



# SAN ANTONIO, AUSTIN & TEXAS BACKCOUNTRY

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## ROAD TRIPS

This edition written and researched by

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and Ryan Ver Berkmoes**

# HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

## Reviews

### In the Destinations section:

**All reviews** are ordered in our authors' preference, starting with their most preferred option. Additionally:

**Sights** are arranged in the geographic order that we suggest you visit them and, within this order, by author preference.

**Eating and Sleeping reviews** are ordered by price range (budget, midrange, top end) and, within these ranges, by author preference.

## Map Legend

### Routes

- Trip Route
- Trip Detour
- Linked Trip
- Walk Route
- Tollway
- Freeway
- Primary
- Secondary
- Tertiary
- Lane
- Unsealed Road
- Plaza/Mall
- Steps
- Tunnel
- Pedestrian Overpass
- Walk Track/Path

### Boundaries

- International
- State/Province
- Cliff

### Population

- Capital (National)
- Capital (State/Province)
- City/Large Town
- Town/Village

### Transport

- Airport
- Cable Car/Funicular
- Parking
- Train/Railway
- Tram
- Underground Train Station

### Trips

- Trip Numbers
- Trip Stop
- Walking tour
- Trip Detour

### Highway Route Markers

- 97 US National Hwy
- 5 US Interstate Hwy
- 44 State Hwy

### Hydrography

- River/Creek
- Intermittent River
- Swamp/Mangrove
- Canal
- Water
- Dry/Salt/Intermittent Lake
- Glacier

### Areas

- Beach
- Cemetery (Christian)
- Cemetery (Other)
- Park
- Forest
- Reservation
- Urban Area
- Sportsground

## Symbols In This Book

- Top Tips
- Link Your Trips
- Tips from Locals
- Trip Detour
- History & Culture
- Family
- Food & Drink
- Outdoors
- Essential Photo
- Walking Tour
- Eating
- Sleeping

- Sights
- Beaches
- Activities
- Courses
- Tours
- Festivals & Events
- Sleeping
- Eating
- Drinking
- Entertainment
- Shopping
- Information & Transport

These symbols and abbreviations give vital information for each listing:

- Telephone number
- Opening hours
- Parking
- Nonsmoking
- Air-conditioning
- Internet access
- Wi-fi access
- Swimming pool
- Vegetarian selection
- English-language menu
- Family-friendly
- Pet-friendly
- Bus
- Ferry
- Tram
- Train
- apt apartments
- d double rooms
- dm dorm beds
- q quad rooms
- r rooms
- s single rooms
- ste suites
- tr triple rooms
- tw twin rooms

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<b>3 Texas Gulf Coast</b> .....	<b>4 days</b>	41
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# Road Trips

## 1 Hill Country, 2–5 days

This drive strings together some of Texas' most welcoming towns. (p23)

## 2 Big Bend Scenic Loop, 5–7 days

Minimalist art, mystery lights and star parties lead to Big Bend. (p33)

## 3 Texas Gulf Coast, 4 days

From Galveston to South Padre Island, explore more than 400 miles of coastline. (p41)

## 4 Heart of Texas, 4 days

Enjoy the solitude of hundreds of miles of remote Texas backcountry. (p49)







# Destinations

## San Antonio & Hill Country (p58)

Most of the small towns in the rolling hills and valleys west of Austin and San Antonio are easy day trips from either city.

## Big Bend & West Texas (p90)

Explore the expansive Big Bend National Park, and soak up the delicious slowness of west Texas in surprising small towns and ghost-town ruins.

## Houston & the Gulf Coast (p100)

Attend world-class museums and award-winning restaurants in Houston before checking out the mellow beach-town scene of Port Aransas and the frenetic hedonism of South Padre Island.

## Heart of Texas (p112)

Leave the big smoke behind and you'll find that this may be the part of Texas that most typifies the state to outsiders. This is a land of sprawling cattle ranches, where people still make a living on horseback.

Prickly pear, Big Bend National Park (p97)

DANITA DELIMONT / LONELY PLANET IMAGES ©



# Driving in Southwest USA

*The interstate system is thriving in the Southwest, but a well-maintained network of state roads and scenic byways offers unparalleled opportunities for exploration.*

## Driving Fast Facts

- ➔ **Right or Left?** Drive on the right.
- ➔ **Legal Driving Age** 16 (New Mexico: 15½)
- ➔ **Top Speed Limit** 85 mph (Hwy 130 between Austin and San Antonio, TX)
- ➔ **Best Bumper Sticker** We're all here because we're not all there (Jerome, AZ)

## DRIVER'S LICENSE & DOCUMENTS

All drivers must carry a driver's license, the car registration and proof of insurance. If your license is not in English, an official translation or an international driving permit (IDP) is highly recommended. You will also need a credit card in order to rent a car.

## INSURANCE

Liability insurance covers people and property that you might harm in an accident. For damage to your own rental vehicle, a collision damage waiver (CDW) is available for about \$22 to \$27 per day. If you have liability and collision coverage on your vehicle at home, it might cover damages to rental cars; inquire before departing. Additionally, some credit cards offer reimbursement coverage for collision damages when you use the card to rent a car; again, ask before departing. There may be exceptions for rentals of more than 15 days or for exotic models, SUVs, vans and 4WD vehicles.

Note that many rental agencies stipulate that damage a car suffers while being driven on unpaved roads is not covered by the insurance it offers. Check with the agent when you make your reservation.

## RENTING A CAR

Rental cars are readily available at airports and many downtown city locations. Rates usually include unlimited mileage, but 'unlimited' can actually be capped. Dropping off the car at a different location is usually more expensive than returning it to the place of rental. Larger companies don't require a credit card deposit, which means you can cancel without a penalty if you find a better rate. Since deals abound and the business is competitive, it pays to shop around.

Most companies require that you have a major credit card, are at least 25 years old and have a valid driver's license. Some national agencies may rent to drivers between the ages of 21 and 25 but may charge an additional daily fee.

The following companies operate in the Southwest:

**Alamo** ([www.alamo.com](http://www.alamo.com))



**Avis** (www.avis.com)  
**Budget** (www.budget.com)  
**Dollar** (www.dollar.com)  
**Hertz** (www.hertz.com)  
**National** (www.national.com)  
**Thrifty** (www.thrifty.com)

## BORDER CROSSING

Cities and towns in Arizona where you can cross the Mexican-US border include San Luis (south of Yuma), Lukeville (Hwy 85), Nogales and Douglas. From New Mexico, travel south to El Paso, TX, to reach Ciudad Juárez. US Customs and Border Protection tracks current wait times (see <http://apps.cbp.gov/bwt>) at every border crossing.

Bring your passport if you are crossing the border. Foreign visitors should review US entry requirements at the State Department (www.travel.state.gov) and the US Customs and Border Protection (www.cbp.gov) websites.

## MAPS

Detailed state highway maps are distributed free by state governments. Call or send an email to state tourism offices

## Road-Trip Websites

**American Automobile Association (AAA)** (800-222-4357; www.aaa.com) Provides maps and other information, as well as travel discounts and 24-hour emergency assistance for members.

**America's Byways** (www.byways.org) Descriptions and maps for designated national scenic byways.

**Gas Buddy** (www.gasbuddy.com) Find the cheapest gas in town.

**Roadside America** (www.roadsideamerica.com) Strange and wonderful things in Texas towns large and small.

**Historic Route 66** (www.historic66.com) The historic way across the Panhandle.

## Southwest USA Playlist

**Border Town** Chris Whitley  
**Rocky Mountain High** John Denver  
**Take it Easy** The Eagles  
**Texas, Texas** Red Meat  
**Viva Las Vegas** Elvis Presley

(typically through their websites) to request maps, or pick them up at highway tourism information offices when you enter a state on a major highway. For exploring Native American reservations in the Four Corners region, buy the popular AAA Indian Country map. It's for sale at **Books 'n' More** (8am-8pm Jun-Aug, vary rest of the year), which is across the plaza from Grand Canyon Visitor Center on the South Rim, and from various outlets online.

## ROADS & CONDITIONS

Be extra defensive while driving in the Southwest. Everything from dust storms to snow to roaming livestock can make conditions dangerous. Near Flagstaff, watch for elk at sunset on I-17 – they like to soak up warmth from the blacktop (or so we heard). Elk can weigh between 500lb and 900lb.

Distances are great in the Southwest and there are long stretches of road without gas stations. Running out of gas on a hot and desolate stretch of highway is no fun, so pay attention to signs that caution 'Next Gas 98 Miles.'

Road conditions for interstates and rural highways are typically very good. Unpaved roads to ghost towns, petroglyph sites, and remote trailheads are generally well-graded but can be challenging after storms or if they lead to very remote sites. Unpaved roads across Indian reservations are of varying quality. Consider using 4WD vehicles for extended trips on dirt roads and ask locally about conditions.

For updates on road conditions, call 511 (excluding Texas) while traveling within the state, or call one of the following:  
**Arizona** (in-state 511, 888-411-7623; www.az511.com)  
**Nevada** (in-state 511, 877-687-6237; www.nvroads.com)

**New Mexico** (☎in-state 511, 800-432-4269;  
<http://nmroads.com>)

**Southern Colorado** (☎in-state 511, 303-639-1111; [www.cotrip.org](http://www.cotrip.org))

**Texas** (☎800-452-9292)

**Utah** (in-state 511, 866-511-8824; [www.commuterlink.utah.gov](http://www.commuterlink.utah.gov))

your location, watch for speed limit signs requiring a lower speed than the maximums listed here.

Texting while driving is banned for all drivers in Colorado, Nevada and Utah. Hand-held cell phone use is banned in Nevada.

## ROAD RULES

Driving laws are slightly different in each state, but all require the use of safety belts. In every state, children under five years of age must ride in a child safety seat secured by proper restraints.

The maximum speed limit on all rural interstates is 75mph, with Texas and Utah allowing higher speeds on a handful of specified sections of road. The speed limit drops to 65mph in urban areas in Arizona, Colorado, Nevada and Utah. New Mexico and Texas allow urban interstate drivers to barrel through at 75mph. But no matter

## PARKING

Public parking is readily available in most Southwest destinations, whether on the street or in parking lots. In rural areas and small towns it is often free of charge. Many towns have metered parking, which will limit the amount of time you can leave your car.

Parking can be a challenge in urban areas. Street parking is limited so you will probably have to pay to leave your car in private lots. See the City Guides, p10, for more information about parking in San Antonio and Austin.

## Road Distances (miles)

Austin, TX	495																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																				</
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## Driving Problem-Buster

**What should I do if my car breaks down?** Call the service number provided by the rental-car company, and it will make arrangements with a local garage. If you're driving your own car, it's advisable to join AAA (p125), which provides emergency assistance.

**What if I have an accident?** If serious damage occurs, you'll have to call the local police (☎911) to come to the scene of the accident and file an accident report, for insurance purposes.

**What should I do if I get stopped by the police?** Always pull over to the right at the first available opportunity. Stay in your car and roll down the window. Show the officer your driver's license and automobile registration. For any violations, you cannot pay the officer for the ticket; payment must be made by mail or online.

**What happens at a border patrol checkpoint?** The 'stop side' of the checkpoint is the route going from the south (Mexico) to the north (USA). You may be waved through; otherwise, slow down, stop and answer a few questions (regarding your citizenship and the nature of your visit) and possibly pop your trunk and roll down your window so that the officers can see into your car.

**What if I can't find anywhere to stay?** In summer it's advisable to make reservations in advance. Most towns have tourist information centers or chambers of commerce that will help travelers find accommodation in a pinch. Public lands managed by the Bureau of Land Management and the forest service often allow dispersed camping, which means you can camp where you want on undeveloped land as long as you stay 900ft from a developed water source and follow other guidelines ([www.blm.gov](http://www.blm.gov)).

## FUEL

Gas stations are common in urban areas and along interstates. Many are open 24 hours a day. Small-town stations may be open only from 7am to 8pm or 9pm.

At most stations, you must pay before you pump. The more modern pumps have credit-/debit-card terminals built into them, so you can pay right at the pump. At more expensive, 'full service' stations, an attendant will pump your gas for you; no tip is expected.

## SAFETY

When leaving the car, travelers are advised to remove valuables and lock all car doors, especially in urban areas and at isolated

trailheads. Be extra careful driving on rural roads at night, which may not be well-lit and may be populated by deer, elk, livestock and other creatures, which can often total your car if you hit them.

## RADIO

**Arizona** On the Hopi reservation KUYI (88.1FM) plays reggae, honky tonk, Cajun and Native American music, with Hopi news.

**New Mexico** KTAO (101.9FM) in Taos is a solar-powered station airing Native American music, astrology reports, local news, outlaw country and world music.

**Texas** In Lubbock, KDAV (1590AM), where Buddy Holly once worked, plays nothing but classic rockabilly.

# OUR WRITERS



## AMY C BALFOUR

Amy has hiked, biked, skied and gambled her way across the Southwest. She has authored or co-authored more than 15 books for Lonely Planet and has written

for *Backpacker*, *Every Day with Rachael Ray*, *Redbook*, *Southern Living* and *Women's Health*.



## LISA DUNFORD

Does living in a state for 22 years, marrying a native and learning to speak the language mean someone can become a naturalized Texan? Lisa

sure hopes so. Over the years she's logged tens of thousands of miles exploring her adopted home. She loves cruising the country roads seeing what there is to see – a cow in a bluebonnet field, or an old barnlike dance hall. She's bought boys drinks at the Continental Club in Austin, ridden the rides at the State Fair in Dallas and sailed on Corpus Christi Bay. Before becoming a freelance writer, Lisa was a restaurant reviewer and an editor in the features department at the Corpus Christi Caller-Times newspaper. Now no matter where she roams, she always returns to the patch of riverfront east of Houston that she, her husband and their dogs call home.



## MARIELLA KRAUSE

Mariella first fell in love with Austin when she checked out the UT campus during her junior year of high school. After college, she intended to live

'everywhere,' but felt so at home in Austin that she accidentally stayed for 15 years. Mariella will always consider Texas home, and she still sprinkles her language with Texanisms whenever possible, much to the amusement of those who don't consider 'y'all' a legitimate pronoun.



## REGIS ST LOUIS

A Hoosier by birth, Regis grew up in a sleepy riverside town where he dreamed of big-city intrigue. He's lived all over the US (including New York City,

San Francisco, Los Angeles and New Orleans), and has crossed the country by train, bus and car while visiting remote corners of America. Favorite memories from his most recent trip include crab feasting on Maryland's eastern shore, hiking through striking state parks in west Texas, catching music jams in the Blue Ridge Mountains of Virginia and going eye-to-eye with wild horses on Assateague Island. Regis has contributed to more than 50 Lonely Planet titles, including New York City and Washington, DC.



## RYAN VER BERKMOES

Ryan grew up in Santa Cruz, California, the sort of goofball beachtown place that made him immediately love Port Aransas.

An inveterate wanderer, he

was most at home on the hundreds of miles of Texas backroads he traversed for research. Whether it was discovering a forgotten town on Texas Hwy 70 or driving to the literal end of the road to (happily!) check out still another empty Gulf Coast beach, he relished every click on the odometer.

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