

# Welcome to Texas

*A darn sight bigger than a whole heap of countries, Texas is largely diverse: big-city lights to small-town simplicity; white-sand beaches to high-country hikes.*

## Now That's Country

Country is as much about a way of life as a place. Slowing down, taking the rural, farm-to-market back roads; steppin' out in polished boots and starched blue jeans for a Saturday-night dance under the stars; doin' nothing more on a Sunday afternoon than floating down a lazy river... Life in the country lopes along. Even if most Texans now live in urban areas, they're influenced by the state's agricultural, roping-and-riding heritage – and they escape to the country just as often as they can.

## Fun Foods

There's just something about eating a big pile of brisket off a butcher-paper 'plate'. Don't dare ask for a fork; real 'Q is for fingers only. And great barbecue is not the state's only fun food. At festivals, rodeos and fairs much of your meal can be served on a stick, from corny dogs to fried PB&J sandwiches. In Austin and other cities the food-truck phenomena continues. And we haven't even dug into the ubiquitous Mexican food, Dallas' fine upscale dining or the foodie-fave restaurants around Houston.

## Cities & Towns

Bright lights, big cities? Check, Texas has them. Dallas and Houston both boast rich arts and culture districts to explore by day, as well as active nightlife. If you really want to party, Austin is the place – with endless live-music concerts and an outdoorsy, alternative vibe. San Antonio may seem a bit more sedate, but once evening falls on the Riverwalk there's a fiesta every night. City life is fun, but don't stop there. Texas also has countless small towns with brick-building-lined courthouse squares, landmark cafes and eclectic shops to explore.

## As Big as All Outdoors

We know you've heard, but Texas is big... really BIG. More than 261,000 sq miles, in fact. That's larger than Germany, England, Scotland, Ireland, Northern Ireland, Belgium and the Netherlands combined. And it ain't all just tumblin' tumbleweeds. Barrier islands with windswept dunes and public beaches stretch down 367 miles of coastline. In the west, three mountain ranges top more than 7000ft; Big Bend National Park is the state's primary trekking and rafting destination. And to the northeast, soaring pine forests and sinuous, cypress-lined bayous are perfect for hiking and kayaking.



## Why I Love Texas

By Lisa Dunford, Author

Crisscrossing the state in the 22 years I've called Texas home, I've learned that there isn't much I don't love: hiking to a riverside hot-spring hot tub made out of adobe ruins and peering across to Mexico from Big Bend; two-stepping in a giant, family-filled tent with the man who would become my husband at the Refugio county rodeo; listening to Ray Price sing 'Crazy Arms' at John T Floore's Country Store... And the folks here are just as friendly as can be; seems like each time I visit a new place, I come away with new friends.

**For more about our authors, see page 392**