

Big Bend & West Texas



West Texas is the land of wide open spaces. If you've ever wondered whether we're going to run out of places to put people, west Texas is like a big sigh of relief. There are places where you can drive for hours and see few signs of other people. That's not to say it's the land of nothing: two national parks, one large city and a handful of interesting small towns offer worthwhile stops between your long stretches of solitude.

Along I-10 there's not much to look at, just scrub brush and open skies. But dip below the interstate and you'll find a landscape that, while perhaps not traditionally beautiful, is captivating and unusual enough that you may find yourself staring out the windows for hours at a time. Sometimes the rugged terrain looks just like a backdrop for an old Western movie (more than a few have been filmed here) and at other times it looks like an alien landscape, with huge rock formations suddenly jutting out of the endless desert.

There is a slowness here that gets under your skin. You may try to keep up with your email and cell phone for a day or two, but spend a week and you'll feel less of a need to keep apace with the modern world. Moving to west Texas means dropping out, and a lot of visitors drawn to the laid-back lifestyle have been inspired to do just that. Even if you don't buy a pair of boots, pack up your things, and relocate to the desert, odds are good you'll come away from west Texas with a new outlook.

HIGHLIGHTS

Most Surprising Nightlife

Music, margaritas and mixing with the locals at the Starlight Theater (p291) in Terlingua ghost town

Quirkiest Art Installation

The Marfa Prada (p295), in between Marfa and Valentine

Most Increasingly Scenic

Big Bend's Lost Mine Trail (p286), which just gets better and better as you climb

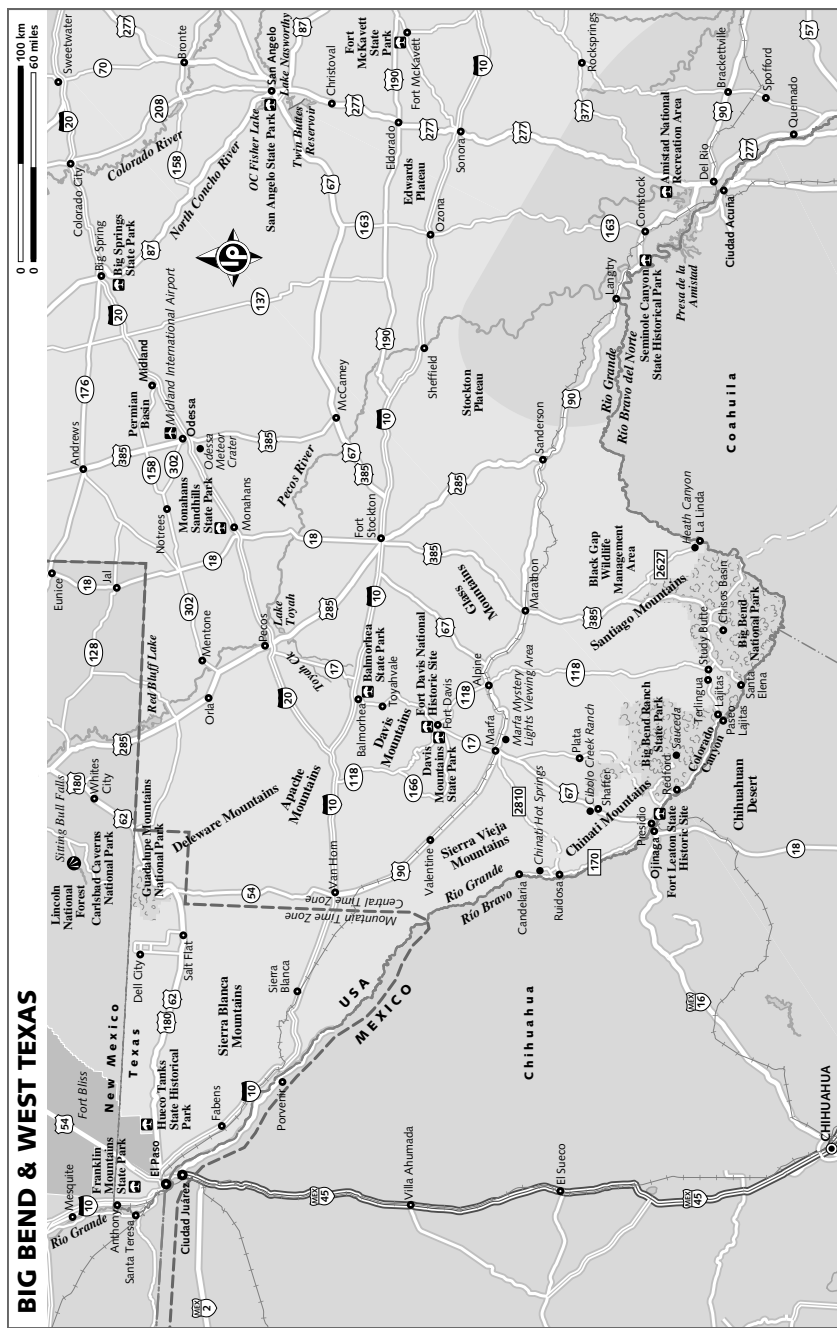
Best Taxidermy

The Gage Hotel in Marathon (p300), both for quantity and for having a unique white buffalo

Most Fun Learning Experience

A late-night Star Party at McDonald Observatory (p293) in Fort Davis





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