

Texas Travel for Tykes

Big adventures for the littlest visitors to the Lone Star State

Texas' wide open spaces are matched in size only by the imaginations of its young travelers. Children of all ages can explore their biggest dreams here – or just get lost in the thrill of a theme park or the warm sun shining down on the Gulf of Mexico.

Lil' pardners looking for a taste of the Old West can hop into the saddle at any of the more than 100 Texas dude ranches with cattle, cowpokes and authentic chuck wagon dinners. Bandera, "The Cowboy Capital of the World" is just northwest of San Antonio and offers such experiences. Families vacationing in urban areas can add a dose of cowboy flavor to their trips with an evening at the rodeo or a two-step lesson at an authentic dance hall.

Young travelers have much to experience through Texas' world-class museums, zoos and aquariums. The Lone Star State houses everything from natural history and children's museums to a tribute to Dr Pepper. Kids can discover the past at the Bob Bullock Texas State History Museum in Austin, or blast off to new worlds entirely at NASA/Johnson Space Center in Houston or spy the night skies at the McDonald Observatory in West Texas. While in West Texas, another can't-miss night wonder is the famous Marfa lights.

More new worlds are waiting underwater in the Lone Star State. The 600 miles of Texas beaches on the Gulf of Mexico are among the most calming and beautiful in the nation. Ideal family activities include parasailing, boating, dolphin watching, bird watching, building sandcastles, deep sea fishing and just relaxing on the pristine beaches.

Texas also has hundreds of old-fashioned freshwater swimming holes scattered throughout the state, from Barton Springs Pool in Austin to San Solomon Springs in Balmorhea State Park. The state is also home to numerous lakes perfect for swimming, boating, jet skiing and fishing.

Another outdoor activity for the whole family has a simple recipe – a tent, a cooler and the beautiful Texas scenery. Texas has plenty of parks, RV sites and cabins to set the stage for an evening under the stars. Beginning and experienced campers alike can enjoy hiking, backpacking and rock climbing from Palo Duro Canyon, in the Texas Panhandle, to the Piney Woods of East Texas.

Those wanting to get their adrenaline pumping need look no further than Texas' theme parks, each with monster roller coasters, stunt shows, musical productions and fun rides for all ages. In addition, Texas is home to some of the nation's best water parks. Families can also spend lazy days floating along Texas' many lazy rivers, including the Comal, San Marcos, Frio and Guadalupe.

"Texas is a great family vacation destination," says Julie Chase, Chief Marketing Officer for the Office of the Governor, Economic Development and Tourism Division. "Whether your family seeks a heart pounding adventure or a laid back getaway, whether your tastes run to the natural or man-made attractions, you can find what you are looking for here in Texas."