

Texas

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Houston	710
Corpus Christi & Around	719
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Best Places to Eat

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- ➔ Southerleigh (p707)
- ➔ Cochineal (p736)
- ➔ Meddlesome Moth (p725)
- ➔ Hugo's (p714)

Best Places to Stay

- ➔ Hotel San José (p697)
- ➔ El Cosmico (p736)
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- ➔ Stockyards Hotel (p729)
- ➔ Gage Hotel (p737)

Why Go?

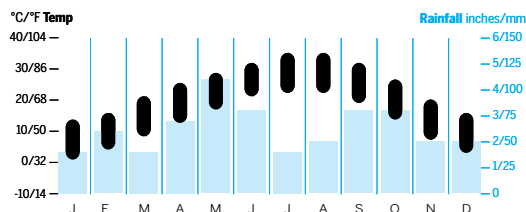
Cue the theme music, and make it something epic: Texas is as big and sweeping a state as can be imagined. If it were a country, it would be the world's 40th largest. And as big as it is geographically, it is equally as large in people's imaginations.

Cattle ranches, pickup trucks, cowboy boots and thick Texas drawls – all of those are part of the culture, to be sure. But an Old West theme park it is not. With a state this big, there's room for Texas to be whatever you want it to be.

You can find beaches, sprawling national parks, historic towns, citified shopping and nightlife, and a vibrant music scene. And the nearly year-round warm weather makes it ideal for outdoor activities like hiking, cycling, rock climbing and kayaking. So saddle up for whatever adventure suits you best: the Lone Star state is ready to ride.

When to Go

Austin



Mar Warm weather during spring break attracts college students and families with kids.

Apr–May Wildflowers line roadsides, festivals are in full swing and summer is yet to swelter.

Oct Crowds have thinned, the heat has broken, but it's still warm enough for shorts.

History

Texas hasn't always been Texas. Or Mexico, for that matter. Or the United States, or Spain, or France...or any of the six flags that once flew over this epic state in its eight changes of sovereignty.

Given that the conquerors' diseases wiped out much of the indigenous population, it seems a bit ironic that the Spaniards named the territory *Tejas* (*tay*-has) – a corruption of the Caddo word for 'friend.' Caddo, Apache and Karankawa were among the tribes that Spanish explorers encountered when they arrived to map the Gulf Coast in 1519.

Spain's rule of the territory continued until Mexico won its independence in 1821. That same year, Mexican general Antonio López de Santa Anna eliminated the state federation system, outlawed slavery and curtailed immigration. None of this sat well with independent-minded 'Texians' (US- and Mexico-born Texans) who had been given cheap land grants and Mexican citizenship. Clashes escalated into the Texas War for Independence (1835–6). A month after Santa Anna's forces massacred survivors of the siege in San Antonio, Sam Houston's rebels routed the Mexican troops at San Jacinto with the cry 'Remember the Alamo!' And thus the Republic of Texas was born. The nation's short life ended nine years later when, by treaty, Texas opted to become the 28th state of the Union.

The last battle of the Civil War (Texas was on the Confederate side) was reputedly fought near Brownsville in May of 1865 – one month after the war had ended. Cattle-ranching formed the core of Texas' postwar economy, but it was the black gold that spewed up from Spindletop in 1910 that really changed everything. From then on, for better or worse, the state's economy has run on oil.

Local Culture

Trying to typify Texas culture is like trying to wrestle a pig in mud – it's awful slippery. In vast generalization, Austin is alternative Texas, where environmental integrity and quality of life are avidly discussed. Dallasesites are the shoppers and society trendsetters. In conservative, casual Houston, oil-and-gas industrialists dine at clubby steakhouses, though it's also home to great ethnic diversity (foodies take note). And San Antonio is the most Tex-Mexican of the bunch – a showplace of Hispanic culture.

SOUTH-CENTRAL TEXAS

So what if the hills are more mole-size than mountainous? They – and the rivers that flow through them – are what define south-central Texas. To the north is the state capital of Austin, where music, music and more music are on the schedule, day and night. Eighty miles south, the major metropolitan center of San Antonio is home to the Alamo and the festive Riverwalk. Between and to the west of the two towns is the Hill Country. Here you can eat great barbecue, dance across an old wooden floor or spend a lazy day floating on the river in small Texas-y towns. If you want to get to the heart of Texas in a short time, this is the way to go.

Austin

You'll see it on bumper stickers and T-shirts throughout the city: 'Keep Austin Weird.' And while old-timers grumble that Austin has lost its funky charm, the city has still managed to hang on to its incredibly laid-back vibe. Though this former college town with a hippie soul has seen an influx of tech types and movie stars, it's still a town of artists with day jobs, where people try to focus on their music or write their novel or annoy their neighbors with crazy yard art.

Along the freeway and in the 'burbs, big-box stores and chain restaurants have proliferated at an alarming rate. But the neighborhoods still have an authentically Austin feel, with all sorts of interesting, locally owned businesses, including a flock of food trailers – a symbol of the low-key entrepreneurial spirit that represents Austin at its best.

The one thing everyone seems to know about Austin, whether they've been there or not, is that it's a music town, even if they don't actually use the words 'Live Music Capital of the World' (though that's a claim no one's disputing). The city now hosts two major music festivals, South by Southwest and the Austin City Limits festival, but you don't have to endure the crowds and exorbitant hotel prices to experience the scene, because Austin has live music all over town every night of the week.

Sights

Don't limit yourself to the sights; Austin is about the experience. Bars, restaurants, even grocery stores and the airport have live music. And there are outdoor activities galore. A