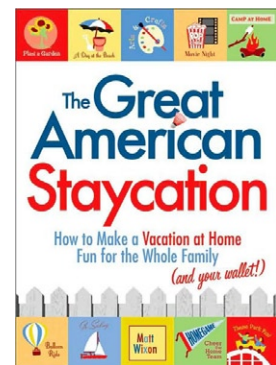




A Summer Activity Guide

RELAX & HAVE FUN

Prior to vacation: What to read



The Great American Staycation: How to Make a Vacation at Home Fun for the Whole Family (and Your Wallet!)
by [Matt Wixon](#)
\$9.95 on Amazon

The newest catch phrase in the vacation universe is “staycation.” It’s all about saving money, having fun closer to home and not feeling deprived while doing it.

Staying within a few hundred miles of home has its advantages. Whether your goal is to invigorate a neglected romantic relationship or to connect with your kids, there’s plenty to do in your own back yard and Matt Wixon provides the ideas.

Remember, the world is a new and exciting place for your kids. If they haven’t been there before, the lake or theme park 100 miles from home is just as exciting as the one 1,000 miles away or more. If you don’t spend as much on plane fare and hotel rooms, you can also splurge more on activities and great food.

Texas “Staycation” Destinations

The Seven Regions

by writer
J. Michael Ross

Two things about Texas that make it a hot vacation spot are that it’s just so darned big and it’s so darned diverse; few states have as much to offer. So for the lucky folks who live here, there’s hardly any reason to cross state lines when it comes time to load up the kids, grandma and the dog and go have some fun. And with recent events tipping the financial scale in the more frugal direction for many us, what better time to have a better look at what’s all around us in this great state?

Instead of a traditional (and often expensive) vacation, how about a “staycation” as an alternative? What’s that? A staycation is simply a vacation that’s closer to home – a way to save money that would otherwise been spent on travel expenses. For people from the Lone Star State, it just about doesn’t matter what you love, whether it’s the ocean or the mountains, the desert or the forests, Texas has what we’re looking for.

The Office of the Governor, Economic Development and Tourism divides Texas into seven major regions and describes them as follows. Have a look and prepare to be amazed.

The Panhandle Plains

Located in the northwestern corner of Texas, the landscape of this region is rugged and flat, changing to reveal dramatic canyons such as the stunning Palo Duro Canyon – second only to the Grand Canyon in size. Amarillo is the largest city in the region with ranching and farming as the main industries. Other key cities in the Panhandle include Lubbock, home of Buddy Holly, and Abilene, the heart of the Texas frontier.

Big Bend Country

This is the most remote part of the state, but arguably the most beautiful. Hailed as one of America’s largest national parks, Big Bend National Park covers more than 800,000 acres along the Rio Grande River in West Texas. The park ranges in elevation from less than 2,000 feet along the river to nearly 8,000 feet in the Chisos Mountains and encompasses massive canyons, rock formations and vast desert expanses. In addition to the region’s two national parks – Big Bend and Guadalupe Mountain National Park – visitors will discover old forts, abandoned mining camps, quirky historic towns and luxurious ranch resorts.

El Paso, at the western tip of the state, is a blend of the wild West, colorful Mexico and the heritage of Native Americans. In Odessa, visitors can see a 550-foot meteor crater, the result of a barrage of meteors crashing to the earth 20,000 to 30,000 years ago.

The Hill Country

Featuring rolling countryside and a strong European heritage with settlers from the United Kingdom, Germany and central Europe, this region is also home to many of the state’s dude or guest ranches, many near Bandera and Kerrville. Austin, the state capital, has a delightful mix of youth, sophistication, culture, live music and eclectic dining and shopping options. The city refers to itself as the “Live Music Capital of the World” and hosts two major internationally-acclaimed music events each year.

In addition, 16 wineries are located along the region’s wine trail. Outside the town of Fredericksburg is Enchanted Rock State Park, named for a 425-foot, 640-acre granite dome. The state park here has been named one of the nation’s top ten campgrounds.

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Eight great ideas for vacationing with kids

by editor
Lainey Emoto

Parents tend to put a lot of thought into outings with kids. Will it be active enough? Fun? Educational? New and exciting? Will it hold their interest?

Here and throughout the issue you’ll find some great suggestions for activities with kids. And while these suggestions are mainly family-oriented, some of them also work for adults, so whether you’re vacationing, staycationing or planning a romantic weekend, read on.

1 Lake Granbury

Nothing can beat the fun of water sports and Lake Granbury, with 103 miles of shoreline and a surface area of 8,500 acres, is a water sports paradise. For no-fee access to the lake, give these area parks a try.

Thorp Spring Park: Located on the west side of Lake Granbury. From US 377 in Granbury, take Business 377, turn north on FM 4 and look for park signs. Ramp will accommodate all boat types.

Hunter Park: Located uplake on the east shore of Lake Granbury. From US 377 in Granbury, take Business 377, turn north on FM 51 and look for park signs. Boat ramp and fishing pier.

Rough Creek Park: Located off Texas 144 just south of Granbury. Ramp will accommodate all boat types.

De Cordova Bend: Located near the Lake Granbury dam. From US 377 just east of Granbury, turn south on FM 4, then right on 167. Watch for park signs. Boat ramp, fishing pier, and access to trail area of the dam.

Granbury City Park and Beach: Located off Business 377 in Granbury. Boat ramp and swimming area. (See related story on Page 22)

2 Historic Granbury Square

Since Lake Granbury was created by damming the Brazos River in 1969, Granbury has been growing by leaps and bounds. At the same time, with its historic square and charming Victorian downtown, Granbury remains in many ways just as it was in the late 1800s. Each year there are more and more fun things to do. You may want to try some of these.

Take a ride through Granbury’s historic district in a white French vis-à-vis drawn by a majestic Percheron horse. Call 817-648-1653 or go to www.brazoscarriage.com.

See a musical at the historic Granbury Opera House. Wednesdays are bargain days and all seats are \$20. Find out what’s playing at www.granburyopera-house.net or call 800-54-SHOWS.

Attend a rousing concert and soak in the nostalgia at Granbury Live. For

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Bargain baseball in Grand Prairie

For the family that’s watching its pocketbook, minor league baseball can be a heck of a bargain. Consider the Grand Prairie Airhogs, for instance.

For just \$6 a ticket, you can watch some pretty darn good players. The team is currently third in their league and in early June, manager Pete Incaviglia announced that All-Star shortstop Dave Espinosa had been acquired by the Seattle Mariners.

The kids will be excited to know there’s a “Kids Zone,” a 17,000-square-foot area protected with netting along the RF line and that players are available both before and after the game to sign autographs for fans.

QuikTrip Park, which attracts about 300,000 people a year, is located between Lone Star Park and Nokia Theater. On game days, tickets can be purchased at the ballpark starting at 9:00 a.m. For advance tickets, call 972-504-9383 or visit their website.

1600 Lone Star Parkway
972-504-9383
www.airhogsbaseball.com

Old-time Train Rides

When you’re reminiscing about past vacations, wouldn’t it be great to be able to say, “Remember the time we went on the train?” If you decide to give it a try, here are some options:

The Austin Steam Train

Ride a vintage passenger train in Austin. Seated in a classic passenger car, you can watch the rivers, ranches and beautiful views of the Texas Hill Country glide by your window for less than \$100 for a family of four. Enjoy soft drinks and munchies in the concession car or bring your own picnic lunch.

If you choose the Bertram Flyer summer excursion, you’ll be in for a three-hour round trip with a stop in Bertram to explore the 1912 train depot. Be sure to inquire which tours feature the restored steam engine.

For more information, visit www.austinsteamtrain.org or call 512-477-8468.

The Texas State Railroad

Enjoy a round trip between Rusk and Palestine pulled by a diesel or steam engine for approximately \$90 to \$120 for a family of four (depending on whether you want open windows or air conditioning). Box lunches containing a sandwich, chips, cookie and drink are available for \$5 to \$8.

Adults can also choose seating in the Governor’s Car, in which every Texas governor has ridden for the past 30 years. This option, priced at \$67, includes table seating, personal service, gourmet cheese and crackers, beverages and dessert. You

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