

TEXAS HILL COUNTRY

Lots more than cowboys

by Glenn Kaufmann



I sit on a bench outside of the Bed & Brew microbrewery (a 21st century saloon), enjoying the warmth of the setting sun on a cool April evening in **Texas Hill Country**. Suddenly something catches my attention—a black hat with a not so friendly looking figure standing under it. I notice his worn plaid shirt with mother-of-pearl buttons, his dusty Wranglers, the knife hanging from his leather belt, and the big belt buckle. I sense that this guy is bad news—probably a ranch hand angling for a fight—even before my eyes reach his battered cowboy boots.

Oh man, he saw me looking at him. Even worse—he’s coming my way and staring at me. I stand as he approaches. Looking me straight in the eye, he says, “I don’t recognize you. Are you new around here?”

“Yes. Just having a beer”, I croak.

By now I’m pretty sure I’m not about to get branded—except as an out-of-towner—but I’m unprepared for his response, “Yeah, the beer’s pretty good here, and it’s real nice out this time of year. Welcome to **Fredericksburg**.”



Fredericksburg has many comfortable lodgings including cozy Bed & Breakfasts.

After a round of introductions I learn that this rough-looking ranch hand is in fact, a friendly custom furniture designer who owns and operates his own shop just a block or two down Main Street! He tells me that he's one of the many folks that have escaped the big city in favor of life in this quaint, yet vibrant small town.

Fredericksburg: Old and New

Although full of newcomers, the town of Fredericksburg cherishes its past. Founded in 1846 by German immigrants, the first European settlers found an abundant land that responded well to their hard work. In an effort to protect themselves and to live peacefully alongside the indigenous people, these newcomers signed a treaty with the local tribe, the Comanches. Supposedly, this is the only treaty between American settlers and Native American tribes that remains unbroken to this day.

The town's past sometimes reveals itself in surprising ways. For instance, the last thing one expects to see in the heart of Texas, miles from open water, is a giant pink steamboat. Paradoxically, that is exactly the look of the Nimitz Museum. This museum commemorates the life of Admiral Chester Nimitz, the 5-star Fleet Admiral and Pacific Theatre Commander-in-Chief. Nimitz grew up in Fredericksburg before achieving fame and glory during World War II.

The Nimitz Museum is just one part of the much larger National Museum of the Pacific War, which examines that entire conflict in detail. It encompasses five additional exhibit areas including the Plaza of the Presidents, the Pacific Combat Zone, the George Bush Gallery, and the Veterans' Memorial Walk. The final exhibit area, the Japanese Garden of Peace, is a gift from the people of Japan. The garden

MOTORCYCLE RENTALS AND TOURS WORLDWIDE



866-432-4537 toll free • www.eaglerider.com

serves not only as a peaceful respite for contemplation, but as the focal point for what may be the museum's most crucial work—as time claims the lives of World War II veterans on both sides of the fight, the museum races to unite them and document their experiences.

Over the years, the museum has brought together dozens of Japanese and American soldiers, sailors, and airmen. In one such reunion, an aging Japanese pilot was introduced to the U.S. Navy sailor who had pulled the pilot from the water and then defended the rescued man from his vengeful shipmates 50 years earlier.

Today, Fredericksburg has become “the” choice for Texans and others seeking a high standard of living in a small town within a short drive of several larger metropolitan areas.

With hiking/mountain biking trails and fly-fishing streams just minutes from downtown, over 60 restaurants to choose from, and nearly two-dozen wineries in the surrounding countryside, it's easy to see why many Texans consider Fredericksburg the perfect place for raising a family or for their retirement.

Fredericksburg is also the perfect base camp for tourists wanting to explore a unique landscape in central Texas—the nearby Texas Hill Country, an area full of outdoor recreational opportunities. The town has plenty of affordable places to stay, eat, drink, and shop. It's also a great place to just relax and blow the dust off of a busy life. The decision to visit is made even easier when you realize that you can get there in under an hour from San Antonio (to the south) or from Austin (to the east).



Texas Hill Country offers top rate opportunities for hunting, fishing, hiking, and horsebackriding.

Enjoy the Great Outdoors

“Draw back, pause, and release, nice and easy.” My guide’s mantra rings in my ears as I do my best to loft a tiny hand-tied fly into a pool of water about twenty feet away. Cool water rushes past my hip boots and through the creekside reeds as I finally get the fly where I want it.

Just then my partner yells, “I got one.” To my dismay, in the time it took for me to get my act together, “my fish” had drifted into his pool. Ahh well, there are lots more fish in this creek.

With so many rivers, ponds, and streams within 30 miles of Fredericksburg, guided and unguided rafting, paddling, and fly-fishing trips abound. In this adventure-rich atmosphere, knowledgeable guides

include both life-long local fisherman and even retired National Geographic photographers. Larger, man-made reservoirs nestled in the valleys provide fishers and boaters lots of elbow room.

The gentle landscape makes for easy to moderate hiking, biking, and horseback riding on a wide variety of trails. However, to avoid wandering onto private property in this area rife with private ranch land, it’s advisable to get a trail guide, or ask for directions before starting out.

Luckily, the crème de la crème of hiking trails is located on public land. Enchanted Rock State Natural Area offers hikers a 6/10-mile trail to the top of the second largest granite dome in North America. It’s a somewhat strenuous hike, but worth the exertion.



The Alamo is a historical must-see in San Antonio.

The Hill Country

When you think of wine country, it's rarely riddled with cattle guards, Texas scrub, dry washes, wide open pastures, and mesquite. But **Texas Hill Country** proves that you can have it all. The relatively cool, moist air and a long growing season has helped vintners yield a surprising range of top quality grapes. In fact, more than a few of the nearly two-dozen vineyards and wineries in the region are well on their way to national acclaim. Bottles from Texas Hill Country vineyards are feature items in cellars statewide and increasingly throughout the country.

And while the summers do get hot, Hill Country enjoys daytime temperatures significantly lower than you'd expect in Texas and evenings that are high desert cool. These fair temperatures combined with the picturesque, rolling landscape make this the perfect spot not just for vintners, but for anyone wanting to spend their free time outdoors.

Luckenbach is the Pits

In the darkness I can just make out a small wooden frame about two feet square. In the center of the frame I see a small dark hole. Slowly my arm rears back and then swings forward, lofting a gleaming silver washer, which lands, to my mind, nowhere near the hole. One of the locals rushes up and pats me on the back. "Good job", he roars. I've just pitched my first washer in Luckenbach—a popular pastime in local saloons. It's time for a frosty drink and some good music.

Located just 10–12 miles outside of Fredericksburg, this is the very same town made famous by Waylon Jennings in his song "Back to the Basics of Love". In reality Luckenbach is a "town" in only the loosest sense of the word. It is in fact an intimate outdoor music venue with a stage, a bar/gift shop/post office, an enclosed dance hall, and a couple of washer pitching pits.



AmeriFleet Transportation

AmeriFleet Transportation is the leading vehicle transportation provider in the United States. If you are interested in Full time, Part Time, or On-call opportunities delivering vehicles, please call 1-888-850-9876. Moves available daily nationwide. A great opportunity for those with airline flight privileges.

What Luckenbach is best at is providing a place for people to have a cold drink and watch some good music with folks who want the same. If you go, don't forget to ask the bartender for a cup of washers and directions to the pits.

San Antonio Sites

With its dynamic, turbulent past and numerous historic sites, San Antonio seems the wise elder sister of Texas Hill Country. Yet the ambiance of the city's popular Riverwalk also gives the city a unique and modern feel.

If you enjoy sitting next to a cool river under a shaded canopy umbrella, drink in hand and plate overflowing with Tex-Mex, then the Riverwalk district is the place for you. Begun as a scenic path along the river, Riverwalk offers endless opportunities for shopping, dining, and nightlife or just strolling. To experience Riverwalk at a slightly faster pace you can book a carriage ride, a boat tour, or a riverboat cruise.

For anyone with even a passing interest in history, Mission San Antonio de Valero is a must see. Popularly known as the Alamo, this

mission was the location of the fateful battle in the Texas Revolution. Additionally, the San Antonio Mission Trail, which begins at the Alamo, winds southward along a nine-mile stretch of the San Antonio River and provides a glimpse into both the religious and cultural struggles to settle the area.

Beyond just seeing the missions, visitors to San Antonio can take advantage of numerous other off-the-beaten-path arts and culture offerings. Some of these include the Market Square Mexican Market, the San Antonio Cultural Arts Mural Tours, La Villita Historic District, the Air Force History and Traditions Museum, the Army Medical Museum, the Buckhorn Saloon and Museum, the Mexican Cultural Institute, and the Fort Sam Houston Museum.

Austin - a capital of fun

In contrast to San Antonio, Austin is the hip, high-energy, younger brother of Texas Hill Country. Home to the world famous annual South By Southwest (SXSW) film and music festival, Austin has attracted a young and dynamic community of



Visit San Antonio's Riverwalk district, with its many shops and restaurants.

filmmakers and musicians. The result is a city filled with cafes, theaters, and music clubs. The city reportedly has the best music scene in the U.S.

Lest visitors think that Austin is a wasteland of youthful exuberance, it must be noted that the city is home to a number of terrific arts and culture collections including the Austin Museum of Art, Umlauf Sculpture Garden & Museum, and the Elisabet Ney Museum. And with the opening of the University of Texas at Austin's Blanton Museum of Art in February 2006, some 17,000 works of art will find a permanent home.

With so much to see, do, and hear, many visitors find themselves starving by day's end. This could also be attributed to the almost constant aroma of good cooking in the air. With the influx of musical and film talent, the city has found itself afloat in talented chef's, too. Long known as a haven for Tex-Mex food and barbecue, Austin now boasts growing number of gourmet restaurants.

A High Quality of Life

Fredericksburg, with its connection to the outdoors; San Antonio, with its commitment to its past, and Austin, with its creative music and art scene, are three examples of communities of people who have chosen to live well in unique, desirable places.

Rather than keeping this high quality of life a secret (perhaps it's their way of continuing to honor the Fredericksburg peace treaty), the citizens of Texas Hill Country and the surrounding cities take the time to welcome their guests with southern hospitality and Texas charm. It's certainly worth the trip to visit these hospitable folks on your next vacation.

About the Author: Glenn Kaufmann is a freelance travel, food, arts, and culture writer based in Bloomington, Indiana. Glenn can be reached at: mail@glennkaufmann.com. Photos: Courtesy of Fredericksburg, Texas Convention and Visitor Bureau (see photo credit page for details).