

Aggieland - A Special Spot Deep in the Heart of Texas

For many people from around the world Texas is a fascinating place. In many ways they are correct. Texans pride themselves on being "like a whole other nation". Almost from the first moment that a visitor gets off the plane s/he notes that special bravado and culture that sets Texas apart from other places in the US.

Texans are known for telling tall-tales, for being gun-caring westerners who are not afraid to speak their mind. Texans do wear big hats and boots. Rodeos and football are a way of life. Texans are also known for their tolerance, diversity, Tex-Mex foods, cowboys, and where the old west begins. Texas is big, it is over 1600 kilometers from one side of the state to the other and often driving across the state it feels as if one will drive forever.



Perhaps two of Texas' most famous attractions, the Alamo in San Antonio, and Southfork ranch, a television set featured in the world famous television series, Dallas, sum up what most people think about when they hear the word Texas. As such Texas is as much a state of mind as it is a real place.

Texans, however, know that what their state has is a lot more diverse. The state has a lot more to offer than just cowboys, cattle, gunslingers, and Tex-Mex food. Deep within the heart of Texas, about two hours from Houston to the east and Austin to the west is one of those special places, known to Texans, but often unknown to people from abroad. If you make an imaginary triangle with Houston in one corner, Austin in the other corner and Dallas on top, you will find almost in the middle of the triangle, one of Texas most unusual places: College Station.

Fondly known as Aggieland, College Station along with its sister community of Bryan, is home to Texas A&M University. In some sense, College Station is to Texas what Cambridge is to England, not merely a place, but a state of mind. A quick drive through town will not give you the impression that College Station is that different from any other Texas city, but stay a few days and the reality of the place will soon sink in and you will begin to understand the sign that unabashedly states: "Welcome to Aggieland, the best place in the world".

The students who attend Texas A&M are called Aggies and somehow the name also applies to almost anyone who lives in College Station. College Station is different and the longer you stay the more you will come to understand the Aggie expression: "From the outside looking in you can't understand it, and from the inside looking out you can't explain it".



This is (American) football country and currently a new renovated American football stadium, called Kyle Field, is rising at the cost of almost half a billion dollars. Life in Aggieland revolves around both university life and a world of traditions. Even the vocabulary here is a bit different. Aggies do not say hello but howdy. They do not have cheerleaders, but male “yell leaders” and saying “yes sir” or “yes mam” is a way of life.

This is a place where tens of thousands gather to practice their school cheers at midnight yell (held at midnight before a game) and where life takes on a holy feel during muster when Aggies remember their fellow Aggies who died during the past year. Aggieland is a place where there seems to be a tradition for every aspect of life. Here are a few ideas of things to see and do while visiting Aggieland:

Make sure to watch the early morning or late afternoon drills by the students studying to become soldiers. They are part of what is called here the “Corps of Cadets” and members of the “corps” take great pride in their clean-cut looks and in being the keepers of Aggie traditions.

Note the special boots that the seniors wear. If you are in Aggieland during football season, do everything possible to go to a Saturday football game. It really does not matter if you understand football or not. The pageantry outdoes anything that European football (called here “soccer”) can provide. You will be amazed to see tens of thousands of people singing and swaying together in an action called “humping”.

At game day, traditionally the students stand through the entire game as a sign that any of them should be ready to come onto the field and help their team win. If possible make sure that you also attend midnight yell. Once again until you experience it, you cannot understand it.

There is a lot more here than merely football. Within College Station the visitor will find a great variety of cultural offerings, these include performances at Rudder Theater of world class dance and music, museums that provide insights into world and Texas culture.

The star of College Station’s museum world is the George Bush (XLI) presidential library complex. The museum complex tells the story of the first Bush presidency with display of Presidential history from January 20, 1989 to January 20, 1993. Not far from the Library is Research Park, not only world class center for academic and scientific innovation but also filled with tranquil lakes, bike and walking paths meant to sooth the sole.



When most people think of food in Texas they think of (beef) bar-b-cue, a Texas staple. College Station not only abounds in bar-b-cue eateries, but offers a wide variety of local traditions from bars with rattle snakes (in cages) to dinning that appears to have come out of the pages of the old west.

Not far from College Station is the birthplace of Texas independence, Washington-on-the-Brazos. If you come in the springtime you will find vast fields of blue bonnets, the state flower, interspersed between real working cattle ranches. Once at Washington-on-the-Brazos, a small hamlet of less than 500 people, you can visit the place where Texas declared its independence from Mexico, and visit a "recreated community" that shows how Texans lived in the early 19th century.

Returning to College Station, stop in the city of Navasota for some great antiques, a bit of Texas country life, that appears to come sleight out of the movies, and some spectacular photo opportunities of streets that look as if they were frozen in time.

Just north of College Station you can visit the antique capital of Texas, the old railroad city of Calvert. Here you will not only find the raised wooden sidewalks that are a feature of the old west, but great antiques not only from Texas but also from around the world.

As you leave this unique part of Texas, you too may agree with the sign: "You are now leaving Aggieland: the best place in the world!" and understand why Texas tell visitors in their peculiar drawl: "Ya'al come back, real soon, You hear?"

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