

# Big Time

By Carla Caldwell

Texas is big.

Our 28th state is the second largest state in the United States at 268,601 square miles.

Only Alaska is bigger. California comes in a distant third.

And, just like in the movies, Texas is home to big ranches, big cars, big hair and big money.

But the story is so much bigger than that. There's the Gulf Coast, the NASA Space Flight Center in Houston, The Alamo and more than 110 state and national parks (one of them alone—Big Bend National Park, at 801,163 acres—is the size of Rhode Island).

Whether you are traveling in Texas on vacation or getting better acquainted with your new home, you are in for big fun and adventure.

The state's tourism folks break the state into seven regions that include 500 cities. Now that's big.



## Big Bend Country Region-

This is the Texas of every little cowboy's (and cowgirl's) Wild West dreams. The wide-open plains and mountains scream westerns. You can almost taste the dust and hear bullets ricocheting off of boulders. The area is bordered by Mexico to the south and New Mexico to the west, and stretches as far as Midland-Odessa to the northeast and Del Rio to the southeast. Cities include El Paso and Wink, Texas—the birthplace of rock and roll pioneer Roy Orbison.

Big Bend Country was once so wild that a number of U.S. forts were built to protect travelers—Fort Bliss, Fort Davis and Fort Stockton. All are open to tourists. And due to the area's rollicking past filled with saloons, bank robberies and boom towns, the area is also the final resting place for many gunfighters, according to state tourism information. Admission is free to Big Bend National Park, and more information can be found at [www.nps.gov/bibe/](http://www.nps.gov/bibe/).

### Military highlights

#### Fort Bliss [www.bliss.army.mil](http://www.bliss.army.mil)

Established in 1848 to protect against hostile Native American tribes. Served as headquarters for Confederate forces in the Southwest during the Civil War. Troops there led efforts against Apache chief Geronimo.

#### Fort Davis [www.nps.gov/foda](http://www.nps.gov/foda) Established 1854.

Deactivated 1891. Now operated by National Park service and provides look at frontier military life. Features a museum, ruins and restored barracks. After the Civil War, the fort was patrolled by black "buffalo soldiers," many of whom were once slaves on Southern plantations.

#### Fort Stockton [www.tourtexas.com/fortstockton](http://www.tourtexas.com/fortstockton)

Established 1858. Abandoned 1886. Frontier military post that originally had 35 buildings (adobe and hand-hewn limestone). Only eight remain.



## Hill Country Region

The center of Texas features lakes, rivers, rolling hills and year-round green landscapes. Cities include Austin, the state capitol, which has a capitol dome larger than our nation's capitol building. The Bob Bullock Texas State History Museum is here, as is the Lyndon B. Johnson Library and Museum.

The area has two-dozen state parks, most of which are on the water.

### Military highlight

#### National Museum of the Pacific War (Fredericksburg)

[www.nimitz-museum.org](http://www.nimitz-museum.org). Tells the story of Admiral Chester Nimitz and features displays and exhibits detailing the American and Japanese battles in the Pacific Ocean during World War II. Hours vary.



## The Gulf Coast Region -

Featuring more than 620 miles of coastline along the Gulf of Mexico, this area stretches from the Louisiana border to the Mexican border near Brownsville. The area includes the North Padre National Seashore. The area is the longest undeveloped stretch of barrier-island beach in the world. If you are leery of crowds, or if you love them, take note of the massive parties up and down the coast during spring break and Mardi Gras.

### Military highlights

#### San Jacinto Battleground State Historic Site - (LaPorte)

[www.tpwd.state.tx.us/spdest/findadest/parks/san\\_jacinto\\_battleground/](http://www.tpwd.state.tx.us/spdest/findadest/parks/san_jacinto_battleground/)

It was on this 1,200-acre site, on April 21, 1836, that Texas, led by General Sam Houston, avenged its Alamo defeat and won its independence from Mexico on April 21, 1836. Hours vary.

#### NASA/Space Center (Houston)

[www.spacecenter.org](http://www.spacecenter.org)

Live shows and presentations, interactive exhibits, IMAX theater, behind-the-scenes tours to the Johnson Space Center and more.

See spacecraft including the Mercury, Gemini, and Apollo capsules, and watch astronauts train for upcoming space shuttle missions. Try on space helmets, touch a moon rock, or land the shuttle and try a space walk on state-of-the-art simulators. Live satellite links to NASA facilities provide up-to-date information about current space flights and astronaut training activities. Admission is free.

## Panhandle Plains Region -

Wide-open plains and star-filled skies. This area's northern border is the Texas-Oklahoma state line. The southern-most point is San Angelo. To the west is New Mexico and to the east Wichita Falls. Cities in the area include Lubbock, Abilene and Amarillo.

A portion of the famous Route 66 passes through the area. If you are in the mood for music, be sure to stop in Lubbock, the birthplace of musician Buddy Holly, and home of the Buddy Holly Center ([www.buddyhollycenter.org](http://www.buddyhollycenter.org)), which pays tribute to the rock and roll pioneer. If you are interested in pioneers of a different sort, stop in Abilene at Frontier Texas!, a multi-million dollar interactive attraction that provides a look at frontier life on the Texas plains. Offers military discounts. For more information, visit [www.frontiertexas.com](http://www.frontiertexas.com).

The region is also home to one of the state's largest state parks—Palo Duro Canyon State Park. The park includes 18,000 acres and has mountain walls, carved by the Red River, that drop 1,000 feet to the canyon floor. Three restored cabins available for rent on the side of the cabin. Historical marker cites one of the last big U.S. Calvary/Indian battles in Texas. Visit [www.palodurocanyon.com](http://www.palodurocanyon.com) for more information.

### Military Highlight

#### 12th Armored Division Memorial Museum

[www.12tharmoreddivision.com/museum](http://www.12tharmoreddivision.com/museum) Museum honors the 12th Armored Division, which trained in Camp Barkeley, near Abilene, and served during World War II. The "Hellcats" fought in the European Theatre, Germany, France, and finally occupied Japan. When the war ended, the division was deactivated and many of the men settled in Abilene.



## Prairies and Lakes Region

This is where you'll find three of the state's larger cities: Dallas, Fort Worth and Arlington. Visit [www.visitdallas-fortworth.com](http://www.visitdallas-fortworth.com) and [www.arlington.org](http://www.arlington.org) for more information.

In Dallas, visit the Dallas Museum of Art, the Dallas Zoo, Fair Park (home to the State Fair of Texas, held every September and October), and the Deep Ellum entertainment district—a warehouse district full of restaurants, music venues and clubs.

In Fort Worth, get a sense of the true cowboy spirit at the Stockyards National Historic District, the Stockyards Collection & Museum, the National Cowgirl Museum and Hall of Fame, and Billy Bob's Texas—the largest honky tonk in the world.



## Piney Woods Region

This is East Texas. We're talking both historic oil country and old-style Southern charm. And, roses, roses and more beautiful roses.

Historic towns Kilgore, Marshall, Joinerville and Longview celebrate their ties to Texas' oil boom days. There are museums and other attractions. In Jefferson, there are Plantation homes and horse-drawn carriage rides. Cities include Tyler, known around the world for its flowers, especially roses. The Tyler Municipal Rose Garden ([www.texasrose-festival.com](http://www.texasrose-festival.com)) is the nation's largest municipal rose garden, with 38,000 rose bushes on 22 acres.

### Military Highlight

#### Town of Nacogdoches

[www.visitnacogdoches.org](http://www.visitnacogdoches.org) For a taste of Texas history during its struggle for independence, check out the state's oldest town, Nacogdoches. It was originally established as a Spanish fort in the mid 1700s and was later the site of three short-lived republics. In 1832, what were considered the opening shots of the Texas Revolution were fired here. Citizens forced Mexican troops out of East Texas.

8 [www.AmeriForce.net](http://www.AmeriForce.net)

In Arlington, visit Six Flags Over Texas, Six Flags Hurricane Harbor, and Rangers Ballpark—home of the Texas Rangers baseball club. Just a few miles away is Texas Stadium, where the Dallas Cowboys play their home games.

While in the area, drop by College Station (home of Texas A&M University) to visit the George Bush Presidential Library and Museum. The 69,000-square-foot library and museum is dedicated to the preservation, research and exhibit of official records, personal papers and memorabilia from the life and career of George Bush. There is a replica of Bush's Camp David office and his Air Force One office. The library is on the southwest corner of the university campus. Admission is free. [www.bushlibrary.tamu.edu](http://www.bushlibrary.tamu.edu)



## South Texas Plains Region

This area includes San Antonio, one of the state's largest and loveliest cities. And, because the area borders Mexico, the area is alive with the sights, sounds and flavors of the Mexican culture. The area includes the southeast corner of the Rio Grande Valley, which is warm year-round and attracts people from across the country each winter who want to escape the ice and snow at home.

Popular attractions in San Antonio include: The Alamo, River Walk, Sea World San Antonio, Six Flags Fiesta Texas, San Antonia Children's Museum and the San Antonio Children's Museum. For specific information on each venue, visit [www.sanantoniovisit.com](http://www.sanantoniovisit.com).

### Military highlight

#### Alamo [www.thealamo.org](http://www.thealamo.org)

The most famous spot in Texas, according to the state's tourism board. It was here that 189 defenders fell on March 6, 1836, after repeated attacks by Mexican General Santa Anna's army. Mission San Antonio de Valero (The Alamo) was established in 1718 as the city's first mission. Some parts of the original fort remain.

There is so much to see in Texas. After all, the state slogan is: "Like a whole other country." And, the state motto? Friendship.

So explore. Meet the locals. Have a big time! ●

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