

The background of the entire page is a photograph of a highly ornate, light-colored stone archway. The archway features intricate carvings, including a central circular sign that reads "SOUTHERN LINES PACIFIC" with a sunburst design. The archway is flanked by decorative columns and topped with a large, sculpted figure. The scene is set outdoors with palm trees visible in the background.

South Texas evokes images of sun-drenched beaches, swaying palms and colorful citrus trees. But there's more to this region than just the beach. The Texas Tropical Trail Region offers travelers natural, cultural and historical treasures — all with a distinct Hispanic flavor.

Many people have long called this place home — from Spanish and French explorers to riverboat barons, from Hispanic vaqueros to salty sea captains, from land speculators to railroad tycoons.

This is the balmy, vibrant southern tip of Texas, a triangle of coastal plains roughly bounded by the Rio Grande and San Antonio River and the Gulf of Mexico. Situated between the mountain plateaus and the Gulf, and blessed with a subtropical climate, the region hosts plants and animals found nowhere else in the United States.

Diverse groups struggled for control of this strategic borderland. Allegiances ebbed and flowed among six nations: Spain, France, Mexico, Texas, the Confederate States and the United States. Centuries of conflict and cultural blending forged a history that embodies the spirit of the six flags of Texas.

Nomadic hunter-gatherers occupied this land in 1519, when Spanish navigator Alonso Álvarez de Piñeda mapped the Texas coast and explored the Rio Grande. Warfare, diseases, intermarriage and incursions by Plains Indians eventually decimated or dispersed native groups.



South Texas treasures, Hispanic flavor

Historic Brownsville Museum

For almost three centuries, South Texas was part of New Spain's buffer zone between established Spanish provinces in present-day Mexico and French Louisiana to the east. In 1685, France unsuccessfully challenged Spanish control when Robert Cavelier, Sieur de La Salle, established the ill-fated Fort St. Louis near Matagorda Bay.

In response, Spain bolstered its frontier presence during the 1700s with *presidios* (forts) and missions, including one in present-day Refugio. It also offered *porciones* (land grants) to settlers and in 1748 created a new province, Nuevo Santander, which stretched across the Rio Grande to the Nueces River, where it bordered the province of *Tejas* (Texas).

Mexico gained independence from Spain in 1821. The lower Rio Grande Valley region kept its commercial ties to the south despite growing colonies north of the Nueces River. The Republic of Texas gained independence from Mexico in 1836 and claimed the Rio Grande as its southern boundary. Mexico set the Nueces River as the line, and the dispute continued even after Texas became an American state in 1845. The Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, which ended the U.S.-Mexico War of 1846-48, settled the matter. The Rio Grande became the international boundary, and the U.S. gained Mexican territories from Texas to the Pacific Coast.



La Lomita Chapel, Mission



Full-scale replica of Columbus' ship Niña, Corpus Christi Museum of Science & History

Background: Historic downtown Weslaco

During the 1850s, steamboats hauled cargo up and down the Rio Grande, creating wealth for riverboat barons such as Richard King and Mifflin Kenedy, both of whom later turned their riches into ranching empires.

After the Civil War, ranchers drove millions of longhorn cattle to northern markets. Ancient traditions of the Spanish *vaquero* (cowboy) formed a basis of the cowboy culture that spread across Texas during the late 1800s.



The early 20th century brought other newcomers — tourists attracted by the coast's prolific fisheries, cool breezes and pristine beaches, especially those found on Padre Island, the world's longest barrier island.

Today, bi-nationalism reigns in the region and Mexican traditions permeate the language, food, music and religion. Relax in picturesque Hispanic plazas and browse shops along palm-lined streets. Enjoy piquant Mexican foods, rhythmic Tejano music and flashy folklorico dances. Take a trail ride across wide-open spaces and sample sizzling steaks or barbecue. Climb the stairs of a historic lighthouse and try your hand at deep-sea fishing or beachcombing.

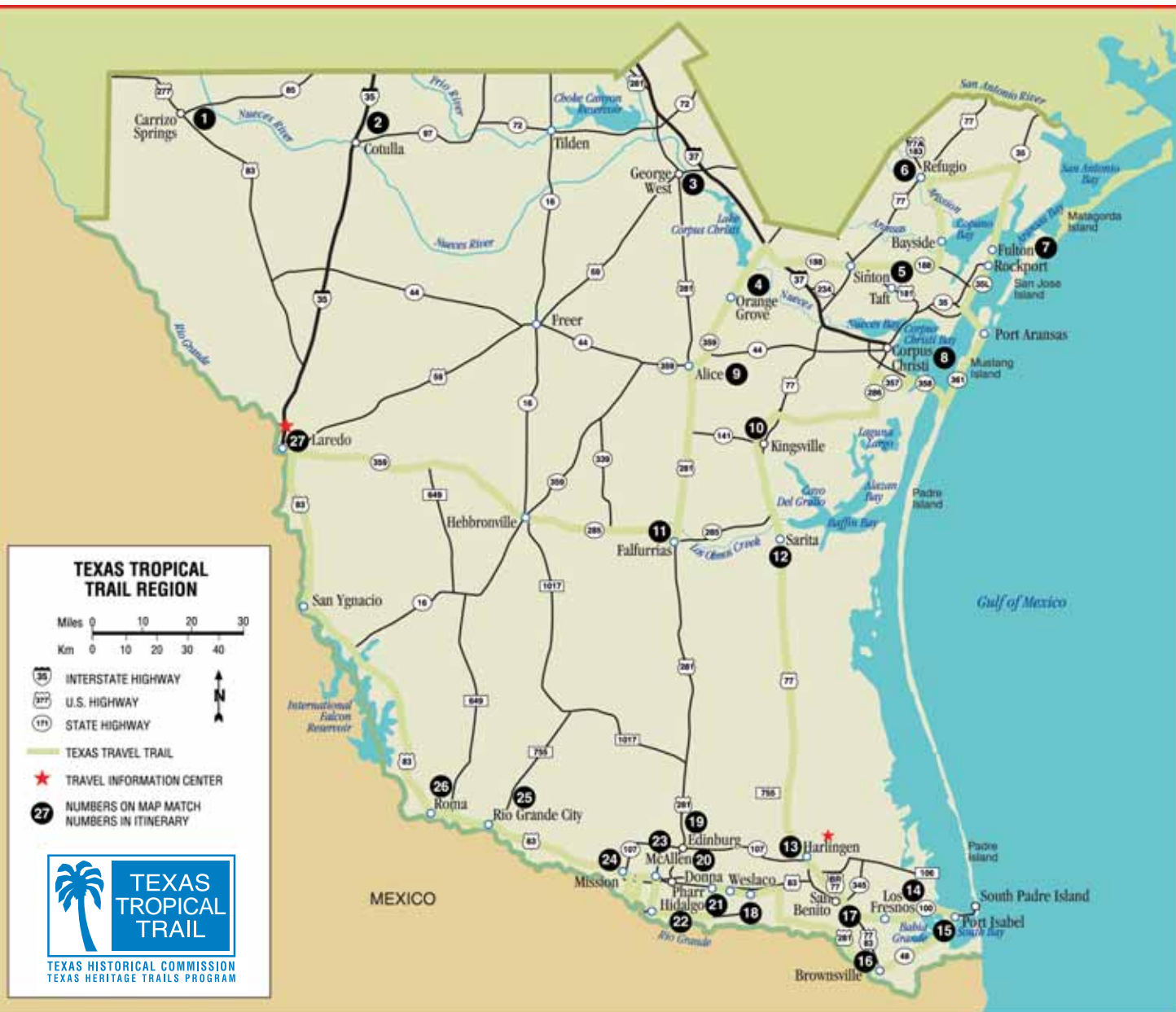
For more than a century, Hispanic and Anglo traditions have blended to create a truly distinctive bicultural heritage. By preserving and promoting that legacy, dozens of museums and heritage sites in the 20-county region remain *guardias del pasado* (guardians of the past).



Midwesterners arriving in South Texas to buy land



1852 Port Isabel Lighthouse State Historic Site



The following cities are described in this guide and the number refers to the city's location on the map.

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www.texasropicaltrail.com

ALICE

Named for ranch legend Richard King's daughter, Alice became a major cattle-shipping point in the 1880s at the junction of two rail lines. After 1900, irrigation influenced agricultural development, and 1930s oil discoveries brought more wealth.

Alice made national headlines after a controversial 1948 U.S. Senate primary boosted the political career of future president Lyndon B. Johnson. The election allegedly turned on help from South Texas political boss George "Duke of Duval" Parr, who was convicted of tax evasion in the 1930s. The judge's bench used in that trial is a prime attraction at the South Texas Museum, housed in the 1940s office building of prominent ranching brothers Claude and Frank McGill. The museum displays a range of artifacts including a San Antonio and Aransas Pass Railroad lantern and a rare horse collar woven from corn shucks.

The Tejano ROOTS Hall of Fame and Museum celebrates Alice's important role in the development of Tejano music. Tejano is the borderland-style music of *conjunto* with up-tempo instrumentation and modern stage presence. Museum exhibits display flashy stage clothes, instruments and photos of more than 100 Tejano stars. An annual hall of fame induction features live stage shows. Inductees include Armando Marroquin, Sr. and Paco Betancourt who started America's first all-Hispanic recording company, Ideal Records, in Alice in 1944. Recording equipment from the landmark company remains on display.



Unusual early 1900s horse collar made of woven corn shucks, South Texas Museum (right)



1940 Stearman trainer, Maxine Flournoy Third Coast Squadron of the Commemorative Air Force Museum

The Alice airport is home to the Maxine Flournoy Third Coast Squadron of the Commemorative Air Force. The squadron's hangar houses restored and flyable World War II planes such as a 1940 Stearman trainer, as well as vintage aircraft under restoration. Exhibits also retell the stories of Coastal Bend military personnel, including squadron namesake Maxine Flournoy, a member of the Women Airforce Service Pilots in World War II.

At nearby **Orange Grove**, the Orange Grove Museum takes visitors back to turn-of-the-20th-century life. A 1907 covered wagon, railroad caboose and Model-T Ford recall early modes of transportation. Period artifacts recreate leather and blacksmith shops, plus scenes of early homesteads.

Across the Nueces River at **San Patricio** sits the state's only remaining empresario home. Built in 1855, the McGloin Homestead was the residence of Irishman James McGloin who, along with John McMullen, acquired Texas' southernmost Mexican land grant in 1828 to settle 200 Irish families. The Corpus Christi Area Heritage Society offers tours of the home, which also serves as a bed-and-breakfast.



BROWNSVILLE

Stately palm trees and blooming bougainvilleas lend the state's southernmost city a subtropical charm.

An early American settlement along the lower Rio Grande, Brownsville sprang up on the river's north bank around Fort Brown (originally Fort Texas). U.S. Gen. Zachary Taylor established the garrison in March 1846 to secure the disputed Nueces Strip. By May, the first major battle of the U.S.-Mexico War occurred on Palo Alto prairie. The Palo Alto Battlefield National Historic Site presents a balanced bilingual chronology of the pivotal two-year war and the ensuing treaty that set the current U.S.-Mexico boundary.

Fort Brown continued to secure the border as a U.S. (and temporarily as a Confederate) post until it was closed after World War II. A number of structures — including the fort hospital and barracks — are part of the University of Texas at Brownsville and Texas Southmost College.

A stone's throw from Fort Brown, the Brownsville Heritage Complex commemorates local history. A heritage museum and resource center offer bilingual exhibits and resource material dating from the Spanish era to the early 20th century. The complex also contains the 1850 Stillman House Museum. After the U.S.-Mexico War, Charles Stillman, a ship owner and merchant living across the river in Matamoros, Mexico, saw a business opportunity. He bought part of a Spanish land grant at Fort Brown, then founded and named the town Brownsville. The Stillman House boasts family heirlooms and an exhibit on an incident of Anglo vs. Hispanic borderland violence known as the Cortina Wars.



1850 Stillman House parlor, Brownsville Heritage Complex

Head to the Brownsville Convention and Visitors Bureau and pick up a local heritage trail guide highlighting Brownsville's many historic structures. Downtown, a restored Spanish Colonial Revival-style Southern Pacific depot is home of the Historic Brownsville Museum. The 1928 structure displays bilingual exhibits on early town history. Its star attraction is the restored 1870s steam-powered Engine #1 of the Rio Grande Railroad. Also displayed is the 1850s mahogany bedroom set of local entrepreneur Simón Celaya, who ran the railroad between Brownsville and the port of Point Isabel (now Port Isabel). Further down the street stands the restored 1912 Cameron County Courthouse, designed by the office of renowned San Antonio architect Atlee B. Ayres.

Near downtown is the Mitte Cultural District, site of the Gladys Porter Zoo and the Brownsville Museum of Fine Art. The museum features a collection of works by N.C. Wyeth, Marc Chagall and James Whistler. It also maintains the 1834 Neale House, considered the city's oldest frame house, as well as the original Fort Brown bandstand.

The cultural district also contains Dean Porter Park, opened in 1927 on a former river channel or *resaca*. A cultural education center houses the Children's Museum of Brownsville and the Costumes of the Americas Museum. Antique and new costumes reveal how native women and men across the Americas have dressed in various historic periods. Rotating exhibits of 50–100 colorful costumes come from the museum's collection of 500.

The Brownsville-South Padre Island International Airport is home to the hangar and museum of the Commemorative Air Force's Rio Grande Wing. The museum exhibits World War II artifacts and retells little-known aviation stories including the tale of the 201st Mexican Fighter Squadron (Aztec Eagles) that trained in Texas for service in the Pacific Theater. The hangar stores flyable World War II aircraft such as a rare German Focke Wulf-44 Steiglitz biplane and an American Boeing PT-13 Stearman biplane. The wing also hosts a major air show each spring.



1840s U.S. infantry reenactor, Palo Alto Battlefield

CARRIZO SPRINGS

For 50 years, Carrizo Springs teacher J.W. House combed the area searching for Native American artifacts. His vast collection is displayed at the Wade House Memorial Museum, located in the Dimmit County Public Library. Uncovering 11,000 years of local history, the compilation includes large projectile points for killing mammoths and mastodons, stone *adzes* (ax-like tool) for woodworking and *metates* (grinding slabs) and *manos* (hand stones) for processing seeds and nuts. The museum also includes Native American artifacts of the Catarina Ranch collection donated by ranch owner and former Gov. Dolph Briscoe, Jr.

Downtown, the 1884 Dimmit County Courthouse was originally designed in a simplified Italianate style. The county expanded and remodeled the courthouse in 1927 to reflect the Classical Revival architecture it displays today.



Dimmit County Courthouse, Carrizo Springs

*The 1884 Dimmit County
Courthouse reflects Classical
Revival architecture.*



LOS CAMINOS DEL RIO

In 1989, the Texas Historical Commission and the Texas Department of Transportation partnered to celebrate *Los Caminos Del Rio*, or Roads of the River, a bi-national heritage corridor along the Rio Grande from Laredo to the Gulf of Mexico. The corridor celebrates an area unlike any other — a place where culture spans a border creating shared values, environment, history and economics. From historic cathedrals and plazas to unique international bridges and panoramic views, *Los Caminos Del Rio* is filled with heritage and natural wonders.



To learn more about *Los Caminos Del Rio*, request a free brochure at 866/276-6219 or download a copy at www.thc.state.tx.us.



Hand-drawn ferry border crossing, Los Ebanos

The Texas Tropical Trail Region is an enchanting paradise for birders and ecotourists. Dozens of preserves, natural areas and refuges scattered throughout the Rio Grande Valley offers some of the best bird watching in the country. Because the Valley is one of the most ecologically complex regions in the U.S., it has become a popular destination for visitors who delight in experiencing its biodiversity. Texas is a natural destination for bird watchers with more than three-quarters of America's bird species, and the Texas Tropical Trail Region is home to many of these winged wonders.

Highlighting the Valley's biodiversity, the World Birding Center is a network of nine sites scattered along 120 miles of river road with habitats ranging from dry chaparral brush and verdant riverside thickets to freshwater marshes and coastal wetlands. For more information on locations, visit www.worldbirdingcenter.org.



Green Jay

TxDOT



American White Pelicans

TxDOT

Not Just for the Birds



CORPUS CHRISTI

The region's largest city is a deep-water seaport, tourist hot spot and a step away from Padre Island National Seashore.

Town founder and land speculator Henry Kinney built a fort-like trading post in 1839 on a bluff above Corpus Christi Bay. Profits soared in 1845 when Gen. Zachary Taylor made Kinney's store his military base following the annexation of Texas by the United States. Soldiers stationed there included three future American presidents — Taylor, Franklin Pierce and Ulysses S. Grant — as well as future Confederate President Jefferson Davis. Also serving was Capt. Forbes Britton who later built a home next to Kinney's post. Today, Britton's home is the Centennial House, a museum with period furnishings. Occupied by the U.S. Army during the Civil War, the house withstood four 20th-century hurricanes and remains the city's oldest structure on its original site.

Nine restored and relocated Victorian homes welcome visitors at Heritage Park, located in the city's bayfront museum and convention district. The park's 1908 French-Galvan House hosts a multicultural center with rotating exhibits. The 1905 Lichtenstein House was the residence of a prominent Jewish family, but today houses a Hispanic culture museum. African American displays occupy the early-1900s home of Hattie Moore Littles, one of the city's first black residents.



Heritage Park's 1908 French-Galvan House

A short walk away, the Texas State Museum of Asian Cultures promotes understanding of Pacific Rim nations and India. The nucleus of the museum is the collection of Corpus native Billie Trimble Chandler, who lived many years in Japan. Objects range from a five-foot bronze Buddha statue to a bike-powered Singapore taxi, from Japanese Hakata dolls to Chinese kites and Korean drums. The museum celebrates Asian holidays with music, dance and craft demonstrations.

The museum district also boasts the Art Museum of South Texas, a striking modernistic edifice. The museum's 1,100-piece permanent collection depicts classical to modern art, emphasizing works from Texas, Mexico and the United States.

Across the Water Garden, the massive Corpus Christi Museum of Science & History details the region's natural and cultural history. Hands-on and interactive displays feature species adapted to a semi-arid climate, such as reptiles, birds and bats. Other areas highlight the world of shells, the nature of hurricanes and drought-tolerant Xeriscaping.

Several galleries examine encounters between French and Spanish explorers and Native Americans. The "Seeds of Change" exhibit, developed by the Smithsonian Institution, explains the impact of the exchange of corn, potatoes, diseases, horses and sugar between the Old World and *Nuevo Mundo* (New World).



Japanese samurai statue, Asian Cultures Museum



Lion's paw and lightning whelk shells, Corpus Christi Museum of Science & History



USS Lexington Museum on the Bay, Corpus Christi

As the state's official marine archeology repository, the museum houses two of North America's most important shipwrecks. The La Salle Odyssey exhibit recounts the birth of the ill-fated 17th-century expedition of French explorer Robert Cavellier, Sieur de La Salle. Visitors view ship fittings and bronze cannons, while learning how Karankawa Indians salvaged and used shipwreck materials.

The museum also interprets the New World's oldest scientifically excavated shipwreck, three Spanish ships that sank in 1554 off Padre Island. Glimmering displays of rare artifacts comprise the world's largest collection of 16th-century silver bullion and Spanish coins. Other artifacts include bombardars (wrought-iron cannons) and part of a ship's keel.

Visitors literally step aboard nautical history on replicas of Christopher Columbus' ships, the *Niña*, *Pinta* and *Santa Maria*. The replicas were built in Spain and sailed to Texas to celebrate the 500th anniversary of the Columbus voyages in 1992.

Across the ship channel rests the Texas State Aquarium and "Lady Lex." Naval enthusiasts climb aboard a World War II aircraft carrier at the USS Lexington Museum on the Bay. "Lady Lex" served in nearly every major operation of the Pacific Theater. Visitors clamor from lower decks to the bridge, getting a feel for wartime life at sea. Ship exhibits outline Japan's attack at Pearl Harbor and its *kamikaze* campaigns. An aircraft elevator space houses a 30-foot theater screen showing action-packed historical films. Head to the flight deck for scenic views and a variety of military aircraft.

Corpus Christi is also home to the Texas Surf Museum, which heralds surfing history through classic boards, historic photos and memorabilia. Adjacent is the South Texas Music Walk of Fame bearing names of regional music stars. The city's biggest music star, Selena Quintanilla, has her own museum. Located in the recording complex where the late Latina diva cut major hits, the Selena Museum displays memorabilia and costumes worn at concerts and award shows.

COTULLA

When Polish immigrant Joseph Cotulla learned the International and Great Northern Railroad was coming to the area in 1881, he donated land for a townsite that soon became the La Salle County seat. Pioneers ranched cattle and sheep on scrubby brushland, but in 1898 two local men planted onion seeds from Bermuda and began selling sweet onions. That ushered in a prosperous era of irrigated spring produce in La Salle and adjacent counties, an area known as the Winter Garden Region.

Cotulla's Brush Country Museum rekindles La Salle County history in a small white house and adjacent school building. A replica parlor, bedroom, kitchen and doctor's office recall early-20th-century life. The schoolroom features displays on education, including segregated Hispanic and Anglo schools, plus the Welhausen School where Lyndon B. Johnson first taught and served as principal.

A Texas Main Street city, Cotulla also boasts the 1931 Moderne-style La Salle County Courthouse with Art Deco detailing.

DONNA

Situated along the Chisholm Trail, this area was a gathering point for 19th-century cattle drives headed north. In 1903, Thomas J. Hooks moved his family to the area because of the farming potential. He secured a stop on the St. Louis, Brownsville and Mexico Railroad where the Lott Town and Improvement Company founded Donna in 1904. Railroad entrepreneur Uriah Lott named the town after Hooks' daughter. When Donna Hooks Fletcher divorced in 1908, she received land from her father, which she turned into a prosperous produce and dairy operation. Local history is honored at her namesake facility — Donna Hooks Fletcher Museum. Artifacts include the town's first telephone, a bar supposedly used in the 1914 Blue Goose Saloon and household appliances, including an ice box, clothes wringer wash tub and butter churn. Prominently displayed is the Bible that Donna Hooks Fletcher held in one hand, while the other hand held a pistol, during the tense 1910s when Mexican revolutionaries raided across the nearby Rio Grande.

Portrait of town namesake Donna Hooks Fletcher



EDINBURG

Named for the capital of Scotland, Edinburg was a ranching settlement when the first rail spur line arrived in 1909. By the time a major Southern Pacific Railroad line reached town in 1927, irrigation had turned many ranches into farms. The restored 1927 Southern Pacific depot, currently housing the Edinburg Chamber of Commerce, features memorabilia and photos encapsulating early railroad history. Artifacts include switch locks, a conductor's cap and the gold-colored spike used during the 1927 ceremony celebrating the line's completion.

Regional heritage is elaborately interpreted at the Museum of South Texas History, which incorporates the century-old Hidalgo County jail. Replica settings and authentic artifacts trace the sweep of history across South Texas and northeastern Mexico. A full-sized replica of a mammoth recalls the region's Ice Age past. A world-class diorama demonstrates Coahuiltecans hunting along the Rio Grande. Military artifacts exemplify the Spanish conquest including a chain-mail shirt, Burgonet helmet, cup-hilt rapier and matchlock musket. An early *carreta* (cart) recalls Mexican traders who transported goods between ranches on both sides of the Rio Grande. The U.S.-Mexico War exhibit recounts how the conflict divided communities and families along the border.

Exhibits also reveal historical footnotes such as the 1936 "Rocket Mail" stunt in which mail from McAllen to Reynosa, Mexico was rocketed across the Rio Grande, making it the first-known international postal rocket delivery.



Replica of mammoth, Museum of South Texas History, Edinburg



FALFURRIAS

In the 1890s, rancher and land developer Edward C. Lasater bought ranches from Hispanic land-grant families and amassed the 350,000-acre Falfurrias Ranch. Within a few years he attracted a rail line to his ranch where he founded a town, then sold tracts to farmers who grew produce on the prairie. In 1914, noted architect Alfred Giles designed the Classical Revival Brooks County Courthouse, which still stands today. Lasater eventually developed the world's largest herd of Jersey cattle, and his Falfurrias Creamery distinguished the town.

Lasater is among many pioneers lauded at the Falfurrias Heritage Museum. The museum's claim to fame is its Texas Ranger collection. Items vary from more than 70 pairs of boots to a fiddle played by a Ranger as he rode the Chisholm Trail. One exhibit highlights county namesake John A. Brooks, one of the Texas Rangers' "Four Great Captains."

Just outside of town, a religious shrine commemorates Pedro (Don Pedrito) Jaramillo, a young Native American-Mexican who arrived in 1881 with stories of self-healing. With scant medical care in the region, this Mexican peasant became a famous *curandero* (faith healer), walking or riding a burro to serve ranch families. Ailing locals later came to his home for healing. Each year thousands still pilgrimage to his burial site and shrine, leaving photographs and written wishes for improved health.



Don Pedrito Jaramillo Shrine, Falfurrias

GEORGE WEST

While still a teenager, George Washington West was one of the first to drive longhorns from South Texas to Midwest railheads after the Civil War. In 1880, he bought a large Live Oak County ranch and by 1912 he gave right-of-way to the San Antonio, Uvalde and Gulf Railroad for a line to his ranch, where he founded his namesake town. West gave his town up-to-date amenities, complete with a courthouse he constructed in order to move the county seat from nearby Oakville. West's colorful past comes alive at the Grace Armantrout Museum. The modern building showcases the life-long collection of local benefactor Grace Armantrout. Featured are vintage furniture (1860–1940), antique firearms, a tusk of a mammoth and George West's personal washstand. The museum also boasts an 1890s soda fountain and a 1920s rail caboose.

HARLINGEN

In 1900, successful lawyer Lon C. Hill first came to South Texas by coach and spent the night at the Paso Real Stagecoach Inn. Along the Rio Grande he saw Mexican-Americans growing abundant fruits and vegetables. He also noticed the land on the American side slopes downhill toward the Gulf. He quickly bought the property, began growing crops and built the region's first gravity-fed

irrigation canals. Hill brought the first railroad to the Valley and founded Harlingen, named to honor the canal-laced ancestral Dutch home of railroad magnate Uriah Lott.

Today, this Texas Main Street city honors the town's history and Hill's 1904 home at the Harlingen Arts & Heritage Museum. Exhibits chronicle early transportation and medicine in two other structures — a replica of the 1850s Paso Real Stagecoach Inn and the first Harlingen Hospital, built in 1923 by two local businesswomen. The museum is on the grounds of a World War II gunnery school, Harlingen Army Airfield (later Harlingen Air Force Base). The police station and brig of the Air Force base houses the museum's permanent collection of historical artifacts and photographs, as well as rotating arts and cultural exhibits.



South Texas grapefruit

Also on the former Harlingen Army Airfield grounds is the Marine Military Academy, a military preparatory school. On the school's parade grounds rises the original working model of the Iwo Jima Monument that stands at Arlington National Cemetery. The school also includes a museum of Marine Corps memorabilia and the grave of Corporal Harlon H. Block, the only Texan depicted in the famous statue.



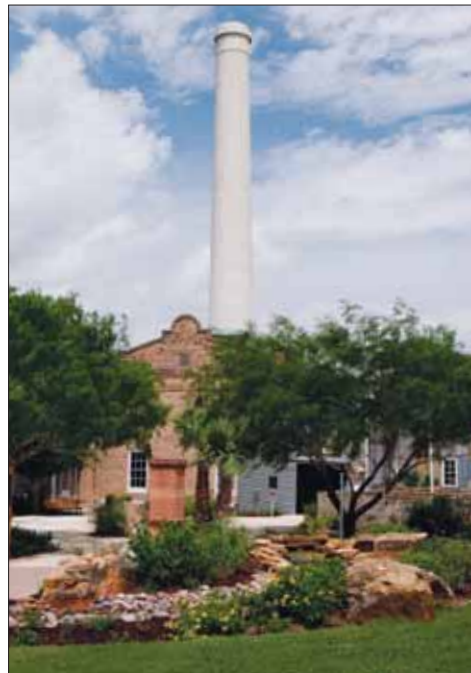
Harlingen Arts & Heritage Museum

HIDALGO

At Hidalgo, U.S. Highway 281 becomes a scenic river road en route to Brownsville. It passes levees and irrigation canals that water large fields of citrus fruits, vegetables and cotton.

Housed in a restored irrigation facility, the Hidalgo Pumphouse Heritage & Discovery Park explores the heritage of South Texas water. Since the mid-1700s, when Spanish colonizer José de Escandón established the province of Nuevo Santander, water was the key to the future. To meet water needs, early settlers received river frontage, making land-grant *porciones* (portions) long narrow strips of land.

In the early 1900s, land developers brought Midwest farmers to what they called the “Magic Valley,” a place where anything would grow. But the Rio Grande had high banks in places, requiring pumps to move water into canals. In 1909, Hidalgo built a pumphouse capable of irrigating 40,000 acres. The pumphouse's first steam boilers were fired by mesquite wood cleared from new farmland. Coal, oil and electricity were used until the pumphouse closed in 1983. The park offers a rare glimpse at the workings of century-old water technology. On site is a riverine hike-and-bike trail to the pumphouse's settlement basin and a canoe trail on an irrigation canal. The park hosts a branch of the World Birding Center and also offers guided trolley tours of an adjacent waterway environment and nearby *Hidalgo Viejo* (Old Hidalgo) Historic District.



Hidalgo Pumphouse Heritage & Discovery Park

Nestled between the Rio Grande and the Nueces River lies a land of endless waving grass and brawny Texas Longhorns. Historically known as the Wild Horse Desert for its wild mustangs, today this area is home to some of Texas' largest and most noteworthy ranches.

This land wasn't always popular. In the 1840s, the area was a source of contention between Texas and Mexico. Texans believed their border was the Rio Grande, while Mexicans argued it was the Nueces River. Eventually, the Rio Grande was set as the border and people slowly began to settle the land. Life was harsh, and it required sturdy, dedicated people to survive.

Two of these dedicated settlers were renowned cattle barons Mifflin Kenedy and Richard King. They were among numerous Anglo investors who created successful ranching empires and helped tame the Wild Horse Desert. *Vaqueros* (cowboys) helped run the ranches and teach Anglos ranching skills. The cooperative efforts of Anglos and Mexicans created a blended culture that endures today.



*Above: Richard King, Mifflin Kenedy
(photo credits: King Ranch Inc. and Kenedy Museum)
Background: 1909 carriage house on King Ranch*

King and Kenedy



KINGSVILLE

Consummate 19th-century entrepreneur Richard King forged fortunes in steamboats and ranching. The King Ranch he and his wife Henrietta began on the Wild Horse Desert remains one of Texas' largest ranches at 825,000 acres and larger than Rhode Island. King was among the first to trail Texas Longhorns from Mexico to Midwest markets. Later innovations — from cattle and horse breeding and disease control to artesian well drilling and pasture improvement — made King Ranch the “birthplace of American ranching” and a National Historic Landmark.

The King Ranch Visitor Center offers guided tours along an old stagecoach road past grazing Texas Longhorns, a mid-1800s commissary and Mrs. King's 1909 carriage house and 1913 home.



Depot Train Museum, Kingsville

houses the Depot Train Museum, which serves as a visitor center and offers exhibits on railroad and town history.

Nearby is a restored 1904 mercantile, now home to the King Ranch Saddle Shop. The clothing and leather goods store once supplied gear only to King Ranch cowboys, known as *los Kineños* (King's people). The store also has exhibits and photos on ranch history. The complete ranch story unfolds at the King Ranch Museum, housed in a restored early-1900s ice plant. The museum showcases impressive ranch photos from the 1940s, various saddles and firearms, plus unusual carriages and cars, including *el Kineño*, a 1949 Buick Eight hunting car custom made for Congressman Richard M. Kleberg Sr., a member of the King Ranch family.

Ranching is among many topics covered on the campus of Texas A&M University-Kingsville at the John E. Conner Museum, housed in a 1930s college building. Natural history exhibits describe the area's mesquite-chaparral and prairie savannah ecosystems. Fossils and a large mural depict Ice Age mammoths, camels and saber-tooth tigers excavated from nearby Nueces County. Cultural artifacts cover Native American, Spanish, Mexican and pioneer Texan eras. Period furniture and utensils recreate an early 1900s kitchen and parlor. The museum's Peeler Hall of Horns features more than 500 trophy mounts from North America.

LAREDO

On a bluff above the Rio Grande, Tomás Sánchez de la Barrera y Garza established the last colony of Nuevo Santander in 1755. Its Hispanic heart survives in the San Agustín de Laredo Historic District. The Gothic spire of the 1872 San Agustín Church rises above a picturesque plaza fronted by the Republic of the Rio Grande Museum. In 1840, Mexicans who supported the 1824 federalist constitution opposed centralist President Santa Anna by declaring this stone and adobe building the capitol of a new nation, the Republic of the Rio Grande. The rebellion lasted only 283 days, but the museum details the complete story, and rooms replicate a period Mexican parlor and kitchen. Next door is La Posada, a luxury hotel housed in a 1916 high school built on the foundation of Laredo's first *casa judicial* (government house). Nearby is Casa Ortiz, an 1820s Mexican colonial residence open for tours and for cultural events of Texas A&M International University. The adjacent Washington's Birthday Celebration Museum shows how an 1898 event organized by a local fraternal order to foster borderland patriotism became a month-long fiesta, one of the state's largest that continues today. The museum displays photos and costumes that reflect the spirit of festival parades and pageants. Rounding out Museum Row, the Villa Antigua Border Heritage Museum showcases border life in South Texas and northern Mexico.

San Agustín Plaza is also the starting point for a trolley tour of this Texas Main Street city's historic districts, including the Old Mercado downtown area, the Victorian-era St. Peter's district and old Fort McIntosh. Optional stops include the Laredo Center for the Arts and the 1909 Webb County Courthouse designed by noted Texas architect Alfred Giles.

Folklorico pair in front of San Agustín Church, Laredo





Smitty's Jukebox Museum, Pharr

MCALLEN

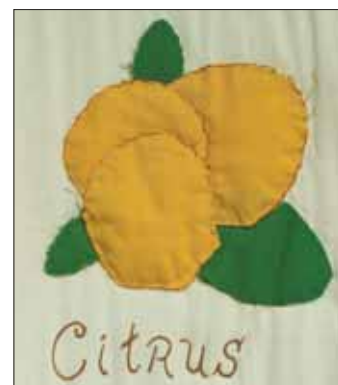
In 1904, John McAllen, a prominent rancher, donated his land for the St. Louis, Brownsville and Mexico Railway, becoming the town's namesake. Within a few years, irrigation made the new town an agricultural powerhouse. When the Mexican Revolution broke out in 1910, tensions rose along the border, and the U.S. sent 20,000 troops from New York to McAllen, further boosting the economy.

The city's 40-year-old International Museum of Art & Science features bilingual hands-on exhibits on science topics, including water resources in the region. The museum's art collection features works by American and European artists, plus pieces from Texas and Mexico. Rotating exhibits range from colonial Mexican silverware to restored vintage motorcycles.

In nearby **Pharr**, a Texas Main Street city, Smitty's Jukebox Museum houses dozens of vintage jukeboxes collected during 50 years by jukebox distributor Leo "Smitty" Schmitt and his sons. Rare restored music players include a 1942 Wurlitzer Model 950 and a 1939 Do-Re-Mi machine, which rotates records on a Ferris wheel-style changer.

MISSION

In the 1860s, Oblates of Mary Immaculate priests built a small church to serve families on La Lomita Ranch. Floods destroyed the original, but the tiny replacement, La Lomita Chapel, still offers the charm of a frontier mission church. The Oblates inherited the ranch and sold almost all of it in 1909 to John J. Conway, who founded a town he named Mission to honor the church. Irrigation and year-round growing allowed farmers to experiment with Texas' first citrus crops. Such experiments grabbed the interest of prominent Corpus Christi land developer John Harry Shary, who turned Mission into the home of the Texas sweet grapefruit. Since 1932, Mission has celebrated its favorite fruit with the annual Texas Citrus Fiesta.



Quilt honoring local agricultural heritage, Mission Historical Museum

The legacy of Shary and the fiesta are colorfully retold at the Mission Historical Museum, housed in Shary's 1939 office building. Displays feature historic photos and a rare example of festival costumes made from citrus products. Other exhibits cover ranching, education, home life and local notables including Mission native and legendary Dallas Cowboys football coach Tom Landry. One exhibit describes Los Ebanos Ferry, whose cables are anchored by native ebony trees. The ferry rests at an ancient river ford 14 miles west in the community of **Los Ebanos**. The car and pedestrian ferry remains the nation's only operational hand-pulled ferry.



Midwesterners traveling by rail to Texas to buy land, Mission Historical Museum

PORT ISABEL

The early 1800s experienced a bevy of activity here at the junction of Laguna Madre, South Padre Island and the mouth of the Rio Grande. Pirate Jean Lafitte likely passed through the area, as did smugglers and gold diggers headed for California. A natural harbor called Brazos Santiago was the official port of nearby Matamoros, Mexico. During the U.S.–Mexico War, Gen. Zachary Taylor set up a supply depot and military hospital named Fort Polk. Steamboats hauled cargo up and down the river. Eventually, an early ranching settlement — *El Frontón de Santa Ysabel* (Bluff of Saint Isabel) — became the town of Point Isabel, later renamed Port Isabel.

By 1853, increased shipping called for a lighthouse, which was used until 1905. The lighthouse was a lookout during the Cortina Wars, Civil War and both world wars. Today, visitors get a Gulf view atop the six-story Port Isabel Lighthouse State Historic Site operated by Texas Park and Wildlife. The site is Texas' only public-access lighthouse. A replica lighthouse keeper's cottage contains exhibits and the chamber of commerce.

Gen. Taylor's water well lies a short walk away at the Port Isabel Historical Museum, housed in the 1899 Charles Champion Building. A rail line from Corpus Christi benefited Brownsville after 1900, but devastated the local economy. Champion saw promise in fishing and tourism and bought the town. In 1908 he repainted his two-story general store with images of Laguna Madre fish and called it "The Key of the Gulf." The paintings are restored, and the museum's elaborate displays, audiovisual presentations and interactive exhibits chronicle the area's key people and events. Adjacent is the Treasures of the Gulf Museum, which examines the Spanish fleet that shipwrecked in 1554 just 30 miles north on Padre Island. Wreck artifacts range from silver coins to ship cannons. The museum explains nautical advances and recounts interaction between explorers and Native Americans.

Nearby Laguna Madre, the historic Yacht Club Hotel looks much as it did when built in the 1920s as a private hideaway for the elite.



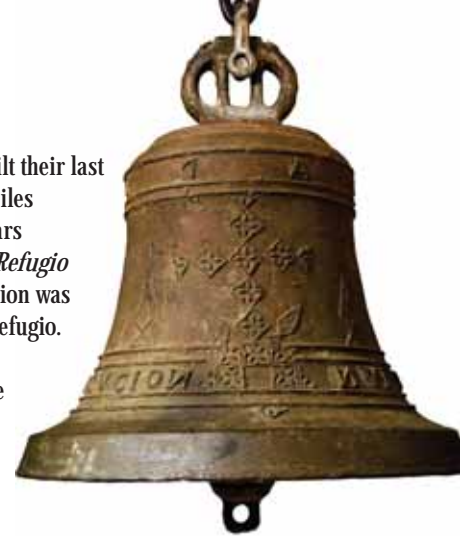
Port Isabel shrimp boat

REFUGIO

In 1793, Spanish friars built their last Texas mission nearly 30 miles northwest of here. Two years later, *Nuestra Señora del Refugio* (Our Lady of Refuge) Mission was relocated to present-day Refugio. Karankawa resistance and Comanche raids closed the mission in 1824. Irish immigrants rebuilt the mission church in the 1830s and named the town Refugio.

The original mission bell is the star of the Refugio County Museum. The museum retells town development, as well as how the county became a center for ranching, farming and oil production. One exhibit recounts the Battle of Refugio, a Texas Revolution skirmish in which Mexican ranchers and troops captured the town and executed Texian fighters. Another exhibit notes the local Royal Irish Regiment, one of the first volunteer military units formed before World War II. On the museum grounds is the 1876 home of pioneers John and Virginia Linney.

Listed in the National Register of Historic Places, the Refugio County Courthouse exemplifies Classic Revival styling with prairie school influence.



Original bell from the last 18th century Spanish mission established in Texas, Refugio County Museum



Refugio County Courthouse

Sunshine and Shipwrecks

Warm waters, gentle breezes and abundant history entice travelers to the Texas coast. With more than 300 miles of coastline, the Texas shoreline has long attracted a variety of colorful characters and industries. From Spanish explorers to sea captains, oil and gas refineries to commercial fishers, the Texas seashore is critical to the state's history, economy and recreation.

Since the early 1900s, northern tourists have trekked to Texas' sandy beaches and warm Gulf waters. Below is a sampling of the region's coastal offerings. Discover why this seaside area is dubbed the third coast of the United States.

- **Corpus Christi/Padre Island National Seashore** Corpus Christi offers an urban oasis while Padre Island National Seashore welcomes travelers with blissful solitude just over the causeway.
- **Port Aransas** Located at the north end of Padre Island, Port Aransas' secluded sands are a ferry ride across Corpus Christi Bay.
- **South Padre Island** Caribbean-like green waters attract crowds from spring breakers to family travelers.



TXDOT



TXDOT

BACKGROUND PHOTO CREDIT: MIKE SLOAT



1899 La Borde House, Rio Grande City

RIO GRANDE CITY

History reverberates in this Texas Main Street city. After defeating Mexico in 1848, the U.S. Army established riverside posts, including one across from Camargo, Mexico, at the boat landing of rancher Henry Clay Davis. Seizing the opportunity, Davis laid out a village at the post later named Fort Ringgold to honor an officer killed in the U.S.-Mexico War's first battle. Davis' settlement became Rio Grande City. Border tensions eased within a decade, and Fort Ringgold closed. The Army quickly re-garrisoned after Juan N. Cortina, a Mexican folk hero, challenged Anglo domination of the border and launched raids in Rio Grande City. Col. Robert E. Lee reopened the fort and lived here briefly on two occasions. His commandant's quarters, now known as the Lee House, has artifacts and exhibits on Ringgold's frontier cavalry units, including Buffalo Soldiers, the renowned mounted African American troops. Decommissioned in 1944, the fort — including barracks, officers quarters and quartermaster's warehouses — was transferred to the local school district.

Henry Clay Davis laid out his town with a plaza running down Britton Avenue from the Starr County Courthouse to the river. The plaza features the 1924 replica of the French grotto shrine of Our Lady of Lourdes, complete with a Paris-forged statue of the Virgin Mary. One block from the river is the 1899 home of French merchant Françoise La Borde. Restored as a hotel, the La Borde House exudes borderland charm with shady verandas and a tropical courtyard. According to guests, it can also exude a friendly ghost or two.

ROCKPORT-FULTON

In 1840, East Coast entrepreneur George W. Fulton married Harriet Smith, daughter of powerful Republic-era politician Henry Smith. After Smith died, Fulton turned Harriet's land inheritance on Aransas Bay into a ranching and packing empire as part of the Coleman-Fulton Pasture Company. During the 1870s, the Fultons made their fortune shipping cattle tallow and hides between Rockport and New Orleans. To symbolize success, they built a French Second Empire mansion called Oakhurst in 1874–77. It was the showplace of the town named for them. Today, the Fulton Mansion State Historic Site operated by the Texas Historical Commission offers a rare glimpse into the posh Victorian world of a prominent South Texas family.

The town of Rockport was incorporated in the 1870s during the peak of a local slaughterhouse and shipping boom. The town later turned to boat building, fishing and tourism. The Texas Maritime Museum explores the area's rich maritime heritage from Spanish explorers to the modern offshore oil and gas industry. Exhibits look at Texas coastal pirates, the 1840s port of Indianola, 1930s shipyards and the advent of the 1,000-mile Gulf Intracoastal Canal. As a La Salle Odyssey museum, the facility captures daily life aboard *La Belle*, French explorer Robert Cavalier, Sieur de La Salle's lost ship. The harbor museum also features antique sport-fishing gear, a folk replica of a Texas scow sloop and a 26-foot self-righting lifeboat.



Fulton Mansion State Historic Site

ROMA

Poised on a bluff above the Rio Grande and Ciudad Alemán, Mexico, this former Spanish colony was the head of navigation for steamboat traffic. Its downtown National Historic Landmark District encompasses numerous 19th-century structures, many which were designed by noted German architect Heinrich Portscheller. The Roma—Ciudad Miguel Aleman International Suspension Bridge provides a historic passage to Mexico.

Fifty-five miles upriver, **San Ygnacio** is the last South Texas community with a large collection of the once-numerous sandstone structures built in the middle and late 19th century. One notable example is the 1830 Fort Trevino, which still includes a unique 1851 sundial set to Mexican time.

SAN BENITO

Like most border towns, San Benito was born with the arrival of irrigation and the railroad. Anglo farmers hired locals to clear brushland and build canals, and town founder Sam A. Robertson brought in the San Benito and Rio Grande Valley Railroad. The San Benito Historical Society Museum uses historic photos to tell the stories of early settlers.

Hispanic music flourishes in three heritage sites located in the Cultural Heritage Museum. The Texas Conjunto Music Hall of Fame & Museum chronicles the evolution of *conjunto*, an early form of Tejano or Tex-Mex music. European, Mexican and American music merged in the early 1900s as working-class musicians on both sides of the border played the accordion and the *bajo sexto* (12-string guitar) in a style dubbed *conjunto* (Spanish for group). Players such as Narciso Martínez, Santiago Almeida, Santiago Jimenez, Sr. and Valerio Longoria made the music popular across South Texas and beyond. They and other musical legends are showcased in the museum with exhibits featuring instruments, photos and memorabilia. The Freddy Fender Museum highlights the life and career of the Grammy-Award winning Mexican-American rocker and San Benito native born as Baldemar Huerta.

Named for the father of *conjunto*, the Narciso Martínez Cultural Arts Center preserves and promotes Mexican and Mexican-American heritage through art, film and literature, as well as performances of music, theater and dance. Every September, the center hosts the Narciso Martínez Conjunto Festival. San Benito is also home to one of South Texas' most historic dancehalls, La Villita, which regularly hosts *conjunto* dances.

Rock-and-roll music takes center stage 11 miles away at **Los Fresnos**. The Little Graceland Museum holds the Elvis Presley collection of a devoted fan and friend. Founder Simon Vega offers guided tours of memorabilia collected since he served in the U.S. Army with Elvis while stationed in Germany. Twice a year, the museum hosts performances of top Elvis impersonators.

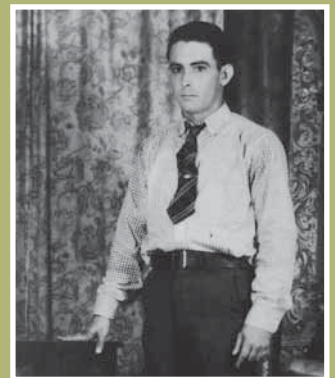


Clearing the townsite, San Benito Historical Museum

SOUTH TEXAS RHYTHM

South Texas has a unique rhythm that reverberates through towns and captures the spirit of this region. In the 1920s, two styles of dance music emerged in South Texas: *conjunto* and *orquestras*. *Conjunto* combines the button accordion and the *bajo sexto*, a type of 12-string guitar, creating a distinct, lively sound. Referred to as the music of the working people, *conjunto's* patriarchs include Bruno Villareal, Pedro Ayala, Santiago Jimenez, Sr. and Narciso Martínez.

Although *orquestras* include many of the same songs as *conjuntos*, this style of music originally catered to wealthier Anglo-Mexicans and utilized more complex arrangements for a full band. Ultimately, these two styles merged, creating the Tejano music of today.



Narciso Martínez

San Benito's historic
La Villita Dancehall



Grammy won by La Mafia,
Tejano ROOTS Hall of Fame
& Museum, Alice





Kenedy Ranch Museum, Sarita

SARITA

Located 20 miles south of Kingsville, the Kenedy Ranch Museum maintains the legacy of the Mifflin Kenedy family. For nearly a quarter century, Kenedy partnered with long-time friend Richard King in riverboat and ranching endeavors, then the two built separate ranching empires. Kenedy eventually accumulated 400,000 acres and was among the first ranchers to hold cattle inside wire fences. Kenedy, like King, was the patrón of his ranch hands, who proudly called themselves *Kenedeños* (Kenedy's people). He enhanced his fame and fortune as a cotton trader and railroad magnate and became the namesake of Kenedy County. Kenedy married into a prominent Mexican family and, though a Quaker, accepted the Catholic faith of his wife, Petra Vela de Vidal. Also a devout Catholic, their granddaughter, Sarita Kenedy East (for whom the town is named), eventually donated the Kenedy fortune to charitable foundations, one of which operates the museum, housed in the 1927 Kenedy Ranch headquarters.

TAFT

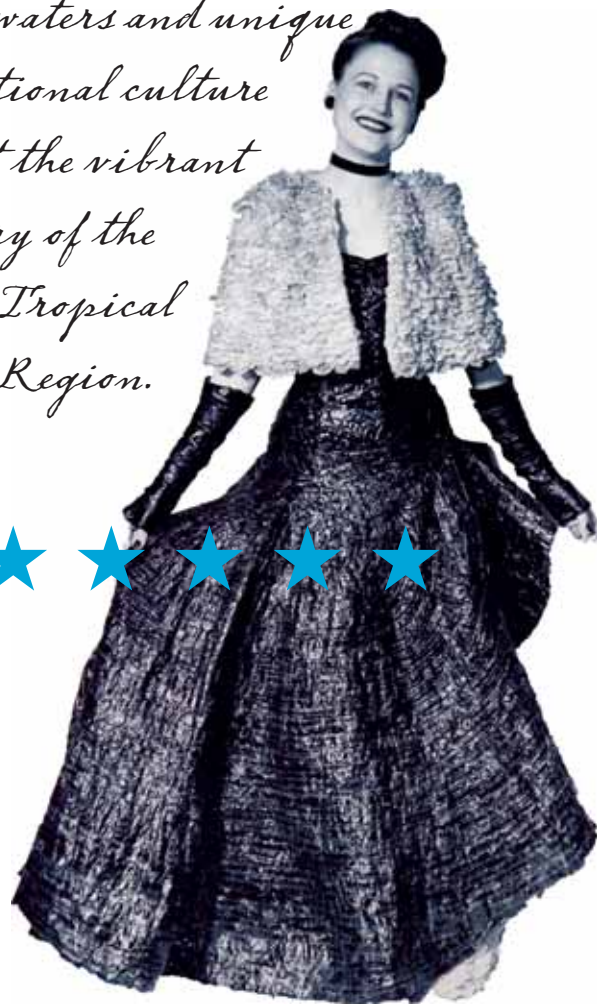
Financial problems of the Coleman-Fulton Pasture Company led George W. Fulton to enlist help from college friend David Sinton. A millionaire from Cincinnati, Sinton became majority stockholder and the namesake for the San Patricio County seat. After Sinton died, the ranching empire went to his daughter Anna, wife of Charles P. Taft, and became Taft Ranch. Ranch manager Joseph F. Green expanded the operation and sold ranch land to farmers promising "the best cotton-pickin' land around." The 1920s building that housed Taft Ranch offices — as well as two company banks, a drugstore and barbershop — is now the Taft Blackland Museum. Manager Green's furnished office occupies a second-floor corner and contains early ranch maps and company files. The museum houses cotton wagons and other agricultural equipment and displays early town photos and relics of farm and ranch life.

Right: Weslaco Style Show model wearing clothing made from local fruits and vegetables sewn on cloth, Weslaco Museum

WESLACO

The town's name is an acronym of W.E. Stewart Land Company, a development company that capitalized on the Lower Rio Grande Valley's agricultural boom of the 1910s. Near the town's charming 1928 Spanish Moorish city hall is the Weslaco Museum, repository of early town history. The museum examines economic and social changes from 18th-century Spanish colonial ranching to mid-20th-century agribusiness. Interesting artifacts include 1920s buttons made of mussel shells harvested from the Rio Grande. Photos recall the 1930s Weslaco Style Show that honored agriculture via an unusual contest in which women made clothes using local fruits and vegetables. One exhibit pays tribute to hometown hero Harlon Block, the only Texan shown in the famous World War II photo of soldiers raising the American flag on Iwo Jima. Another display shows a guitar covered in fellow soldiers' signatures, carried by Weslaco native Amador Cuellar during the Vietnam War.

*Bountiful nature, pleasant
Gulf waters and unique
bi-national culture
accent the vibrant
history of the
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Trail Region.*



REGIONAL STATE PARKS

Travelers to the Texas Tropical Trail Region can visit the area's beautiful parks owned and operated by Texas Parks and Wildlife.

For more information on the following sites, please call 800/792-1112 or visit www.tpwd.state.tx.us.

- Bentsen-Rio Grande Valley State Park, Mission
- Choke Canyon State Park, Calliham
- Estero Llano Grande State Park, Weslaco
- Falcon State Park, Falcon Heights
- Goose Island State Park, Rockport (above)
- Lake Casa Blanca International State Park, Laredo
- Lake Corpus Christi State Park, Mathis
- Resaca de la Palma State Park, Weslaco
- The World Birding Center, Mission



TEXAS MAIN STREET CITIES

Visitors can stroll the sidewalks and peruse shops in one of the region's six Texas Main Street cities. Partnering with the Texas Historical Commission, these communities work to revitalize their historic commercial area, which is often the heart of a town.



- Cotulla
- Harlingen
- Laredo
- Pharr
- Rio Grande City
- Sinton

The Plaza Theater, Laredo

FOR MORE INFORMATION

The Texas Historical Commission offers free travel guides on the real people and real places that shaped Texas history. To request copies, visit www.thc.state.tx.us/travel or call 866.276.6219.



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For more information on the sites in this brochure, visit www.texasropicaltrail.com or contact the sources listed below for site locations and hours, as well as details about events and other local attractions. Many information centers are closed weekends; please contact in advance. To obtain a free *Texas State Travel Guide*, call 800.8888.TEX or visit www.TravelTex.com.

■ ALICE

Chamber of Commerce
361.664.3454
www.alicetx.org

■ BROWNSVILLE

Convention & Visitors Bureau
800.626.2639
www.brownsville.org

■ CARRIZO SPRINGS

Dimmit County Chamber of Commerce
830.876.5205
www.dimmitcountytx.com

■ CORPUS CHRISTI

Convention & Visitors Bureau
800.678.6232
www.corpuschristicvb.com

■ COTULLA

Chamber of Commerce
830.879.2326
www.cotulla-chamber.com



Making corn masa, Kenedy Ranch Museum, Sarita

■ DONNA

Donna Hooks Fletcher Museum
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■ EDINBURG

Chamber of Commerce
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www.edinburg.com

■ FALFURRIAS

Chamber of Commerce
361.325.3333

■ GEORGE WEST

Chamber of Commerce
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■ HIDALGO

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www.hidalgotexas.com

■ KINGSVILLE

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■ LAREDO

Convention & Visitors Bureau
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Chamber of Commerce
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www.mcallenchamber.com



Elvis buckle, Little Graceland Museum, Los Fresnos

MISSION

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www.missionchamber.com

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Chamber of Commerce
956.787.1481
www.pharrchamberofcommerce.com

PORT ISABEL

Chamber of Commerce
800.527.6102
www.portisabel.org

REFUGIO

Refugio County Chamber of Commerce
361.526.2835
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RIO GRANDE CITY

Economic Development Corporation
956.487.0672
www.riograndecity.net

ROMA

Chamber of Commerce
956.849.1411
www.cityofroma.net

ROCKPORT-FULTON

Chamber of Commerce
800.826.6441
www.rockport-fulton.org

SAN BENITO

Chamber of Commerce
956.399.5321
www.sbida.com/chamber

SARITA

Kenedy Ranch Museum
361.294.5751
www.kenedyranchmuseum.org

TAFT

Chamber of Commerce
361.528.3230

WESLACO

Chamber of Commerce
888.968.2102
www.weslaco.com



Palms overlook downtown Weslaco



Fulton Mansion State Historic Site, Fulton



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The Texas Historical Commission promotes the highest national standards for historic preservation and does not endorse the relocation of historic structures without thorough documentation of the building on its original site. The professional processes required for such action are intended to record and preserve historic properties for the full enjoyment and education of present and future generations.

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TEXAS TROPICAL TRAIL

R E G I O N

This travel guide is made possible through the Texas Historical Commission's partnership with the Texas Department of Transportation, Office of the Governor – Economic Development and Tourism, Texas Parks and Wildlife and Texas Commission on the Arts.

The Texas Historical Commission, the state agency for historic preservation, administers a variety of programs to preserve the archeological, historical and cultural resources of Texas.

The Texas Heritage Trails Program

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EXPLORING THE CULTURE OF SOUTH TEXAS

