



# Livin' Large

*By Chris Benevich*

*Texas isn't just the second-biggest state in the U.S. Where else can old-school cowboys and high-tech industry peacefully coexist? Let us introduce you to the varied topography and activities of Texas with our regional tour.*

# Texas Panhandle Plains

Stretch out your legs in a Texas mainstay — the cattle country of the Panhandle offers wide horizons, rambling plains, and real cowboys.

In a modern, urban yet clean Lubbock, breathe deep among the award-winning vineyards like the Llano Estacado Winery, Pheasant Ridge Winery, and Teysha Cellars. Learn about the Panhandle's past at the Ranching Heritage Center along with gorgeous geography and geology. Palo Duro Canyon divides the High and the Rolling Plains and abuts the dramatically colorful cliffs of Caprock Escarpment.

# Piney Woods

This forest in east Texas contains millions of acres of pines, wet woodlands, and swamps, perfect for any outdoorsman who wants to get away from it all. It's easy to think of your favorite southern belle in this wonderland of flowering dogwoods, magnolias, and roses.

Need a gift for that impossible person who has everything? If you can't find it in Canton, your sore out of luck. You'll just have to share your search with the monthly crowd of 50,000 at Canton's First Monday Trade Days monthly market filled to the brim with animals, arts and crafts, antiques, and other sundries from the dizzying array of 6,000 vendors. Come Thursdays through Sundays just before the first Monday of each month. After your shopping trek, gather your senses at the nearby "Rose Capital of the World." The town of Tyler's crown jewel is the Municipal Rose Garden with 14 acres flowing with 400 varieties of roses.

Go even further away from your busy day into Nacogdoches, dating back to a 1779 Spanish and Indian trading post. Reputed to have printed the nation's first two newspapers, this town unsuccessfully attempted four times to found the Republic of Texas. Meander through Millard's Crossing, a cluster of restored 19th-century buildings decorated with antiques and pioneer memorabilia. Ramble the downtown's brick roads and buy your own antiques in the local shops. Top off your trip with a square meal at a cozy restaurant. Walk off your meal along ancient North Street, possibly the oldest public thoroughfare in the U.S., as the Native Americans did even before Spanish explorers dubbed it Calle del Norte.

Jefferson, the vintage riverboat town, gives the treasure hunters among us more antique stores to browse.

Relive old Texas in Marshall. It stays true to its origins as a stagecoach and train stop providing weary travelers fancy bed-and-breakfasts in restored homes and a reason to get up again with tours of great mansions.

# Prairie and Lakes

Most people of this region reside in The Metroplex, which includes Dallas and Fort Worth. You need not worry about overcrowding when you're so near miles of prairies of swaying grass, dazzling lakes, and loamy soil well suited for planting.

"Cow Town" Fort Worth merges Wild West with the life of today. Waltz into Billy Bob's Texas, a well known honky tonk, and don't be surprised by high-flying executives talking business while tipping their cowboy hats.

If you'd rather stick to your modern lifestyle, Dallas is for you. You'll become enraptured by its thrilling nightlife, top-notch cultural institutions, and shopping complexes, more of which exist per capita here than anywhere else in our 50 states.

# Gulf Coast

Better known as the "Texas Riviera," this region extends over 600 miles by the Gulf of Mexico. You'll recognize the famous resort towns of Corpus Christi, Galveston, Port Aransas, and South Padre Island. The area's kelly green marshlands, wildlife refuges, and towering sand dunes reach inland up to 60 miles until you encounter all the nearby cosmopolitan cities, like Houston.

Texas' largest oil town and the nation's fourth-largest city, Houston gained its name in Sam Houston's (first president of Texas) defeat of Santa Anna's Mexican troops at San Jacinto. You'll get a sense of the sheer size of the town through the enormous Astrodome, Space Center Houston, and multiple museums, fun festivals, and outdoor theaters. The town doesn't stop at street level: the Houston Underground connects over 50 buildings, 100 restaurants, and many shops in the city center via a six-mile system of sky walks and pedestrian walkways. Then, streak through Houston's skies at AstroWorld's Six Flags amusement park. Finish your day floating and sliding around the 100 attractions, rides, and shows at Water World.

Travel 30 miles east of Houston to the northern end of the Gulf Coast and meet Galveston. The Wall Street of the Southwest, with its roots as a business hub in the 19th century, saved its old Victorian buildings in the Strand Historical District. Move on to the newer part of town to Moody Gardens, a neat place to let your steam off, whether you enjoy the amusement park or botanical gardens within.

Who needs Hawaii when the mainland has its own paradise and "sparkling city by the sea?" Corpus Christi, frequented by sun worshippers, surfers, and windsurfers, is a great stepping-off point for Padre Island National Seashore, great for camping, fishing, swimming, and hiking. Hop over to Port Aransas' Mustang Island State Park, a whopping 3,700 acres. Whooping cranes take their winter break in the Aransas National Wildlife Refuge.

**continued** →

# South Texas Plains

You may know “Llano Estacado,” or “Enfenced Flat Lands,” better by its common parlance name, the South Texas Plains, also the southernmost portion of the United States Great Plains. Completely flat save the erosion-cut series of canyons, this area splays into the Golden Spread, where Texas lies languid in minerals, agriculture and industrial riches.

South Texas blends the old and the new in San Antonio, known for its legendary fiestas. Smack in the center of town, the Alamo stands in memory of 189 volunteers that courageously died fighting to stem the tide of Mexico’s forces, headed by self-proclaimed dictator Santa Anna. The contemporary flair of San Antonio comes alive through its art museums, theaters, and symphony, reputed among the best in the nation.

# Hill Country

Hill Country puts the stereotype of a dry, state-wide desert to rest with its wide-open spaces, dips, and rivets dotted with lush oak and juniper forests filled with twisting streams under limestone cliffs and caverns. The varied landscape belies the region’s diversity, from eclectic Austin to temperate Kerrville to the Germanic New Braunfels.

The pulsing heart of this region, Austin, is known as the music capital of the country for its famous annual festival. The potential for fun is nonstop from its flashy nightlife to its 300 days of sunshine, well-suited for hiking and biking trails, and a 150-mile chain of lakes fit for water lovers of all kinds.

The fantastical Kerrville attracts many for its lovely climate, hilly woods of cedar and oak, and winding streams, caressed by cypress and verdant valleys with frolicking white-tailed deer. The stone, romanesque Hill Country Museum, the former home of Captain Charles A. Schreiner, now displays artifacts, antiques, and memorabilia.

New Braunfels, replete with homey restaurants stocked with old-fashioned German breads, sauerkraut, sausages, and wurst, becomes the center of attention in the annual Wurstfest, or Sausage Festival, in November. Hike more than a mile underground into New Braunfels’ underground creek and cave formations through natural rocky spacious rooms, corridors, and bridge caverns. Set aside some time for the 200-acre Natural Bridge Wildlife Ranch, where car-driving visitors get a chance to hand-feed the freely roaming exotic species.

Fredericksburg, founded in 1846 by German families, keeps its traditions to this day. Meander its streets and listen for those who still speak German, then take a load off by stuffing yourself with fresh pastries and breads at the local bakeries.

# Big Bend Country

All the way from New Mexico at the north and the Rio Grande in the south, just west of the Edwards Plateau, twist your way around the giant mountains guarding this part of the state. Right at the center, the well-known border town of El Paso brings together Anglo, Hispanic, and Native American cultures. The Spanish once called this town “El Paso del Rio del Norte,” or “The Pass of the Northern River.” Its beauty and history are preserved today by the Wilderness Park Museum, the Ysleta, Socorro, and San Elizario missions (predating those in California), and the Tigua Indian Reservation. North you’ll find Fort Bliss, taking up more square area than Rhode Island, perhaps because it serves as the Army’s center for all air defense activity.

Moving east, come to the foot of the Rockies and Guadalupe Mountains National Park. This stalwart range includes El Capitan, towering at 8,078 feet, and Guadalupe Peak at 8,749 feet, making it Texas’ highest mountain. Between the Guadalupe Mountains and the Chihuahuan Desert, visit the restored Fort Davis, constructed in 1854. It originally functioned as a center to ward off what were seen as hostile Native Americans while allowing safe passage for stagecoaches and wagon trains. South of this range we finally meet the actual Big Bend National Park. Covering 801,163 acres within the Chisos Mountains, it stretches 1,100 square miles into the Chihuahuan Desert, the desert with the greatest altitude and wetness in all of North America, letting loose up to one foot of rain per year. Big Bend, also Texas’ first national park, lies in Brewster County. Big Bend attracts campers and rafters, possibly drawn by the 70 types of cacti and over 400 bird species, such as the Colima warblers, breeding each spring exclusively in the Chisos Mountains.

Now that you’ve been over the hills, through the woods, and into the cities of Texas, you can see for yourself how this grand old state helps you live large and without limits.

## Want to Know More?

These websites offer a starting point for home sales and purchases, schools, job searches, and connecting your utilities.

[Acinet.org](http://Acinet.org) (Click on “Relocation Center”)

[Globalsecurity.org/military/facility/conus.htm](http://Globalsecurity.org/military/facility/conus.htm)

[Greatschools.net](http://Greatschools.net)

[Housevalues.com](http://Housevalues.com)

[Recenter.tamu.edu/data/datahs.html](http://Recenter.tamu.edu/data/datahs.html)

[Relocate-america.com](http://Relocate-america.com)

[Whitefence.com](http://Whitefence.com)