



# Texas

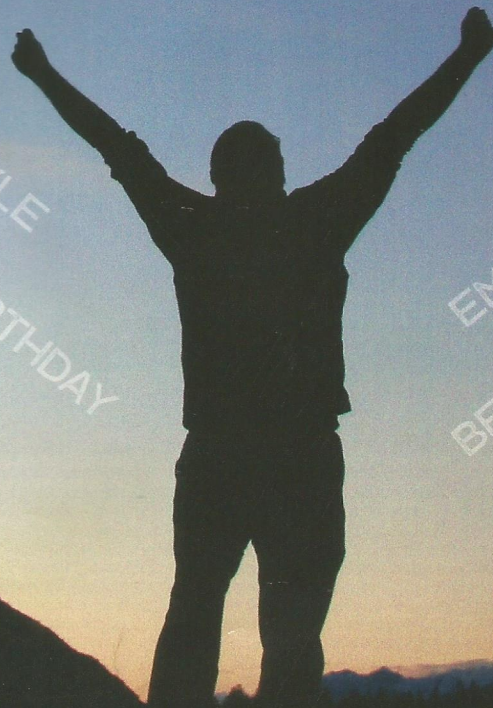
## JOURNEY

THE MAGAZINE FOR AAA MEMBERS

# 20

## WAYS TO CRUSH

# 2020



RAMBLE ON ROUTE 66  
 GORGE AT WURSTFEST  
 PARADE THROUGH AUSTIN  
 CELEBRATE CHARRO DAYS  
 E MUTTON BUSTIN'  
 IN A TEXAS-SHAPED POOL  
 HIT RESTART BUTTON IN STYLE  
 CRAZY FOR WASHINGTON'S BIRTHDAY  
 L DOWN AT HAMILTON POOL  
 E DEEP OFF GALVESTON  
 PADDLE THE RIO  
 PARTY WITH THE STARS  
 BAG OUR HIGHEST PEAK  
 STOMP HILL COUNTRY  
 SPOT AN EAGLE IN THE WIL  
 FIESTA FOREVER IN SAN A  
 EMBRACE YOUR INNER BOOK NE  
 BEHOLD A MIRACLE OF NATURE  
 HANG TEN IN SOUTH PAD  
 DRIVE THE BLUEBONNET



# 20 VERY TEXAN WAYS TO CRUSH 2020

Go big in the new year with  
our ultimate to-do list

Floating in  
Big Bend  
National Park  
is Big Idea 19.



# WINTER



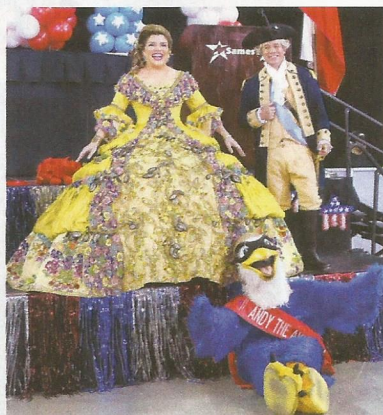
## Hit the Restart Button—in Style

You've survived the holidays, so now's the time to recommit to your health with a stay at the 40-room Lake Austin Spa Resort. From the moment the sleek new water taxi whisks you along the Colorado River to the dock, you know this landmark Texas resort has upped its game. The spa has a host of new offerings, including intensive, efficient new fitness classes. The resort also has its first inspiration and wellness specialist. Icing on the cake, so to speak, is chef Stéphane Beaucamp's conscientious cuisine, a collection of new menus featuring healthy foods from local producers and the organic gardens on the property. Cooking classes enable you to reproduce delicious, cleaner-than-ever dishes back home. *Rates start at \$595 per person per night, which includes meals and activities. (800) 847-5637; lakeaustin.com. —June Naylor*

## Greet the New Year With Some Austin Magic

Celebrate the new year and keep Austin weird by joining in Minor Mishap's New Year's Day Parade. The funky 25-piece group calls itself a "renegade circus-punk band" that is inspired by a love of street music and spectacle. *Doug Sahm Hill. Free. minormishap.com. —Cynthia J. Drake*





## Spot an Eagle in the Wild

Bald eagles have symbolized our nation since the late 1700s, and spotting one in the wild is a particular thrill. Each winter, eagles congregate around Lake Buchanan's cliffs and rocky shores. From mid-November to February, Vanishing Texas River Cruises runs two- to four-hour trips that almost—almost—guarantee you'll spot one. While onboard, you can relax on the outdoor deck or remain comfortably indoors. Be sure to keep an eye out for ospreys, crested caracaras, and great blue herons, too. Cruises start at \$25. (512) 756-6986; [vtrc.com](http://vtrc.com). —*Sophia Dembling*

## Go Crazy for Washington's Birthday

Sure, you've celebrated George Washington's birthday with a day off, but in Laredo, you can go all out for more than a month. The town famously hosts parades, concerts, debutante balls, sporting events, a fashion show, food and wine tastings, theatrical and musical performances, carnivals, and even a Comic Con.

Not sure where to start? Try the weekend of February 14–16, when you can take in the popular Comedy Jam for George, Pipes and Stripes Car Show, and Stars and Stripes Air Show. The celebration runs from January 17 to February 29. (956) 722-0589; [wbcalaredo.org](http://wbcalaredo.org). —*Casey Kelly-Barton*

## Celebrate Charro Days in Brownsville

No other event honors Texas' unique relationship with Mexico quite like this one. Launched in 1938 to boost morale during the Great Depression, Charro Days Fiesta features parades, balls, and street parties—all in celebration of Mexican culture and Brownsville's long-standing friendship with its cross-border neighbor, Matamoros. February 22–March 1. [charrodaysfiesta.com](http://charrodaysfiesta.com).

—*Jim Benning*

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## Ramble Down Route 66 in Amarillo

Rev up your sense of nostalgia by tooling down 150 miles of Route 66 in Texas, from Shamrock to Adrian with a pit stop in Amarillo. Though the Mother Road has largely been usurped by Interstate 40 in most parts of the Panhandle, you'll see historic markers and sites that still herald this epic American road trip, which inspired songs and movies during a time when the journey truly was as important as the destination.

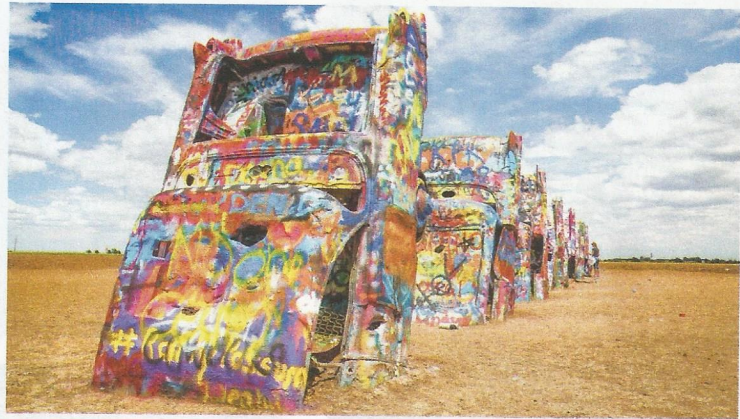
Stop at the Midpoint Cafe in Adrian, perhaps the most famous restaurant on this stretch of road. It marks the halfway point between Chicago and Los Angeles. While en route, soak in the splashy billboards advertising the 72-ounce steak challenge at the Big Texan in Amarillo. The same kind of billboards lured drivers back in the 1960s. Finally, don't miss Amarillo's Cadillac Ranch or the Route 66 Historic District. The latter is home to many original structures, and it's where people still get their kicks on the pilgrimage of a lifetime.

—*Cynthia J. Drake*

## Drive the Texas Bluebonnet Trail

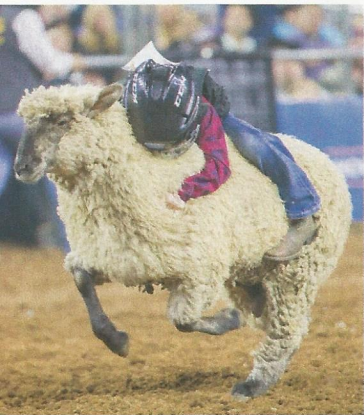
You can't get more Texan than a sprawling Hill Country field blanketed with bluebonnets. The best way to experience our state flower's annual bloom—not to mention enjoy gorgeous parks and lakes—is to drive some 40 miles of the Official Texas Bluebonnet Trail in Ennis. Want even more bluebonnet goodness, along with live music and arts and crafts? Arrive April 17-19 during the Bluebonnet Trails Festival. Pick up a free map at the Ennis Welcome Center, or find one via the Ennis Y'all mobile app. Driving the trails is free; limited tours led by an Ennis Garden Club member are \$50. (972) 878-4748; [visitennis.org](http://visitennis.org).

—*Deborah Lynn Blumberg*



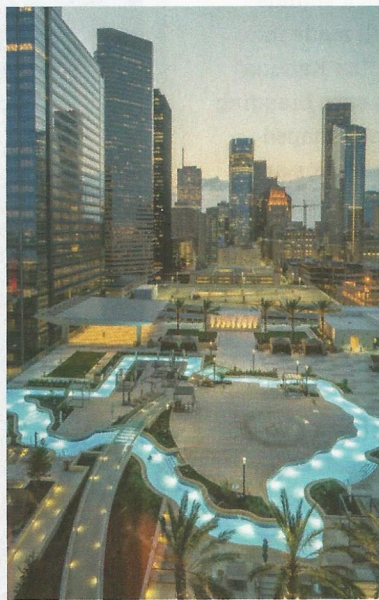
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## See Mutton Bustin' at the Biggest Rodeo in Texas

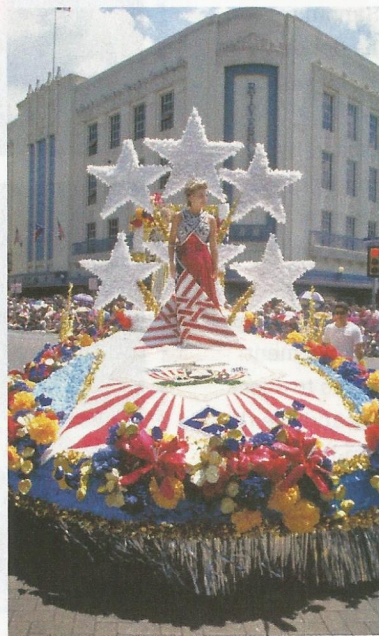
The world's largest indoor livestock exhibition and rodeo takes place each spring in the Bayou City. At the Houston Livestock Show and Rodeo, visitors to NRG Stadium watch calf scrambles, barrel racing, and mutton bustin', where kids in helmets cling to running sheep. From March 3–20, visitors can size up prized cattle, then buy a cowboy hat before munching on Texas-size turkey legs and deep-fried Twinkies. Take in a concert—rock and country greats Santana and George Strait have performed—or end your day on the Ferris wheel. *General admission, excluding rodeo events or concerts, is \$15 for adults, \$5 for kids; free for age 2 and under. (832) 667-1000; rodeohouston.com. —D.L.B.*



## Swim in a Texas-Shaped Pool

Circumnavigate Texas—or at least a reasonable aquatic facsimile thereof—by checking in to the Marriott Marquis Houston and floating the length of its Texas-shaped lazy river. It's a great way to cool down on a hot late-spring day, and you can make the entire journey in about 15–20 minutes. (713) 654-1777; [tinyurl.com/mmarg](http://tinyurl.com/mmarg).

—Jim Benning



## Fiesta Forever (Well, Almost) in San Antonio

Even if you can't make it to the Alamo City for all 11 days of this epic party, drop in for a parade, concert, culinary event, or even the *charreada*. You'll have a great time *and* pay homage to the heroes of The Alamo. April 16–26. [fiestasanantonio.org](http://fiestasanantonio.org). —J.B.



# SUMMER

## 11 Stomp Some Hill Country Grapes

At least once in your lifetime, you should channel your inner Lucille Ball, go totally *I Love Lucy*, and stomp some wine grapes with your bare feet. (Google it, kids.) Two Messina Hof winery locations, in Bryan and Fredericksburg, allow you to pick lenoir grapes and stomp them in late summer as part of Harvest Festival. The grape stomp is just as squishy as it sounds (and, yes, the final product is still made into drinkable wine). There are also “Big Kahuna” competitions at both wineries to earn bragging rights for the biggest and weirdest-shaped picked grape cluster, plus wine tastings and tours. *Tickets start at \$35; various dates in July and August; messinahof.com.* —**Cynthia J. Drake**



## 12 Party With the Stars

See the night sky as it should be seen—with minimal light pollution. Four Texas parks are certified Dark Sky Parks: Big Bend Ranch, Enchanted Rock, Copper Breaks, and South Llano River. And in 2019, Devils River State Natural Area received Dark Sky Sanctuary status, which means it’s one of the darkest places on the planet—10 places in the world have received this designation.

If you go during a star party hosted by volunteer members of local astronomy clubs around the state, you can take a peek at the stars and planets through telescopes while tapping into the knowledge of astronomy hobbyists. Says Stephanie Garcia, spokeswoman for the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department: “We encourage all of our park visitors to check out at least one of these sites to try and see the difference between the night sky in their own homes and some of these places where you can see some incredible celestial objects.” [tpwd.texas.gov/state-parks](http://tpwd.texas.gov/state-parks). —**C.J.D.**

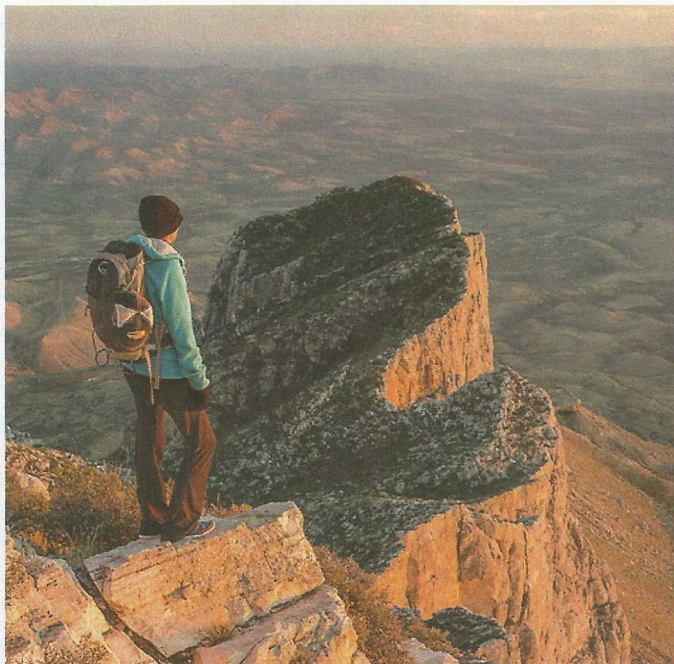


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## Behold the Miracle of Nature

On a regular basis before sunrise from mid-June to August at the Padre Island National Seashore, park rangers release thousands of tiny, endangered Kemp's ridley sea turtles. Watching them waddle down the beach and into the Gulf is to see one of nature's great wonders. *Free. Releases start at 6:45 a.m. on Malaquite Beach. (361) 949-7163; nps.gov/pais. —Deborah Lynn Blumberg*



## Bag Our Highest Peak

The highest point in Texas may put the lie to the argument that "everything is bigger" in the Lone Star State, but that doesn't make Guadalupe Peak any less grand. Standing 8,749 feet above sea level, the iconic West Texas summit reaches just about half the height of Mount Kilimanjaro in Tanzania, but those who make the 8.5-mile round-trip hike from Pine Springs campground to the highest reaches of Guadalupe Mountains National Park can still boast that they've been to the top of Texas. With 2,900 feet of climbing, the trail affords some of the best scenery in the state. Be sure to pack water, sunscreen, and a windbreaker. *Park entry is \$7 per person. (915) 828-3251; nps.gov/gumo/index.htm. —Dan Oko*

## Dive Deep

One hundred nautical miles off the coast of Galveston at Flower Garden Banks National Marine Sanctuary, you can scuba dive a reef teeming with barracuda, chromis, and creolefish. On the ocean floor, coral heads stretch as far as the eye can see. But beware: Dive conditions can be challenging. Beginners may want to head elsewhere. Trips are booked through local dive charters. *Prices vary. (409) 621-5151; flowergarden.noaa.gov/welcome.html. —D.L.B.*

## Hang Ten, Texas-Style

Surfing's never been hotter in Texas. You can find state-of-the-art artificial waves in Waco. *bsrcablepark.com*. More waves may be coming to Austin, where the World Surf League plans to redevelop a now-closed surf park. Better yet, make a beeline to South Padre Island. You can luck into good waves in early or late summer, and conditions are often ideal for beginners. *sopadre.com. —Jim Benning*

## Celebrate Your Inner Book Nerd

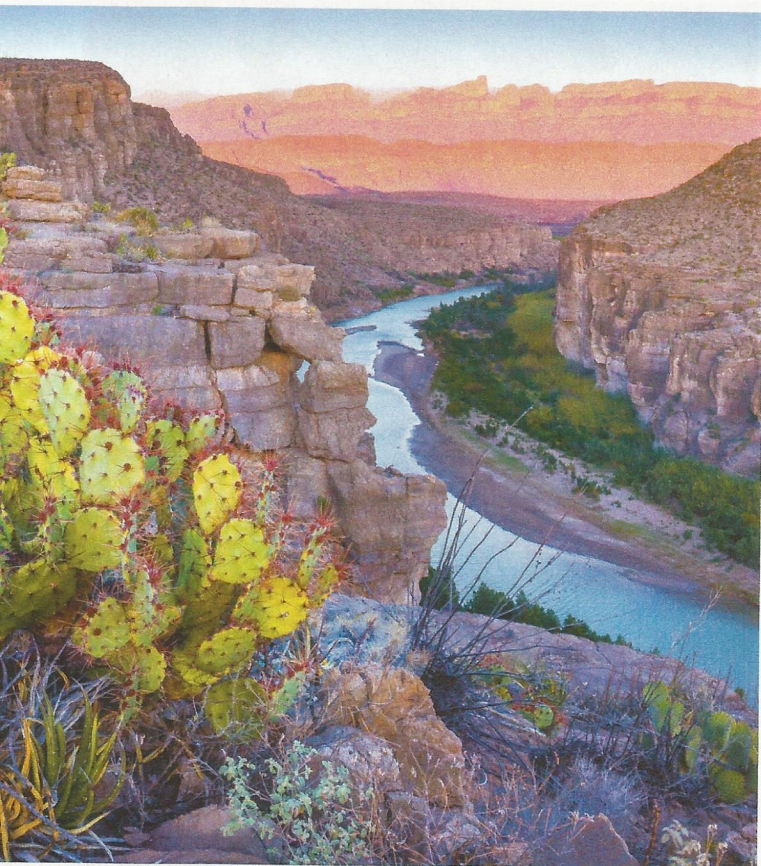
Former librarian and then-First Lady of Texas Laura Bush started the Texas Book Festival in 1995, which means this fall it marks its 25th anniversary. Join 50,000 fellow bibliophiles at the state Capitol to hear authors speak and find your new favorite book. *Dates not set at press time. Free. (512) 477-4055; texasbookfestival.org.*



—Casey Kelly-Barton

MORE >>>

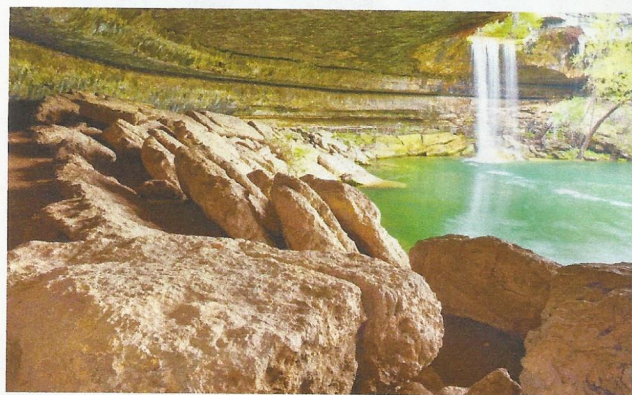




## Dive Into the Ultimate Texas Swimming Hole

There are few ways to cool down more Texan than in a swimmin' hole, and Hamilton Pool Preserve in Dripping Springs is one of the best. Take a quarter-mile hike to the collapsed grotto, then wade through the clear, refreshing waters and snap photos under the 50-foot waterfall. You can swim year-round when conditions are right. *\$11 online reservation plus \$15 cash-only entry fee. (512) 264-2740; tinyurl.com/hamiltonpooltx.*

—Cynthia J. Drake



## Roll on the Rio

As it flows through the Chihuahuan Desert on its way to the Gulf of Mexico, the Rio Grande is a lifeblood for wildlife and human communities on both sides of the Texas-Mexico border. On the western edge of Big Bend National Park, however, the river vanishes between the cliffs of the majestic Santa Elena Canyon, making for one of the most remarkable paddling adventures in North America. Along a 22-mile descent through a rough and remote wilderness, the Rio Grande bisects the astonishing canyon walls, which rise 1,500 feet above the river. To make the most of the backcountry adventure, park officials and river outfitters recommend tackling Santa Elena as a two- to three-day trip, depending on seasonal water flows, which requires camping and allows for side hikes into some of the loneliest, most far-out territory in Texas.

*Park entry is \$30 per vehicle, and riverside camping in the canyon is \$10 per night. (432) 477-2251; nps.gov/bibe.*

*Angell Expeditions offers a three-day, two-night Santa Elena trip with meals and shuttle for \$590 per adult and \$450 for kids 12 and under. A guided boomerang day trip costs \$160 per adult. [angellepeditions.com](http://angellepeditions.com). —Dan Oko*



## Gorge Yourself at Wurstfest

Celebrate a German prince's journey to Texas to create "New Germany." At New Braunfels' 10-day Wurstfest in Landa Park, you can fill up on sausages, pretzels, and German and Texas beers in the *biergarten*. Accordion players and Oompah and polka bands inspire dancing, while others compete in a stein-holding competition. *General admission is \$15; kids 12 and under, free. Admission and drink ticket sales are cash only. [wurstfest.com](http://wurstfest.com).*

—Deborah Lynn Blumberg