

T R A V E L

The Texas Hill Country

A double barrel destination

By Jodie Jacobs

If you haven't visited the Texas Hill Country recently, then scratch what you think you know. You assumed the region did not fall into the Texas flat, see-for-miles category. But did you know it produces award-winning wines? You also probably heard that Fredericksburg, the main town for "doing" the area, is a shoppers' delight. What you didn't know is that you can also see a mini-Japanese sub, National Museum of the Pacific War build-outs and an impressive presidential plaza, all at the Admiral Nimitz Museum complex, downtown.

Indeed, Fredericksburg, a long established German settlement is reinventing itself. Although known for its roadside herb, wildflower and peach farms on the edge of town and beer, bakery and boot shops in town, sophisticated tourists can do art galleries, wine tastings and spas down Main Street and around the corners. All of which makes the town a perfect base for exploring the Hill Country.

Outside Town – Food and Views

Travel a short distance south on US 87 to sample really good gourmet spreads at Fischer & Wieser's das Peach Haus. Don't leave without dipping a



The Texas White House

chip into their famous Original Roasted Raspberry Chipotle Sauce and award-winning Sweet, Sour, Smokey Mustard Sauce. Better yet, bring some home.

Drive the other direction, first on US 87, then onto County Road 2323 for the scenic topography everyone talks about in Texas Hill Country. Your goal is Enchanted Rock State Natural Area. But if you call ahead to Troisi's Italian Ristorante, you can lunch at the delightful Trois Estate at Enchanted Rock. Ask them how *not* to miss the tiny sign at their entrance.

Wine, Wildflowers, White House History and Willie Nelson

A slew of destinations await you east on US 290. Every spring, bright blue bonnets and brilliant red poppies stop drivers at Wildseed Farms, about seven miles out. Ten miles from town, wine aficionados or those who simply want to sip and learn will want to visit three wineries in a row: Grape Creek Vineyard, Torre De Pietra and Becker Vineyard. Recently featured in *Bon Appetite* and *Food & Wine*, Becker is the largest operation, producing several award-winning wines.

History buffs will want to see the Texas White House Complex in the Lyndon B. Johnson National Historical Park. In the LBJ State Park at Stonewall, take a tour bus across the road to the one-room Junction School Johnson attended when he was young,



Texas blue bonnets



the family cemetery, roaming cattle and the LBJ Ranch. His "Oval Office" is a small, casual den off the side porch with rocking chairs.

On the way back, turn south on County Road 1376 to reach Luckenbach, a back hills outpost where Willie Nelson and other country singers come to strum.

Unusual Places to Dine

Top off the day with fine food. Don't judge the Fredericksburg Herb Farm's restaurant from the road. The entire property is undergoing an overhaul, so excuse the dust. Inside, the restaurant is jammed with people who know about its wonderful soups, excellent steaks and fowl and come-back desserts. Arrive early to buy a colorful watering can or herbal soap.

Or go for crab cakes and shrimp at the Cabernet Grill in the Cotton Gin Village. Ask to see a cabin. They're hill-country cute. Besides, there are places you might not have fit in this trip, such as the Johnson Settlement and Visitor Center, further east in Johnson City or the outstanding variety show at Rockbox Theater. So you'll need a place when y'all return.

For more information, contact Fredericksburg CVB, 888-997-3600, or visit www.FredTexLodging.com.

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