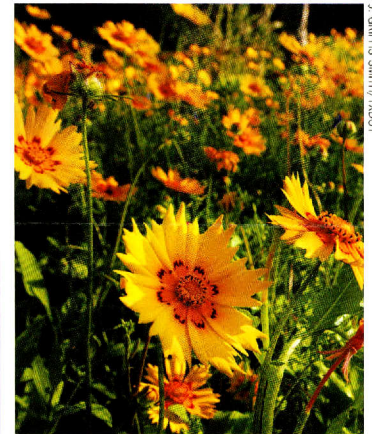
Ayala says the branding campaign will make visitors feel happier, and happier visitors translate into longer stays and more money spent.

"We've got competition everywhere," Ayala says. "Every city needs to do something. We're trying to stand out big time. That's what the WOW! campaign is: That we're unique, we believe in each other, and we believe in Brownsville. That is the WOW! factor."

TEXAS Association of Convention and Visitor Bureaus is gearing up for its 40th annual convention Aug. 14–17 in Killeen.

The nation's largest state organization of CVBs and chambers of commerce—expecting more than 300 attendees from Texas and Oklahoma—will feature educational sessions and an exclusive trade show for industry partners.

For more information, call (361) 749-0467 or visit www.tacvb.org.



J. SMITH/SHUTTERSTOCK

SPRING SPRUNG

EARLY SPRING rains have helped Texas bluebonnets and other native plants grow, as well as boosted their blooms and the germination of developing summer wildflowers.

Among the locations to see good stands of the state flower are: White Oak Bayou from Loop 610 to Interstate 10 in Houston; along U.S. 290 near S. Lamar Blvd. and along Highway 1 in Austin; under the Montgomery Street Bridge of Interstate 30 in Fort Worth; and in the median of Highway 281 in north San Antonio.

Stiff green thread is also blooming in north San Antonio along Encino and Evans roads. And thick stands of California poppy can be seen from trails at the El Paso Museum of Archeology; stands of Drummond phlox and patches of Texas bluebonnets surround highways 181 and 123 between Beeville and Seguin; white

CELEBRATING TEXAS CULTURES

prickly poppy, prairie acacia and stands of bladderpod species are visible along Miners Road between Eagle Pass and Laredo.

At the Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center in Austin, clusters of hundreds of Texas bluebonnets decorate the Savanna Meadow, and California poppy and large buttercup are among the current blooming options from the hundreds of native wildflowers on site.

“All this rain has helped create a very lush Wildflower Center that will continue into future months,” says Damon Waitt, who is the senior botanist and senior director at the Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center. He notes that, each day, something new comes into flower at the center.

Unfortunately, bluebonnets and other Texas wildflowers are harder to spot along roadways when they are mixed in with stands of invasive species such as bastard cabbage with its highlighter-yellow blooms.

“Our garden staff works hard to keep invasive plants in check so visitors can enjoy an invasives-free Texas wildflower experience,” Waitt says.

To determine whether a plant in your yard is an invasive one, visit www.texasinvasives.org/invasives_database. Developing wildflowers at the center can be viewed at www.wildflower.org/bbcm.

For general public sightings, contact the Texas Department of Transportation at (800) 452-9292, or visit www.dot.state.tx.us/travel/flora_map_disclaimer.htm.

To learn more about wildflowers nationally, search the Wildflower Center’s Native Plant Information Network at www.wildflower.org/plants. To purchase seeds to sow of mid- to late-summer bloomers or



COURTESY OF THE INSTITUTE OF TEXAN CULTURES

THE INSTITUTE of Texan Cultures is ready to celebrate diversity with its annual, three-day Texas Folklife Festival featuring several stages of music, dance and entertainment; 15¢ menu items; and 60 arts and crafts vendors and demonstrators that preserve preserve the cultures and customs of Texas.

Performances include the St. George Maronite Lebanese Folk Dancers, the Zorya Ukrainian Dance Ensemble, Tusuy Kusun Peru folk dancers and the Ile Bahia de San Antonio demonstrating the Brazilian art of capoeira.

The Zorya Ukrainian Dance Ensemble is one of many unique Texan cultural offerings at this year’s Texas Folk Life Festival in San Antonio from June 8–10.

Beginning May 1, advance tickets are available online, at HEB Stores, Fort Sam Houston, the ITC museum store, and Lackland and Randolph Air Force bases.

For additional information, call (21C) 458-2300 or visit www.texasfolklifestival.org.

potted native plants, visit www.wildflower.org/suppliers.

IN THE PRESS

GIVING A NOD to Texas museums borne of hobbyists, *The New York Times* spotlights unique Texas’ attractions, including the Toilet Seat Art Museum in San Antonio, Devil’s Rope Museum in McLean, National Museum of

Funeral History in Houston, Eight Track Museum in Dallas and the Cockroach Hall of Fame Museum in Plano.

The magazine points out that “the state has numerous established, well-financed museums that are members of the American Association of Museums in Washington—the Museum of

Fine Arts in Houston, the Museum of Nature and Science in Dallas—but there are dozens of others that exist as museums because someone put up a sign saying so.”

“One thing becomes clear when cataloging the state’s lesser-known museums: Few things fascinate and captivate Texans as much as Texas itself,” noting museums like the Central Texas Oil Patch Museum in Luling, the John C. Freeman Weather Museum in Houston, Dr Pepper Museum in Waco and Southfork Ranch Gift Store and Museum in Parker, where the “Dallas” television series was filmed.

“Why am I doing it?” asks 90-year-old Barney Smith, who took his collection of toilet seats (1,005-plus he seats painted or crafted) and turned his garage into the Toilet Seat Art Museum. “Because I wanted to stay busy and keep with my business. I was a plumber.”

The article also notes the National Cowgirl Museum and Hall of Fame in Fort Worth, and museums dedicated to Texas lawmen and also to convicts and their keepers (Texas

Prison Museum in Huntsville). There is one Houston museum that shows no Texas bias, because its subject (death in general, and funerals in particular) is pretty universal: the National Museum of Funeral History, where visitors can admire late-1800s hearses and a replica of Lincoln’s solid walnut coffin.

EXAMINING the hometowns of bands invited to the South by Southwest film, interactive and music festival in Austin, *The Atlantic* magazine sought to find the hottest music scenes. Using SXSW as its measuring stick, it’s of little surprise that Austin, the Live Music Capital of the World, ranked No. 1 with more than 23 bands per million residents.

In second and third were Oxford and Brighton, England, with 20 and 19 bands per million, respectively. Athens, Ga., took fourth with 16.

Next were Boise, Idaho (4.9 bands per million residents); Hamilton, Ontario (4.5); Copenhagen, Denmark (4.1); Montreal, Canada (3.9); and Leeds, England (3.8).

TXDOT PHOTO



Devil’s Rope Museum in McLean showcases the history of barbed wire and fencing tools.

TRAVEL INFORMATION DIVISION
P.O. BOX 149249
AUSTIN, TX 78714-9249

www.txdot.gov • www.dontmesswithtexas.org
www.traveltexas.com • www.texashighways.com

(8 a.m.–6 p.m. daily, Central Time)

Dial toll-free (800) 452-9292 for travel assistance from
TXDOT's Texas Travel Information Centers

*Compared to last year

VISITOR NUMBERS as of February 29, 2012			
TRAVEL CENTER	Month Visitors	Percent Variation*	Year-to-Date Visitors
AMARILLO	4,578	-10.57	9,208
ANTHONY	4,440	-27.36	8,256
CAPITOL	6,296	+9.48	11,153
DENISON	17,365	-15.31	37,452
GAINESVILLE	16,734	+29.43	34,014
LANGTRY	3,244	-21.01	6,012
LAREDO	5,586	-11.11	12,887
ORANGE	27,333	-9.98	54,453
TEXARKANA	19,102	+239.83	38,168
VALLEY	15,539	-11.88	43,673
WASKOM	17,936	-1.14	34,744
WICHITA FALLS	8,996	-7.36	19,467
CENTER TOTALS	147,149	+3.43	309,487
			+6.90

TEXAS TRAVEL INFORMATION CENTERS

TEXAS TRIVIA

HemisFair, the first officially designated international exposition in the southwestern United States, opened in San Antonio, running through October. It attracted 6.3 million visitors in its celebration of the cultural heritage shared by San Antonio and Latin American nations. More than thirty nations participated with pavilions or exhibits. After the event, San Antonio's landscape was forever changed with the remaining structures including the Institute of Texan Cultures, the Convention Center and Arena, and the 622-foot Tower of the Americas.

On April 6, 1968 a fair for this half of
the world was launched in what city?

TEXAS TRIVIA

TEXAS TRAVELOG is published monthly by the Texas Department of Transportation, Travel Information Division. Please send news items of interest to the Texas travel industry to Texas Travelog, P.O. Box 141009, Austin, TX 78714-1009. (512) 486-5874, fax (512) 486-5879. E-mail: trv-log@dot.state.tx.us. Deadline for each newsletter is the 15th of the month preceding the issue date. To receive this publication electronically, please e-mail trv-log@dot.state.tx.us.
EDITOR: Lois M. Rodriguez
DESIGN/LAYOUT: Kirsti Harms
PRINTED ON RECYCLED PAPER