

HIT THE ROAD

CAN'T-MISS GETAWAYS



➤ DESTINATION: STARR COUNTY ◀

The Early Bird's Reward

Natural wonders and border culture in Starr County

text by **Daniel Blue Tyx**

WHEN NATURE ENTHUSIASTS THINK OF the Rio Grande Valley, they most often picture the glimmering resacas and moss-hung forests of destinations like the Santa Ana National Wildlife Refuge. But venturing farther upriver, away from the large cities and the tropical influence of the Gulf Coast, one finds a strikingly different landscape of rolling ranchland, sheer bluffs, and Old West frontier towns. Not long ago, my wife, Laura, and I headed west from our home in McAllen to explore the natural offerings of Starr County. We hoped to find not only scenic vistas of starkly beautiful country but also bird and plant species that can't be found anywhere else in the United States.



- **Brownsville**
2 hours
- **San Antonio**
4 hours
- **Houston**
6 hours
- **Abilene**
8 hours

As a high school science teacher, Laura was especially looking forward to the first stop on our itinerary, Rancho Lomitas Native Plant Nursery, a 260-acre nursery and nature preserve whose owner, Benito Treviño, is a pioneer in the field of ethnobotany—the study of how humans use plants for food, medicine, and rituals. First, though, we had to get there. The ranch is 10 miles north of Rio Grande City, and no street signs marked our path through winding gravel roads. Luckily, Benito had given us superb directions, but even so, our arrival at the wrought-iron gate—just where he'd said it would be—felt like a small miracle.

The instant we stepped out of the car, a symphony of birdsong filled the air, and we knew the drive was