

The Best of Texas

by David Baird, Edie Jarolim, Eric Peterson & Neil E. Schlecht

Texans are a unique bunch, unapologetic in their swaggering embrace of the place they call home. “It’s flat and dry,” you say. “Yup, parts are,” they reply. “It’s hot,” you say. “Hotter ’n hell,” they confirm. “Texans talk funny,” you say. “Y’all do too,” they retort. Self-confident and independent almost to a fault, Texas seems to embody all that’s good, bad, and especially big about the United States. The former independent Republic of Texas—which shook off the landlord claims of Spain, Mexico, France, and even the United States—has diehards who still wish Texas would suck it up and secede.

Texans don’t seem to mind too much if outsiders get caught up in the myths and clichés about Texas (that way they get to keep the truth to themselves). A 10-gallon hat doesn’t hold 10 gallons of anything, nor is Texas flat, dry, and featureless, filled with cowboys on the range, oilmen watching their backyard gushers spit up black gold, and helmet-haired beauty queens. But it’s hard to compete with the state’s image, the canvas for 100 Western flicks. The big-sky frontier of Texas and the West is the quintessential American landscape, the mythic cowboy leading his longhorn cattle on long drives a heroic figure. The outlaws who thumbed their noses at authority (behind the barrel of a gun) and the boomtown gamblers who struck it rich are also part of the romantic tale of Texas.

The cowboy still exists, but Texas is now decidedly more urban than rural. Three of the nation’s 10 largest cities are here: Houston, Dallas, and San Antonio. Texas today is as much a leader of high-tech industries as it is an agricultural and ranching state. There are world-class art museums and collections in Houston, Fort Worth, and Dallas, where local philanthropists have used their money and influence to import the world’s most celebrated architects to build some of the nation’s most talked-about museums. Although Texas is by and large a conservative place, Austin has for decades supported thriving hippie and renegade musician communities, and Dallas is nipping at its heels with a thriving music scene. The state is a melting pot dotted by pockets of Czech, German, and Irish communities; bilingual populations in the lower Rio Grande Valley and border towns; and more than four million people of Hispanic descent statewide.

This enormous state also has immense geographical diversity. Cross Texas and you’ll see desert plains in the Texas Panhandle, the Piney Woods in East Texas, beaches in the Gulf Coast, North Texas prairies, scenic wildflowers and lakes in central Texas Hill Country, desert canyons in Big Bend National Park, and the rugged Guadalupe Mountains.

Still, some of the clichés are true. Texas, the second-largest state in the United States in both land mass and population, is larger than any country in Europe. You can set out from Amarillo in your car and drive south for 15 hours and still not reach the Mexico border. And everything is bigger in Texas, of course: The

ranches are bigger, the steaks are bigger, and the bigger and badder cars—Cadillacs with longhorns on the grille and monster pickup trucks with gun racks in back—really do exist. In Texas you can carry a concealed handgun even in church, and the state is known as the capital punishment capital of the world. “Don’t Mess with Texas” is more than an effective antilitter campaign.

Texans, though, are startlingly friendly and hospitable folks. Deals are still completed with handshakes, and adults say “yes, ma’am” and “nossir” to each other. Also, Texans love their sports, especially football. This is a place where entire towns pack the bleachers for Friday night high school games and preachers mention the game in their sermons, praying for victory in a kind of gridiron holy war.

Former Texas governor and owner of the Texas Rangers baseball team George W. Bush, who delights in using the down-home moniker “Dubya,” lost the popular vote but was elected the 43rd president of the U.S. in 2000 and reelected in 2004. Bush regularly draws the national media corps to his sprawling ranch in Crawford, Texas, outside of Waco, when he takes long breaks from Washington “to get back in touch with real people.” Bush, a savvy politician, straps on his cowboy boots and homespun airs and hops in the pickup, showing that he knows how to make the most of his transplanted Texan status.

It’s hard for most people to be indifferent about Texas. It’s a place to romanticize and ridicule, to dream about and dismiss. Texans can leave the state, but sooner or later they’ll admit their weaknesses for Texas dance halls and Old West saloons, Tex-Mex and barbecue, cowboy boots, and country music. From the big sky and flat plains and the Hill Country highways lined by Texas bluebonnets to the larger-than-life personalities like LBJ and Willie Nelson: Texas stays with you.

—Neil E. Schlecht

1 The Best Luxury & Historic Hotels

- **The Adolphus Hotel** (Dallas; ☎ 800/221-9083): This landmark Beaux Arts hotel, built by beer baron Adolphus Busch, looks and feels like a European château. Luxuriate among dark-wood parlors, baroque art and antiques, and an opulent dining room, one of Big D’s best restaurants. Rooms are English country style, and a three-course English tea is served in the lobby living room every afternoon. See p. 88.
- **The Mansion on Turtle Creek** (Dallas; ☎ 800/422-3408): Repeatedly named one of the top five hotels in the United States, the Mansion draws movie stars, princes, presidents, and luxury mavens. Formerly the grand estate of a cotton magnate in the 1920s and 1930s, the Mansion is refined and supremely elegant throughout, with service to match. The innovative Southwestern restaurant has slipped a notch, but is still among the most prized in town. See p. 90.
- **Hotel Zaza** (Dallas; ☎ 866/769-2894): This super-fashionable Uptown boutique hotel has a catchy name and a cachet few can match. It is luxurious but hip, with eclectic style to burn and a bar and restaurant run by celebrity Dallas chef Stephan Pyles (formerly of Star Canyon). Especially prized are the numerous suites with funky themes (the “Shag-a-delic” Suite, anyone?). See p. 90.
- **Stockyards Hotel** (Fort Worth; ☎ 800/423-8471): Over-the-top

luxury would be gauche in the old stockyards, so this extremely comfortable and authentic slice of the Old West qualifies as a Fort Worth indulgence: cowboy luxury. Outlaws on the run, cowpokes and their madames, and the C&W elite have all propped up their boots here. Cowtown's cattle-ranching and railroad past are effortlessly evoked in the rooms, each of which is different: Tie your horse to the post (okay, park the Taurus in the lot) and bunk in the Bonnie & Clyde, Geronimo, or Victorian Parlor room. See p. 128.

- **Four Seasons Hotel Houston Center** (Houston; ☎ 800/332-3442 or 713/650-1300): Lots of space to stretch out in and lots of service so you don't have to stretch too far. This hotel surpasses all others in amenities and services, and has the best fine dining in downtown Houston. Within a few blocks are the baseball park, the new basketball arena, a shopping mall, and the convention center. A bit beyond that is the city's theater district and nightlife hub. See p. 166.
- **Lancaster Hotel** (Houston; ☎ 800/231-0336 or 713/228-9500): Personal service, charming rooms, and great location are the keys to this hotel's success. If there's one hotel that makes having a car unnecessary in Houston, this is it. A block away are the symphony, the opera, three theaters, and the ballet. Make things easy on yourself by getting the concierge to buy your tickets at the time you make your reservations. Also within a block or two are a multiplex cinema and several restaurants and clubs—you'll have the best part of the city at your feet. See p. 166.
- **Omni Corpus Christi Hotel** (Corpus Christi; ☎ 800/843-6664 or 361/887-1600): The two

towers of the Omni overlook Corpus Christi Bay, and the floor-to-ceiling windows of the 20-story Bayfront Tower offer spectacular views of the Gulf, particularly from its upper floors. Pamper yourself with a massage from the in-house massage therapist or relax in the whirlpool. Then have dinner in their Republic of Texas Bar & Grill. See p. 227.

- **Radisson Resort South Padre Island** (South Padre Island; ☎ 800/333-3333 or 956/761-6511): From the high-ceilinged lobby to the beautiful landscaping around the swimming pools, this Radisson spells luxury. Many rooms have grand views of the ocean, and everything is at your fingertips. See p. 247.
- **Menger Hotel** (San Antonio; ☎ 800/345-9285 or 210/223-4361): Who can resist a place that's right across the street from the Alamo and still has the bar where Teddy Roosevelt recruited his Rough Riders? This 19th-century gem sparkles now as it did 100 years ago. See p. 287.
- **The Driskill** (Austin; ☎ 800/252-9367 or 512/474-5911): If you want to play cattle baron, you can't do better than stay in this opulent 1886 hotel, restored to its former glory at the end of the 20th century. See p. 302.
- **Camino Real Hotel** (El Paso; ☎ 800/722-6466 or 915/534-3000): El Paso's finest hotel, just 6 blocks north of the Mexican border, effortlessly meshes El Paso's past and present. Although it has undergone numerous renovations since its opening in 1912, the lobby retains its stunning Tiffany glass dome ceiling and the original stained-glass windows, and you'll still find the elegant touches that established the hotel as an Old West landmark. See p. 346.

2 The Best Bed & Breakfasts & Boutique Hotels

- **Hôtel St. Germain** (Dallas; ☎ 214/871-2516): Ever wanted to stay with your spouse at a plush bordello? This intimate boutique hotel and elegant, prix-fixe restaurant is about as close as you'll come to that fantasy. A gorgeous mix of early-20th-century France and New Orleans, the seven suites are so swank, with pampering features like wood-burning fireplaces, draped Napoleon sleigh beds, bidets, and soaking tubs, that you may not want to leave. But your budget may force you to. See p. 90.
- **The Ashton Hotel** (Fort Worth; ☎ 800/327-4866): Just off Sundance Square, this new boutique hotel—Fort Worth's only small luxury hotel—offers plush rooms and smooth service, as well as one of the best new restaurants in North Texas. It's the new place to be in Cowtown. See p. 130.
- **Etta's Place** (Fort Worth; ☎ 817/654-0267): A cozy and relaxing small hotel that feels like a B&B is just a heartbeat from Fort Worth's charming nightlife, shops, and restaurants of Sundance Square. It bears the name of Etta Place, the handsome girlfriend of the Sundance Kid, who no doubt would approve of the spacious, modern rooms with lots of light and Texas touches. Kick back in the clubby library and music rooms. See p. 131.
- **La Colombe d'Or** (Houston; ☎ 713/524-7999): Have a four-course French dinner served in your suite's separate dining room.

With such personal service and with only five suites and one penthouse, there's no way you'll get lost in the shuffle. Occupying a mansion built for an oil tycoon in the 1920s, the hotel has uncommon architectural features, and is furnished with antiques. Its location in Houston's Montrose District puts it squarely in the middle of the hippest part of town. See p. 171.

- **George Blucher House Bed & Breakfast Inn** (Corpus Christi; ☎ 866/884-4884 or 361/884-4884): This wonderful B&B combines the ambience of an elegant historic home—it was built in 1904—with modern amenities. Breakfasts are served by candlelight; and you're just across the street from a prime bird-watching area. See p. 227.
- **Ogé House Inn on the River Walk** (San Antonio; ☎ 800/242-2770 or 210/223-2353): The King William area abounds with B&Bs, but the Ogé House stands out as much for its professionalism as for its gorgeous mansion and lovely rooms. You don't have to sacrifice service for warmth here. See p. 262.
- **Villa del Rio Bed & Breakfast** (Del Rio; ☎ 800/995-1887 or 830/768-1100): A luxurious Mediterranean-style villa—actually a mix of Italian and Mexican styles—built in 1887, the Villa del Rio gets our vote for the best place to stay in this area for anyone who appreciates old-world ambience and pampering and an exciting breakfast. See p. 377.

3 The Best Hotel Bargains

- **The Bradford at Lincoln Park** (Dallas; ☎ 888/486-STAY): A new residential-style hotel that primarily targets businesspeople,

it's also superb for other travelers and families. The nicely styled and spacious suites have fully equipped kitchens, and there are a

pool and small spa, exercise room, and business center, as well as free continental breakfast and local calls. See p. 92.

- **The Hotel Lawrence** (Dallas; ☎ 877/396-0334): Downtown used to be a wasteland after dark, but now it's become a cool spot where a number of upscale hotels and restaurants are thriving. But you won't have to pay through the nose to stay near the famed grassy knoll and the original Neiman Marcus. This historic hotel has nice rooms and good services—in addition to its coveted location—for the cost of a roadside motel. See p. 89.
- **Miss Molly's Bed & Breakfast Hotel** (Fort Worth; ☎ 800/99-MOLLY): Texas style and hospitality radiate from this small 1910 home and now B&B on the main drag of Fort Worth's Stockyards District. Cattle barons, railroaders, and cowboys have all rested their heads here, often on the lap of a local lady. For Old West romanticism, this Victorian house among saloons and Western shops can't be beat, especially for the price. See p. 130.
- **Grant Palm Court Inn** (Houston; ☎ 800/255-8904 or 713/668-8000): The economy hotel business is quite competitive; rarely does a guidebook writer come across a motel in this category with such a marked price advantage. Attractive, clean rooms, well-kept grounds, and a convenient location that's not on some ugly freeway all make this a great pick. Throw in a free continental breakfast, pool, and hot tub and you'll want to pinch yourself. See p. 170.
- **Best Western Sunset Suites** (San Antonio; ☎ 866/560-6000 or 210/223-4400): Low room rates, lots of free perks, and a convenient location near downtown—not to mention super attractive rooms in a historic structure—make staying here a super deal. See p. 262.
- **Austin Motel** (Austin; ☎ 512/441-1157): Look for the Austin's classic neon sign in Austin's hip SoCo area. The rooms have been individually furnished, many in fun and funky styles, but the place retains its 1950s character and its lower-than-1990s prices. See p. 305.
- **El Paso Marriott** (El Paso; ☎ 800/228-9290 or 915/779-3300): After a major renovation in 2000, this modern hotel is a solid lodging option for those who want to be near the airport. Catering mostly to business travelers, it's a bargain on the weekends. See p. 346.

4 The Best Restaurants

- **The French Room** (Dallas; ☎ 214/742-8200): This formal but thankfully not intimidating restaurant in the historic Adolphus Hotel is dreamy, like dining at Versailles. Indulge in superb classic French cuisine and museum-quality wines surrounded by a rococo-painted ceiling, flowing drapes, and crystal chandeliers. See p. 94.
- **Citizen** (Dallas; ☎ 214/522-7253): This ultrasleek and superchic Eurasian restaurant, adopted by Big D's scenesters, dares to pull out all the stops. Only a few years back Dallas could never have supported such an audacious restaurant. From the dramatic decor to dishes like black cod with blonde miso and tuna tartare with caviar

and crème fraîche, it's Dallas's way of saying New York and LA ain't got nothing on it. See p. 97.

- **Javier's Gourmet Mexicano** (Dallas; ☎ 214/521-4211): The owners and devotees of this gourmet Mexico City restaurant will gently inform you that, no, this isn't Tex-Mex. Javier's serves deliciously prepared grilled fish and meat dishes and mesquite-smoked chicken in a Spanish colonial setting. Come for a top-shelf margarita at the clubby bar, but I guarantee you'll stay for dinner. See p. 98.
- **Café Ashton** (Fort Worth; ☎ 817/332-0100): The creative New American bistro fare at this swank new restaurant, in a boutique hotel of the same description, has quickly shot to the top of everyone's best-of lists in Fort Worth. Hotel dining is rarely this good or this intimate. See what all the fuss is about. See p. 134.
- **Mark's** (Houston; ☎ 713/523-3800): No fussy French nouvelle here, and no boring steak and potatoes either. Mark's manages to serve up dishes that can satisfy at some deep subconscious level while they fulfill our eternal quest for something new. This is the New American cooking as it should be performed. See p. 180.
- **Cafe Annie** (Houston; ☎ 713/840-1111): No other restaurant in Houston garners quite the attention that this place does from both food critics and the public alike. With its innovative Southwestern cooking, the best wine list in the city, and a master sommelier (the only "master" in Texas), the restaurant has its credentials. Chef/owner Robert Del Grande offers up wonderful dishes that show just how fertile the cross-breeding of Mexican and American cooking can be. See p. 185.
- **Le Rêve** (San Antonio; ☎ 210/212-2221): After several years on the fine-dining scene, this restaurant has proved that it's got staying power and that San Antonio is ready for a place where men have to wear jackets and there is seating for dinner. The reward is stellar French food. See p. 267.
- **Uchi** (Austin; ☎ 512/916-4808): Don't think of this restaurant as just a good place for sushi and Japanese cuisine. It's a great restaurant, period, with creative cooking that transcends its humble roots. The setting, in a beautifully revamped 1930s house, is transcendent, too. See p. 312.
- **Café Central** (El Paso; ☎ 915/545-2233): Well worth the splurge, Café Central is a sleek urban bistro serving sophisticated international cuisine. The menu changes daily, but always offers a wide range of standout fare—most notably creative Southwestern interpretations of traditional Continental dishes—such as guyamas shrimp with a zesty tequila-cilantro sauce. The wine list is one of the city's best, with nearly 300 bottles, and desserts include the best *leches* (Mexican milk cakes) in all of Texas. See p. 348.
- **Avanti Authentic Italian Restaurant** (Del Rio; ☎ 830/775-3363): Who would ever dream of going to a West Texas border town for great Italian food? No one, until they've been to Avanti, which offers some of the best homemade northern Italian dishes we've tasted anywhere. There's also an excellent selection of northern Italian wines. See p. 379.

5 The Best Texan Dining

- **Sonny Bryan's Smokehouse** (Dallas; ☎ 214/357-7120): Sonny Bryan's has been turning out sweet barbecue since 1910, and the little smoke shack out on Inwood has acquired legendary status. Salesmen perch on their car hoods with their sleeves rolled up and wolf down hickory-smoked brisket, sliced beef sandwiches, and succulent onion rings. Thinner sorts squeeze into tiny one-armed school desks and get ready to douse their brisket with superb, tangy sauce. A classic. See p. 101.
- **Bob's Steak & Chop House** (Dallas; ☎ 214/528-9446): Bob's will satisfy the steak connoisseur—the real Texan—in you. With a clubby but relaxed mahogany look and behemoth wet-aged prime beef and sirloin filets, this is a place for the J. R. crowd. Even the accompaniments—“smashed” potatoes and honey-glazed whole carrots—are terrific. And the meat-shy need not fear: The chophouse salad is a meal in itself. Cigar aficionados should keep their noses trained for Bob's cigar dinners: Every course is served with a different cigar. See p. 96.
- **Lonesome Dove Western Bistro** (Fort Worth; ☎ 817/740-8810): The work of a daring young couple, this friendly and eclectic restaurant challenges Cowtown to broaden its horizons. The daring Southwestern menu at this Stockyards eatery successfully stretches the popular theme in new ways, adding unique Texas touches that are both avant-garde and comforting. Pop in for the cheap Stockyards lunch special or dive into a blowout dinner. See p. 133.
- **Angelo's** (Fort Worth; ☎ 817/332-0357): Fort Worth's classic Texas barbecue joint is as unpretentious as they come: Its wood paneling, mounted deer and buffalo heads, metal ceiling fans, and Formica tables might have come from a Jaycees lodge. That's kitschy cool to some, meaningless to everyone else. What is important is the fantastic hickory-smoked barbecue. See p. 136.
- **Loma Linda** (Houston; ☎ 713/924-6074): Bursting the bubble of a perfectly puffed tortilla smothered in chile con queso is the moment where anticipation meets realization in the Tex-Mex experience. The aroma, the texture, the taste . . . Words fail me. You can scour the borderlands a long time before coming up with an old-fashioned Tex-Mex joint like this one. The restaurant even has its own special tortilla maker for producing these puffed-up beauties. Also, of note are the perfectly seasoned classic Tex-Mex enchiladas with chili gravy. See p. 180.
- **La Playa** (Corpus Christi; ☎ 361/980-3909): For a Tex-Mex restaurant to be considered truly great, it must, of course, do a good job with the traditional enchiladas in chili gravy, have excellent fajitas, and pay attention to the details in cooking the rice and beans. It helps if it has a signature dish or two. In this case, it's deep-fried avocados. No place but Texas, baby! See p. 228.
- **Shady Grove** (Austin; ☎ 512/474-9991): This is the most quintessentially Austin restaurant in town. It offers a laid-back Texan menu, a huge outdoor patio, and an “unplugged” music series. See p. 310.
- **L&J Café** (El Paso; ☎ 915/566-8418): An El Paso landmark since it opened its doors in 1927,

the L&J is both inexpensive and offers some of the best Tex-Mex food you'll find anywhere. The chicken enchiladas, overflowing with fluffy meat and buried under chunky green chile and Jack cheese, approach perfection. It doesn't hurt that the salsa is spicy, the beer is cold, and the service is quick and friendly, even when the place is filled to capacity—as it is most of the time. See p. 349.

- **Texas Café and Bar** (Lubbock; ☎ 806/792-8544): This rowdy, smoky roadhouse, affectionately called “The Spoon” by locals, is pure Texas, from the local color seated at the bar and weathered tables to the Lone Star neon signs, longhorn skulls, and politically incorrect wooden Indian. The menu, too, is 100% Texas: The barbecue is made with turkey, ribs, beef, or sausage. See p. 434.

6 The Best Lone Star Experiences

- **Hopping Aboard the Grapevine Vintage Railroad:** The Old West comes alive aboard the Tarantula Railroad. A nostalgic train (when running, a restored 1896 steam locomotive called “Puffy”) rumbles along the track from Stockyards Station in Fort Worth, tracing the route of the Chisholm Trail, to the Cotton Belt Depot in historic Grapevine, Texas, a town with 75 restored turn-of-the-20th-century buildings. See “The Grapevine Vintage Train” in chapter 4.
- **Lassoing the Fort Worth Stock Show and Rodeo:** Fort Worth ain't called Cowntown for nothing. In late January and early February, the Southwestern Exposition and Livestock Show, as it's officially called, recalls the glory cowboy days with horse shows, auctions, and all sorts of livestock, from beef cattle to llamas and swine. The nightly rodeos are big draws. See “Fort Worth” in chapter 4.
- **Attending a Mariachi Mass at Mission San José:** The Alamo may be more famous, but hearing a congregation of San Antonians raise their voices in spirited prayer reminds you that the city's Spanish missions aren't just, well, history. See p. 276.
- **Smelling the Bluebonnets at the Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center:** Few people remember that it was Lady Bird Johnson who started a program to beautify America's highways—and that she began practicing it in her home state. This flower-powered research center is a natural outgrowth of this first lady's lifelong efforts to beautify the state. See p. 315.
- **Running the *Other* River Walk:** Enjoy a stroll or jog along the Concho River's 4-mile trail, meandering among bountiful outdoor gardens and water displays. Gaze at a bronze statue of a mermaid, “Pearl of the Conchos,” or take in the Bill Aylor, Sr., Memorial RiverStage, an outdoor performing arts venue. There's also a 9-hole golf course on the River Walk's acres. See p. 370.
- **Exploring Big Bend National Park:** Vast and wild, this rugged terrain harbors thousands of species of plants and animals—some seen practically nowhere else on earth. A visit can include a hike into the sun-baked desert, a float down a majestic river through the canyons, or a trek among high mountains where bears and mountain lions rule. See “Big Bend National Park” in chapter 10.

7 The Best Museums

- **The Nasher Sculpture Center** (Dallas): This world-class collection of modern sculpture recently debuted in the downtown Dallas Arts District. Ray Nasher and his wife Patsy spent 4 decades assembling what has been called the finest private collection in the world (it includes superlative works by Miró, David Smith, Brancusi, Moore, Giacometti, Picasso, Matisse, Calder, and many more). Designed by Renzo Piano, it has a gorgeous open-air sculpture garden with landscape design by Peter Walker. See p. 105.
- **Meadows Museum of Art** (Dallas): Now in a new building with more room to show off the greatest collection of Spanish masters outside Spain, the Meadows was built by a Dallas oilman fascinated by Spanish art. The museum proudly displays a wealth of works by Velázquez, Goya, Ribera, Murillo, Zurbarán—just about all the biggies from Spain's golden era as well as the 20th-century masters Picasso, Dalí, and Miró. See p. 108.
- **Kimbell Art Museum** (Fort Worth): Probably the country's finest small museum, this masterpiece by Louis Kahn is a joyous celebration of architecture and a splendid collection of art to boot. Kahn's graceful building, a wonder of technology and natural light, is now a chapter in architectural studies worldwide. The small permanent collection ranges from prehistoric Asian and pre-Columbian pieces to European old masters, Impressionists, and modern geniuses. The Kimbell also gets some of the world's most important traveling shows. See p. 143.
- **Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth** (Fort Worth): In a spanking new modernist building designed by the Japanese architect Tadao Ando, the new Modern—actually the oldest art museum in Texas—is now the nation's second largest dedicated to contemporary and modern art. The permanent collection includes works by Picasso, Rothko, Warhol, Rauschenberg, and Pollock. See p. 144.
- **Amon Carter Museum of Western Art** (Fort Worth): The newly expanded Amon Carter Museum is one of the finest collections of Western and American art in the country, including the most complete group of works by Frederic Remington and Charles M. Russell, two behemoths of Western art. It also possesses a great photography collection and important paintings by Georgia O'Keeffe and others. See p. 142.
- **Menil Collection** (Houston): One of the great private collections of the world, it could very well have ended up in Paris or New York, but was graciously bestowed by the collectors on their adopted city. To experience the Menil is pure delight; very little comes between the viewer and the art, which includes works by many of the 20th-century masters, classical works from the ancients, and tribal art from around the world. See p. 192.
- **Museum of Fine Arts, Houston** (Houston): With the addition of the Audrey Jones Beck Building, the Fine Arts museum has doubled its exhibition space and has especially put its collection of Impressionist and baroque art in the best possible light. The museum also has several satellite facilities and attracts major touring exhibitions. See p. 190.

- **The Center for the Arts & Sciences** (Brazosport): One of those rare entities that does a lot of things exceptionally well, The Center includes a terrific natural history museum, a delightful small planetarium, an attractive art gallery, two theaters for a variety of performing arts events, and a nature trail. See p. 218.
- **San Antonio Museum of Art** (San Antonio): Almost as impressive for its architecture as for its holdings, this museum combines several castlelike buildings of the 1904 Lone Star Brewery. The \$11-million Nelson A. Rockefeller Center for Latin American Art is the most comprehensive collection of its kind in the United States. See p. 276.
- **McDonald Observatory** (northwest of Fort Davis): McDonald Observatory is considered one the world's best astronomical research

facilities, and twice a day, visitors can glimpse sunspots, flares, and other solar activity. Additionally, nighttime “Star Parties” are held 3 evenings a week, when visitors can view celestial objects and constellations through the observatory’s high-powered telescopes. See p. 356.

- **Panhandle-Plains Historical Museum** (Canyon): The largest history museum in Texas, this excellent museum is anything but a dusty collection of spurs and bits. Well-thought-out, engaging, and informative, it is largely hands-on—you can sit in a Ford Mustang and listen to Buddy Holly tunes or try out a sidesaddle. There are also comprehensive exhibits on the region’s history in terms of petroleum, art, transportation, Western heritage, and paleontology/geology. See p. 423.

8 The Best Shopping

- **Neiman Marcus** (Dallas): Established in 1907, Neiman Marcus is intimately identified with Big D and its shopaholics. The luxury purveyor’s annual holiday catalog, with his-and-her fantasies for the rich, has become an institution. The downtown store is classy and retro-cool, the best place in North Texas to drape yourself in Prada and Chanel. See “Dallas” in chapter 4.
- **NorthPark Center** (Dallas): Dallas loves to shop, and while there are more malls than most people (except Dallasites) know what to do with, NorthPark is the most traditional and elegant with a graceful layout that outclasses its garish competitors. Besides top anchor stores (Neiman Marcus, Tiffany’s) it enjoys rotating pieces from owner Ray Nasher’s spectacular

collection of modern sculpture, on display throughout the mall. See “Dallas” in chapter 4.

- **Stockyards National Historic District** (Fort Worth): In Cowtown, looking the part is important. Pick up Western duds—suits and shirts with elegant piping and embroidered yokes that would have made you a star in the Old West, plus cowboy boots and other Western paraphernalia—just steps away from the old Stockyards livestock pens. Right on the main drag is **Maverick**, which has upscale Western wear and a bar serving up Lone Star longnecks. **M. L. Leddy’s** is a longtime family-owned shop with a big boot sign out front and top-quality hats, hand-tooled belts, and custom-made boots. And just down the street, plunk down the

- cash for exquisite custom cowboy boots at **Ponder Boot Company**. See “Fort Worth” in chapter 4.
- **Uptown** (Houston): In this one, relatively small district of the city you can find Houston’s Galleria (with over 300 retailers including Saks, Neiman Marcus, Tiffany’s, and Versace) and four other malls fronting Post Oak (including retailers like Cartier and FAO Schwarz). See “Shopping” in chapter 5.
 - **Paris Hatters** (San Antonio): Pope John Paul II, Prince Charles, Jimmy Smits, and Dwight Yoakam have all had Western headgear made for them by Paris Hatters, in business since 1917 and still owned by the same family. About half of the sales are special order, but the shelves are stocked with high-quality ready-to-wear hats, too. See “Shopping” in chapter 7.
 - **Capitol Saddlery** (Austin): The custom-made boots of this classic three-level Western store near the capitol, run by the same family for 7 decades, were immortalized in a song by Jerry Jeff Walker. Come here for hand-tooled saddles, belts, tack, and altogether unyupified cowboy gear. See “Shopping” in chapter 8.
 - **Fredericksburg** (Texas Hill Country): It’s hard to say how a town founded by German idealists ended up being a magnet for Texas materialists, but Fredericksburg’s main street is chock-a-block with boutiques. This is the place to come for everything from natural chocolate mint-scented room deodorizer to handmade dulcimers. See “Hill Country Side Trips from Austin” in chapter 8.
 - **El Paso Chile Company** (El Paso): We love this shop for its tongue-searing delicacies, with fiery names like “Hellfire & Damnation,” and all things spicy. See “El Paso” in chapter 9.

9 The Best Places for Boot-Scootin’

- **Adair’s Saloon** (Dallas): Deep Ellum’s down ‘n’ dirty honky-tonk is unfazed by the new wave discos, rock clubs, and preppy SMU students in its midst. It sticks to its down-to-earth anti-style, knee-slapping country and redneck rock bands, cheap beer, and tables and walls blanketed in graffiti. See “Dallas” in chapter 4.
- **Gilley’s Dallas** (Dallas): Gilley’s is where John Travolta rode a bucking bronco in *Urban Cowboy*, and now Big D has a branch of the famous Houston honky-tonk. If bigger is better, this one’s right up there with the best of them: It’s got 90,000 square feet of dance floor, bars, and stages. See “Dallas” in chapter 4.
- **Billy Bob’s Texas** (Fort Worth): Kind of like a big-tent country theme park, Billy Bob’s has it all: 40 bars, a huge dance floor for two-stepping and Western swing, pro bull riding, and live performances by some of the biggest names in country music. And of course dance lessons: shuffle and two-step like a Texan after a few hours with instructor Wendell Nelson. See “Fort Worth” in chapter 4.
- **Blanco’s** (Houston): This is one of those genuine honky-tonks where you go for the music and the dancing and not for dressing up in Western duds. It’s strictly come as you are, and this place attracts ‘em from all walks of life, from bankers to oil field workers. It’s a small venue, but gets some of the best of Texas’s country music bands. See “Houston After Dark” in chapter 5.

- **Floore's Country Store** (San Antonio): Not much has changed since the 1940s when this honky-tonk, boasting the largest dance floor in South Texas (half an acre), opened up. Boots, hats, and antique farm equipment hang from the ceiling of this typical Texas roadhouse. There's always live music on weekends; Willie Nelson, Dwight Yoakam, Robert Earl Keen, and Lyle Lovett have all played here. See "San Antonio After Dark" in chapter 7.
- **Texas Hill Country** (San Antonio and Austin): The Texas Hill Country has some of the best honky-tonks in the state. In Gruene, just outside of New Braunfels, **Gruene Hall** is the oldest country-and-western dance hall in Texas and still one of the mellowest places to listen to music. Don't miss **Arkey Blue & The Silver Dollar Bar**, a genuine spit-and-sawdust cowboy honky-tonk on the Main Street of Bandera. When there's no live music, plug a quarter in the old jukebox and play a country ballad by owner Arkey. And look for the table where Hank Williams, Sr., carved his name. See "Hill Country Side Trips" in chapters 7 and 8.
- **Broken Spoke** (Austin): This is the gen-u-ine item, a Western honky-tonk with a wood-plank floor and a cowboy-hatted, two-steppin' crowd. Still, it's in Austin, so don't be surprised if the band wears Hawaiian shirts, or if tongues are firmly in cheek for some of the songs. See "Austin After Dark" in chapter 8.
- **Midnight Rodeo** (Lubbock): This place is a great spot for two-steppin' or line dancing to live and recorded country music. See "Lubbock" in chapter 11.

10 The Best of Natural Texas

- **Dallas Arboretum & Botanical Garden:** Who knew Dallas had more than dust, concrete, steel, and glass? This surprising oasis on the edge of White Rock Lake is a great spot to duck the Texas sun. Relax on 70 acres of groomed gardens and natural woodlands, interspersed with a handful of historic homes. The gardens are especially colorful in spring and fall. See p. 106.
- **Fort Worth Botanic Garden:** A rambling, spacious showcase of 2,500 native and exotic species of plants on 100-plus acres, this is the oldest botanical garden in Texas, created back in the late 1920s. The Texas Rose Garden, 3,500 roses that bloom in late April and October, and beautiful Japanese Garden, are terrific places to hide out from the world. Bring a picnic, a book, and a flying disk. See p. 145.
- **Big Thicket National Preserve:** It has been called "the American Ark" for its incredibly rich variety of plants and wildlife, all packed into 100,000 acres of watery bottomland in deepest East Texas. You can explore the area on foot or in canoe, and see first-hand how the woods grow so thickly here that they all but blot out the sun, and make trailblazing almost impossible. See "Side Trips to East Texas" in chapter 5.
- **Aransas National Wildlife Refuge:** A mecca for birders, with some 300 species sighted here, the refuge is also home to a variety of frogs and other amphibians, plus snakes, turtles, lizards, and numerous mammals. But Aransas has become famous for being the main winter home of the near-extinct whooping crane, the tallest bird in America—5 feet high with

- an 8-foot wingspan. See “Rockport” in chapter 6.
- **Mustang Island State Park:** This barrier island has more than 5 miles of wide, sandy beach, with fine sand, few rocks, and broken shells, and almost enough waves for surfing. The park is one of the most popular of Texas state parks, and is especially busy on summer weekends. See “Port Aransas” in chapter 6.
 - **McKittrick Canyon:** The canyon is forested with conifers and deciduous trees. In autumn the maples, oaks, and other hardwoods burst into color, painting the world in bright colors set off by the rich variety of the evergreens. See “Guadalupe Mountains National Park” in chapter 10.
 - **Palo Duro Canyon State Park:** This 60-mile canyon, sculpted by the Prairie Dog Town Fork of the Red River over the last 90 million years, is a grand contrast to the ubiquitous, treeless plains of the Texas Panhandle. Its 800-foot cliffs, striped with orange, red, and white rock and adorned by groves of juniper and cottonwood trees, present an astoundingly stark beauty. See “Canyon & Palo Duro Canyon State Park” in chapter 11.

11 The Best Historical Attractions

- **The Sixth Floor Museum at Dealey Plaza (Dallas):** The events of November 22, 1963, shook the world. John F. Kennedy’s assassination in Dallas is remembered by everyone old enough to remember, and argued over still. Visitors can tour the sixth floor of the Texas School Book Depository, from where the Warren Commission concluded that a single sniper, Lee Harvey Oswald, felled the president. The museum also examines the life, times, and legacy of the Kennedy presidency, making it a place to revisit not only the tragic episode but also an era. A companion must-visit for cynics is the Conspiracy Museum, whose name says it all. See p. 103.
- **The Stockyards National Historic District (Fort Worth):** Still very much looking the part, this area north of downtown was once the biggest and busiest cattle, horse, mule, hog, and sheep marketing center in the Southwest. Put on your boots and best Western shirt and tour the Livestock Exchange Building; Cowtown Coliseum (the world’s first indoor rodeo arena); former hog and sheep pens now filled with Western shops and restaurants; and Billy Bob’s Texas, the “world’s largest honky-tonk.” Then grab a longneck at the White Elephant saloon—the oldest bar in Fort Worth and the site of the city’s most famous gunfight in 1897—and check in at the historic Stockyards Hotel. To enhance the experience, check out the “longhorn cattle drive” that rumbles down Exchange Avenue daily—or take the Vintage Train into Grapevine. See “Fort Worth” in chapter 4.
- **San Jacinto Monument (Houston):** Here on the battlefield of San Jacinto, a small army of Texans led by General Sam Houston charged the much larger, better equipped Mexican army and dealt them a crushing blow. The victory gave Texas its independence. A monument and museum occupy the battlefield to honor and explain the history of the battle and its significance. See p. 187.

- **USS *Lexington* Museum on the Bay** (Corpus Christi): Exploring this huge World War II-era aircraft carrier offers non-naval persons the opportunity to get an idea of what it was like to live for sometimes months in the claustrophobic conditions of such a limited area. In addition to sleeping, dining, and cooking areas, the ship provided a hospital, rec room, and of course numerous necessary working areas. See p. 225.
- **The Alamo** (San Antonio): It's smaller than you might expect, and it sits smack in the heart of downtown San Antonio, but the graceful mission church that's come to symbolize the state is a must-see, if only to learn what the fuss is all about. See p. 273.
- **San Antonio Missions National Historic Park:** It's impossible not to remember the Alamo when you're in San Antonio; more difficult to recall is that the Alamo was originally just the first of five missions established by the Franciscans along the San Antonio River. Exploring these four missions, built uncharacteristically close to each other, will give you a remarkable glimpse of the city's early Spanish and Indian history. See p. 276.
- **State Capitol** (Austin): The country's largest state capitol, second only in size to the U.S. Capitol—but 7 feet taller—underwent a massive renovation and expansion in the 1990s, which left it more impressive than ever. See p. 315.
- **New Braunfels:** Trying to decide which of the Hill Country towns is the most representative of the area's rich German heritage is tough, but the *gemütlich* inns, history-oriented museums, and sausage-rich restaurants—not to mention the major celebration of Oktoberfest—make New Braunfels a standout. See “Hill Country Side Trips from Austin” in chapter 8.
- **El Paso Mission Trail:** Established in the 17th and 18th centuries, these three historic Spanish missions provide a link to El Paso's colonial past. They are among the oldest continually active missions in the country, and warrant a visit for their architectural and historic merit. Especially impressive is the large Presidio Chapel San Elceario, near the site of “The First Thanksgiving,” said to have taken place in 1598, 23 years before the Plymouth Thanksgiving. See p. 340.

12 The Best Family Adventures

- **Old City Park** (Dallas): Dallas is determinedly modern, with gleaming skyscrapers and a love for newness, but its Western heritage lives on museum-like in this facsimile of the Old West, a 13-acre park of historic buildings. Mounted like a late-19th-century village, it has a redbrick Main Street, Victorian homes, train depot, general store, one-room church, schoolhouse, and bank, all relocated from the Dallas area. The “Living Farmstead” re-creates a 19th-century prairie with actors in period garb. See p. 109.
- **The Stockyards** (Fort Worth): Far from a dry old historic district, the Stockyards comes alive with the flavor of the Old West. Kids will adore the twice-daily “cattle drive” of the Fort Worth Herd, which rumbles down the cobble main drag, led by cowhands in 19th-century duds. They'll also love to find their way around the

- Cowtown Cattlepen Maze**, a human maze made to look like old cattle pens. See “Fort Worth” in chapter 4.
- **Fort Worth’s Children’s Museums** (Fort Worth): The **Fort Worth Museum of Science and History** is large and multifaceted, with a domed IMAX theater, planetarium, and a bunch of great hands-on science displays, including life-size Lone Star dinosaurs. The **National Cowgirl Museum & Hall of Fame** teaches little cowgirls and cowboys about pioneering women of the American West, but in a way that really brings the culture to life: Jukeboxes pump out country tunes, and kids can ride a simulated bucking bronco, see the film of their adventure on the museum’s website, and get their pictures superimposed on old Western film posters. See “Fort Worth” in chapter 4.
 - **Arlington**: Sandwiched between Dallas and Fort Worth is a kids’ suburban dream world, where youngins can stumble from the roller coasters at Six Flags Over Texas to the water slides at Hurricane Harbor, followed by a visit to Ripley’s Believe It or Not and The Palace of Wax, topped off by paying their respects to baseball’s greats at the Legends of the Game Baseball Museum at The Ballpark in Arlington. See “Arlington” in chapter 4.
 - **Space Center Houston** (Houston): Always the most popular attraction in the city, NASA’s Space Center Houston is a joint effort powered by NASA technology and Disney know-how. It is the epitome of interactive display and simulation that manages to fascinate both kids and parents. During your visit, you can check out what’s going on at the Johnson Space Center through a tram ride and video feeds. See p. 188.
 - **The Gulf Side of South Padre Island**: Fine white sand and warm water lapping at your toes—what more do you want? Although the shore is lined with hotels and condos, the beaches are public and open to everyone. See “Padre Island National Seashore” in chapter 6.
 - **Six Flags Fiesta Texas** (San Antonio): Major thrill rides, a huge swimming pool shaped like Texas, and entertainment/food areas with Texas history themes—there’s something for every family member at this theme park, and it’s even slightly educational. See p. 277.
 - **The Austin Bats**: The majority of adults and kids alike tend to find bats a bit creepy—until they learn more about them, that is. From March to November, you can watch thousands of bats emerge in smoky clouds from under the Congress Avenue Bridge, and find out why Austinites adore the little critters. See “Seeing the Sights” in chapter 8.
 - **Balmorhea State Park**: This is one of the crown jewels of the Texas state parks and also one of the smallest, at 45 acres. The main attraction is the massive, 1¼-acre swimming pool—3.5 million gallons of water at a fairly constant 74°F (23°C). Not your usual swimming pool, it’s teeming with small fish and laden with rocks. But swimming, snorkeling, and scuba diving are all popular. There’s also a reconstructed *cieneqa* (desert wetland) where you might spot native wildlife such as a Texas spiny soft-shell turtle, a blotched water snake, or a green heron. See “Small Towns of Central West Texas” in chapter 9.

13 The Best of Texas Online

- **The Handbook of Texas Online** (www.tsha.utexas.edu/handbook/online): The Handbook is an encyclopedia offering concise entries that explain who's who, what's what, and where's where in Texas. It's easy to use and has information on just about everything, from the locations of towns and counties to explanations of some of the state's legends, to biographical data on the many characters who left their mark on Texas history.
- **Texas Department of Transportation** (www.traveltex.com): The state's official tourism website is practically the only site you'll need to type in—everything else will be a link. We especially like the section that offers easily printable discount coupons, primarily for lodging and attractions.
- **Texas Outside** (www.texasoutside.com): This is a great resource for planning outdoor activities for just about anywhere in the state. It breaks Texas down into different regions and has separate pages for Texas's largest cities. You'll find maps and information on all sorts of outdoor sports, such as hiking, hunting, fishing, biking, and canoeing.
- **Dallas–Fort Worth Area Official Visitors' Website** (www.visitdallas-fortworth.com): For purely practical matters, this frighteningly bureaucratic-sounding address gives you the lowdown on area events and even allows you to download coupons good for saving a few bucks at museums, theme parks, and other local attractions.
- **MySanAntonio.com**: The website of the city's only mainstream newspaper, the *San Antonio Express-News*, not only provides the daily news, but also links to local businesses such as dry cleaners and florists (via its Power Pages) and to movie, nightlife, and dining listings and reviews.
- **Austin 360** (www.austin360.com): Movie times, traffic reports, restaurant picks, homes, jobs, cars . . . This site, sponsored in part by the *Austin-American Statesman*, the city's main newspaper, is a one-stop clicking center for a variety of essentials. It's easy to navigate, too.
- **Texas fun**: We all know the Internet's best for purely personal and marginal interests, so check out these sites once you're done with your trip planning. Visit www.texascooking.com for authentic Texas cooking, including recipes and discussions of mysteries like the Texas fruitcake subculture conspiracy. Then there's www.texascooking.com/notable.htm: Which is the best three in a row? Morgan Fairchild, Farrah Fawcett, and Freddy Fender, or George “Spanky” McFarland of “Our Gang,” Larry McMurtry, and Meat Loaf? Finally, check out www.tded.state.tx.us/admin/trivia.htm for Texas trivia, including a list of some of the state's biggest and best, as well as Texas firsts.