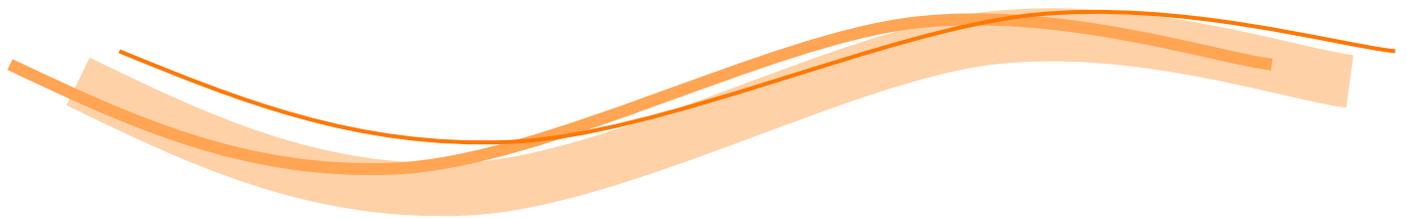




Chris' Travel Notes: TEXAS, HOUSTON & GALVESTON





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| <p>TEXAS</p> | <p>Texas is still home to cowboys and Southern hospitality - but don't imagine that that is all there is to the Lone Star State. Visitors to Texas will discover that a huge variety of experiences await them. From the mountains and rugged landscapes of Big Bend National Park in the West of the State to over 1000kms of pristine Gulf Coast in the South. From outdoor adventure at over 100 working dude ranches to wine tasting at a choice of some 180 wineries. Texas has first class golf – but did you know that it is also a top destination for bird watchers?</p> <p>Texas can be a great destination for a weekend getaway – whether you are looking for fine art and museums, shopping or spas. There are 18 museums and 8,000 dining options in the chic city of Houston alone! And Texas also specializes in longer stays – the relaxed coastal charm of Galveston, for instance, has made it a popular retreat from the cold winters up North.</p> <p>You may not have thought of Texas as a place to start your cruise vacation – but you can now take a Caribbean cruise from Galveston, and Houston's spectacular new Bayport Cruise Terminal. So now you can book your cruise out of Texas - and it would be a crime not to also enjoy pre and post cruise stays in the diverse and welcoming State of Texas.</p> <p>Taste the tropics of Texas! At the top of the Texas Gulf Coast, experience the exciting cosmopolitan city of Houston. And less than a one hour drive away – discover the relaxed coastal charm of Galveston Island.</p> |
| <p>Location</p> | <p>Nearly 700,000 square kilometers of the Lone Star State – as far south as you can go in the USA, right in the middle, up against the Mexican border on the south west of the state and bordering the Gulf of Mexico on the south east side. Texas also borders Louisiana, Arkansas, Oklahoma and New Mexico.</p> |
| <p>Geography</p> | <p>Texas is larger than the countries of France, Belgium, Holland, Switzerland and Luxembourg combined!</p> |
| <p>Name</p> | <p>The name "Texas" can be traced to Native American tribes: "Tejas" is the Spanish pronunciation of the Caddo word for "friend."</p> |
| <p>Population</p> | <p>Total for the state: 24 million 32% Hispanic/Latino, 11% Black, 0.6% American Indian</p> |
| <p>Language</p> | <p>70% English, 27% Spanish, 3% other</p> |
| <p>Currency</p> | <p>US Dollars; the Canadian Dollar = 0.75 US Dollar as at Nov 2015</p> |
| <p>Tipping</p> | <p>The custom of tipping is a common practice in Texas: 15% to 20% for waiters; 10% to 15% for taxi drivers; \$1 per bag for bellmen. Occasionally gratuities are automatically added to restaurant checks, but not usually.</p> |

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| Dress | Clothing styles in Texas cities are as varied as any other major city in the world. Styles of dress ranging from comfortable and casual to elegant and stylish will be seen in all parts of the city. Air conditioning is a way of life during Texas summers, making all clothing comfortable indoors. |
| Documentation | Passports are required for Canadian visitors, so make sure you apply well in advance of travel if you do not have a Passport currently. |
| Time zone | Texas is located in the Central Time Zone (except El Paso in the west, which is on Mountain Time) |
| Health | Healthcare is excellent in Texas, but although it's not required of travellers, health insurance is highly recommended. Unlike many other countries, the United States does not usually offer free or low-cost medical care to its citizens or visitors. Doctors and hospitals are expensive, and in most cases will require advance payment or proof of coverage before they render their services. |
| Safety tips | Although tourist areas are generally safe, U.S. urban areas tend to be less safe than those in Canada. You should always stay alert. This is particularly true in border towns such as El Paso. If you're in doubt about which neighbourhoods are safe, don't hesitate to make inquiries with the hotel front desk staff or the local tourist office. |

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| CLIMATE | |
| General climate | As would be expected in a state as big as Texas, climate varies, sometimes dramatically, by location; it can be snowing in one area of the state, such as Amarillo, while people are swimming at South Padre Island. High temperatures in the summer average in the 30s Celsius in most of the state, while average winter temperatures drop - sometimes much lower than you might expect - as you travel north. Southern Texas is known for its muggy summers, which make it feel hotter than it really is, and contrasts with the dryness of the West Texas deserts. The state's few mountainous areas have more extremes of temperatures, hitting the upper 20s and 30s Celsius during the day only to lunge into the single digits Celsius at night. All areas of Texas get more sunshine than most other parts of the United States. |
| Today's weather | 23 degrees Centigrade and sunny in Houston and Galveston (21 st November 2015) |
| Best time to visit | Any time is a good time to visit Texas, although for Canadians perhaps winter and spring are the most favoured times. |

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| GETTING THERE | |
| Flying | With convenient flights (including non-stops) from major cities across Canada, Texas is ideal for a weekend getaway, multi-day vacation or long stay escape from Canadian winter. Air Canada offers the most non-stop flights per day between Canada |

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| | <p>and Texas, with multiple non-stop flights per day and the choice of George Bush Intercontinental Airport in Houston, Dallas Fort Worth (DFW) International Airport and Austin. American Airlines and United also offer direct flights.</p> <p>Houston is 3 flying hours from Toronto and 4 hours from Montreal</p> |
| Cities | <p>There are two special feature sections at the end of this Texas file for Houston and Galveston.</p> <p>Texas is home three of the largest cities in the US: Dallas, San Antonio and Houston.</p> |
| Distances | <p>Texas is BIG! For instance: Dallas to Galveston is 460kms; Dallas to Houston 380kms; Brownsville to Amarillo is over 1,200kms.</p> |
| Trains | <p>Amtrak (tel. 800/USA-RAIL; www.amtrak.com) connects Dallas, Austin, and several other Texas cities to both the East and West Coasts.</p> |
| Car Rental | <p>Unless you plan to spend the bulk of your vacation time in a city where walking is the best and easiest way to get around, the most cost-effective, convenient, and comfortable way to travel around Texas is by car. The interstate highway system connects cities and towns all over the country and the state; in addition to these high-speed, limited-access roadways, there's an extensive network of federal, state, and local highways and roads. Some of the national car-rental companies include Alamo (tel. 800/462-5266; www.alamo.com), Avis (tel. 800/230-4898; www.avis.com), Budget (tel. 800/527-0700; www.budget.com), Dollar (tel. 800/800-3665; www.dollar.com), Hertz (tel. 800/654-3131; www.hertz.com), National (tel. 800/227-7368; www.nationalcar.com), and Thrifty tel. 800/847-4389; www.thrifty.com</p> |
| Buses | <p>Although bus travel is often the most economical form of public transit for short hops between U.S. cities, it can also be slow and uncomfortable. However, the urban bus networks in Texas are generally efficient, good value and modern.</p> |

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| TARGET GROUPS | |
| Kids | <p>Kids will love the dinosaurs at the Witte Museum in San Antonio, the Great Outdoors almost anywhere in Texas and of course the Gulf Coast beaches – almost 1,000 kms of sands and dunes.</p> <p>SeaWorld San Antonio will delight the youngsters too.</p> |
| Teens | <p>Traverse through the tree canopy on zip-lines just 50kms west of Austin, Texas. Cypress Valley Canopy Tours is known for eco-adventure tours. Strapped into mountain climbing gear, guides take guests through a cypress-lined creek high up in the canopy.</p> <p>Teens will also love the Cowboy attractions of Fort Worth and the theme parks between Dallas and Fort Worth.</p> |
| Romance | <p>The Big Skies of the Texas plains, the exclusive spa resorts of the cities and the 1000 kilometers of beach for long walks in the twilight...all offer scope for romance and special time together. And the romantic River</p> |

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| | Walk of San Antonio of course... |
| Zoomers | The Gulf Coast of Texas, particularly Galveston, has become the centre for many Canadian snowbirds escaping the winter chill. Merit Vacations offer long stay vacations in Galveston that cater for those who do not have their own accommodation on Texas' south shore. |

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| UNIQUES | |
| Texas Fun Facts | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Texas is the largest of the contiguous states with 267,277 square miles. • The Texas Capitol in Austin is the tallest domed capitol building in the country, measuring 309 feet. • More than 5,000 flowering plants are native to Texas. • Texas has more than 4,959-square miles of fresh water more than any state except Alaska. • Texas' four national forests and the Big Thicket National Preserve offer more than 730,000 acres of woodland recreation. • Caddo Lake in East Texas is the state's largest natural lake. • The King Ranch in Kingsville is the largest ranch in Texas and is slightly larger than the state of Rhode Island. • Texas has more than 1,000 kms of coastline to explore. • Houston, Dallas and San Antonio are among the nation's 10 largest cities. Texas is the second most populous state in the nation estimated at more than 20 million residents. • The largest concentration of bats in the world is found in Bracken Cave near San Antonio, home to some 20 million Mexican free-tailed bats. • Texas is the fifth largest wine producer in the United States. • The tallest Texan stands a whopping 52 feet tall – it's Big Tex, the friendly cowboy who welcomes visitors to the State Fair of Texas. • The world's largest livestock auction is held in Amarillo. • There are over 300,000 kms of streams and rivers in Texas. • The world's third largest single structure telescope is atop Mount Fowlkes in the Davis Mountains. • The longest footbridge in the U.S. is in Rusk. • First word transmitted by a human from the moon: "Houston." • The Dallas/Fort Worth International Airport is larger than the island of Manhattan, New York. • The world's first computer chip was produced by Texas Instruments in Dallas in 1958. • Six nations have ruled Texas: Spain, France, Mexico, the Republic of Texas, the Confederate States and the United States. • The tallest peak in Texas is Guadalupe Peak in the Guadalupe Mountains. • State motto: Friendship |

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| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • State nickname: Lone Star State • State mammal: Armadillo • State bird: Mockingbird • State tree: Pecan • State flower: Bluebonnet • State dish: Chili |
| <p>History</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 10,000 B.C.-A.D. 1500 Prehistoric and Native American tribes occupy the territory between the Rio Grande in the south and the Red River in the north. • 1519 A Spanish explorer, Alonso Alvarez de Piñeda, explores and maps the Texas coastline. • 1528 Cabeza de Vaca shipwrecks on Galveston Island and spends the next few years exploring Texas. • 1682 Spanish missionaries establish the first two missions in present-day Texas, near El Paso. • 1685 The Frenchman LaSalle establishes Fort St. Louis on the coast and lays claim to Texas for France. • 1716-89 Spain establishes Catholic missions in Texas and the new towns San Antonio, Goliad, and Nacogdoches. • 1821 Stephen F. Austin receives a grant from the Mexican government to begin colonization in Texas, and many thousands of Americans settle over the next 2 decades. • 1835 Texans turn back Mexican troops at the Battle of Gonzales, instituting the Texas Revolution. • 1836 The Texas Declaration of Independence is signed and an interim government for the Republic of Texas is formed. A small Texan army is overwhelmed by the Mexican army during a 2-week siege at San Antonio's Battle of the Alamo. Nearly 400 Texans are executed by the Mexicans at the Goliad Massacre, under order of Santa Anna. Texans decisively defeat Mexican forces at the Battle of San Jacinto and win independence. • 1845 U.S. president James Polk annexes Texas and signs legislation making Texas the 28th state. • 1846 The Mexican-American War erupts over boundary disputes, establishing Texas's southern boundary at the Rio Grande River. • 1861 Texas secedes from the Federal Union and joins the Confederate States of America. • 1870 The U.S. Congress readmits Texas into the Union. • 1925 Texas becomes the second state to elect a woman governor, Miriam Ferguson. • 1963 President John F. Kennedy is assassinated in Dallas. Texan Lyndon B. Johnson is sworn in as president. • 1964 The Space Center in Houston (now named for Lyndon B. Johnson) becomes permanent home to NASA. |

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| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1970s Unprecedented population growth as "Sun Belt" seekers flood the state; oil industry is catalyst behind booming economy. • 1994 Texas becomes the second-most-populous state in the nation. • 2000 After a prolonged and disputed election, Texas Governor George W. Bush is ushered into the presidency of the United States by the U.S. Supreme Court. |
| Books | Lonely Planet's Texas is a concise and well written guide to all of Texas: http://shop.lonelyplanet.com/usa/texas-travel-guide-4/ |
| 1000 Places to see before you die | No less than 33 entries in the USA & Canada edition: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Central Texas Barbeque - Lake Austin Spa Resort - Austin's live music scene - Spamarama and the Austin Festival subculture - Bandera, Cowboy Capital of the World - Big Bend National Park - Palo Duro Canyon State Park - Space Center Houston - The Dallas Arts District - Deluxe Hotels of Dallas - Sixth Floor Museum, Dallas - The State Fair of Texas (Sept/Oct) - Stockyards National Historic District, Fort Worth - Cowtown's Cultural District, Fort Worth - Fredericksburg: Germany in Texas - Galveston: sandcastle architecture and Victorian splendor - Gruene: the dance halls of the Hill Country - Café Annie, Houston - Houston Livestock Show and Rodeo - Houston's Art Museums - Jefferson and Caddo Lake: elegant grace and spooky waters - Kerrville Folk Festival: music by the Guadalupe River - Cibolo Creek Ranch, Marfa - Marfa: maximal sky, minimal art - The Mountains of West Texas - The Great Texas Birding Trail - Round Top Antiques Fair: capital of vintage shopping - The Alamo and The Missions Trail - River Walk, San Antonio - San Antonio's Hispanic Heritage - Texas comfort food: Mexican food for Gringos - South Texas Gulf Coast - Texas Hill Country |

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The Regions of Texas

Texas is a big state, so it has been broken down into regions, each with descriptive names. Each region and city has its own flavour, and a Texas vacation offers your clients a diverse and culturally stimulating experience.

1. Big Bend Country offers a two-nation vacation

Big Bend Country is in the westernmost region of Texas, bordering New Mexico and Mexico. Pifas Silva, Communications Manager for the El Paso CVB, says that clients can have a “two-nation vacation”, thanks to its proximity to Mexico.

El Paso is a great ‘gateway’ city to experience a blend of different cultures; in El Paso, you can ‘do Texas different’ – they have a unique culture, with Mexican heritage and Spanish speakers.

New developments in El Paso include a golf course by the airport, a new Doubletree hotel in 2008, a revitalization of the downtown area and a burgeoning museum district.

2. Gulf Coast region – Space out in Houston

The Gulf Coast region is situated on the Gulf of Mexico and includes the cities of Houston and Galveston. Galveston is a port city, with many cruise ships stopping over for the day, including ships from Royal Caribbean International.

Houston is the fourth largest city in the U.S., with over 5 million residents. The NASA space program is based here, and visitors can go to the Space Centre Houston to see and experience it. There’s also a boardwalk, a fine museum district, and Houston Livestock, one of the largest rodeos in the world.

Golfers will also find lots to do in Houston, with over 160 courses ranging from municipal courses to high-end. Reasonable green fees and a wide range of golf facilities will suit any budget.

3. Hill Country – Live music and lavender fields

The Hill Country region is located in the heart of Texas and includes Austin, the state capital and the ‘live music capital of the world’, in addition to Fredericksburg, a city with European roots.

Fredericksburg is like “the Provence of the United States,”. The city was settled by German immigrants, and still retains a European old-world feel. Fragrant lavender fields, wineries, and 300 unique bed & breakfast inns offer a charming stay for visitors.

Austin is the state capital, famous for live music and the South by Southwest music festival, an annual event with over 500 acts. Another

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internationally renowned event is the Austin City Limits Festival, the second largest music festival in the U.S.

4. Piney Woods

If you haven't experienced this part of Texas, you should know all those tall, beautiful green things are not funny-looking cacti. Sure, they have pointy needles too, but they're actually pine trees. Believe it or not, Texas has huge tracts of land bathed in the dappled light beneath these steeple-high pine trees, as well as broad hardwood forests too. Dotted with uniquely charming towns, this area contains a mixture of beauty, culture and history that draws immense interest.

5. Panhandle Plains

The Panhandle Plains region is in the north, bordering New Mexico and Oklahoma. Lubbock and Amarillo are some of the major cities in this region, and travellers will see vast spaces, cattle, and the wide open plains that characterize the 'Wild West' and cowboy movies. The northernmost region of Texas got its name for the way it looks like the handle of a frying pan.

6. Prairies and Lakes region

'The Big D', Dallas, is located in this region, as well as Fort Worth, a major hotbed of cowboys and Western culture.

The city of Grapevine, located by the Dallas-Fort Worth airport, is a historic resort town with artisans, gift shops, galleries and 10 vineyards. Visitors can take the oldest steam train in the U.S. (dating from 1896) to the Fort Worth Stockyards Historic District.

In Fort Worth, you can tour the Ewing Family's mansion as seen in the TV show 'Dallas', visit the National Cowgirl Museum and Hall of Fame. Of course, Fort Worth is one of the many places in Texas where you can experience real cowboy life on a ranch.

7. South Texas Plains

The South Texas Plains region is at the southern tip of the state. San Antonio is one of the major cities in this area, filled with rich Texas history and landmark buildings like the Alamo. Spanish missions, the River Walk, and modern attractions like Sea World, a host of museums and a Six Flags park make for an excellent family vacation.

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| SPORTS ACTIVITIES | Reliant Stadium is the dazzling \$367 million facility that's home to the |
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| | <p>NFL team, the Houston Texans; it features a retractable roof and natural grass field. Baseball – Texas Rangers based in Arlington and Houston Astros Hockey – Dallas Stars. Basketball – San Antonio Spurs are a very successful NBA team</p> |
| <p>Golf</p> | <p>Here in Texas, not every hole in the ground spouts oil. Fact is, you can play 18 at more than 750 golf courses in the state. Come test your skill at some of the country's most diverse and challenging courses, which are home to numerous PGA and LPGA tour events. And of course, the 19th Hole is famous here, too. With more than 900 courses in the state, you won't be shy any rounds if you come to play the links. If you do pack your clubs while visiting Texas, you won't be alone. You can count over 70 of the top PGA players as Texas residents.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Four Seasons Resort and Club at Las Colinas A short drive from DFW Airport, the Four Seasons Las Colinas is a true rarity-a four-star hotel with two equally great golf courses. The Tournament Players Course, and at the resort's alternate course, Cottonwood Valley, designed by Robert Trent Jones II the first hole features a huge green shaped like the state of Texas. - Tour 18 Calling their design America's greatest eighteen holes, the developers of Tour 18 in Houston (and a second Tour 18 course located between Dallas and Fort Worth) have reproduced an assortment of great golf holes from famous courses around the country. While you may not actually "walk in the footsteps of the legends," as the promos claim, Tour 18's use of aerial photography and computerized CAD technology has made for remarkably accurate simulations. - The Sand Greens of McLean Lions Grass greens require both an irrigation system and lots of water, so from the first days of Texas golf, sand greens were a logical choice. Now those sand greens remain on only one course in the state and only a handful in the entire country. - The new Horseshoe Bay Resort offers outstanding golf facilities including three Robert Trent Jones Sr. designed courses (Apple Rock, Ram Rock and Slick Rock) as well as an 18-hole Whitewater Putting Course that is lit for night play. - Home of the original Legends of Golf tournament and the PGA Seniors Champions Tour held every year, Austin boasts Barton Creek Resort and Spa, one of the nation's premier golf resorts and keeper of the #1 and #2 rated golf courses in Texas. The resort's championship courses, designed by Tom Fazio, Arnold Palmer and Ben Crenshaw, are a tribute to the game and the unique terrain of the Hill Country |
| <p>Fishing</p> | <p>Galveston Exciting varieties of food and game fish are found in Gulf waters off</p> |

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| | Galveston Island. Fishermen may join one of the many party boats for bay or offshore action. Offshore species are sailfish, marlin, ling, wahoo, king mackerel, bonito, pompano, red snapper, and other big league species. |
| Dude Ranches | As one would expect in a major cattle-ranching state like Texas, there are ample opportunities for visitors to saddle up and hit the trail with genuine bow-legged cowboys. Close to 100 working ranches welcome guests. There are a number of ranches in the San Antonio area, and of course the West Texas plains have more than its share. A complete list of ranches, with contact information and other details, is available on the Texas Tourism website at www.traveltex.com |
| Hiking | <p>There are plenty of hiking trails in Texas, including those at the numerous state parks. Perhaps the most scenic trails are in the Big Bend and Guadalupe Mountains national parks - it's especially hard to beat the spectacular beauty of a fall hike in McKittrick Canyon at Guadalupe Mountains National Park. Also very attractive are the hiking trails at Palo Duro Canyon State Park in the Panhandle Plains. Hikers need to be prepared though; take plenty of water when hiking in the desert, watch for poisonous snakes and insects most everywhere, and use mosquito repellent in the Gulf Coast area.</p> <p>The Great Texas Coastal Birding Trail (GTCBT) has been developed to help birders find the great avian resources along the Texas coast, and to ensure that the Texas coastal birding experience is rich and varied. There is a Galveston Island Loop.</p> |
| Cycling | <p>Franklin Mountains State Park, located near El Paso, offers mountain biking through Chihuahuan Desert habitat</p> <p>Copper Breaks in North Texas attracts expert riders with its Big Loop Trail cutting through rugged badlands.</p> <p>Tyler State Park is one of the top mountain biking areas in the state, difficulty cutting through a hilly stretch of Pinyonwoods.</p> <p>Huntsville State Park cuts through tall pine forest in classic Pinyonwoods country; alligators crossing swampy areas</p> <p>Dinosaur Valley State Park allows you to pedal where giant reptiles once walked.</p> <p>Caprock Canyons Trailway is a 100 km section of former railbed that stretches from the top of the Caprock escarpment to the Red River Valley.</p> |
| Water Sports | Swimming and water-skiing are practically year-round activities along the Gulf Coast and at Amistad National Recreation Area in West Texas. The many lakes around the state - especially in East Texas and the Hill Country around San Antonio - also offer ample opportunity for a variety of water sports, especially canoeing and power boating. In Austin, a highlight is swimming at the natural springs pool called |

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| | Barton Springs, a revered local favorite. Rafters usually head to the Rio Grande near Big Bend National Park, where they can float downstream on their own or go with one of the local rafting companies. For beachcombing, try Padre Island National Seashore . |
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| CULTURE | |
| Arts | <p>Dallas has the largest urban arts district in America. Here's some highlights:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Trammell and Margaret Crow Collection of Asian Art: free entrance, contemporary and historic art, provides insight into Asian cultures; fabulous jade collection - Nasher Sculpture Center: features early modern works and art of the postwar period; indoor and outdoor sculptures; sculpture garden; child friendly museum; includes works by Moore, Matisse, Picasso and Rodin - Goss Gallery: always features exciting new and innovative travelling exhibitions (when I was there, John Lennon's piano was a star exhibit), changing monthly with contemporary artists - Dallas Museum of Art: a comprehensive collection often highlighted by major exhibitions and with activities for visitors to really experience and discover art |
| Music | It's hard to imagine an itch for entertainment, high or low, that Austin , Texas couldn't scratch. For starters, live music is found everywhere and in just about every genre. And the level of virtuosity is impressive. Many famous musicians such as the Dixie Chicks and Shawn Colvin call Austin home and frequently perform here. But there are also a large number of lesser known but great performers, who for one reason or another are content to stay in Austin and enjoy a comfortable and modest level of success. |
| Films | Texas has been the backdrop of innumerable films and you can tour an active film studio in Dallas. |
| Museums | <p>Dallas is home to a large and vibrant arts culture and eight of its top museums have created The Fair Park Passport offering 40 per cent off admission. The list includes; Age of Steam Railroad Museum, African American Museum, Dallas Aquarium, Dallas Museum of Natural History, Hall of State, Science Place, Texas Discovery Gardens and The Women's Museum.</p> <p>One of the most unique museums in the passport program is The Women's Museum. The museum honours the past and explores the contributions of women through fun, state-of-the-art interactive exhibits. World-renowned photographer Annie Leibovitz recently chose The Women's Museum as the permanent home to her latest exhibit Women.</p> |
| Festivals | <p>Fort Worth Stock Show and Rodeo – In January 2016, the Fort Worth Stock Show and Rodeo, also known as the Southwestern Exposition and Livestock show, returns to the Will</p> |

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| | <p>Rogers Memorial Center for its 120th year. Events include Best of the West Ranch Rodeo, livestock events, Western shopping, family-friendly events, Best of Mexico Celebracion, Stock Show Goes Pink and more. Events take place January – February in the heart of Fort Worth’s Cultural District.</p> <p>Red Steagall Cowboy Gathering and Western Swing Festival – This October, Fort Worth welcomes the Red Steagall Cowboy Gathering and Western Swing Festival to the Stockyards National Historic District. Voted “Best Cowboy Gathering” and “Best Family Event” by readers of American Cowboy Magazine, this three day event features chuck-wagon cook-offs, fiddle contests, cowboy poetry, ranch rodeo, live Western music and more.</p> <p>Fiesta de las Luminarias – San Antonio Stroll along the lush banks of the San Antonio River guided by more than 2,500 luminarias made of warmly glowing candles in sand-filled bags. These line the walkways to symbolically mark the "lighting of the way" for the Holy Family. Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays in December</p> <p>San Antonio Stock Show & Rodeo – Feb Enjoy star-studded concerts, carnival, livestock centers, shopping and PRCA rodeo action. AT&T Center.</p> <p>Mariachi Vargas Extravaganza – San Antonio Nov/Dec. Events include a mariachi-inspired art exhibit, serenades by students at the historic River Walk, workshops and mariachi competitions.</p> |
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| ATTRACTIONS | |
| Beaches | <p>Texas has 1000 km of coastline. Sitting on the warm waters of the Gulf of Mexico, Texas offers many great beaches, including two of the best-known in the country: Padre Island National Seashore and South Padre Island. The water’s fine and the warm waters of the Gulf of Mexico meet the 26 degree C median temperature of the Lone Star State, making Texas beaches among the most calming and beautiful in the nation.</p> <p>The best beaches in Texas are centered around three locales: Galveston, Corpus Christi (gateway to Padre and Mustang islands) and South Padre Island.</p> <p>There are plenty of beaches all around Galveston. In fact, there are 50kms of beachfront on the island including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - East Beach: The biggest in the Lone Star state, this popular beach features outdoor concerts, special events and other activities for people of all ages. And unlike most public beaches, East Beach allows the |

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| | <p>consumption of alcohol.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Stewart Beach: Families are the focus at this popular, amenities-rich beach park, where volleyball, sandcastle competitions, concerts and other family-oriented activities are the norm all summer long. - Galveston Island State Park: There's an activity for everyone at this historic, 2,000-acre park, whether its camping, hiking, swimming, bird-watching, biking or simply munching on a burger in the picnic areas. |
| <p>Wildlife</p> | <p>Texas has some of the best bird-watching opportunities in the United States, especially along the Gulf Coast, where you often see colorful Neotropical species found nowhere else in the United States. Check out the numerous national wildlife refuges, or stop practically anywhere along the coast - like the Rockport area. You can get bird checklists from most visitor centers and wildlife refuges, and online from the Northern Prairie Wildlife Research Center (www.npwrc.usgs.gov/resource/othrdata/chekbird/r2/48.htm). Also, check with the Audubon Society (tel. 800/967-7425; www.audubon.org) to see what the national organization and its various Texas chapters are offering by way of birding tours. Wildlife viewing is especially good at Big Bend National Park</p> <p>McAllen is the number one birding spot in the US with more than 500 species recorded! The World Birding Center is a new network of sites that offer visitors a dazzling array of birding adventures, from wilderness walks and float trips to hands-on, state-of-the-art educational exhibits. The headquarters, the first of nine sites, was recently opened at Bentsen-Rio Grande Valley State Park, recognized as a world-class birding destination. To learn more about birding in Texas, visit www.worldbirdingcenter.org .</p> |
| <p>Parks</p> | <p>Vast and wild, Big Bend National Park is a land of extremes - and a few contradictions. Its rugged terrain harbors thousands of species of plants and animals - some seen practically nowhere else on earth - and a visit here can be a hike into the sun-baked desert, a float down a majestic river through the canyons, or a trek among high mountains where bears and mountain lions rule.</p> <p>Once a long reef poking up through the ocean, then a dense forest, Guadalupe Mountains National Park is today a rugged wilderness of tall Douglas firs and lush vegetation rising out of a vast desert. Here you will find varied hiking trails, panoramic vistas, the highest peak in Texas, plant and animal life unique in the Southwest, and a canyon that many believe is the prettiest spot in all of Texas.</p> |
| <p>Gardens</p> | <p>The Botanical Research Institute of Texas (BRIT), an international cultural and scientific centre for conservation (www.brit.org), has opened a 69,000-square-foot facility, located at 1800 University Drive in the heart of the Fort Worth Cultural District.</p> |

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| | <p>Moody Gardens in Galveston features formal gardens, Japanese Garden of Life, the Vietnam Memorial, Hope Rose Garden, Horticulture Terraces, the Vineyard, plus nature/walking trails. Moody Gardens is an education/entertainment museum, and is easily recognizable for its three large glass pyramids. The first one built was the rainforest pyramid, which holds trees, plants, birds, fish, and butterflies from several different rainforest habitats. A stroll through the building will fascinate anyone who has never been in a rainforest environment, and the unusual species of Amazonian fish, birds, and butterflies are not often seen in zoos. The aquarium pyramid displays life from four of the world's oceans: penguins from Antarctica, harbour seals from the northern Pacific, and Caribbean and South Pacific reef dwellers. There is also a petting aquarium. The discovery pyramid displays space exploration.</p> |
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| OTHER ACTIVITIES | |
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| Shopping | Texas is the state for shoppers! All the major cities have great malls, often the size of small European countries. You can also head to the Texan border with Mexico where beautiful hand-made Mexican treasures abound in cities such as Brownsville and Laredo. Cowboy hats and boots make great Texan souvenirs. |
| Markets | The largest Mexican market outside of Mexico lies in downtown San Antonio at El Mercado . With mariachis and folk dancers everywhere, you can wander around the pottery stalls and leather craftsmen and be tempted by the colourful papier mache decorations. |
| Nightlife | For fans of the performing arts, Houston is fertile ground. Few cities in the country can equal it in the quality of its resident orchestra, opera, ballet, and theater companies. In addition, there are several organizations that bring talented artists and companies here from around the country and the world, presenting everything from Broadway shows to Argentine tango groups to string quartets. San Antonio has its symphony and its Broadway shows, and you can see both at one of the most beautiful old movie palaces in the country. But much of what the city has to offer is not quite so mainstream. Latin influences lend spice to some of the best local nightlife. Don't forget San Antonio is America's capital for Tejano music, a unique blend of German polka and northern Mexico rancho sounds (with a dose of pop added for good measure). You can sit on one side of the San Antonio River and watch colorful dance troupes like Ballet Folklórico perform on the other. And Southtown, with its many Hispanic-oriented shops and galleries, celebrates its art scene with the monthly First Friday, a kind of extended block party |
| Casinos | Lucky Eagle Casino in the South Texas Plains is operated by the Kickapoo Indians, this handsome facility features bingo hall, and Las |

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| | Vegas-type games with state-of-the-art equipment. Also features restaurant, sports bar and scheduled live entertainment. |
| CUISINE | Explore the mouthwatering Texas BBQ Trail , taste succulent seafood, spice it up with Tex-Mex, or enjoy Texas contemporary American cuisine. And pair it with tasty wine along the Hill Country Wine Trail . |
| Food | Texans are famous for their love of artery-clogging steaks the size of Volkswagens, but steak - whether broiled or chicken-fried - is only part of the story. The real holy trinity of Texas eats consists of three down-home staples no true Texan can do without for long: chili, barbecue, and Tex-Mex. |
| Drink | Texas is the fifth largest wine producing state in the US, many in the Central Texas Hill Country around Fredericksburg and the High Plains near Lubbock. Llano Estacado and Pheasant Ridge are national award winners. There are more than 180 in total and for a unique weekend getaway, visitors are invited to follow the Texas Hill Country Wine Trail and stop to explore some of the 24 wineries en route. Texas now also boasts over 80 microbreweries. |
| Restaurants | <p>Some Texan recommendations:</p> <p>Café Ashton (Fort Worth; tel. 817/332-0100): The creative New American bistro fare at this swank new restaurant, in a boutique hotel of the same description, has quickly shot to the top of everyone's best-of lists in Fort Worth. Hotel dining is rarely this good or this intimate. See what all the fuss is about.</p> <p>Mark's (Houston; tel. 713/523-3800): No fussy French nouvelle here, and no boring steak and potatoes either. Mark's manages to serve up dishes that can satisfy at some deep subconscious level while they fulfill our eternal quest for something new. This is the New American cooking as it should be performed.</p> <p>Cafe Annie (Houston; tel. 713/840-1111): No other restaurant in Houston garners quite the attention that this place does from both food critics and the public alike. With its innovative Southwestern cooking, the best wine list in the city, and a master sommelier (the only "master" in Texas), the restaurant has its credentials. Chef/owner Robert Del Grande offers up wonderful dishes that show just how fertile the crossbreeding of Mexican and American cooking can be.</p> <p>Le Rêve (San Antonio; tel. 210/212-2221): After several years on the fine-dining scene, this restaurant has proved that it's got staying power and that San Antonio is ready for a place where men have to wear jackets and there is seating for dinner. The reward is stellar French food.</p> |

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| | <p>Uchi (Austin; tel. 512/916-4808): Don't think of this restaurant as just a good place for sushi and Japanese cuisine. It's a great restaurant, period, with creative cooking that transcends its humble roots. The setting, in a beautifully revamped 1930s house, is transcendent, too.</p> <p>Café Central (El Paso; tel. 915/545-2233): Well worth the splurge, Café Central is a sleek urban bistro serving sophisticated international cuisine. The menu changes daily, but always offers a wide range of standout fare - most notably creative Southwestern interpretations of traditional Continental dishes - such as guyamas shrimp with a zesty tequila-cilantro sauce. The wine list is one of the city's best, with nearly 300 bottles, and desserts include the best leches (Mexican milk cakes) in all of Texas.</p> <p>Avanti Authentic Italian Restaurant (Del Rio; tel. 830/775-3363): Who would ever dream of going to a West Texas border town for great Italian food? No one, until they've been to Avanti, which offers some of the best homemade northern Italian dishes anywhere. There's also an excellent selection of northern Italian wines.</p> |
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| MORE INFO | |
| Brochures | For a free copy of the Texas State Travel Guide, Canadians can call 1-800-8888-TEX |
| Connect | Website: www.TravelTex.com for Texas holiday planning Connect with Texas Tourism on facebook: https://www.facebook.com/TexasTourism Follow Texas Tourism on Twitter: https://twitter.com/texastourism |

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| HOUSTON | <p>Houston is the fourth largest city in the U.S with a population of 2,151,000 - and big with attitude and appeal. It is home to popular attractions such as the Space Center, 18 world-renowned museums, more than 8,000 dining options, a vibrant arts scene and exciting nightlife. From the quirky Beer Can House (spawned from the bright idea that beer cans would make good house siding, a folk art legend was born) to the National Museum of Funeral History, to the spectacular Menil Collection (one of the world's finest private art collections) - Houston's museums and arts scene is varied and world-class, and the fifth largest in the US.</p> <p>Houston will host Super Bowl 51 in 2017, and in anticipation of the big event, an investment in infrastructure of more than US\$1.5 billion is currently taking place in the downtown convention district.</p> |
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Houston is hip and trendy – its chic boutique hotels such as Hotel Za Za, Hotel Icon and Hotel Sorella offer comfort and contemporary design. Houston is also a shopping mecca - the Uptown/Galleria area is well known for its trifecta of stellar shopping, fine dining and great hotels – more than 700 retail choices are within just two miles and you will find every brand name you could wish for. Shopping is tax free for Canadians (refunds are processed at the airport)! In contrast to the city’s modern side, eclectic “Montrose” and “The Heights” offer visitors quaint historic areas with charming bistros, diners, art galleries and boutiques.

A fun way to explore the neighbourhood of Montrose is the “Montrose Dine Around” walking tour - combining a cultural, historical, and architectural tour with a progressive meal, held at four critically acclaimed local restaurants. Other culinary tours on offer in Houston include a walking tour of downtown culinary delights and a “Where the chefs eat” tour.

The new-and-spectacular Bayport Cruise Terminal offers ultra-modern facilities to make your cruise departure easy and stress free. Princess Cruises is now sailing out of the Bayport Cruise Terminal as the Caribbean Princess and Emerald Princess make Houston their home port for Western Caribbean sailings. And Norwegian Cruise Line has returned to Houston to to the new terminal with the Norwegian Jewel sailing seven-day Western Caribbean itineraries. And if you are cruising - stay and play in Houston, it is perfect for “pre” or “post” cruise stop overs. The difficulty will be to decide what to pack into your stay!

The Houston Space Center is a “must see’ – it’s exciting to be behind the gates of NASA, the site of so many dramatic events in Man’s quest to reach the stars. NASA’s official visitors’ center is a multi-sensory experience for adults and children alike. Living in Space (an insider’s look at the space shuttle), Blast Off and the NASA Tram Tour with a glimpse of Mission Control are just a few of the ways to experience great moments in space exploration. Kids have their own space-theme play area.

The Kemah Boardwalk is home to fabulous waterfront restaurants, amusements, charming retail stores, festivals and seaside shows every day. There are rides from the gentle Carousel to the white knuckle Boardwalk Bullet! Ride the train and Ferris wheel and plunge 140 feet on the Drop Zone. Kemah Boardwalk appeals to all kids – young and old!

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| <p>CityPASS</p> | <p>Enjoy Houston’s Top Attractions with CityPASS A great way to see the sights of Houston is to purchase a Houston CityPASS. You will save almost 50 percent on admission to the city’s five must-see attractions, and skip most ticket lines too. The CityPASS booklet, which is thinner than an iPod and sized to fit in a pocket, is loaded with a carefully selected collection of the city’s most sought-after sites: Space Center Houston (includes tram tour) Downtown Aquarium Houston Museum of Natural Science Houston Zoo – OR - Kemah Boardwalk Museum of Fine Arts, Houston - OR - Children’s Museum of Houston</p> <p>Users of the Houston CityPASS can visit five attractions for USD \$51 for adults and USD \$41 for children ages 3-11. www.citypass.com</p> |
| <p>Livestock Show and Rodeo Concerts</p> | <p>The 2016 Houston Livestock Show and Rodeo runs March 1 – 20, 2016 at Reliant Park. Tickets are available online at www.rodeohouston.com or by phone at 1.800.726.1313</p> |
| <p>Cruising from Houston</p> | <p>The new-and-spectacular Bayport Cruise Terminal offers ultra-modern facilities to make your cruise departure easy and stress free. Princess Cruises is now sailing out of the Bayport Cruise Terminal as the Caribbean Princess and Emerald Princess make Houston their home port for Western Caribbean sailings. And Norwegian Cruise Line has returned to Houston to to the new terminal with the Norwegian Jewel sailing seven-day Western Caribbean itineraries. And if you are cruising - stay and play in Houston, it is perfect for “pre” or “post” cruise stop overs. The difficulty will be to decide what to pack into your stay! For more information on the Cruise Terminal: http://www.portofhouston.com/cruise-information</p> |
| <p>Tours</p> | <p>Tours are available to a number of the big attractions in Houston:</p> <p>Space Center Houston Space Center Houston, NASA’s official visitors center, is a multi-sensory experience for adults and children. It’s exciting to be behind the gates of NASA. Living in Space (an insider’s look at the space shuttle), Blast Off and the NASA Tram Tour with a glimpse of Mission Control are just a few of the ways to experience great moments in space exploration. Space Center Houston has announced the opening of the new international landmark Independence Plaza on Jan. 23, 2016. The eight-story-tall multiple-exhibit complex features a shuttle replica mounted on top of the first shuttle carrier aircraft, the NASA 905. The</p> |

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jumbo-sized complex will give visitors a rare glimpse into the historic shuttle era and the NASA breakthroughs and technological advances gained from the shuttle program. In the shuttle they will see the flight deck, mid-deck, payload bay and exhibits. The airplane will have multiple exhibits in seven different areas that explore innovation, science and technology. Visitors will see inside the plane's cockpit and learn how the plane was retrofitted to carry the shuttle.

Kids have their own space-theme play area.

Downtown Aquarium, right in the middle of downtown, was a redevelopment project that combined two historic landmarks for an indoor-outdoor attraction. It amplifies the story of the region's aquatic and historical details. In addition to 200 species of marine life examples in 500,000 gallons of water, exhibits bring to life the look, sounds and creatures of the Louisiana swamp, a sunken 17th Century Spanish galleon, and the Gulf of Mexico waters as seen by off-shore rig divers. The restaurant has spectacular views of the aquarium and downtown Houston.

Kemah Boardwalk

This is the perfect getaway! Enjoy amusement rides, nine waterfront restaurants, shopping, midway games, live entertainment and weekend festivals. Ride the train and Ferris wheel and plunge 140 feet on the Drop Zone. Kemah Boardwalk appeals to all kids – young and old.

Houston Museum of Natural Science

This museum beautifully organizes a wide variety of the planet's animals and natural world. Captivating exhibits of paleontology (fossils), geology and drilling, chemistry, gems and minerals, rare and spectacular shells, Texas wildlife and African wildlife anchor the museum.

The Houston Zoo

This is home to 4,500 exotic animals representing more than 800 species, including Spectacled Bears (the South American answer to pandas), Indochinese Tigers, African lions and an exciting small mammals exhibit. Kids pop out of prairie dog domes in play, or getting a close look at the solitary okapi, who lives alone and come together only to mate in the zoo's 40-exhibit Children's Zoo.

The Museum of Fine Arts

Located in the heart of Houston's Museum District, The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston showcases 5,000 years of world art, from the Stone Age to the present day. The Southwest's premier public art collection showcases African, Asian, American, European, and Latin American art

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| | <p>of various media—painting, sculpture, photography, prints, and decorative arts—in an outdoor sculpture garden and two museum buildings connected by a remarkable light tunnel. Special exhibitions and programs, Cafe Express and the MFAH Shop offer fun for the whole family.</p> <p>Children's Museum of Houston With more than 14 vibrant exhibits, designed for kids' ages birth to 12, the Children's Museum of Houston is rated 5-star nationwide by Citysearch.com and one of the best two in the nation by Child magazine. The Museum offers an action-packed, family experience with innovative exhibits in science and technology, history and culture, health, environmental issues and engineering. New permanent exhibits include Invention Convention a hands-on, minds-on workshop, the three-story exercise adventure PowerPlay and Kidtropolis a kid-sized city.</p> |
| <p>Culinary Houston</p> | <p>The city is considered to have one of the best culinary scenes in the country, with cuisine from around the world in more than 10,000 restaurants covering 35 regions across the globe.</p> <p>Explore the food and culture of some of Houston's most intriguing neighbourhoods on one of these fun Walking Food Tours: http://www.houstonculinarytours.com</p> <p>Downtown Food Tour Historic, and hip, downtown Houston honors the city's rich past while simultaneously embracing the future. Houston's largest business district offers modern skyscrapers, historic facades, world-class athletics, cosmopolitan activities, and a variety of critically acclaimed bars, restaurants and shops. From historic Main Street and Market Square to Green Street, downtown Houston has something for everyone. These three-hour walking food tours will discuss the evolution of the area's history architecture and culture, while stopping at a number of establishments to enjoy a variety of food and drink.</p> <p>Market Square Park/Historic District Just blocks from the Buffalo Bayou as well as the neighbouring warehouse district, north downtown Houston has a history as long as the city itself. From Market Square Park, the former home on the city's first major public to historic, vibrant Main Street, the area has undergone an exciting revitalization. Turn-of-the-century buildings have been painstakingly restored to their former glory and now house a variety of bars, shops, and restaurants. The Food tour may include the following:</p> |

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| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Tex-Mex - Spanish Tapas - Regional American - Craft beers - Locally grown organic produce |
| <p>Shopping</p> | <p>The fourth largest city in the USA, Houston is arguably the style capital of the South. It's home to a Project Runway winner and more than a dozen distinct shopping areas, with retail that runs the gamut from vintage to high-end designer.</p> <p>International shoppers can get a refund of their sales tax at Tax Free Shopping locations around the city or at Bush Intercontinental Airport, Terminals D and E. For a list of participating stores and specific requirements visit http://taxfreetexas.com/</p> <p>The Galleria: Multi-taskers and shopaholics rejoice in the glory of the Galleria and its 375-plus stores and grand ice rink, flanked by Neiman Marcus, Saks Fifth Avenue, Nordstrom and Macy's. Akin to New York's Fifth Avenue or Rodeo Drive in Beverly Hills - with shops like Louis Vuitton, Montblanc, Chanel, Gucci and Versace - the sprawling mall also has hip designer boutiques like Tory Burch and Henri Bendel, plus J. Crew, Lululemon and Aveda.</p> <p>Highland Village: Drive into the palm tree-lined shopping center and take advantage of complimentary valet service for a totally different shopping experience, just a short drive from The Galleria. You'll find BHLDN, Joseph, Anthropologie, Kiehl's, West Elm, Crate & Barrel and Restoration Hardware's The Gallery at Highland Village.</p> <p>Uptown Park: Snag a space in front of your favorite hot spot and walk anywhere you want to go in this convenient arrangement of boutiques, restaurants, spas and wine and sports bars. More than 50 shops dot the chic shopping destination, including Longoria Collection, The University of Texas Co-Op, M Penner, Crave Cupcakes, Berripop, The Tasting Room and Baker Furniture.</p> <p>River Oaks Shopping Center: Built in 1927 and made over in 2007, River Oaks was the first "shopping center" in Houston and one of the first in the country to cater to cars. With Art Deco-style and the glam Landmark River Oaks Theatre marquee to welcome shoppers, prepare for 322,000 square feet of retail</p> |

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therapy in a posh neighborhood. There are 14 restaurants and 76 stores like Brasserie 19, Americas, Bath Junkie, Events, Mia Bridal Couture, Design Within Reach, Sur La Table and Luke's Locker (for custom-fit sneakers).

West Ave:

Set at the crossroads of Upper Kirby and River Oaks, Houston's West Ave development brings together luxury residences, retail and fine dining options. The pedestrian-friendly urban village has drawn some of the city's most talented, along with highly-regarded regional and national brands to create a hub of fashion, dining and nightlife. The art-deco-inspired development--which offers 195,000 square feet of retail space--is home to luxury retailers including Q Custom Clothier, Rye 51, Ivannia Boutique and Ivory Bridal Atelier. Tootsies, a Houston-based luxury retailer of women's clothing, serves as West Ave's anchor store, occupying an entire city block.

Rice Village:

In this quaint cluster of shops and restaurants, which is tucked away a few blocks from the Rice University campus, expect to find the latest from local fashionistas like Alexandra Knight and Elaine Turner, a chic accessories designer, and Project Runway winner Chloe Dao's world-renowned Dao Chloe Dao boutique. Other tenants include Half-Price Books, Naked Body + Bath and staples like Victoria's Secret, Chico's and Banana Republic.

Downtown:

The Shops at Houston Center house a variety of retailers - from Jos. A Banks Clothiers to Dress Barn - and at nearby GreenStreet, find stores like Forever 21 and BCBG.

Westheimer Curve:

Lower Westheimer, also known as the Westheimer Curve, is a winding road of offbeat and sometimes amazing shopping. You never know what surprise piece you'll find at Buffalo Exchange, a thrift shop that mixes street clothes with last season's designer duds, or at the minimalist-chic Couture Blowout. Coquette Boutique and Bistro blends much-sought-after designer labels and light bites. Stylish shoppers who want to stretch their dollars make a beeline to Fashion Recycler on Westheimer to nab name brand and designer clothing, handbags and shoes.

Historic Heights:

Surround yourself with the charm of Victorian houses and quaint streets

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| | <p>(19th St., Yale and Studewood) while shopping the eclectic fashion, furniture, art and gifts in one of the most historic 'hoods in Houston. Score vintage fashion at Retropolis and Buffalo Exchange, kitchen accoutrements at Penzey's Spices, as well as furniture finds at Antiques on 19th and Historic Heights Antiques</p> <p>CityCentre: Set in the former Town & Country Mall location in West Houston, the 37-acre, contemporary community blends retail, restaurant, office space, luxury living and nightlife in an open-air environment. Hip restaurants were some of the first on the stellar culinary scene, while Anthropologie, Elaine Turner and J. Crew add to the retail side.</p> <p>For more details, go to: http://www.visithoustontexas.com/media/houston-media-kit/shopping</p> |
| <p>New in Houston</p> | <p>Houston will host Super Bowl 51 in 2017, and in anticipation of the big event, an investment in infrastructure of more than US\$1.5 billion is currently taking place in the downtown convention district.</p> <p>A new 1,000-room Marriott Marquis Hotel is under construction on the north end of the George R. Brown Convention Center (GRB). The new hotel, scheduled to open in the fall of 2016, will be connected by skywalk to the convention center, opposite to the existing 1,200-room Hilton Americas-Houston.</p> <p>Convention District improvements also include a new façade to the GRB and a pedestrian plaza with dining and shopping options in Avenida de las Americas, the avenue in front of the GRB. Six other hotels are currently in construction and will open by the end of 2016, all near the GRB:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hampton Inn/Homewood Suites, with 300 total rooms • Springhill Suites, with 166 rooms • Hotel Alessandra, a 225-room luxury boutique property • Holiday Inn Hotel, a 215-room hotel • Aloft Houston Downtown, a 173-room hotel |
| <p>Connect</p> | <p>Website: www.visithoustontexas.com Connect with Visit Houston on facebook: https://www.facebook.com/VisitHoustonTexas Follow Visit Houston on Twitter: https://twitter.com/visithouston</p> |

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| <p>GALVESTON</p> | <p>There are fifty kilometres of beaches on Galveston Island, where restored mansions rise to greet the seaside sun. Galveston is a delightful historic beach town - known as the "Belle" of the Texas Gulf</p> |
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Coast - and it entices vacationers with its seaside location and gracious charm. Its population is only 48,500, so it's a very different vacation experience to its big city neighbor of Houston.

A romantic island tucked deep within the heart of south Texas, Galveston Island is a popular year-round destination, blending temperate weather and rich history – including one of the largest well-preserved concentrations of Victorian architecture in the US.

You'll never run out of things to do here! The island is also home to a wide variety of family attractions, museums, restaurants, downtown shopping, top resort hotels, and outdoor adventure activities by land or sea. These include kayaking, diving, deep-sea fishing, birding, golfing, beach volleyball and more. And there are also festivals galore in Galveston – from Mardi Gras to the Shrimp Festival.

Much of Galveston's appeal is tied to its well preserved history. Popular historical attractions on the island include the 1892 Victorian mansion Bishop's Palace, the 1895 Moody Mansion and The Downtown Historic Strand Seaport District.

The Strand is lined with Victorian buildings that house quaint boutiques, shops, restaurants and attractions. A couple of blocks over, Postoffice Street is home to art galleries, shops, restaurants and entertainment venues such as The Grand 1894 Opera House.

Galveston has a surprising array of interesting museums. The Galveston Railroad Museum has a large collection of lavishly restored trains. The Offshore Drilling Rig Museum is a museum, educational attraction, and working drilling rig all rolled into one. The Texas Seaport Museum tells the story of Galveston's history as a port with a rich legacy of seaborne commerce and immigration. Galveston was the "Ellis Island of the West"! Plus you can visit the beautifully restored 1877 Tall Ship ELISSA. And, at the Lone Star Flight Museum, visitors can see and even fly in rare historic aircraft from World War II.

Galveston's newest major attraction brings the glory of the island's famous history into the present with world-class amusements at the Galveston Island Historic Pleasure Pier. The new pier stands in the same location a pleasure pier stood in Galveston during the 1940s. Located on the Gulf of Mexico, the Pleasure Pier features thrill rides for adults and kids, midway games, shopping, live music and a Bubba Gump Shrimp Co. restaurant.

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| | <p>On the West End of the island, visitors to Galveston will find a cluster of family and adventure attractions all within walking distance of each other. The first, Moody Gardens, is a 245-acre resort complex known for its large glass pyramid buildings. One of the most visited places in Texas, Moody Gardens has an Aquarium Pyramid and a tropical Rainforest Pyramid that houses more than 1,000 species of plants and free roaming animals from rainforests around the world. Moody Gardens also has 3-D, 4-D and Ridefilm theaters, a golf course, a kid's water park, and historic paddlewheel boat cruises.</p> <p>Right next door, Schlitterbahn Galveston Island Waterpark is open year round with an outdoor and indoor park.</p> |
| <p>Galveston Cultural Delights</p> | <p>Galveston has a blossoming arts and culture scene centred on its historic downtown, which was recently designated as an official cultural arts district in Texas.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The Strand and Postoffice Streets - The Grand 1894 Opera House - Artwalk - Third largest Mardi Gras celebration in the nation - Festivals year-round - Culinary scene |
| <p>Historic Charm</p> | <p>Much of Galveston's appeal is tied to its history, an aspect the island's tight knit tourism community works to preserve. Popular historical attractions on the island include the 1892 Victorian mansion Bishop's Palace, 1895 Moody Mansion, Galveston Railroad Museum, Texas Seaport Museum and 1877 Tall Ship ELISSA. The Downtown Historic Strand Seaport District is located across the street from the Galveston Cruise Terminal. The Strand is lined with Victorian buildings that house quaint boutiques, shops, restaurants and attractions. A couple blocks over, Postoffice Street is home to art galleries, shops, restaurants and entertainment venues such as The Grand 1894 Opera House.</p> |
| <p>World Class Adventure</p> | <p>Galveston's newest major attraction brings the glory of the island's famous history into the present with world-class amusements at the Galveston Island Historic Pleasure Pier. Located on the Gulf of Mexico, the pleasure pier features thrill rides for adults and kids, midway games, shopping, live music and a Bubba Gump Shrimp Co. restaurant. The pier stands in the same location a pleasure pier stood in Galveston during the 1940s.</p> <p>On the West End of the island, visitors to Galveston will find a cluster of family and adventure attractions all within walking distance of each other. The first, Moody Gardens, is a 245-acre resort complex known for its large glass pyramid buildings. One of the most visited places in Texas, Moody Gardens has an Aquarium Pyramid and a tropical Rainforest Pyramid that houses more than 1,000 species of plants and</p> |

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| | <p>free roaming animals from rainforests around the world. Moody Gardens also has 3-D, 4-D and Ridefilm theatres, a golf course, a kid's water park, and historic paddlewheel boat cruises.</p> <p>Right next door, Schlitterbahn Galveston Island Waterpark is open year round with an outdoor and indoor park. Nearby is the Lone Star Flight Museum, where visitors can see and even fly in rare historic aircraft from World War II.</p> |
| <p>Snowbirds</p> | <p>Galveston Island's tropical climate and breathtaking views of the Gulf of Mexico provide the relaxing escape you've been longing for. Yet, you'll feel right at home with the small town culture and southern hospitality found on this historic island.</p> <p>Exploring in Galveston is easy to do as the island offers 50 kms of beaches, world-class attractions and adventure opportunities, one of the largest collections of Victorian architecture in the country, a charming historic downtown and plenty of award-winning restaurants. And, if you're looking to meet fellow long-stay visitors, branch out to the many Winter Texan exclusive events offered throughout the season. You can learn about these events, special savings and other ways to make your long-term stay in Galveston more enjoyable by stopping by the Galveston Island Visitor Information Center located inside Ashton Villa.</p> |
| <p>Accommodations</p> | <p>Galveston Island boasts a tremendous variety of accommodations for every budget and preference.</p> <p>From luxury hotels and resorts to elegant bed and breakfasts, and from vacation beach house rentals to condominiums to RV parks, you will find just the place to suit your needs.</p> <p>Luxury hotels include Hotel Galvez (a Wyndham Historic Hotel), Moody Gardens Hotel & Spa, San Luis Resort, Spa & Conference Center & The Tremont House (a Wyndham Historic Hotel), and are the ideal romantic getaway.</p> <p>Ever stayed in a historic bed & breakfast? The island features unique, historic properties offering a way for you to experience turn of the century living in these restored gems.</p> <p>Beach house rentals are the perfect family retreat vacation. From small, quaint bay homes to extravagant coastal mansions, there is one for every family.</p> <p>Interested in long-term rentals? Galveston Island offers a variety of condominiums along Seawall Boulevard. Live like a true Galvestonian...buy fresh Gulf shrimp straight from the boat and prepare in your kitchen.</p> |
| <p>Cruising from Galveston</p> | <p>Exploring Galveston Island is a natural addition to a cruise vacation. With major cruise lines offering multiple Caribbean cruises from Galveston, many vacationers enjoy excursions on Galveston Island before or after their voyage.</p> |

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| | <p>From the decks of the cruise ships, passengers can easily see the charming Historic Downtown District just one block from the cruise ship terminals on Harborside Drive. The 36-block district offers more than 100 shops, restaurants and galleries housed in beautiful Victorian iron-front buildings. The area is also home to the Texas Seaport Museum, 1877 Tall Ship ELISSA, Great Storm Theater, the Ocean Star Oil Rig Museum, the interactive museum Pirates! Legends of the Gulf Coast, harbour boat dolphin tours, and more.</p> |
| <p>Galveston History</p> | <p>In 1528, when the first Europeans landed, Galveston Island was home to Akokisa and Karankawa Indians who camped, fished and hunted the swampy land and buried their dead here. The Spanish explorer Cabeza de Vaca was shipwrecked on the Island and lived among the Karankawa for several years as a medicine man and slave. In the late 1600's, French explorer Robert Cavalier La Salle claimed this area for King Louis and named it St. Louis.</p> <p>Galveston was named for Bernardo de Gálvez, a Spanish colonial governor and general. Gálvez sent Jose de Evia to chart the Gulf of Mexico from the Texas coast to New Orleans, and on July 23, 1786, de Evia charted an area near the mouth of a river and named it Galveston Bay. Later, the island and city took the same name. Bernardo de Gálvez died the same year, never setting foot on his namesake island.</p> <p>How can you resist a town whose first known European settler is a pirate? The cultured and debonair privateer Jean Lafitte established the colony of Campeche on Galveston Island in 1817, numbering about 1,000 people at its peak. Lafitte Jean Lafitte was eventually forced to leave (burning his town behind him), and Galveston as we know it was founded by Michel Menard and Samuel May Williams, among others. The homes of these early island pioneers are still standing.</p> <p>Everything is bigger in Texas and in the nineteenth century, everything in Texas was done first in Galveston. Incorporated in 1839, Galveston quickly became the most active port west of New Orleans and the largest city in the state. This exciting and sophisticated city built the state's first post office, first opera house, first hospital, first golf course, first country club...the list goes on and on.</p> <p>However, the glittering town was hit by one "first" that was devastating: on September 8, 1900, Galveston was battered by what stands as the most deadly natural disaster to strike this country, known 100 years later as the Great Storm. At the time of the 1900 Storm, Galveston had a population of 37,000 and was the fourth largest city in Texas following Houston, Dallas and San Antonio. One-third of the city was completely destroyed, more than 3,600 buildings. More than 6,000 people were killed. For the complete dramatic story, the film The Great Storm (shown daily at Pier 21 Theatre in the Strand district) is well worth seeing. Those who stayed were more determined than ever to persevere, and</p> |

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| | <p>they raised the entire level of the city by eight feet, 17 feet at the Seawall, slanting the ground so water would run off into the bay. The grade raising was so successful that when another hurricane as ferocious as the 1900 storm swept down on Galveston in 1915, the city was safe and only eight people were killed.</p> <p>However, Galveston never returned to being the city it once was. Prosperous because of its port, Galveston commerce was eclipsed when Houston dug its Ship Channel in 1917. Starting with Prohibition-era bootlegging, Galveston evolved into a gambling and drinking resort town. At the high end was Sam and Rose Maceo's star-studded Balinese Room, and at the low end were numerous saloons for wayward sailors. However, this era came to a dead halt on June 10, 1957 when the Texas Rangers raided the city – serving injunctions against the gambling joints and ending gambling in Galveston for good.</p> |
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