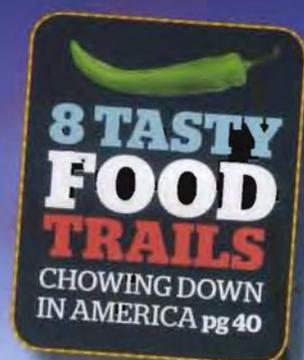


TRAVELER

ALL TRAVEL, ALL THE TIME | September 2010

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\$4.99US \$6.99CAN





Guadalupe River run: Recreation on the river includes rafting, tubing, and paddling a canoe.

ROAD TRIP

Tooling the Hill Country

The German-settled towns in central Texas offer travelers an authentic taste of the Lone Star State. | *By* JESSICA DUPUY

HOUSTON, AUSTIN, San Antonio, and Dallas—the Lone Star State's pillar cities—all have their attractions, but if you haven't been to the Hill Country, then you haven't really been to Texas. This rugged patch of central Texas is stamped with rolling, rocky slopes, expansive vistas, shimmering spring-fed rivers, and sweeping landscapes speckled with wildflowers in the spring and shadowy oak trees in the fall. Pastoral ranches dotting the countryside have been passed on for generations, some dating back to the immigration of Germans in the mid-1800s.

Starting in Austin, take a weekend or longer to meander the back roads and main thoroughfares of the Hill Country, losing yourself "deep in the heart of Texas."

JOHNSON CITY Drive west on U.S. Highway 290 toward Johnson City, boyhood home of President Lyndon Johnson (though not named for him). You'll pass peach orchards, never ending ranchland with grazing cattle, and a smattering of Hill Country wineries, this being the

main corridor of the Hill Country Wine Trail. With 180 wineries, Texas is one of the top wine producers in the United States. In recent years, Texas winemakers have received national recognition for their French Rhône-style and Spanish wines. Stop at Becker Vineyards, one of the area's oldest and largest.

"As a family we've been in the Hill Country for most of our lives," says owner Richard Becker. "It's unlike any other part of the state. The diversity of flora and fauna blends with German culture visually evident in the farms and old buildings that reach back into Texas history."



Just west of Johnson City, the Benini Studios & Sculpture Ranch is a working ranch of a different sort. The galleries display paintings by Benini as well as contemporary Italian painters. Drive roads or walk along paths in the 145-acre sculpture ranch where 140 modern large-scale installations blend into the natural environment. Take a brief detour to Luckenbach, little more than a live music dance hall and a 160-year-old general store made famous by country music legends Willie Nelson and Waylon Jennings in the 1970s. On Sunday evenings, musicians gather under the oak trees at the general store and entertain locals and visitors alike.

FREDERICKSBURG From Luckenbach, move on to Fredericksburg, the veritable capital of the Hill Country. This old German town has a timeless appeal with historic buildings, traditional beer gardens, art galleries, and inviting boutiques. You can spend hours shopping along Main Street, finding antiques and furnishings at Homestead, vintage lamps at Red, heirloom quilts at Jabberwocky, and the latest women's fashions (Trina Turk and Ella Moss designs) at Root. Take a break at Rather Sweet Bakery & Café, where you can create your own breakfast tacos or lunch on a Texas grass-fed bison burger and made-from-scratch tortilla soup. The pink pig shortbread cookies make for a great souvenir. Fredericksburg is home to the National Museum of the Pacific War, which houses a 45,000-square-foot indoor exhibit space displaying Allied and Japanese aircraft, tanks, guns, and other large artifacts such as the only restored PT boat on display in the United States. Outdoors, the serene Japanese Garden of Peace



Texas time-outs: Shopping at chic boutique Root on Main Street in Fredericksburg for home accessories (left), walking along the lavender fields at family-owned Becker Vineyards (below), and petting the friendly burros at Juniper Hills Farm (far left).





The sun sets on a pair of granite monoliths at Enchanted Rock. Before leaving Austin, try the Texas two-step at the Broken Spoke (right).

features large black granite stones and green mossy mounds designed to represent islands in the Pacific.

ENCHANTED ROCK For a dose of the great outdoors, head 18 miles north of town to Enchanted Rock. Named for the Tonkawa belief in its mystical allure, this large granite dome rises 425 feet and covers 640 acres. It's considered one of the largest batholiths in the United States. Along with hiking trails, the Enchanted Rock State Natural Area offers camping, bird-watching, rock climbing, and stargazing.

End your day at the Cabernet Grill in Fredericksburg, housed in an 1850s-style cotton gin, for a Texas dinner made with ingredients from local purveyors and farms that includes grilled Texas quail stuffed with jalapeño and wrapped with applewood-smoked bacon. The beverage menu features exclusively Texan wines by the glass and signature cocktails made with vodka and bourbon distilled in Texas.

From here, you can choose from an array of inviting bed-and-breakfasts, many of which were Sunday houses used by early ranchers who would weekend in town for church and supplies. (Note: most B&Bs require a two-night minimum stay on the weekends.)



COMFORT If you prefer roomier lodgings, head south toward the town of Comfort to Riven Rock Ranch (www.rivenrockranch.com). This hilltop guest ranch features natural limestone and native landscaping. Charming yet sophisticated cottages have kitchens, fireplaces, wide front porches, and stone patios with broad views of the region. Guests can book an entire cottage (each sleeps four to eight people) or a private room within the cottages. The ranch also fronts the Guadalupe River, where guests can paddle a canoe (available nearby) and fish for bass and perch along banks lined with towering cypress trees. Float trips on the river are popular, and several local outfitters offer day-trips that include the rental of inner tubes and rafts.

Round the corner on State Highway 27 for a stroll through Comfort, settled by German “Freethinkers,” who eschewed the political and religious austerity of standard German culture and led a less conservative lifestyle. This laid-back mentality endures today in this one-stop-sign town with a hundred pre-1910 buildings and a handful of shops, including Cypress Creek Antiques and Wilson Clements Antiques. The locals are decidedly friendly—sneeze on one side of the street, and someone from the other side will say

“**This rugged patch of Central Texas is stamped with rocky slopes, expansive vistas, and shimmering spring-fed rivers.**”

“bless you.” Stop for lunch at High’s Café for a jalapeño-pimiento cheese or meat loaf sandwich, a side of hummus, and a warm macaroon or homemade scone with jam.

BOERNE Take Interstate 10 southeast for 16 miles to Boerne, pronounced “bur-nee.” Similar to Fredericksburg, it’s a German town with a Main Street full of shops, eateries, and the Ye Kendall Inn (www.yekendallinn.com), a historic stagecoach stop turned hotel reputed to have a few haunted rooms. For memorable sightseeing, drive east and north toward Blanco, then veer right on County Road 165, which passes the glimmering Blanco

River, exotic game ranches, and one of the best views of the region. You’ll find it about seven miles down 165. At the top of a long, steep climb, pull to the side of the road and look behind you. Just a few miles from this overlook is Juniper Hills Farm. Though the Mexican-style casita cabins—some with indoor/outdoor showers and private patios—are inviting enough for an evening stay, the cooking classes led by owner Sibby Barrett are the real draw. Join other guests in her expansive Main House kitchen to prepare a meal with ingredients from the morning’s farmers market and beef from local ranches all to be eaten at a communal table afterward. Surrounded by your newfound friends, you won’t soon forget the familial experience of Juniper Hills—or the joy of a drive through Texas Hill Country. ■