

Texas has seven regions to explore and each is unique in its terrain, history, and attractions.

The Panhandle Plains are in the north-western corner of Texas where the landscape is rugged and flat and then suddenly changes to reveal dramatic canyons including 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 is the most remote part of the state but it has amazing beauty. 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.

Apart from two national parks in this region visitors will discover old forts, abandoned mining camps, quirky towns with great history and luxurious ranch resorts. El Paso is at the western tip of the state, where Mexico, New Mexico and Texas meet. It's a blend of the Old West, colorful Mexico and the heritage of Native Americans. In Odessa, visitors can see a 550-foot meteor crater, the second largest in the nation, which was the result of a barrage of meteors crashing to the earth 20,000 to 30,000 years ago.

The Texas Hill Country features rolling countryside and a strong European heritage with settlers from the UK, Germany and central Europe. Many of the state's dude or guest ranches are located here, 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 is named the "live music capital of the world" and hosts two major internationally acclaimed music events each year.

Texas is the fifth largest wine producer in the USA and many wineries are located in this region. Follow the wine trail and enjoy tasting the wine varieties at 16 wineries. Just outside the town of Fredericksburg is Enchanted Rock State Park. Visitors can camp, hike, rock climb, stargaze and view interesting birds and wildlife. The park got its name from the granite dome that rises 425 feet above the ground and covers 640 acres.

The South Texas Plains expand from San Antonio to the Rio Grande River, the natural border with Mexico, with changing scenery from rolling countryside to desert that is a delight for birdwatchers in the Rio Grande Valley, bargain hunters who visit the border towns, and history enthusiasts touring The Alamo and other missions in the city of San Antonio. San Antonio boasts fabulous Tex-Mex restaurants and the celebrated Fiesta San Antonio.

The Texas Gulf Coast, a shoreline of over 600 miles, is protected by barrier islands stretching from Galveston to South Padre Island. Visitors can wander along the Great Texas Coastal Birding Trail, which offers 308 individual birding sites, enhanced by boardwalks, observation platforms and special landscaping designed to attract native and migrating birds.

Fishing is a major sport in Texas with more than 90 freshwater lakes and saltwater bays.

Fishing enthusiasts will enjoy everything from tournament fishing for black bass to fly fishing for rainbow trout. Deep-sea fishing excursions from South Padre Island, Corpus Christi and Galveston offer fishermen a chance to bring home a prize sailfish or shark from their day in the Gulf of Mexico. The Lone Star State offers numerous swimming, rafting and scuba diving adventures for those who want to get their feet wet. The Flower Garden Banks National Marine Sanctuary is a scuba diver's paradise and a world premier diving destination.

Houston, nicknamed Space City, is the fourth largest in the USA and is home to NASA and Johnson Space Centre. The city also hosts the world's largest rodeo and livestock show held annually in February and March.

The Prairies and Lakes Region is dominated by the Dallas/Fort Worth Metroplex and is likely to be one of the first areas tourists visit. Dallas was made famous by the TV soap "Dallas" and today is a vibrant sophisticated city with more restaurants and shops per capita than New York and has a superb nightlife. Its neighbor, Fort Worth, has kept its strong western heritage and one can feel like a cowboy with a visit the historic Stockyards, watch a herd of longhorn cattle being driven down Exchange Avenue and enjoy a rodeo or country and western music at the world's largest honky tonk.

Beyond these two great cities the region stretches south through charming small towns where one can stop at antique stores along the road. Nature abounds in this region of the state, with freshwater lakes, forest, and the chance to find real dinosaur tracks in the bed of the Paluxy River in Dinosaur Valley State Park.

The Piney Woods offers a landscape filled with forests and streams, lush meadows and quaint historic towns. For the plant lover this region offers amazing azalea and rhododendron displays in the spring and is a great rose cultivation area for the entire United States. The region's four national forests draw visitors for their beauty, peace and outdoor pursuits. Nature enthusiasts will especially enjoy the Big Thicket National Preserve, where diverse plant groups such as orchids, cactus, cypress and pine thrive as well as many species of birds, insect-eating plants and a wide variety of wildlife. Caddo Lake, located in the northern part of this region, offers magical tours through its cypress swampy environs and is a haven for canoeing, fishing, and nature photography.

For more information on all there is to see and experience in Texas, visit www.TravelTex.com or call 1-800-8888-TEX to order the Official Texas State Travel Guide and map.