

THIS WORLD OF
ADVENTURE

TEXAS

Road trips, hidden gems, and the places worth the drive

WHERE TO GO · WHAT TO DO · PRACTICAL TIPS

TRAVEL GUIDE

WELCOME

About this guide

Welcome to our Texas Travel Guide. Texas is enormous, bigger than most countries, and that is exactly what makes it fun. You can swim a spring-fed river in the morning, eat world-class barbecue for lunch, and watch the sun drop behind a desert mountain that night.

This guide is the shortcut. Inside you will find how to get around, when to go, the regions and cities worth your time, our favorite state parks and swimming holes, where to eat, where to stay, and ready-made itineraries so you can stop planning and start driving.

A BRIEF HELLO

We're Courtney and Matt

We're the team behind This World of Adventure. We grew up in Texas, just outside Houston, and after years of traveling all over the U.S. and the world we fell back in love with our home state. We make honest, photo-first travel content for more than 400,000 people across platforms, and everything in this guide is a place we have actually been.

HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

Skim the table of contents and jump to what you need. Each spot includes a quick why-go and the area it is in. The itineraries at the back stitch the best stops into a route you can follow as-is or remix.

A NOTE ON HOW WE WORK

We only share places we genuinely love. We work exclusively with paid partnerships and never accept gifted, affiliate, or commission-based deals, so what you read here is honest. This guide is for your personal use, please do not copy or resell it.

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TEXAS TRAVEL GUIDE

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Getting around Texas

Texas is car country. Distances are big and public transit between cities is limited, so a road trip by car is almost always the move. Here is how to plan it.

Rent a car

For almost any Texas trip you will want your own wheels. Pick up at a major airport, and consider an SUV if you are heading to Big Bend, Hill Country backroads, or the beach.

Know the distances

Texas is wide. Houston to Big Bend is roughly 9 hours, Dallas to Austin about 3, Austin to the Gulf Coast about 3 to 4. Build in drive time and plan stops along the way, the drive is part of the trip.

Toll roads & gas

Major cities have toll roads, a rental toll pass saves hassle. Fill up before long empty stretches in West Texas, where gas stations can be 60-plus miles apart.

In the cities

Austin, Dallas, Houston, and San Antonio all have Uber and Lyft, plus walkable downtown pockets. You will still want a car to reach the best spots outside the center.

INSIDER TIP

Beaches like Port Aransas and parts of the coast let you drive right onto the sand. Check tide and conditions, air down your tires a little, and never park below the high-tide line.

When to visit & weather

Texas weather swings hard by season and by region. As a rule, spring and fall are the sweet spots almost everywhere.

Spring (Mar-May)

The best all-around season. Wildflowers (hello, bluebonnets), mild temps, and green Hill Country. Book popular parks early.

Fall (Sep-Nov)

Our favorite. Cooler air, fewer crowds, and great desert and big-city weather. Prime time for Big Bend and West Texas.

Summer (Jun-Aug)

Hot and humid, often 95 to 105. This is swimming-hole and coast season. Start outdoor plans at sunrise and chase shade and spring-fed water.

Winter (Dec-Feb)

Mild in the south, cold snaps up north. Great for cities, Big Bend hiking, and the Rio Grande Valley. Pack layers.

BEAT THE HEAT

From late spring through early fall, plan hikes and photo stops for the early morning. Spring-fed pools like Barton Springs and Balmorhea stay cool even in August, and the Gulf is warm and swimmable for months.

WATCH THE SKY

Spring brings strong storms to North and Central Texas. Keep a weather radar app handy and build in flexibility on road trip days.

Must-have apps

Google Maps

The essential. Download offline maps for West Texas and Big Bend, where cell signal disappears for long stretches.

Texas State Parks (Reserve)

Day passes and campsites for popular parks sell out, especially weekends and summer. Reserve through the official Texas Parks & Wildlife site or app before you drive out.

AllTrails

Trail maps, distances, and recent conditions for hikes from Enchanted Rock to the Guadalupe Mountains.

GasBuddy

Find and compare fuel prices, genuinely useful before long empty drives out west.

Weather radar (RadarScope or your phone's)

Texas storms move fast. A good radar app keeps your road trip days flexible and safe.

iOverlander

Great for road trippers and campers, with crowd-sourced spots, water, and overnight options off the beaten path.

INSIDER TIP

Screenshot your reservations and key directions before you head into Big Bend or the desert. When the signal drops, a screenshot still works.

Airports & gateways

Texas has several major airports. Pick the one closest to where your trip starts to save hours of driving.

Dallas-Fort Worth (DFW) & Dallas Love (DAL)

NORTH TEXAS

Huge hubs with flights almost everywhere. Best base for North Texas, the Panhandle, and Palo Duro Canyon.

Houston (IAH & Hobby)

GULF COAST / EAST

Gateway to the upper Gulf Coast, Galveston, and the Piney Woods. Two airports, lots of options.

Austin-Bergstrom (AUS)

CENTRAL TEXAS

The easiest landing for Hill Country, swimming holes, and Austin itself. Books up fast for festivals.

San Antonio (SAT)

SOUTH / HILL COUNTRY

Great for the River Walk, the missions, Fredericksburg, and the southern Hill Country.

El Paso (ELP)

WEST TEXAS

The closest major airport to Big Bend country (still a long, beautiful drive) and Guadalupe Mountains.

INSIDER TIP

For a Big Bend trip, compare flying into El Paso versus Midland. Either way you have a multi-hour desert drive, so fuel up and stock snacks and water before you go.



ORIENTATION

The regions of Texas

Hill Country

Spring-fed rivers, wineries, German towns, and rolling oak hills. Centered on Austin, Fredericksburg, and the Frio and Guadalupe rivers.

Gulf Coast

Beaches, fishing towns, and warm water. Galveston, Port Aransas, Corpus Christi, and South Padre Island.

West Texas & Big Bend

Wide-open desert, mountains, and the darkest skies in the country. Big Bend, Marfa, Balmorhea, and the Davis Mountains.

Piney Woods (East)

Tall pines, bayous, and lakes. Caddo Lake, Tyler, and the most "Deep South" corner of Texas.

Panhandle & Plains

Big sky and the surprise of Palo Duro Canyon, the second-largest canyon in the country.

Prairies & Lakes (DFW)

Dallas–Fort Worth, the Stockyards, lakes, and small historic towns within easy reach.

South Texas

San Antonio, the missions, the Rio Grande Valley, and incredible birding and Tex-Mex.

DON'T MISS

Must-see cities

Austin

CENTRAL TEXAS

Live music, food trucks, and a swim at Barton Springs. The Hill Country gateway and an easy first stop.

San Antonio

SOUTH TEXAS

The River Walk, the Alamo, and the UNESCO-listed Spanish missions. Rich history and unbeatable Tex-Mex.

Fort Worth

NORTH TEXAS

The Stockyards with twice-daily cattle drives, a strong arts district, and real cowboy culture.

Houston

GULF COAST

World-class museums, the Space Center, and some of the best, most diverse food in the country.

Fredericksburg

HILL COUNTRY

German heritage, Main Street shopping, and the heart of Texas wine country. Enchanted Rock is close by.

Marfa

WEST TEXAS

A tiny desert art town with big-name installations, the famous mystery lights, and a quiet that sticks with you.

Big nature & state parks

Big Bend National Park

WEST TEXAS

Canyons, the Rio Grande, desert and mountains in one park, and some of the darkest night skies anywhere.

Guadalupe Mountains National Park

WEST TEXAS

The highest peak in Texas and a stunning fall-color hike through McKittrick Canyon.

Palo Duro Canyon State Park

PANHANDLE

The "Grand Canyon of Texas," with red-rock trails, scenic drives, and great camping.

Enchanted Rock

HILL COUNTRY

A giant pink-granite dome you can summit for huge views. Reserve a day pass in advance.

Caddo Lake

PINEY WOODS

Otherworldly cypress swamp draped in Spanish moss, best explored by paddle.

Longhorn Cavern State Park

HILL COUNTRY

An easy day trip from Austin into caves 130 feet underground, with great history.

Swimming holes & rivers

When Texas turns up the heat, this is where we cool off. Spring-fed pools stay cold all year, rivers are made for a slow float.

Frio River, Concan

Crystal-clear water and shady tubing under the cypress trees.

Barton Springs, Austin

A 68-degree spring pool in the heart of the city.

Comal River, New Braunfels

The chill, spring-fed float everyone loves.

Blue Hole, Wimberley

Rope swings and cypress shade. Reserve ahead in summer.

Krause Springs, Spicewood

A spring pool and waterfall grotto. Go early.

Hamilton Pool, Dripping Springs

A collapsed grotto with a waterfall. Reservations required.

Balmorhea State Park

A massive spring-fed pool in the West Texas desert.

Inks Lake State Park, Burnet

Cliff jumping at Devil's Waterhole and sunset paddles.

INSIDER TIP

Bring water shoes for rocky river bottoms, carry cash for small park entries, and check river flow before a tubing trip. After a dry spell, low rivers mean more walking than floating.

Hidden gems

Marfa Lights Viewing Area

WEST TEXAS

Pull over after dark and watch for the unexplained lights on the horizon. Strange and wonderful.

Prada Marfa

VALENTINE

A lone art installation shaped like a luxury store, in the middle of the desert. Peak Texas-weird photo op.

McDonald Observatory Star Party

FORT DAVIS

One of the best stargazing experiences in the country under truly dark skies.

Hamilton Pool Preserve

DRIPPING SPRINGS

A jaw-dropping grotto and waterfall. Reservations are a must and sell out fast.

Gorman Falls

COLORADO BEND SP

A lush, 70-foot living waterfall at the end of a rugged hike. It does not feel like Texas.

Jacob's Well

WIMBERLEY

A famous artesian spring and swimming hole. Strictly reservation-only in season.



FOR THE CAMERA

Best photo spots

- Bluebonnet fields along Hill Country backroads (spring)
- The Santa Elena Canyon walls in Big Bend
- Prada Marfa at golden hour
- The San Antonio River Walk after dark
- Enchanted Rock summit at sunrise
- Palo Duro Canyon overlooks
- The Gulf shoreline at Port Aransas
- Cypress reflections at Caddo Lake
- Historic courthouse squares in small towns
- The Marfa lights and West Texas night sky
- Gorman Falls in Colorado Bend
- Downtown Austin skyline from Lady Bird Lake

INSIDER TIP

The hour after sunrise and before sunset is everything in Texas. Soft light, fewer people, and cooler temperatures. It is worth the early alarm every time.

Where to eat

You do not visit Texas to diet. Here is how to eat your way across the state.

Barbecue

The holy grail. Central Texas-style brisket rules. Expect lines at the legends, and go early before they sell out. Smaller-town joints are often the best surprise.

Tex-Mex & Mexican

Enchiladas, fajitas, and queso are a way of life. San Antonio and the border bring some of the most authentic interior Mexican food in the U.S.

Breakfast tacos

The official breakfast of Texas. Austin and San Antonio will argue forever over who does it best. Try both.

Kolaches

A Czech-Texan gas-station staple. Grab a few for the road, especially driving through Central Texas.

Gulf seafood

Fresh shrimp, oysters, and fish along the coast. Galveston and Port Aransas have great no-frills spots.

Chicken-fried steak & pie

Classic small-town diner comfort food. The roadside cafe with a full parking lot is your answer.

Where to stay

Texas does hotels, but some of the most memorable stays are the unique ones. A few ideas by style.

Unique & outdoorsy

River cabins on the Frio, glamping near Big Bend, Marfa's design hotels and safari tents, and lakeside cabins in the Hill Country.

City stays

Boutique hotels in downtown Austin and San Antonio put you near the food and music. Book early for festival weekends.

Classic & historic

Grand old hotels like the ones anchoring San Antonio and Galveston bring serious character.

Camping & cabins

State park cabins and campsites are the best value and the closest to nature. Reserve months ahead for peak dates.

INSIDER TIP

For Big Bend, decide early between staying inside the park at Chisos Mountains Lodge (book very far ahead) or in nearby Terlingua, a quirky desert town with great character and food.

Road trip ideas

The Hill Country Loop

3–4 DAYS

Austin to Fredericksburg to the Frio River and back, with wineries, Enchanted Rock, and swimming holes along the way.

The Big Bend Run

5–7 DAYS

El Paso to Marfa to Big Bend to Balmorhea. Desert, mountains, art towns, and the darkest skies you have ever seen.

The Gulf Coast Cruise

3–5 DAYS

Galveston down to Port Aransas and Corpus Christi. Beaches, fresh seafood, and laid-back island towns.

The City Sampler

4–6 DAYS

San Antonio to Austin to Fort Worth. Missions, music, and the Stockyards, with great food the whole way.

The Panhandle & Canyon

3–4 DAYS

Amarillo, Palo Duro Canyon, and the wide-open plains. Cap II with a classic steak in cattle country.

Long weekend: Hill Country

Day 1 • Austin

Morning: Land in Austin, breakfast tacos, and a swim at Barton Springs.

Afternoon: Explore downtown and the food trucks, walk Lady Bird Lake.

Evening: Live music on South Congress and Texas barbecue for dinner.

Day 2 • Fredericksburg & Enchanted Rock

Morning: Drive to Enchanted Rock and summit the dome early (reserve a pass).

Afternoon: Main Street Fredericksburg, wineries, and German food.

Evening: Sunset and a quiet night in a Hill Country cabin.

Day 3 • The River

Morning: Head to the Frio or Comal River for a tube float.

Afternoon: Lunch in a river town, then a stop at a swimming hole.

Evening: Drive back to Austin, last-night dinner and one more taco.

READY-MADE

One week in Texas

Day 1-2 • San Antonio

River Walk, the Alamo, and the mission trail. Plenty of Tex-Mex and a stroll along the river at night.

Day 3 • Hill Country

Drive north through Fredericksburg, summit Enchanted Rock, and overnight near the river.

Day 4 • Austin

Barton Springs, food trucks, live music, and downtown. The easy-living heart of Central Texas.

Day 5 • Drive west

Long, beautiful drive toward Marfa. Stop for Prada Marfa and stay for the desert quiet and the mystery lights.

Day 6 • Big Bend

Hike Santa Elena Canyon, soak in the scenery, and watch an unforgettable dark-sky sunset.

Day 7 • Balmorhea & home

Cool off in the spring-fed pool at Balmorhea on your way back toward the airport.

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Frequently asked

When is the best time to visit Texas?

Spring and fall are ideal almost everywhere: mild temps, fewer crowds, and great light. Summer is for swimming holes and the coast, winter is great for cities and Big Bend.

Do I need a car?

Yes. Texas is huge and built around driving. Rent a car, and an SUV if you are heading to Big Bend or the beach.

How many days do I need?

A long weekend covers one region well. A week lets you combine cities, Hill Country, and a taste of West Texas. Big Bend alone deserves several days.

How do I beat the summer heat?

Start early, chase spring-fed water, and save midday for food, museums, and air conditioning. Hydrate more than you think you need to.

Do I need reservations?

For popular parks and swimming holes (Enchanted Rock, Hamilton Pool, Jacob's Well, Big Bend lodging), yes, and well in advance. Book the moment you have dates.

THANK YOU

See you out there

Thanks for letting us help plan your trip. Texas is best taken slow, so roll the windows down, take the long way, and stop for the small towns. If this guide made your trip better, the best thank-you is sharing it with a travel buddy.

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