

The Best of Texas

by David Baird, Eric Peterson & Neil Edward Schlecht

In this chapter, we've put together lists of our favorite experiences, destinations, and services to help you plan your own Texas travels.

1 THE BEST LUXURY & HISTORIC HOTELS

- **The Adolphus Hotel** (Dallas; ☎ 800/221-9083 or 214/742-8200): 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 every afternoon. See p. 85.
- **Rosewood Mansion on Turtle Creek** (Dallas; ☎ 800/422-3408 or 214/599-2100): 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 revamped restaurant has again vaulted to the top of the heap. See p. 89.
- **Hotel Zaza** (Dallas; ☎ 800/597-8399 or 214/468-8399): This superfashionable Uptown boutique hotel has a catchy name and a cachet few can match. It is luxurious but überhip, with eclectic style to burn. The hotel has "concept" suites with funky themes ("Shag-a-delic" Suite, anyone?) and new, fantasyland "Magnificent Seven" suites. See p. 90.
- **Stockyards Hotel** (Fort Worth; ☎ 800/423-8471 or 817/625-6427): 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. See p. 126.
- **Four Seasons Hotel Houston** (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. Within a few blocks are the baseball park, the basketball arena, a shopping mall, and the convention center. A bit beyond that are the city's theater and nightlife hubs. See p. 168.
- **Hotel Derek** (Houston; ☎ 866/292-4100 or 713/961-3000): The most comfortable and most fun place to stay in Houston's highly popular Uptown/Galleria area. The Derek offers a rare combination of practicality and style, making it a perfect choice for the business traveler or the vacation shopper. Service is smooth, and the restaurant wins raves from the local food writers. See p. 175.

- **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. Within easy walking distance are the symphony, the opera, three theaters, the ballet, a multiplex cinema, and several restaurants and clubs. See p. 169.
- **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. See p. 230.
- **Isla Grand Beach Resort** (South Padre Island; ☎ 800/292-7704 or 956/761-6511): From the high-ceilinged lobby to the beautiful landscaping around the swimming pools, this resort spells luxury. Many rooms have grand views of the ocean. See p. 250.
- **Omni La Mansión del Río** (San Antonio; ☎ 800/830-1400 or 210/518-1000): Occupying what was once the local seminary, this hotel has kept the local feel of the building, with architectural features such as beamed ceilings and stone balconies. La Mansión is not a high-rise, and it enjoys a wide frontage along the River Walk. It is, in short, the best hotel for experiencing San Antonio. See p. 264.
- **The Watermark Hotel & Spa** (San Antonio; ☎ 866/605-1212 or 210/396-5800): If relaxation and pampering are what you seek, the Watermark should be your choice in San Antonio. From the moment you step foot into the lobby, everything is taken care of effortlessly. The hotel has a great location on the River Walk, but the rooms are so attractive and comfortable, the service is so personal, and the spa is so easy to enjoy that you may never leave. See p. 264.
- **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. 307.
- **Four Seasons Austin** (Austin; ☎ 800/332-3442 or 512/478-4500): With panoramic views of the lake, the wonderful service that this chain is known for, and a spa that consistently wins high praise, nothing is lacking here. Rooms are large and comfortable and come with all the amenities. Right outside the door is Austin's popular hike-and-bike trail, which rings the lake, and Austin's comfortable and fun downtown. See p. 307.
- **Lake Austin Spa Resort** (Austin; 1705 S. Quinlan Park Rd.; ☎ 800/847-5637): This spa resort gets more write-ups than any other lodging in Austin, most recently as best destination spa in the country by the readers of *Condé Nast Traveler*. Nothing spells luxury better than the pampering spa treatments this place is known for. But you can also find it in the beauty and serenity that surround the place. See p. 316.
- **Cibolo Creek Ranch** (Shafter; ☎ 432/229-3737): Tucked under the Chinati Mountains in some of the most wide-open country in all of Texas, this is a getaway for the most special of occasions, and accordingly priced. The idyllic setting plays host today to a first-class resort, featuring picture-perfect guest rooms with red-tile floors, adobe walls, and sumptuous border decor. The recreation is as impressive as the scenery. See p. 370.
- **Gage Hotel** (Marathon; ☎ 432/386-4205): Located 50 miles north of Big Bend National Park, the historic Gage

Hotel opened in 1927 as the social hub for area ranchers and miners, but fell into shambles under the desert sun in the ensuing decades. But that period is long over: The current owners restored the old redbrick's many charms in the

early 1980s, melding history and an eye for Texas chic. The historic rooms have cow-skin rugs, hardwood floors, Navajo blankets, and oodles of personality. See p. 400.

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 such pampering features as wood-burning fireplaces, draped Napoleón sleigh beds, bidets, and soaking tubs, that you may not want to leave. See p. 88.
- **Belmont Hotel** (Dallas; ☎ 866/870-8010 or 214/393-2000): Dallas usually goes gaga over mirrored glass and brand-spanking-new buildings, so it's a refreshing change to find this vintage 1940s motor lodge in Oak Cliff transformed into a stylish, retro-styled boutique hotel. With its cool lounge bar and midcentury-modern decor, it's a dollop of Palm Springs with the attitude of Austin and views of the Dallas skyline. See p. 87.
- **The Ashton Hotel** (Fort Worth; ☎ 866/327-4866 or 817/332-0100): Just off Sundance Square, this boutique hotel—Fort Worth's only small luxury hotel—offers plush rooms and smooth service, as well as, in 610 Grille, one of the best restaurants in North Texas. See p. 131.
- **Etta's Place** (Fort Worth; ☎ 866/355-5760 or 817/255-5760): 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. 132.
- **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, 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. 173.
- **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. 230.
- **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 professional service as for its gorgeous mansion and lovely rooms. See p. 268.

- **Mansion at Judges Hill** (Austin; ☎ 800/311-1619 or 512/495-1800): A room in the original mansion evokes the feel of a more relaxed and gracious era, especially the second-floor rooms which have a large and inviting porch, tempting one to linger and enjoy the view. The friendly and helpful service reinforces the feeling. See p. 314.
- **Hotel Saint Cecilia** (Austin; ☎ 512/852-2400): This new hotel captures the feel for what's fun about the Austin scene. It also takes comfort to an entirely new level: Sleep deeply on a handmade Swedish mattress; greet the morning

with whatever your favorite crepe is; lounge on the private deck or patio of your room; or spin some vinyl on your in-room turntable. See p. 313.

- **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. 385.

3 THE BEST HOTEL BARGAINS

- **Hyatt Summerfield Suites** (Dallas; ☎ 866/974-9288 or 214/696-1555): This straightforward, residential-style hotel primarily targets businesspeople but is also superb for other travelers and families. The spacious suites have fully equipped kitchens, and there are a pool and small spa, an exercise room, and a business center. See p. 92.
- **Lovett Inn** (Houston; ☎ 800/779-5224 or 713/522-5224): This B&B offers attractive, comfortable rooms with private balconies for a low price. Add a pool and a central location that is handy but quiet, and you have a winning combination. See p. 173.
- **Best Western Sunset Suites—Riverwalk** (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 superattractive rooms in a historic structure. See p. 267.

- **Austin Motel** (Austin; ☎ 512/441-1157): Look for the 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. 313.
- **Travelodge Hotel—La Hacienda Airport** (El Paso; ☎ 800/772-4231 or 915/772-4231): Some roadside motels surprise you with their attention to detail—this is definitely one of them. We like the eight Jacuzzi rooms, featuring picture windows that separate the tubs from the bedrooms, and the spacious and amusingly decorated family suites. See p. 359.

4 THE BEST RESTAURANTS

- **The French Room** (Dallas; ☎ 214/742-8200): This formal but 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.

- **Fearing's** (Dallas; ☎ 214/922-4848): Legendary, cowboy boot-clad chef Dean Fearing made his name as an innovator of Southwestern cuisine at the Mansion on Turtle Creek. At long last, he has opened his own place within the swanky new Ritz-Carlton uptown. Named *Esquire* magazine's New Restaurant of the Year in 2008, it may just be the finest thing about one of the most buzz-worthy new destinations in Dallas—something to see, and a place to be seen. And the food? Outstanding. See p. 97.
- **Mansion Restaurant at Rosewood Mansion on Turtle Creek** (Dallas; ☎ 214/443-4747): After the departure of its famous chef Dean Fearing, a head-to-boot makeover, and a new whopper of a name, the Mansion is back, and maybe just better than ever. The tried-and-true but a little tired Southwestern menu was scrapped, replaced by a more cosmopolitan and sophisticated New American cuisine. The restaurant is more contemporary, relaxed, and inviting. See p. 97.
- **610 Grille** (Fort Worth; ☎ 817/332-0100): The creative New American bistro fare at this swank restaurant, in a boutique hotel of the same description, quickly shot to the top of everyone's best-of lists in Fort Worth. Hotel dining is rarely this good or this intimate. See p. 137.
- **Lanny's Alta Cocina Mexicana** (Fort Worth; ☎ 817/850-9996): The great-grandson of the man behind Fort Worth's standard for Tex-Mex, Joe T. Garcia's, has struck out on his own with this sensational fine-dining take on Mediterranean cooking with Mexican sensibilities. Sophisticated but unfussy, it's *the* place to dine in downtown Fort Worth. See p. 137.
- **Mark's** (Houston; ☎ 713/523-3800): No fussy French nouvelle here, and no boring steak and potatoes either. Mark's serves up dishes that satisfy while they fulfill our eternal quest for something new and creative. This is New American cooking as it should be. See p. 182.
- **Cafe Annie** (Houston; ☎ 713/840-1111): No other restaurant in Houston garners the attention that this place does from foodies and food critics alike. With 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 crossbreeding of Mexican and American cooking can be. See p. 189.
- **Le Rêve** (San Antonio; ☎ 210/212-2221): Regularly designated the best restaurant in Texas, Le Rêve never disappoints. Owner/chef Andrew Weissman is exacting in the practice of his craft and produces a dining experience that is close to being otherworldly. See p. 274.
- **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. 319.
- **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. The wine list is one of the city's best, and desserts include the best *leches* (Mexican milk cakes) in all of Texas. See p. 360.

- **Sonny Bryan's Smokehouse** (Dallas; ☎ 214/357-7120): Sonny Bryan's has been turning out sweet barbecue since 1910, and the little smoke shack 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. 97.
- **Lonesome Dove Western Bistro** (Fort Worth; ☎ 817/740-8810): This friendly and eclectic restaurant challenges Cowtown to broaden its horizons. The 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 inexpensive Stockyards lunch special or dive into a blowout dinner. See p. 134.
- **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. 138.
- **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 us. 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. See p. 182.
- **Gaidos** (Galveston; ☎ 409/762-9625): Offering traditional cooking as it is practiced on the Texas Gulf Coast, Gaidos is the keeper of the flame for seafood devoid of fads and trends. The family has been serving up stuffed snapper, gumbo, and fried oysters for four generations. See p. 220.
- **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. See p. 231.
- **La Playa** (Port Aransas; ☎ 361/749-0022): This place is in no way connected to La Playa of Corpus Christi. But the cooking is just as local, with Tex-Mex-style seafood dishes such as *campechana* cocktails and fish tacos. The margaritas transcend cultures. La Playa has that hominess and welcoming feel that is as much Texas as anything else. See p. 240.

- **Mi Tierra** (San Antonio; ☎ 210/225-1262): Some people dismiss this cafe as touristy. Not so. It is the practitioner of old San Antonio cooking traditions. Order any of the Tex-Mex specialties and sit back and enjoy the ambience—both the food and the decor are expressions of local tastes when celebrating is called for. And travelers may celebrate once they've hit upon this gem. See p. 276.
- **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. 321.
- **L&J Café** (El Paso; ☎ 915/566-8418): An El Paso landmark since 1927, the L&J is 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. 361.
- **Starlight Theatre** (Terlingua; ☎ 432/371-2326): A 1930s movie palace abandoned when the mines in Terlingua went bust in the following decade, the Starlight Theatre was reborn as an eatery and watering hole in 1991. The stage is still here, but the silver screen takes a back seat to the food (especially the trademark enchiladas, filet mignon, and sautéed chicken), drink (namely Texas beers and prickly pear margaritas), and desserts (the cobbler for two is legendary). See p. 400.

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 p. 143.
- **Lassoing the Fort Worth Stock Show and Rodeo:** Fort Worth ain't called Cowtown 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 livestock from beef cattle to llamas and swine. The nightly rodeos are big draws. See “Fort Worth,” in chapter 5.
- **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. 284.
- **Tubing on the River:** In central Texas, upstream from the town of Gruene, is a stretch of the Guadalupe River that Texans love to float down “leisurely like” in tubes (one tube per person and one for the ice chest). During the late spring and early summer the air is hot, the water is cold, and the “tuber” (tube-potato?) finds life most agreeable. There is no shortage of outfitters who can set you up with a tube. See p. 289.
- **Explore Tejas/Cross the Border:** There are nearly 800 miles of Texas-Mexico border, and the Rio Grande from the Gulf of Mexico to El Paso is a fascinating region. We are big fans of Ciudad

Acuña, across the river from Del Rio, and the amazing canyons in Big Bend National Park, but the entire “borderlands” region is more attractive and diverse than most visitors realize. See chapters 10 and 11.

- **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 11.

7 THE BEST MUSEUMS

- **Nasher Sculpture Center** (Dallas): This world-class collection of modern sculpture is 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): In a building with plenty of 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. 109.
- **Kimbell Art Museum** (Fort Worth): Probably the country’s finest small museum, this masterwork 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. 145.

- **Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth** (Fort Worth): In a modernist building designed by Japanese architect Tadao Ando, the Modern—actually the oldest art museum in Texas—is 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. 146.
- **Amon Carter Museum of Western Art** (Fort Worth): This museum has 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. 143.
- **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. 196.
- **Museum of Fine Arts, Houston** (Houston): With the addition of the

Audrey Jones Beck Building, this museum has doubled its exhibition space and has put its collection of Impressionist and baroque art in the best possible light. The museum has several satellite facilities and attracts major touring exhibitions. See p. 194.

- **The Center for the Arts & Sciences** (Brazosport): The Center is one of those rare entities that does a lot of things exceptionally well, including 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. 221.
- **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 Nelson A. Rockefeller Center for Latin American Art is the most comprehensive collection of its kind in the United States. See p. 283.
- **Marion Koogler McNay Art Museum** (San Antonio): A beautiful collection beautifully located and beautifully displayed. This small museum is a delight

to visit, especially for fans of modern art, who will devour its collection of works by the modern masters. See p. 283.

- **McDonald Observatory** (northwest of Fort Davis): McDonald Observatory is considered one of the world's best astronomical research facilities. Twice a day visitors can glimpse sunspots, flares, and other solar activity. Nighttime "Star Parties" are held 3 evenings a week, during which visitors can view constellations and celestial objects through the observatory's high-powered telescopes. See p. 366.
- **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. 430.

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 p. 115.
- **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 (even with a recent expansion that doubled its size). The graceful layout outclasses its more garish competitors. Rotating pieces from owner Ray Nasher's spectacular collection of modern sculpture are on display throughout. See p. 116.
- **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. 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 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 5.
- **Uptown** (Houston): In this relatively small district, 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 (with such retailers as Cartier and FAO Schwarz). See "Shopping," in chapter 6.
 - **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 p. 291.

- **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 unyuppified cowboy gear. See p. 337.
- **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 chockablock with boutiques. This is the place to come for everything from natural chocolate mint-scented room deodorizer to handmade dulcimers. See p. 341.
- **El Paso Chile Company** (El Paso): We love this shop for its tongue-searing delicacies, with fiery names such as "Hellfire & Damnation," and all things spicy. See p. 358.

9 THE BEST PLACES FOR BOOT-SCOOTIN'

- **Adair's Saloon** (Dallas): Deep Ellum's down-and-dirty honky-tonk is unfazed by the discos, rock clubs, and preppy SMU students in its midst. It sticks to its down-to-earth antistyle, knee-slapping country and redneck rock bands, cheap beer, and tables and walls blanketed in graffiti. See p. 119.
- **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 p. 119.
- **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, pro bull riding, and live performances by big 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 p. 119.

- **Pearl's Dancehall & Saloon** (Fort Worth): Perhaps a tad less down-and-dirty than when it was called Big Balls of Cowtown, Pearl's is still a winner. In the shadow of Billy Bob's, it's an intimate spot for live Western swing and honky-tonk and dance lessons every Wednesday. See p. 153.
- **Blanco's** (Houston): This is a genuine honky-tonk where you go for music and 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. The small venue gets some of

the best of Texas's country music bands. See p. 205.

- **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 p. 293.
- **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. **Arkey Blue & The Silver Dollar Bar** is 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 8 and 9.

- **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 planted firmly in cheeks for some songs. See p. 339.

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 & Japanese Gardens:** 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 the beautiful Japanese Garden are terrific places to hide out from the world. Bring a picnic, a book, and a flying disk. See p. 144.
- **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. Explore the area on foot or in canoe, and see 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 6.

- **Aransas National Wildlife Refuge:** A mecca for birders, with some 300 species sighted here, the refuge is also home to snakes, turtles, lizards, mammals, and a variety of frogs and other amphibians. 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 7.
- **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 7.

- **Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center:** Few people remember that Lady Bird Johnson started a program to beautify America's highways—and 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. 329.
- **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 11.

- **Palo Duro Canyon State Park:** This 60-mile canyon, sculpted by the Prairie Dog Town Fork of the Red River over the past 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 12.

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. See p. 103.
- **The Stockyards National Historic District (Fort Worth):** Still 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. Finally, check out the “longhorn cattle drive” that rumbles down Exchange Avenue daily—or take the Vintage Train into Grapevine. See “Fort Worth,” in chapter 5.

- **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. 191.
- **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, a rec room, and, of course, numerous necessary working areas. See p. 228.

- **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. 281.
- **San Antonio Missions National Historical 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 glimpse of the city's early Spanish and Indian history. See p. 284.
- **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. 328.
- **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 9.
- **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. 353.

12 THE BEST FAMILY ADVENTURES

- **Old City Park** (Dallas): Modern Dallas gleams with 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. The “Living Farmstead” re-creates a 19th-century prairie with actors in period garb. See p. 110.
- **The Stockyards** (Fort Worth): Far from a dry old historic district, the Stockyards come 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 cobbled 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 5.
- **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, a planetarium, and great hands-on science displays. The **National Cowgirl Museum and 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 West film posters. And the **Fort Worth Zoo** is one of the best in the country. See “Fort Worth,” in chapter 5.
- **Arlington:** Sandwiched between Dallas and Fort Worth is a kids’ suburban dream world: Stumble from the roller coasters at Six Flags Over Texas to the water slides at Hurricane Harbor, visit Ripley’s Believe It or Not and the Palace of Wax, and pay your respects to baseball’s greats at the Legends of the Game Baseball Museum at the Rangers Ballpark in Arlington. See “Arlington,” in chapter 5.
 - **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, check out what’s going on at the Johnson Space Center through a tram ride and video feeds. See p. 192.
 - **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 7.
 - **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. 285.
 - **The Austin Bats:** Most adults and kids 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 9.
 - **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, 1³/₄-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. Swimming, snorkeling, and scuba diving are all popular. At a reconstructed *ciénega* (desert wetland) you may 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 10.

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.traveltexas.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.dfwandbeyond.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.
- **Guidelive.com**: The entertainment Web page of the *Dallas Morning News*, North Texas's major newspaper, contains the most current events listings, as well as restaurant, movie, music, and show reviews for both Dallas and Fort Worth. It even has a shopping blog that promises the inside guide to the best local finds and deals.
- **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 once you're done with your trip planning, check out www.texascooking.com for authentic Texas cooking, including recipes and discussions of mysteries such as the Texas fruitcake subculture conspiracy.