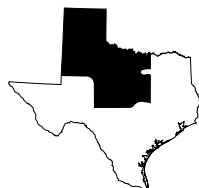


Panhandle & Central Plains



The Panhandle and Central Plains may be the part of Texas that most typifies the state to outsiders. This is a land of sprawling cattle ranches, a place where people can still make a living on horseback. Its landscape appears endlessly flat, punctuated only by utility poles and windmills, until a vast canyon materializes, seeming to plunge into another world.

It's a region of long drives on lonely two-laners. Its cities are few and small. But Midland was an important waypoint in the lives of two US presidents, Lubbock embodies the region's rich music heritage in its favorite son, Buddy Holly, and Amarillo keeps cattle kings of the Panhandle. Natural wonders include America's second-largest canyon at Palo Duro, where the Comanche fought on long after other tribes gave in. But the greatest assets are the tiny towns seemingly lost in the past. Slumbering in the sun are forgotten architectural gems and small-town cafes that have you itching for the next mealtime.

The scope and scale make this a place where people tend to think big, but some of the area's purest pleasures are in its details: the scent of sage after rainfall, a flint quarry plied by Texas' first inhabitants thousands of years ago, or the wistful love songs written by young troubadours whose legacies ultimately reached far beyond the plains.

PANHANDLE & CENTRAL PLAINS

HIGHLIGHTS

Best Place to Get Wired

The barbed wire exhibit at the Devil's Rope Museum (p338) in the old Route 66 town of McLean

Biggest Pair of Spectacles

A statue of Buddy Holly's iconic glasses outside his namesake museum in Lubbock (p329)

Where You'll Wish the Road Never Ends

Texas Hwy 70 (p333) wanders through forgotten small towns, lush ranchlands and classic wide open spaces

Food to Die For

Only the foolhardy take the challenge at Amarillo's Big Texan Steak Ranch (p339): eat a huge steak and sides in under an hour and it's free; don't and pay

Where to Get Your Spurs

Wander the old streets and beautiful river trails of San Angelo (p324), then get outfitted Texas-style in a Western gear store



