

Experience a Different Texas: The Hills and Rivers Region

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If your family has outgrown children's museums and you're looking for an appealing alternative to theme parks, how about some of the attractions of the Central Texas Hills and Rivers Region? This multi-county area, just north and west of Fredericksburg, Texas, features family adventures of every kind. Opportunities include kayaking, cave-crawling, park explorations, and Indian pictographs.



Nuts about Nuts

The Texas Hills and Rivers Region offers attractions big and small. San Saba County is known as the Pecan Capital of the World. Visitors can't pass through the county seat town of San Saba without noticing one or more of the pecan companies that line the highway. The San Saba River Pecan Company and Oliver Pecan Company are super stops where you can fill up on plain pecans, Pecan Pie in a Jar, and Jalapeño Pecan Brittle.



A Great State Park

Colorado Bend State Park, named for a prominent curve in Texas's Colorado River, is a major attraction. The park (over 5,000 acres) offers hiking trails, picnicking, primitive camping, swimming, boating, and bird-watching. Visitors can join scheduled tours of Gorman Falls, a beautiful, secluded, 60-foot waterfall. Adventurous teens and their families might enjoy a self-guided, crawling exploration of Gorman Cave.



For fun on the water, take advantage of the Free Fishing in State Parks program, which allows visitors to fish in state parks without a license. If you want to wet a worm, this is an inexpensive place to do it. Area outfitters offer canoe rentals, or bring your own canoe or kayak. When the river level is adequate, boaters can paddle ten miles to Lake Buchanan—the trick is figuring out how to get back.

Heart of the State

The charming little town of Brady, with its homey courthouse square, is the exact geographic center of Texas. The largest town in the Hills and Rivers Region, Brady has several chain motels. You'll find good eating at the Hard Eight Pit Barbecue, the Heart of Texas Depot, Burrito Express (fresh, homemade breakfast tacos), and Ranelle's Corner Deli and Bistro (a great lunch spot).

The Heart of Texas Country Music Museum, open Friday through Sunday, is free and worth a visit. Stage costumes, musical instruments, tour buses belonging to Jim Reeves and Ernest Tubb, and Ferlin Husky's Cadillac limo are featured. Don't miss Oklahoman Leon Russell's pink suit with rhinestones and purple grapes.

Great Graffiti

In Paint Rock, it's hard to say which is the bigger attraction, the Indian pictographs or Kay Campbell, the granddaughter of the man who bought the land to protect these treasures. Kay is a born teacher who sets the scene for every visit to the site.

Guided tours take visitors to the base of a cliff where scores of drawings, thought to be between 200 and 500 years old, have been preserved. Pictographs include handprints, geometric figures, animals, human figures, and some that seem to relate to the solar calendar. Admission is \$6 for adults; \$3 for children.

Sheep were once a major economic element in this area. You can still see rugs and saddle blankets being woven at Ingrid's Custom Hand Woven, Inc. in Paint Rock.



A River Runs through It

The San Saba River runs through Menard County and through the town of Menard. Sneak a little more history into your trip by swinging by Canal Street to see the acequia (ah-SAY-key-uh) the Spanish built to water their fields.

From June 9-16, the town will observe the 250th anniversary of the destroyed Spanish Mission Santa Cruz de San Saba and the Royal Fort with a week-long archaeological dig. Celebrations include historical re-enactments, the sale of commemorative items, a bike ride, and a pilgrimage walk.

If you haven't tried kayaking, the San Saba River is the place to begin. Erase any images of turning upside-down and getting stuck. Brent Frazier, owner of San Saba River Adventures, rents sit-on-top kayaks (starting at \$10/hour or \$25/day). For a real treat, arrange a half- or full-day guided kayak tour. It's a bit pricey (\$130 for first person, \$25 each additional person up to four), but a never-to-be-forgotten family outing.

The Three Rs: Relax, Reflect, and Reconnect

South of Menard, in Kimble County, the Junction area offers more treats. For a real family get-away, stay at CAVU Canyon Ranch. If your family has to stay busy all the time, this is not the place for you. But if you're looking for time to be together, talk, walk, play games, or sit back and look at the stars, it's ideal. The ranch caters to wildlife photographers and nature lovers and has built several blinds suitable for bird and animal watching.

The South Llano River State Park, not far from the CAVU Canyon Ranch, is also good for spotting birds. Large, comfortable, observation stations near stocked feeders assure success. For a cooling treat, float the river. Canoes and tubes may be rented nearby. The site, over 500 acres, also offers camping, picnicking, water sports, and hiking and biking trails.

Less crowded than the more familiar Hill Country to the south, the Central Texas Hills and Rivers Region offers a variety of family activities and the space to enjoy them. This area may be just the ticket for reconnecting with one another and enjoying some good family fun.

Destination Information**Texas Parks & Wildlife Department**

800-792-1112

www.tpwd.state.tx.us

Great San Saba River Pecan Company

234 W US Hwy 190

San Saba, TX

800-621-8121

www.GreatPecans.com

Oliver Pecan Company

1402 W Wallace

San Saba, TX

800-657-9291

www.oliverpecan.com

Colorado Bend State Park

325-628-3240

Free Fishing in State Parks

800-792-1112

The Heart of Texas

Country Music Museum

1701 S Bridge St, Brady, TX

325-597-1895

www.hillbillyhits.com/museum

Paint Rock Pictographs

325-732-4376 for reservations

www.PaintRockPictographs.com

San Saba River Adventures

701 Ellis St, Menard, TX

325-396-2658

www.SanSabaRiverAdventures.com

CAVU Canyon Ranch

Segovia, TX

325-446-9133 or 9135

www.CAVUCanyonRanch.com

South Llano River State Park

325-446-3994

*Feel free to contact **Elaine Warner** with questions or comments at okietravel@yahoo.com. Photos by Elaine.*