

93 DAYS OF SUMMER

THE ULTIMATE
TEXAS SUMMER BUCKET LIST
TO SOAK UP EVERY SECOND
OF THE SEASON



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VISIT
TEXASHIGHWAYS
.COM FOR A
PRINTABLE
CHECKLIST OF ALL
THE SUMMER FUN

SOME TEXANS

AREN'T CONTENT WITH A LIFE WELL LIVED, THEY WANT HARD EVIDENCE: THE FAMILY VACATION PHOTOS, A SOUVENIR TO STICK ON THE SHELF, THEIR NAME IN A REGISTER AT THE HIGHEST POINT IN TEXAS. TO HELP YOU ACHIEVE THOSE GOALS, WE'VE COMPILED A LIST OF ONLY-IN-OUR-STATE PURSUITS YOU NEED TO CHECK OFF BEFORE ANOTHER SUMMER SPEEDS BY. SOME OF TEXAS' GREATEST ADVENTURES REQUIRE PHYSICAL CHALLENGE (THE WORLD'S TOUGHEST CANOE RACE) AND SOME MAY REQUIRE GETTING OUT OF YOUR COMFORT ZONE (GOAT YOGA), WHILE OTHERS ARE SIMPLY EXCUSES TO TAKE ADVANTAGE OF ALL TEXAS HAS TO OFFER (WATERPARKS, MUSEUMS, SWIMMING HOLES, AND OLD-FASHIONED DR PEPPER FLOATS). THIS IS A PACKED LIST—MORE THAN 100 IDEAS TO FILL THE 93 DAYS OF SUMMER—BUT THE REWARD WILL BE WELL WORTH THE EFFORT. TAKE NOTE, THEN TAKE OFF.

ON THE WATER

HANG 10, DUDE

Whether you're a beach bum who can't wait to wax up your board or a curious beginner, catching waves makes your Texas summer all the more righteous. Some of the best surfing destinations in the state include Matagorda Bay, North Jetty on South Padre Island, Boca Chica Beach, Jamaica Beach in Galveston, and the neighboring towns of Quintana and Surfside Beach. Most of these towns have vendors offering gear and lessons for beginners. If you don't want to work for your waves, **NLand Surf Park** in Austin offers hourly rates (as well as seasonal and annual memberships) for access to its lagoon, which features a wave-making machine that creates consistent surf at three levels of difficulty. The facility also offers lessons, an observation area, a sand beach, brewery, and restaurant, so you can have a full day of fun. For those who want to engage in surf culture without getting on a board, the **Texas Surf Museum** features exhibits on Gulf Coast female surfers, surfing films, and photography. nlandurfpark.com; texassurfmuseum.org



ON THE WATER



Frio River

GO WITH THE FLOW

Fill up a cooler and grab your pals for a leisurely float down one of Texas' refreshing rivers. Head to Concan to enjoy the **Frio River**, trek to San Marcos to check out the youthful spirit of the **San Marcos River**, or decamp to New Braunfels to float the **Comal River**. Riverside outfitters will prep you for the relaxing float ahead. Don't forget to reapply sunscreen!

JUMP OFF A CLIFF

Poosum Kingdom Lake—the Brazos River basin's first water supply reservoir—sparkles with blue waters and 310 miles of shoreline. But its most striking feature looms dramatically over the water on the southern edge of the lake: two towering cliffs that rise 90 feet on either side—appropriately named Hell's Gate. Like flies to honey, the world's best competitive cliff divers converge here in the summer for the Red Bull Cliff Diving



LAZE ON THE RIVER

Downstream from the Highland Lakes, the **Colorado River in Bastrop** winds through a quiet stretch of Texas' Blackland Prairie that makes for relaxing paddling. Forests and pastures line the river, and several sandbars and islands provide overnight camping stops between Webberville Park and Columbus. Avoid camping on the riverbanks though, as almost all of them are private property.

WATCH JAWS ON THE WATER

Even in the tame waters of Lake Travis, it's easy to feel on edge when John Williams' score for *Jaws* starts. That adrenaline rush is why movie-lovers head to **Alamo Drafthouse's annual Jaws on the Water** events at Volente Beach in Austin. Each viewer gets a keepsake tube to float in while a giant screen plays the 1975 Spielberg classic. To keep things interesting, scuba divers have been known to pinch and tickle unsuspecting audience members underwater. Check website for dates. drafthouse.com

PARK IT AT A WATERPARK

Whether you seek out the most harrowing, jaw-dropping slides or enjoy the chill vibe of a lazy river, Texas water parks offer something for everyone. There are also cool times to be found at **Typhoon Texas** in Katy, **Great Wolf Lodge** in Grapevine, **Six Flags**

World Series (June 2). The reservoir's bone-chilling waters (about 53 degrees) aren't reserved for thrill-seekers; spectators can watch the cliff-diving action from boats, kayaks, and paddleboards and beat the Texas heat with a plunge in the lake from a more sensible height. possumkingdomlake.com

PADDLE THE CITIES

Kayaking novices and experts will find much to love when going out on **Lady Bird Lake** in Austin, **Buffalo Bayou** in Houston, and the **Trinity River** in Fort Worth. No need to buy your own equipment or venture out into the wild unknown—rental shops provide boats, life vests, and instruction. All you have to do is sit back and enjoy the cool urban views—oh, and paddle of course.



Athens Scuba Park

Hurricane Harbor in Arlington, and **Wet 'N' Wild Splashtown** in El Paso. With its 70 acres of tube chutes, slides, and pools, the original **Schlitterbahn** in New Braunfels is a Texas summertime rite of passage. Water-sport enthusiasts might find a refreshing challenge in wakeboarding parks like **BSR Cable Park** in Waco and **Texas Ski Ranch** in New Braunfels.

TAKE A DEEP DIVE

Scuba-diving, often associated with tropical destinations, is possible (and

fun!) in Texas. In East Texas, **Athens Scuba Park** features a dive shop for equipment and training courses on everything from rescue diving to night diving, and 35 sunken wrecks to discover in both an indoor pool and an outdoor manmade lake. At **Flower Garden Banks National Marine Sanctuary**, with the help of a dive charter company, you'll experience a variety of sea life as you delve into the depths of the Gulf of Mexico 100 miles offshore. athensscubapark.com; flowergarden.noaa.gov



ADMIRE SAN ANGELO'S LILIES

It might seem odd to find water lilies in arid West Texas, but in **San Angelo's Civic League Park**, seven raised ponds display hundreds of varieties. The plants are the life work of Ken Landon, who has traveled the world collecting seeds of rare lilies, many of which are now extinct in their native countries. Celebrate the blooms at San Angelo Lilyfest on Sept. 15. internationalwaterlilycollection.com



DIVE IN

Can you truly experience summer in Texas if you don't swim in a spring-fed swimming hole? Some of our favorites include **San Solomon Springs** in West Texas, **Barton Springs** in Austin, **Blue Hole** in Wimberley, **Fort Clark Springs** in Brackettville, and **Hancock Springs** in Lampasas.

CHEER ON CANOERS

With 260 miles of paddling in the relentless summer heat, the **Texas Water Safari** is known as "the world's toughest canoe race." Starting June 9, competitors have four days and four hours to navigate the San Marcos River's rocky hazards, rapids, portages, and spillways from the headwaters in San Marcos to the shrimping town of Seadrift on the Texas coast. texaswatersafari.org

PADDLE-BOARD ON LAKE MARBLE FALLS

Jolly Rodgers Paddle Co. offers a sublime stand-up paddleboarding experience on the sparkling waters of Lake Marble Falls. Once you get the hang of it, head out for one of the rental company's frequent special events. "Dive In Movie Nights" feature classics like *The Sandlot* for viewers floating in the lake. jollyrodgerstx.com

THE GREAT OUTDOORS



ENJOY THE MOUNTAIN BREEZES

Situated along the southern reach of the Davis Mountains—one of the largest and wettest mountain ranges in the state—the 2,709-acre Davis Mountains State Park is a favorite summer getaway for heat-weary Texans because of its high elevation, low humidity, and frequent breezes. Established in the 1930s, the park's CCC-built Indian Lodge will reopen in June after months of renovations. tpwd.texas.gov/state-parks/indian-lodge

HOP ABOARD THE IVORY BILL

Experience East Texas' Neches River on one of the *Ivory Bill's* weekly guided tours of the **Big Thicket National Preserve**. The covered pontoon boat explores the diverse flora and fauna of the thicket's swamps and forests, an outing that's typically 10 degrees cooler than hiking the bottomlands on foot. nechesriveradventures.org

CLIMB TO THE TOP OF TEXAS

Hiking **Guadalupe Mountains National Park** is a nice reminder that Texas isn't as flat as some people think. Six peaks in the park top 8,000 feet, including El Capitan, the most famous sight you'll see when entering the park driving north from Van Horn. Nearby Guadalupe Peak is the highest point in Texas at 8,751 feet. Test your legs on the Guadalupe Peak Trail, an 8.4-mile round trip. nps.gov/gumo

DON'T FORGET TO WRITE

Don't let the kids have all the fun this summer. Relive the glorious days of sloppy joes, bunk beds, and campfires with a stay at **Camp No Counselors**. Part of a nationwide chain, the Texas version of this adult camp takes place in Hunt, along the scenic Guadalupe River. Just like grade-school camp, activities include archery, arts and crafts, dodgeball, a slip 'n' slide, and a talent show—but with grown-up twists like a Bloody Mary bar at breakfast. "Camp No Counselors



GLIDE IN WEST TEXAS

See Marfa's breathtaking desert landscape from a whole new perspective by hopping on one of **Marfa Gliders'** aircrafts. Make an appointment online to ride shotgun and enjoy the view while a certified pilot takes the wheel. flygliders.com

was created to give adults a chance to step away from their lives at work and home, and get in touch with the fun of being kids again, along with the fun parts of being an adult," says Dave Kushner, vice president of community engagement. Who knows? You might find a pen pal or develop a lifelong friendship with your bunkmates. Upcoming sessions run May 10-13, and Oct. 5-8 and 11-14. campnocounselors.com

TAKE YOUR FITNESS TO NEW HEIGHTS

Not for the faint of heart, the **Davis Mountains Fitness and Training Camp** whips amateur athletes into shape over the course of a week in August. Every summer, about 100 fitness enthusiasts gather at **Prude Ranch** to partake in a wide range of daily activities, like early-morning

yoga classes, 20- to 85-mile cycling trips, runs, and hikes of various levels of difficulty. Lest you think it's all a grueling, sweat-soaked affair, fun outings like viewing the Marfa Lights and swimming in San Solomon Springs at Balmorhea State Park are also on the schedule. fitnesscamp.org

VISIT AN LCRA PARK

Established in Depression-era Texas, the Lower Colorado River Authority operates 41 parks encompassing more than 11,000 acres—from the **Cedar Point Recreation Area** along the north shore of **Lake Buchanan** to the isolated beaches of **Matagorda Bay Nature Park**, which offers guided horseback riding, beachcombing, and birding. The legendary **Highland Lakes**—Inks, Buchanan, LBJ, Marble Falls, Travis, and Austin—sparkle in the Central Texas summer sun. The biggest of the collection, Lake Buchanan, offers nice pebble beaches on its western shore, perfectly primed for swimming, water skiing, canoeing, and windsurfing. lcra.org



Visit an LCRA park

EAT AND DRINK



Black's BBQ

EAT YOUR WAY THROUGH THE BARBECUE CAPITAL OF TEXAS

Lockhart is home to three of Texas' most legendary barbecue joints: **Kreuz Market** (go for the sausage, stay for the smoky pork chops), **Black's BBQ** (dinosaur beef rib, anyone?), and **Smitty's Market** (lines form for a taste of its shoulder clod, brisket, hot links, and pork ribs). Why not try all three in a day? lockhartchamber.com/pages/bbqcapitloftexas

TRY A PIÑA PREPARADA

Piñas preparadas satisfy your inner child, but you might think twice about serving one to a kid. The South Texas specialties feature a hollowed-out pineapple filled with a variety of fruits, gummy bears, sour worms, and other candies, all sprinkled with a dusting of chili-lime powder, then filled with Topo Chico or malt liquor. Its brazen ingredients and liberal use of sugar make for a summer temptation that's worth the indulgence. Try one in Laredo at **La Laguna** or **Picca Dilly's**.



FILL UP AT A FOOD HALL

Following a trend in cities like Atlanta and Seattle, food halls are popping up across Texas. These convivial food courts feature several vendors in a large, shared space serving varied cuisines—like a mess hall but with more pizzazz (and a bar). **The Bottling Department** at The Pearl in San Antonio

features burgers by Fletcher's and doughnuts by Maybelle's; **Fareground** in Austin dishes out tacos by Dai Due and pretzels from Easy Tiger; **Conservatory** in Houston serves up poke and pizza ("European-style" Finn Hall is set to open later this year); and **The Market** in Dallas has everything from

seafood to macarons. bottlingdept.com; faregroundaustin.com; conservatoryhouston.com; dallasfarmersmarket.org/the-market

IMBIBE IN THE HILL COUNTRY

Brew buffs will find much to love at award-winning Hill Country breweries like **Real Ale Brewing Co.** in Blanco, **Twisted X Brewing** in Dripping Springs, **Pecan Street Brewing** in Johnson City, and **Seguin Brewing Company** in Seguin. The **Hill Country Craft Beer Trail** offers five different shuttles for a safe and fun way to experience it all. hillcountrycraftbeertrail.com

DRINK A DR PEPPER FLOAT

As you tour the **Dr Pepper Museum** in Waco and delve into the history of this homegrown Texas soda, you might find yourself salivating. Lucky for you, the museum's **Frosty's Soda Shop** serves everything from chili dogs to ice cream sundaes. But nothing beats an old-fashioned float, made with hand-pumped Dr Pepper and a scoop of Blue Bell vanilla ice cream. drpeppermuseum.com



PICK YOUR OWN TEXAS FRUIT

Summer in Texas means farm-fresh fruits will be ripe for the picking. Since 1982, Texans have been picking their own blueberries at **Blueberry Hill Farms** in Edom. At **Sweet Berry Farms** in Marble Falls, blackberries should be ready for harvest in May, while peaches and nectarines at **Sweet Eats Fruit Farm** in Granger ripen late May through August. blueberryhillfarms.com; sweetberryfarm.com; sweeteats.com

Blueberry Hill Farm's Blueberry Streusel Muffins

Yield: one dozen

- Muffins:**
- 1/3 cup sugar
 - 1/4 cup butter or margarine, softened
 - 1 egg, beaten
 - 2 1/3 cups all-purpose flour
 - 4 tsp. baking powder
 - 1/2 tsp. salt
 - 1 cup milk
 - 1 tsp. vanilla extract
 - 1 1/2 cups fresh or frozen blueberries
- In a mixing bowl, cream together sugar and butter. Add egg; mix well. Combine flour,

baking powder, and salt; add to creamed mixture alternately with milk. Stir in vanilla. Fold in blueberries. Fill 12 greased or paper-lined muffin cups two-thirds full.

Streusel:

- 1/2 cup sugar
- 1/3 cup all-purpose flour
- 1/2 tsp. ground cinnamon
- 1/4 cup butter or margarine

In a small bowl, combine sugar, flour, and cinnamon; cut in butter until crumbly, then sprinkle mixture over muffins. Bake at 375 degrees for 25 to 30 minutes or until browned; test with toothpick.



SHAKE UP THE SOTOL

If **Desert Door** has anything to say about it, sotol will someday be to Texas what bourbon is to Kentucky. The Driftwood-based distillery, which opened in December, crafts sotol from the ubiquitous West Texas plant of the same name. Take a tour, take home a bottle, and try this recipe:

Desert Door Paloma

Ingredients:

- 2 oz. Desert Door Original Sotol
- $\frac{3}{8}$ oz. fresh grapefruit juice
- $\frac{3}{4}$ oz. fresh lime juice
- $\frac{3}{4}$ oz. agave nectar
- Splash of grapefruit soda

Directions:

Combine all ingredients except soda into shaker. Add ice and shake vigorously for 8-10 seconds, then fine strain in a rocks glass with fresh ice, and top with soda. Garnish with a grapefruit wheel. desertdoor.com



GRAPE STOMP

In a classic episode of *I Love Lucy*, our favorite comedic heroine visits a vineyard for some barefoot grape-stomping, only to get into a juicy skirmish with an angry local. In Fredericksburg, **Becker Vineyards** pays homage with its annual **Lucy and the Italian Woman Costume Contest** (Sept. 2), the culmination of two weekends of grape-stomping. beckervineyards.com



TOUR THE BLUE BELL CREAMERY

Blue Bell fans travel from all over to see the making of their favorite ice cream. At **The Little Creamery** in Brenham, visitors can watch the manufacturing process from an observation deck while attendants narrate and provide fun facts, and then check out the Visitors Center to read up on the company's history and see artifacts. The self-guided tours conclude with \$1 scoops from the parlor. In addition to regular favorites, the creamery also serves special flavors like Milk 'n' Cookies and Cake Batter. bluebell.com

INDULGE IN INNOVATIVE ICE CREAM

Sure, vanilla, chocolate, and rocky road satisfy—but a crop of upstart ice cream shops are pushing the cup and cone with new adventurous flavors. Sample the slightly spicy strawlepeño from **Melt Ice Creams** in Fort Worth, blueberry lavender from **The Latest Scoop** in San Angelo, Rice Krispie treat from **A La Mode Gelateria** in Corpus Christi, duck fat caramel from **Heritage Creamery** in Waco, and roasted beets and fresh mint from **Lick Honest Ice Creams** in Austin and San Antonio. melticecreams.com; latestscoopicecream.com; alamodegelateria.com; heritagecreamery.com; ilickelick.com

Lick Honest Ice Creams

Photos: © Eric W. Pohl, Clark Crenshaw (right)

FAMILY FRIENDLY

FLY A KITE ON SOUTH PADRE ISLAND

There's something joyful about looking out across the Laguna Madre and seeing hundreds of kites soaring over the Gulf of Mexico. Pick out a colorful kite from the multitude available at **B&S Kites** or rent a kiteboard from a local vendor. In 2017, *National Geographic* named the island as one of the world's 13 greatest kiteboarding spots. sopadre.com

FIND A LIGHTNING WHELK

The lightning whelk—Texas' state shell—is among the Gulf Coast's largest shells at 8 to 16 inches long. Found only on the western part of the Gulf of Mexico, the shell has a long history in the region: Some Native Americans used it as a tool for eating and drinking, while others considered it to be sacred.

BEFRIEND A PENGUIN

In Galveston, **Moody Gardens'** 45-minute Penguin Encounter grants you access to the frigid penguin habitat, along with a biologist-led tour of the food-preparation area, participation in an enrichment activity with the animals, and information about conservation, training, and biology. Or you can always visit penguins at the Aquarium Pyramid, where they reside next door to seals, stingrays, and sharks. moodygardens.com

GAZE AT THE STARS

It may still be warm when the sun goes down, but nighttime activities offer a welcome reprieve from the blazing sun. **George Observatory** in Needville, only open on Saturdays, has three telescopes for public use and a planetarium with educational exhibits. **The University of Texas McDonald Observatory** (high up in the Davis Mountains offers daytime tours, solar viewings, and star parties. hmns.org/george-observatory; mcdonaldobservatory.org



TAKE YOURSELF OUT TO THE BALL GAME

No doubt the World Series-winning Houston Astros are the hottest ticket this summer—and the most expensive. For more wallet-friendly bat-crackin' entertainment, the minor leagues offer numerous teams to support across Texas. Perks like the lazy river at **Dr Pepper Ballpark** (home of the Frisco RoughRiders) and the gorgeous view of the Gulf of Mexico at **Corpus Christi's Whataburger Field** (home of the Hooks) add to the fun. milb.com



Dell Diamond, home of the Round Rock Express

FAMILY FRIENDLY

SPRAY PAINT A CAR AT THE VW SLUG BUG RANCH

An homage to the more famous Cadillac Ranch just 35 miles east, this quirky roadside attraction on Interstate 40 outside of Amarillo touts five Volkswagen Beetles planted nose-down in the dirt. In some ways, it's better than its Cadillac cousin: fewer people, lower profile, and more room to spray paint with abandon.

BEAT THE CHRISTMAS RUSH

Summer Christmas shopping might sound crazy, but come November you'll be patting yourself on the back. In Laredo, the **Sister Cities Festival** features more than 180 vendors from Mexico (and sometimes China, Australia, Argentina, and Spain) selling handmade items ranging from leather goods to jewelry to pottery. The free, three-day shopping extravaganza has been around for 16 years and runs July 13-15 this year. visitlaredo.com

HEAD UNDERGROUND

Halfway between San Antonio and Big Bend National Park off Interstate

10, the **Caverns of Sonora** is a prime locale to hide from the blazing Texas sun this summer. Keep in mind: While the temperature 155 feet below the surface is 72 degrees year-round, high humidity levels mean it can feel more like 85. cavernsofsonora.com

WATCH THE SUNSET FROM A TREEHOUSE

Cypress Valley Canopy Tours opened in Spicewood in 1999 as the first zip-line canopy tour in the continental United States. Nestled high above a creek, Cypress Valley's two-bedroom "Nest" is an ideal sanctuary for families. "There's something about being off the ground, when you're up in a tree," co-owner David Beilharz explains, "whether it's some instinctive monkey evolution or it's feeling like *The Swiss Family Robinson*." cypressvalleycanopytours.com

REMEMBER—AND REIMAGINE—THE ALAMO

"What if you could stand where Davy Crockett defended the Alamo and could hear the story about how he wound up there?" asks Michael McGar, president of augmented-reality production company Imagine Virtua. Thanks to the combined efforts of coders, artists, and a half-dozen historians, you don't have to wonder anymore.

Imagine Virtua debuted its free **Alamo Reality** app in March, offering

users the chance to interact with the hallowed historical site in a new way. At 14 sites on the Alamo grounds, the app recognizes your location and displays 3-D digital images of what the location looked like in 1836, the year of the Alamo battle, including various characters that would have been present. At each location, the app also provides deeper historical context, interpreting the sites as they would have appeared when occupied by Native Americans and then the Spanish.

"You can be engaged on your phone and share it with the people around you and still be in the moment," says Leslie Komet Ausburn of Imagine Virtua. "The app is designed to elevate the experience." alamoreality.com



WATCH THE BATS TAKE FLIGHT

As if summoned by a dinner bell, millions of bats spiral out of their dark homes across Texas every summer night—a spectacular show if you know where to look.

More than 15 million Mexican free-tailed bats make **Bracken Cave** near San Antonio the world's largest such colony. In

Austin, **Congress Avenue Bridge** is home to more than 1.5 million. batcon.org/bracken; batcon.org/congress



SEE THE SUNFLOWERS SHINE ALONG I-35

From May to October, you're likely to witness the golden glow of sunflowers when driving along Texas highways. More often than not, the flowers are part of crops harvested for their seeds. The sunflowers along Interstate 35 near Hillsboro often draw admirers, but keep in mind the fields are mostly on private property.



ENCOUNTER ELEPHANTS

Last year, the **Houston Zoo** renovated its **McNair Asian Elephant Habitat**, adding a 7,000-square-foot barn and boardwalk with unobstructed views of the pachyderms bathing in their new 160,000-gallon pool. Summer also brought a new baby elephant, Joy. Now's the ideal time to visit and learn about these highly intelligent animals. houstonzoo.org



Caverns of Sonora

SAVE THE DATE



JOIN A PICKIN' CIRCLE IN LUCKENBACH

Pickin' circles are a longstanding tradition in the blink-and-you'll-miss-it, unincorporated town of Luckenbach. On Sunday through Thursday nights, musicians of all sorts and skill levels gather under the oak trees outside the Luckenbach Texas dance hall and general store for an acoustic jam session. If you've never strummed in public, don't be shy; the town's motto says it all: "Everybody's Somebody in Luckenbach." luckenbachtexas.com

WATCH A MUSICAL IN THE NATION'S SECOND-LARGEST CANYON

Every summer for more than five decades, Palo Duro Canyon has set the stage for **TEXAS!**, an outdoor musical chronicling the Native Americans who called this Panhandle wonder home and the pioneers who settled it. It's theater for the people, but more than anything, it depicts the drama of frontier history in a setting like no other. Shows run June 1-Aug. 18. texas-show.com

SEE THE SEA TURTLES

The Gulf Coast is preparing for summer's most welcome guests: tiny Kemp's ridley sea turtle hatchlings. While most of the endangered turtles' nests are protected from public view, well-timed tourists can witness a release from Malaquite Beach in front of the **Padre Island National Seashore Visitor Center** from mid-June through August. nps.gov/pais

GET COUNTRY ON THE 4TH

In Austin, the red-headed stranger returns to Circuit of The Americas for the 45th annual **Willie Nelson's 4th of July Picnic**, a full day of country music old and new. Meanwhile at Kerrville's Louise Hays Park, **Robert Earl Keen's Fourth on the River** offers free live music and the largest fireworks display in the Hill Country. thecircuit.com; kerrvilles4th.org



EMBRACE THE MOSQUITOES

In most places, to be called "mosquito legs" would be considered an insult. But skinny stems are prize-worthy in Clute, home of the **Great Texas Mosquito Festival** (and its Mosquito Legs competition). The 38th annual event, July 26-28, celebrates the summer nuisance in style with three days of events, including carnival rides, the mosquito chase (a 5K race), barbecue and fajita cookoffs, horseshoe and washer throwing tournaments, and games. Live entertainment caps off each evening with the likes of Jack Ingram and Rodney Atkins. The buzziest sight is the Mosquito Calling competition, in which contestants vie to summon the biggest bloodsucker. "It definitely put us on the map," says Clute Visitors Bureau Director Angel Cowley. "We've embraced it." mosquitofestival.com

HONOR JUNETEENTH

Celebrated on June 19, the Juneteenth holiday memorializes the day in 1865 when word of the Emancipation Proclamation—signed two-and-half years earlier—finally reached Texas. Galveston celebrates with a reading of the Proclamation at the Ashton Villa. Houston's Emancipation Park is home to one of the oldest Juneteenth festivities in the South—dating to 1872—with parades, church choirs, and vendors. galveston.com; visithoustontexas.com

CATCH A CLASSIC MOVIE ON THE SILVER SCREEN IN EL PASO

Celebrate the magic and nostalgia of cinema at the **Plaza Classic Film Festival** (Aug. 2-12), which screens

an array of films in downtown El Paso's beautifully restored Plaza Theatre. Don't be surprised if you spy a few famous faces while you're there; in previous years, celebrities like Al Pacino and Debbie Reynolds have attended screenings of their classic hits. plazaclassic.com

GET SANDY IN GALVESTON

What kind of sandcastle would a professional architect build? Find out on Aug. 25 when more than 60 teams of architects, designers, engineers, and contractors dig in for Galveston's annual **AIA Sandcastle Competition**. This isn't your average sandcastle contest—teams often spend months developing a design plan before taking to the beach. aiahouston.org



AIA Sandcastle Competition



SAY WHAT?

Houston's **Comicpalooza** attracts more than 40,000 attendees for all things comic books, sci-fi, anime, gaming, and pop culture. This year's event, May 25-27, promises star power from the likes of Edward James Olmos, Jimmie Walker (dynomite!), and Orlando Jones. comicpalooza.com



SOW THE SEEDS OF SUMMER

Luling will serve up a juicy slice of summer during its annual **Watermelon Thump**, June 21-24. Held since 1954, the festival draws an estimated 30,000 visitors to the small town for live music, a parade, car rally, carnival, and of course, watermelons—topped off with a seed-spitting contest. watermelonthump.com



LOOK TO THE SKY IN LONGVIEW

Now in its 41st year, the **Great Texas Balloon Race** (July 27-29) attracts some of the best balloon pilots in the world to race for the title during the day; evenings are filled with live concerts and a spectacular balloon glow. greattexasballoonrace.com

BEAT THE HEAT



FROLIC WITH SEA LIFE
Discover magnificent underwater worlds at the spectacular—and air-conditioned—Texas State Aquarium in Corpus Christi. The expansive facility displays all manner of marine life, from sharks and flamingos to river otters and dolphins, with special programs that involve feeding and interacting with some of the animals and educational programs led by staff members. texasstateaquarium.org

GRAB A DRINK IN PORT A
Less than a year after Hurricane Harvey ravaged the Gulf Coast, Port Aransas is ready to welcome back tourists for the summer. While recovery work remains, many of the town's businesses have already reopened, including **Shorty's Place**—the self-proclaimed “oldest and friend-

liest bar in Port Aransas”—and the pirate-themed **Gaff Bar**, home of the belt sander races. shortysportaransas.com; gotothegaff.com

STAY AT A VINTAGE SUMMER RETREAT
A stay at Alpine's **Antelope Lodge** feels like stepping into a sepia-toned Big Bend postcard. While it still caters to travelers who like its rustic charm, this 1949 motor court relic has been refreshed after a new owner took over this year. New linens, appliances, a renovated lobby, updated plumbing, and improved Wi-Fi add comfort while retaining the lodge's midcentury character. antelopelodge.com

ADMIRE ART IN HOUSTON
Houston's cultural abundance manifests itself in the **Houston Museum District**, home to a whopping 19

museums across 9 square miles. With its location in the heart of the city, the district allows visitors—it saw 6.5 million last year—to truly experience the diversity Houston has to offer. The institutions are divided into four walkable and cyclable zones: Those with kids in tow might enjoy Zone 4, which includes the Houston Zoo and the Children's Museum of Houston; aesthetes should head to Zone 3, where the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston and the Contemporary Arts Museum Houston are stationed; and history buffs will find much to learn in Zone 2, home of the Buffalo Soldiers National Museum, Holocaust Museum Houston, and Czech Center Museum Houston. Houston Museum District Executive Director Julie Farr has a special fondness for Zone 1, which includes

the Menil Collection, Rothko Chapel, and the Houston Center for Photography. “I like to call Zone 1 a ‘lower your blood pressure’ atmosphere,” Farr says. “It’s very calm and peaceful; you’ll see families picnicking, people taking wedding photos, and dogs chasing Frisbees.” houmuse.org

COOL OFF WITH THE GRANDEST OF HISTORIES
The **Bullock Texas State History Museum's** permanent exhibits—the 17th-century *La Belle* ship and the original Goddess of Liberty statue, for example—are always worth a visit. But the museum introduces new opportunities for learning this summer with special exhibitions *Rodeo!* and *Comanche Motion*. When you get your fill of history, the giant, dark, and chilly IMAX theater is a worthy respite. thestoryoftexas.com

LEARN HOW TO SWING DANCE AT GRUENE HALL
Grab your dancing shoes and head to Texas' oldest continually operating dance hall, which this summer hosts



Two Ton Tuesdays June 5-Aug. 14. Before the country music starts (courtesy of San Antonio band Two Tons of Steel), the venue offers one-hour swing-dancing lessons so you can brush up on your boot-scootin' skills. gruenehall.com



NAMASTE WITH GOATS
If you're looking for a tough workout, this class isn't for you. But if you need an Instagram-worthy moment and a good laugh, goat yoga definitely delivers. Several studios—among them **GOGA Goat Yoga in Austin**, **Goat Yoga Houston**, **Texas Hill Country Goats & Yoga**, and **Goat Yoga Richardson**—have joined the trend of adding goats into yoga classes because of the animal's anxiety-reducing effect. As class members practice sun salutations, baby goats are free to climb on top of people, chase each other, and even nap on the mats. goga.yoga; goatyogahouston.com; nuluvgoatmilkproducts.com/goat-yoga; goatyogarichardson.com



TOWER OVER TEXAS
Enjoy the view from the top of these city towers. At **Dallas' Reunion Tower**, a 470-foot observation deck with telescopes and high-definition zoom cameras provides panoramic views. In San Antonio, check out the city from the 750-foot observation deck and the revolving **Chart House Restaurant at Tower of the Americas**. Travel 34 floors in the glass elevator of the Hyatt Regency Houston to get to **Spindletop**, a revolving restaurant that shows off the glittering metropolis. reuniontower.com; toweroftheamericas.com; houstonton.regency.hyatt.com

FIND ZEN IN AN ART MUSEUM
Stay cool in crow pose at a museum yoga class. At the **Blanton Museum of Art** in Austin, **Longview Museum of Fine Arts**, **San Angelo Museum of Fine Arts**, and the **Amon Carter Museum of American Art** in Fort Worth, mix stretching with creative inspiration and contemplation. After class, you're invited to enjoy the art. **L**