

El Camino Real de los Tejas

NATIONAL HISTORIC TRAIL

In 2004, legislation introduced by Sen. Kay Bailey Hutchison (R-Texas) and Rep. Ciro Rodriguez (D-Texas) passed the U.S. Congress, leading to the designation of El Camino Real de los Tejas as a National Historic Trail.

In partnership with the Texas Department of Transportation and the Texas Historical Commission, this publication seeks to introduce visitors to the oldest travel route in Texas and provide information about both historical and modern day points of interest along El Camino Real de los Tejas.

El Camino Real de los Tejas National Historic Trail is administered by the National Parks Service. For more information, visit www.nps.gov/elte.

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For additional copies of this brochure, write to Travel Information Division, Texas Department of Transportation, P.O. Box 149249, Austin, TX 78714-9249 or e-mail trv-lit@dot.state.tx.us.



TEXAS
HISTORICAL
COMMISSION

The State Agency for Historic Preservation

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The Royal Road

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elcome to El Camino Real de los Tejas
— or Texas’ “royal road” — a thoroughfare instrumental
in the settlement, development and history of Texas.

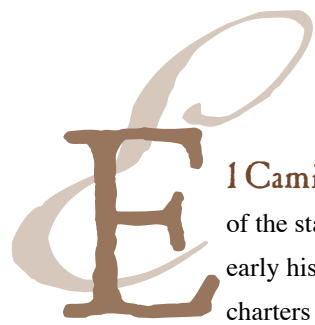
More than just an 18th-century transportation route
between Mexico City and the Spanish capital of the province of Texas, this road,
which was designated a National Historic Trail in 2004, has had more than 300 years
of impact on the state. El Camino Real de los Tejas played an influential role in the
Spanish colonial period, Mexico’s independence from Spain and Texas’ fight for
independence. Within Texas, this corridor stretches from the Sabine River to the
Rio Grande, winding through trees of the Piney Woods, over the rolling landscape
of the Hill Country and among the mesquite and brush of the South Texas Plains.

Modern-day travelers will find sites — including Caddoan mounds, missions and
presidios — along the route highlighting the American Indian and Spanish Colonial
presence in the state followed by settlements such as Nacogdoches, San Antonio,
and later, Austin and Laredo.

While segments of the route
have since been replaced by
paved roads, today’s explorers
can enjoy ease of travel and
revel in the history while
discovering newer charms not
available to earlier travelers.



BOTH IMAGES: TXDOT



El Camino Real de los Tejas, or Texas' King's Highway, is steeped in the expansive history of the state. It is one of the oldest and most significant routes traversing Texas, and it is the most famous of the early historic trails. A camino real connected important Spanish towns, capitals of provinces and forts that held charters with royal privileges. El Camino Real de los Tejas linked Spanish missions and posts between Los Adaes (now part of Louisiana; but from 1729 to 1770 the Spanish capital of the province of Texas) with Monclova, Mexico, and, ultimately, Mexico City. Other routes that carried camino real designations, in what would become the United States, include the California mission trail and El Camino Real de Tierra Adentro from El Paso to Santa Fe.

El Camino Real de los Tejas was actually composed of a variety of trails and routes — including the Camino Pita, Upper Presidio Road, Lower Presidio Road and Camino Arriba. While the road constituted the primary overland route between Mexico City and Los Adaes, the trails changed through time because the travelers' course was influenced by weather, Indian relations, terrain and modes of transportation.

One of the places where the variance of the road can be seen is at the locations where travelers chose to cross the Rio Grande. As missions and settlements formed along the river, different fords were more commonly used. Many of the earliest explorers in the late 1600s crossed at fords near what is now Guerrero, Mexico, and may have traveled northeast through San Antonio. Some of the later travelers along El Camino Real de los Tejas may have chosen to take a more southerly route, crossing near Laredo or Villa de Dolores, an important cattle ranch that was established in 1750, then heading toward Goliad or San Antonio.

Formed from previously established buffalo and Indian trails and trade routes, El Camino Real de los Tejas emerged in the 18th century when the European powers were building their empires.

In an effort to extend the French empire, Rene Robert Cavalier, Sieur de La Salle, led a French expedition of four ships and about 250 colonists to a landing on a Texas beach near Lavaca Bay. In 1685, La Salle established the ill-fated Fort Saint Louis near Garcitas Creek. Although he managed to explore portions of East Texas, La Salle was murdered by his own men in 1687



Painting at the San Augustine Civic and Tourism Center

while away from the fort. Shortly thereafter, the colony succumbed to internal dissent, disease and an Indian attack that spared few and left the fort in ruins.

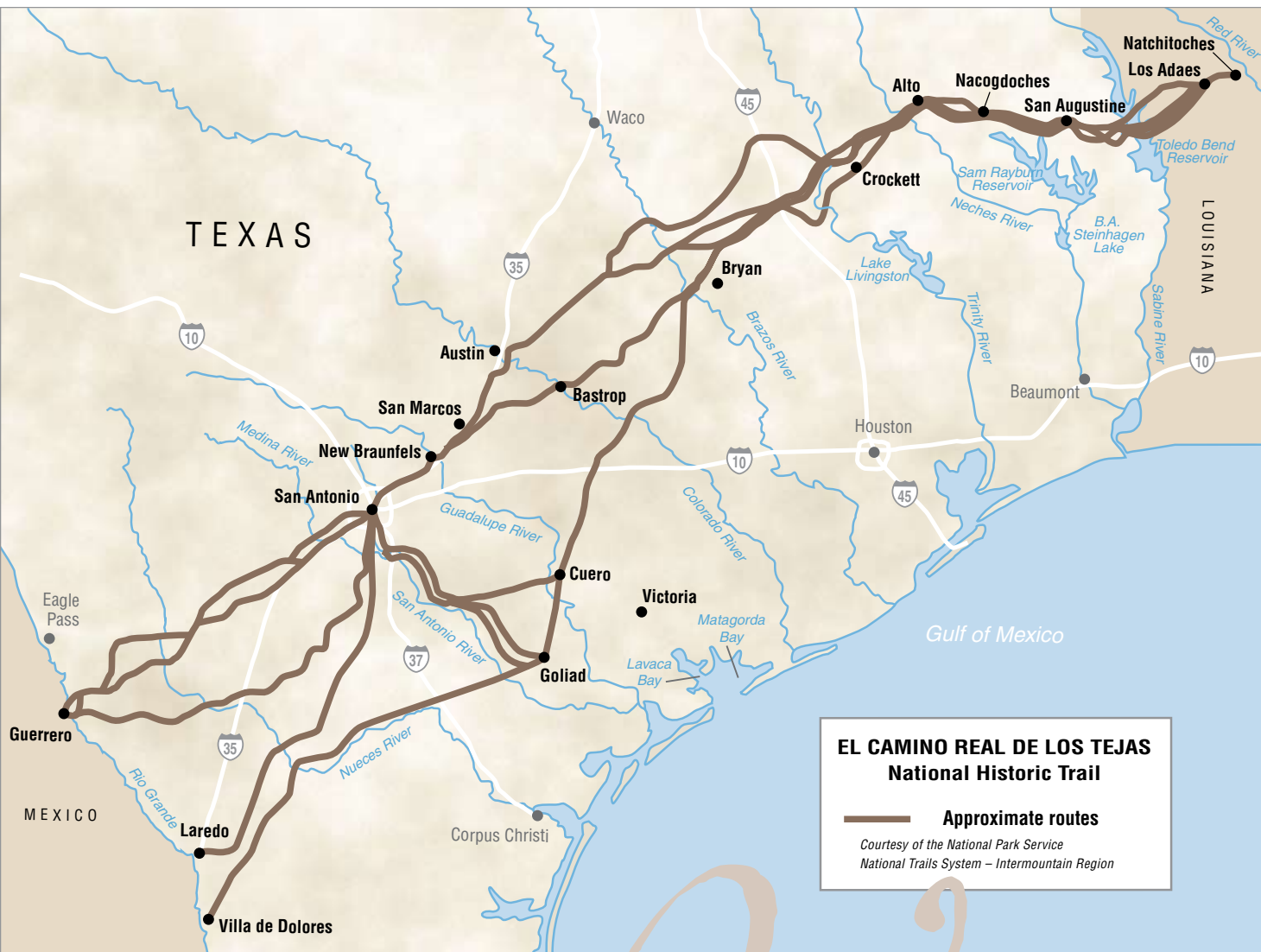
When Alonso De Leon, Spanish governor of Coahuila, learned of La Salle's encroachment into what they considered Spanish lands, he set out to find and destroy the French fort. Between 1686 and 1690 De Leon led multiple expeditions in search of the fort. He located the scattered remnants of the village and fort on Espiritu Santo Bay (near present-day Matagorda Bay) during his fourth expedition.

In order to combat further French incursions into Spanish lands, De Leon proposed establishing forts in this area to support Spanish missions. Fray Damian Massanet, who had joined De Leon on the fourth expedition, suggested starting only one Spanish settlement with seven additional missions. The belief was that the conversion of the natives to Catholicism would build loyalty and prevent the natives

from deciding to align with the French.

In 1690, De Leon and Massanet founded the first Spanish mission in East Texas, the short-lived San Francisco de los Tejas, at a site near present-day Weches, in Houston County.

De Leon's expeditions established the corridor for what would become known as El Camino Real de los Tejas. This route would be refined, somewhat, when Domingo Teran de los Rios, the first governor of the Spanish province of Texas, tried to establish more direct connections with the East Texas missions during expeditions in 1691–92.



Early in the 18th-century route, Domingo Ramon, son of the commandant at Coahuila, led an expedition to Louisiana in 1716 to reassert Spanish presence in East Texas with the establishment of several missions.

The trail was strengthened when a Spanish military outpost was erected and a mission re-established on an abandoned mission site at Los Adaes in 1721 by Marqués de San Miguel de Aguayo. Los Adaes became the terminus for El Camino Real de los Tejas. Plagued by a lack of steady supplies and the isolated location, residents resorted to trade with the French in nearby Natchitoches, even though that was prohibited by the Spanish government. The mission developed good relations with Caddoans but proved unsuccessful at converting them. The settlement persevered for several decades but never really thrived.

While the road constituted the primary overland route between Mexico City and Los Adaes, the trails changed through time because the travelers' course was influenced by weather, Indian relations, terrain and modes of transportation.

The routes of El Camino Real de los Tejas were the arteries that kept Texas alive. They not only carried information vital to the survival of the province — orders for its administration, reports of danger and appeals for help — but also were the sole avenues of commerce throughout the colonial period.



Millard's Crossing Historic Village in Nacogdoches

Agua also increased Spain's presence in Texas with the addition of a post at La Bahia del Espiritu Santo and the mission San Jose in San Antonio. Spanish representatives chose settlement sites — in East Texas and at La Bahia — for their defensive potential in relation to French bases and their proximity to Indian groups that were not hostile and that might become allies.

During the life of the trail communities were founded as way stations between outposts. San Antonio de Bexar was the first and most enduring of these, and it became a hub for the roads of this region.

Until Mexico achieved independence from Spain in 1821, the Spaniards alternately expanded and reduced the number of outposts in North America in response to political and military changes.

Following the Seven Year's War, where Spain allied with the Bourbon French against the English, Spain received French Louisiana in the 1762 Treaty of Fontainebleau. With the 1763 Treaty of Paris, France lost the remainder of its North American possessions to Britain. Future events would lead Spain to return Louisiana to France in 1800. However, at the time of the Louisiana Purchase, Spain would contend it still owned what later became the Oklahoma Panhandle and southwestern portions of Kansas and Louisiana.

With the French threat of encroachment removed, the need for the presidio at Los Adaes ceased. Presidios and missions in East Texas started closing because they were expensive to maintain, hard to keep supplied because of the distance and could show

few converts. Settlers from Los Adaes, which was abandoned by 1773, were ordered to move to San Antonio, which became the provincial capital.

Even after Los Adaes was vacated, El Camino Real de los Tejas continued to be a strategic route for trade and travel. Immigrants from the American colonies — invited to Texas — would use this corridor to settle the state. Texas heroes such as Davy Crockett, Stephen F. Austin, Jim Bowie and Sam Houston, instrumental in Texas' struggle for independence from Mexico, used this road. The road also would be used to supply troops and the war effort when war broke out between the United States and Mexico over the annexation of Texas.

The section of El Camino Real de los Tejas known as the Camino Arriba became known as the Old San Antonio Road, which stretched from San Antonio to Natchitoches, La. This road would gain historical significance for its role in the migration of American settlers into Texas. Communities made improvements along this road, ferries provided transportation at major river crossings and wooden bridges were built. Following the United States' war with Mexico, the Old San Antonio Road was noted for its role as a trade route for cotton, supplies and troops.

Eventually, use of El Camino Real de los Tejas and the Old San Antonio Road diminished as the growth of towns such as Austin, Galveston and Houston and the building of railroads changed the direction of travel and trade.

In the beginning years, though, the routes of El Camino Real de los Tejas were the arteries that kept Texas alive. They not only

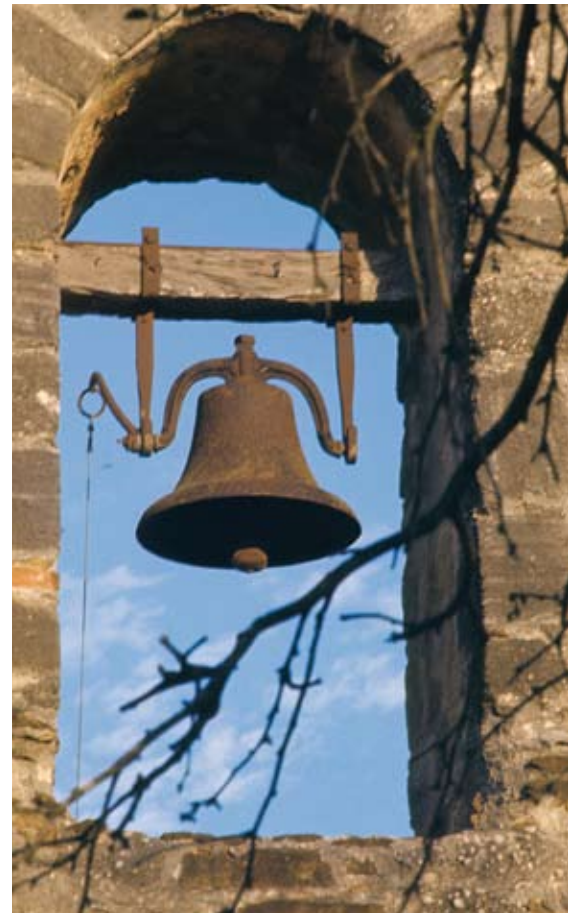


Blacksmith at Caddoan Mounds State Historic Site in Alto

carried information vital to the survival of the province — orders for its administration, reports of danger and appeals for help — but also were the sole avenues of commerce throughout the colonial period. Traders used this road network that connected Texas to the rest of the Spanish world, and for a time, to French and then American Louisiana. It was a post road six decades before the Republic of Texas began developing its network of post roads, and it was the primary route for driving cattle and other livestock a century before the Chisholm Trail opened.

This road directly influenced the growth of several Texas towns and cities, while surviving segments formed part of our modern road system. Today's travelers can enjoy their own royal road trip, planning stops at historical sites and modern points-of-interest.

Sources: National Park Service: El Camino Real de los Tejas, National Historic Trail Feasibility Study and Environmental Assessment, 1998; TexasAlmanac.com/history/highlights; The Handbook of Texas Online; www.texasbeyondhistory.net/adaes; and www.crt.state.la.us/siteexplorer.



Covered wagon at Folkfest in New Braunfels. Top right: Bell tower at Mission San Francisco de la Espada in San Antonio.

M

uch history, along with those who made it, has traversed El Camino Real de los Tejas.

The American Indians, the Spaniards and many more carved a lifeline through the state from the Louisiana border to Mexico. Along the way, towns — big and small — arose and continue to serve as a living pulse along this royal road. The travelers and their purposes may have changed, but El Camino Real de los Tejas is still a thriving corridor with many opportunities left to explore. Though parts of the trail are now on private property, there are plenty of public lands and communities where travelers can re-create the path worn so many years ago.

Our journey along the modern-day network of roads that make up the core of El Camino Real de los Tejas — Upper Presidio Road, Camino de los Tejas, Lower Presidio Road and Camino Arriba — begins in San Augustine, just a few miles into Texas from the Louisiana border.



Mission Dolores Visitor Center in San Augustine

SAN AUGUSTINE

For travelers yearning for a big dose of Texas history, San Augustine is rich in it. From historic homes, churches and assorted landmarks, those who have passed through have left their mark. In fact, there are more than 50 recorded historical landmarks and sites here, like the 1839 Ezekiel Cullen House. San Augustine also is home to the first university and first churches for several denominations. Those settlers found their way via El Camino Real de los Tejas trail.

For a glimpse into the lives of former inhabitants, there is the Mission Dolores Visitor Center, commemorating an early Spanish mission founded in 1716. It features exhibits describing life among the missionaries and Ais Indians, as well as territorial struggles between Spain and France. Travelers will find a wealth of information at “The Log Cabin,” home to the Civic and Tourism Center and the San Augustine County Chamber of Commerce. A walking bridge connects the Log Cabin with nearby Sante Fe Park and Nature Trail. Nearby, at Courthouse Square, see the statue of Texas’ first governor James Pickney Henderson facing the Royal Highway where the Ayish Bayou crosses El Camino Real de los Tejas.

With its Piney Woods locale, it’s only natural that nature is a key attraction in San Augustine, just as it was then, although today it’s more out of pleasure than necessity. Campers, hikers, cyclists, birders and nature lovers have many options. Flanked by Toledo Bend and Sam Houston reservoirs, San Augustine also is ideal for water sports and fishing.

More recent history, involving trailblazers of a new era, is marked by tragedy. Space Shuttle Columbia disintegrated upon re-entry into the Earth’s atmosphere in February 2003, killing its crew and leaving debris strewn across San Augustine County. A year later, San Augustine County dedicated a monument to the memory of the seven astronauts who died.

NACOGDOCHES

There are many tales to tell in this, one of the oldest towns in Texas, which was named for the Caddo family of Indians who once lived here. Legend tells of a Caddo chief who sent his twin sons three days in the opposite direction of each other to set up their own home bases. The well-worn path between their two communities — Nacogdoches in Texas and Nachitoches in Louisiana — became part of El Camino Real for Spanish travelers.

Nacogdoches remained a Caddo Indian settlement until 1716 when the Spanish set up Mission Nuestra Senora de Guadalupe de los Nacogdoches to keep the French from settling there. After the French threat was over, the Spaniards abandoned the mission, ordering all its settlers to move to San Antonio. Spanish trader Antonio Gil Y’Barbo led the settlers back to Nacogdoches in 1779. Mexico designated it a town that summer, making it one of the first “towns” in Texas. The center of town is marked by the intersection of El Camino Real and Calle Norte.

MILAM

The first stop in Texas from the Louisiana side of the famous El Camino Real is Milam. Though no longer a formally organized town, the location began as a popular campsite on the Old San Antonio Road. Nowadays, Milam is hopping each year on the Saturday before Thanksgiving. That’s when the Milam Settlers Day Organization hosts a celebration to honor the city and its founders at El Camino Park. The park features an 1830 log cabin and the first (placed in 1918) of many El Camino Real stone markers.

El Camino Park

EST. 1993

WINGS HIGHWAY
CAMINO REAL
OLD SAN ANTONIO ROAD
MARKED BY THE
COUNTEILERS OF THE
AMERICAN REVOLUTION
AND THE STATE OF TEXAS
A.D. 1918

Since then, Nacogdoches and the Old Stone Fort became the site of three failed attempts to establish a Republic of Texas; as a result, nine flags have flown over Nacogdoches while only six have flown over Texas.

All of this makes for a historically rich travel destination, and one of the most popular in the state. Visitors enjoy artifacts and memorabilia at the Stone Fort Museum,

a 1936 replica of Y'Barbo's home. The Sterne-Hoya House Museum and Library, circa 1830, reflects the lives of its earliest occupants. Millard's Crossing Historic Village — a collection of relocated 19th-century buildings, including a schoolhouse, church and boarding house — offers a glimpse of a bygone era.

The Durst-Taylor Historic House and Gardens, with its grounds, blacksmith shop and smokehouse, is interpreted to the 1840 to 1860 era. It is the second oldest structure still standing on its original site in the city.

ALTO

About A.D. 800 — long before there was El Camino Real — the Caddoan Indians called this region, and Alto, home. They have left behind a wealth of artifacts and evidence of their way of life.

The interpretive center at the 93.8-acre Caddoan Mounds State Historic Site showcases the way of life for the Caddoans and features a village site. Visitors can learn about these early inhabitants through exhibits, displays and more than 150 artifacts that have been discovered here. The center also offers walking trails to mounds — two served ceremonial purposes, the other burial purposes.

Alto (meaning “high”) was aptly named for being the high point between the Angelina and Neches rivers. Because of its location, it was a likely place to serve as a way station for travelers. It remains a great stopping spot for travelers.

When traveling through Alto — at Texas State Highway 21 and U.S. Highway 69 — the exceptional beauty that the Caddoans enjoyed is still visible today. The 161,500-acre Davy Crockett National Forest touches along U.S. 69 and several roads around Alto, offering miles of scenic driving. About seven miles southwest of Alto, the forest features the Neches Bluff recreational area along the Neches River.



Caddoan Mounds State Historic Site in Alto

CROCKETT

As with many travelers along El Camino Real, frontiersman Davy Crockett thought this was a perfect place to camp while on his journey to the Alamo. The town, established in 1837, was named for that Tennessean scout. It is one of the oldest Texas Republic period towns in the state, and it is the seat of Houston County, one of the oldest in the Republic of Texas. During the Civil War, Crockett was a mustering point and training center for Confederate forces.

Today, travelers can witness the architectural charms of the homes, businesses, shops, restaurants and more in the Architectural District or learn about blues legend Lightnin' Hopkins from his statue in Old Town Crockett.

Because of its rich background, history buffs have more than 265 registered historic landmarks to discover in Houston County.

For recreation, anglers will find many bodies of water in the area. Hiking, boating, swimming and birding opportunities are plentiful there, too.

Additionally, many events, like the World Championship Fiddlers Festival, Houston County Fair, and Heritage Day, plus festivals celebrating bluegrass, gospel, peanuts and more, provide entertainment for Houston County residents and visitors.

BRYAN

This city in the Brazos River Valley was as much a key stop along El Camino Real de los Tejas trail then as it is now. Still, it wasn't until the 1820s that settlement here began. By 1867, the railroad came and established Bryan as an agricultural and commercial center.

With so much area history, it's no surprise that there are many museums to celebrate the arts, its people, geology and long-standing traditions.

Local history and genealogy can be found in the 1903 Greek revival style Carnegie Public Library. Behind the library is the Children's Museum, which offers fun, educational outlets for the young ones.

The Brazos Valley Museum of Natural History exhibits the mastadons, mammoths and saber-toothed tigers that once roamed

MISSION TEJAS STATE PARK

Along El Camino Real de Los Tejas National Historic Trail, near Weches, travelers will find the entrance to Mission Tejas State Park, which commemorates Mission San Francisco de los Tejas, the first Spanish mission in East Texas. The mission was built in 1690 in hopes of stemming the tide of French settlement; but, like similar missions, it was later moved to San Antonio.

The park is 363 acres featuring more than a mile-long segment of the original trail. You'll also find the landmark Rice family log home, which served as a stagecoach inn, one of many along the Royal Highway. There is camping, picnicking, fishing, hiking and nature trails, which offer access to the natural beauty of the East Texas Piney Woods.



Clockwise from top: Downtown Nacogdoches as seen from the historic Fredonia Hotel. Carnegie Library in Bryan. Sam "Lightnin'" Hopkins statue in Crockett.



Above: First National Bank in downtown Bastrop. Right: Brazos River just west of Bryan.

the area. It also shows visitors the changing modes of transporting products — like cotton — from ox to rail. Various other artifacts and displays offer a glimpse of life along this part of El Camino Real.

Bryan features many other tourism opportunities and businesses, including year-round hunting, fishing and camping in nearby streams and woodlands, like the 828-acre Lake Bryan facility.

BASTROP

Bastrop — founded on the Colorado River at the Lost Pines in 1832 — is bustling, while maintaining its old-town charm and the wonders of nature that surround it.

The natural draws of Bastrop include the loblolly pines of Bastrop State Park, direct access to the Colorado River at Fisherman's Park, nearby Lake Bastrop, Buescher, Somerville and McKinney Falls state parks. They lend plenty of opportunity to fish, bike, backpack, camp, picnic, canoe (park rents canoes), swim (pool), hike and view wildlife. There also is El Camino Real Paddling Trail, a six-mile trail with some minor rapids along the way.

Golfers can delight in the three area courses, including Lost

Pines Golf Club, one of the finest and most scenic 18-hole golf courses in Central Texas.

The Old Town business district and nearby historic neighborhoods are testament to Bastrop's pride in its history and heritage. See one of the oldest opera houses in Texas here, then peruse the gifts and antiques at the shops along Main Street and throughout downtown.

AUSTIN

While early passersby — making music, no doubt — might not have been concerned with trying to “keep Austin weird,” they found themselves charmed by this gateway to the lush rolling hills and prairies of the Texas Hill Country. Originally, American Indians found this to be a perfect spot for buffalo hunting. In 1838, settlers thought it was the perfect spot for setting up a trading post along the Colorado River. Today, it is the heart of Texas history and politics, where residents and visitors have also found it to be an ideal spot for outdoor recreation, live music and its diverse blend of people. That might explain why it is the second biggest settlement along El Camino Real de los Tejas.

An iconic structure that is a key draw for Austin is the pink granite Texas State Capitol. Tours are available to visitors, even while the business of running the state continues.

The history of those who have left their mark on the area is well-documented and the subject of many Austin attractions.

The three-story Bob Bullock Texas State History Museum tells that story of Texas with interactive exhibits; the *Star of Destiny* special effects show; and, in its IMAX Theater, *Texas: The Big*

Picture — in large format, of course.

At the museum, visitors can get a sense of the enduring times of Texas' past, many of which have occurred along the famous royal highway.

One of France's diplomatic outposts in the Republic of Texas days, the French Legation, now serves as a museum and the oldest standing frame structure in Austin.

Former President Lyndon B. and First Lady Lady Bird Johnson have left an indelible mark on the city including the Lyndon B. Johnson Library and Museum, the Lady Bird

Johnson Wildflower Center, and about an hour out of Austin, the Lyndon Baines Johnson National Historical Park in Johnson City.

Step back in time to the 1880s through Pioneer Farms, a living history museum in Northeast Austin featuring special events and hands-on programs to allow modern-day people to not just read about history, but to be immersed in it. Here, visitors will find three historic farmsteads on more than 80 acres depicting life on the Blackland Prairie of Central Texas. A commercial cotton farm, a homestead farm and a tenant farm are in operation year-round.

History enthusiasts may visit many prominent Texans in their final resting spot — Texas State Cemetery. Here lie notable Texans like Stephen F. Austin, John Connally, J. Frank Dobie, Barbara





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The Capitol in Austin

Jordan, James A. Michener, and Ann Richards. The cemetery log includes 13 Texas governors, four first ladies of Texas, 11 Republic of Texas veterans, nine Confederate generals, two American Revolutionary War veterans and one 17th-century French sailor whose remains were discovered in the wreck of LaSalle's ship, *La Belle*.

Today, life in Austin — the “Live Music Capital of the World” — is marked by fine arts, outdoor recreation and, of course, plenty of music. Austin features its own professional Ballet Austin, Austin Symphony, Austin Lyric Opera as well as local theater companies. There also are 20 museums, a multitude of art galleries and more than 60 performance companies.

An anomaly of nature that catches many an eye are the 1.5 million Mexican free-tail bats that make a nightly exodus from under the Ann W. Richards Congress Avenue Bridge between March and October. It's the largest urban bat colony in North America. Beneath the bridge, alongside bat-watching boat tours, are rowers, canoers and kayakers traversing the waters of Town Lake. A 10-mile hike and bike trail along the lake — drawing cyclists, runners, joggers and walkers — bisects the city and connects to Zilker Park, where swimmers can dive into the spring-fed Barton Springs Pool. Just a few paces from here is Lake Austin and the Deep Eddy spring-fed pool. Further west, recreational boating and water skiing on Lake Travis are highlights.

This city comes with its own soundtrack that plays nightly at nearly 200 venues on any given night — from the Warehouse District and Sixth Street to legendary venues and assorted

businesses throughout the town. Austin is also home to the nationally syndicated Austin City Limits television program showcasing American and Texas roots music. Its accompanying summer music festival in Zilker Park and the South By Southwest music, film and interactive conference have caught on as international favorites and translate into a huge draw for visitors who seek the best in music and film.

SAN MARCOS

This stop along El Camino Real is one that has long proved popular. It is one of the oldest continuously inhabited sites in North America, with American Indians living along the ever-present riverbanks of the San Marcos River as far back as 12,000 years ago. A small group of Mexican families settled here in 1808, where El Camino Real de los Tejas crosses the San Marcos River.

Today, visitors can get a glimpse of San Marcos' history through exciting tours like the Living History Trolley Tours, hosted by the likenesses of the town's founding couple.

Of all San Marcos has to offer, nature is a prominent draw, and the San Marcos River is at the hub of it all. Tubing and kayaking the clear waters of the river rule the recreation arena. Along the river are resting spots like Sewell Park and Lions' Park, both offering tube and canoe rentals.

The Rio Vista Dam on the river helped create Spring Lake, home to Aquarena Center. The Center offers a unique



showcase of the river’s plant and animal life through glass bottom boats. It is also an ideal location for birding, and it features historical sites and a wetlands walkway.

Spelunkers can discover the wonderment of Wonder World Park, which includes one of the most visited caves in Texas. The earthquake-formed cavern features multiple rooms with actively growing wet-formation stalagmites and stalagmites, calcite crystals, and fine examples of Buda and Edwards limestone.

Along with exploring the cave, the park includes the Tejas Observation Tower for breathtaking views from the fault line’s drop-off point. Guests can also feed animals in what is billed as the largest petting park in Texas featuring a variety of deer, llamas, turkeys, peacocks, scare goats, antelopes and more.

For more above-ground and out-of-the-water fun, San Marcos rakes in the shoppers at its two, side-by-side outlet malls featuring clothing, electronics, books, gifts and more. This shopper’s haven runs neck-and-neck with river recreation in terms of popularity, drawing in people from across the state and Mexico.

Museum lovers can enjoy the Lyndon Baines Johnson Museum of San Marcos, the Calaboose Museum of African-American History and the Commemorative Air Force Exhibit, among others.

NEW BRAUNFELS

New Braunfels and its definitive roots — founded in 1845 under German charter — is rich with Old World heritage and small town charm. There’s a bit of the modern mixed with the influence of the Germans who followed Prince Carl Solms-Braunfels here in search of economic security and personal freedom.

The town’s visitor center helps travelers discover the many ways to have a great time in New Braunfels, but visitors are likely to immediately discover the welcome of the biergartens for dining

Above: Downtown New Braunfels. Right: Shoeing a horse at Texas Natural and Western Swing Festival in San Marcos.

and oompah music for dancing.

Tubing down the clear rivers is a huge draw. New Braunfels’ 65-acre Schlitterbahn water park, consistently top-ranked in the nation, is another opportunity to jump into New Braunfels fun. Water sport opportunities also include fishing on the Guadalupe River, wakeboarding at Texas Ski Ranch, and a number of sports like parasailing and boating at Canyon Lake.

On dry land, the town’s history can be absorbed on walking tours, in museums and its historic districts, like Gruene. In Gruene, you’ll find the oldest dance hall in Texas. Go a little deeper into New Braunfels for a spelunking adventure at Natural Bridge Caverns, the largest caverns in the state. Next door, the Natural Bridge Wildlife Ranch offers a safari adventure for the family.





The Riverwalk in San Antonio

SAN ANTONIO

While Austin might be the political heart of Texas, San Antonio is the spiritual heart with America's oldest Spanish mission complex, including the Alamo, now a shrine and museum in the heart of the city. Because of this, San Antonio's nickname is the "Alamo City." The town grew to encompass this mission where the Battle of the Alamo took place. Here, the stirring cry — "Remember the Alamo" — became the rallying point of the Texas Revolution against Mexico.

Originally, American Indians lived in the San Antonio River Valley. In 1691, Spanish explorers and missionaries came upon the river on the feast day of St. Anthony and named the river San Antonio in his honor, but it wasn't until 1718 that the city was founded. San Antonio was a major stop along El Camino Real de los Tejas then, and remains so today because of its attractions, legacies and multi-cultural traditions.

Now a community of more than 1.2 million, San Antonio's Alamo and Paseo del Rio (River Walk) are consistently the top two attractions in Texas, helping to draw in about 20 million tourists per year. SeaWorld of Texas, Six Flags Fiesta Texas and the San Antonio Zoo are also consistent top attractions.

The San Antonio missions — the Alamo, San Jose, Concepción, San Juan and Espada — were created as outposts where natives could be taught the ways of Spanish society and Catholicism. The missions were cultural centers that also served as regional suppliers of goods.

Today, the Daughters of the Republic of Texas maintain the Alamo as a visitor center and museum filled with Texas artifacts. The other four missions, though maintained by the National Park Service as the San Antonio Missions National Historical Park — remain active parishes and are open to the public.

San Antonio also showcases a wealth of arts and culture. On the campus of the University of Texas at San Antonio is the Institute of Texan Cultures, which celebrates the differences and commonality of the people of Texas. The Witte Museum showcases South Texas — its history, culture and natural science including dinosaur bones and historic homes. Other museums include one dedicated to the Texas Rangers and a 33-acre "living museum" of the Botanical Gardens.

The celebration of art and culture takes a global spin, too. This city has many national and world-class offerings like the Museo Alameda, which tells the story of the Latino experience in America, and the McNay Art Museum, which has treasures including paintings by Gauguin, Cezanne, Matisse, Picasso and Van Gogh.

San Antonio's Guadalupe Cultural Arts Center maintains the cultural feel by presenting several major events throughout the year, including the Tejano Conjunto Festival.

LAREDO

This present-day major point of entry from Nuevo Laredo, Mexico, into the United States was also a chosen crossing point over the Rio Grande by many a traveler in the later days along El Camino Real de los Tejas. Established in 1755 by Tomás Sánchez de la Barrera y Garza, Laredo was part of Spain's last attempts at colonization. The city is full of history.

Get a feel for this fascinating city through visits to some of its historic landmarks. San Augustin Cathedral is one of the Southwest's oldest churches. Its position on San Augustin Plaza, in the heart of the old Spanish section, was reserved when the town site was laid out in 1767. The cathedral was rebuilt several times over the years, and the current structure dates from 1872.

Visitors can stop by the former Republic of the Rio Grande capitol building, now a museum, to learn about this short-lived effort by Federalist leaders in Northern Mexico to gain independence from Mexico. Guns, saddles, household goods and more from this period in 1840 are displayed.

Fort McIntosh, established by the U.S. Army in 1848 following the Mexican War, was among a series of border forts guarding against attack. Several buildings from the fort remain in use today by Laredo Community College, and the original earthen fort is part of the Paseo Del Indio Nature Trail.

Anyone who visits Laredo during late January or in February is in for a treat. For more than 100 years, this city has been home to a celebration of the first Western Hemisphere leader of a New World country, the United States, that gained independence from



Republic of the Rio Grande Museum in Laredo

European rule. Washington's Birthday Celebration offers parades, live entertainment, air show, carnival, fireworks and much more. This is the largest celebration of its kind in the United States.

There also are plenty of other things to see like Lake Casa Blanca International State Park for camping, swimming, boating, mountain biking, and fishing; Lamar Bruni Vergara Environmental Science Center to learn about plants and animals in the Rio Grande Watershed; and the Laredo Center for the Arts with its various exhibits of work by local, national and international artists. Visitors can also enjoy shopping, experience the night life and savor delicious cuisine.

GOLIAD

This is one of the state's oldest municipalities, and the area was inhabited before recorded history. An Aranama village had occupied the site before Spain established Mission Nuestra Señora del Espíritu Santo de Zuniga and Presidio Santa Maria del Loreto de la Bahia at its present location in 1749. La Bahia became one of the more important forts on the Spanish frontier and along El Camino Real de los Tejas, and it served as the place where Col. James W. Fannin Jr. and his men were imprisoned after their surrender and while awaiting their execution. With the closure of Los Adaes and Los Orcoquisac presidios, La Bahia became solely responsible for the defense of the coastal area and eastern province of Texas. La Bahia has been excavated and restored to one of the finest examples of a complete Spanish presidio in the state. A living history program re-creating Fannin's occupation of the fort and the massacre is held each year.

Anyone interested in history who visits Goliad will also want to visit the Zaragoza Birthplace State Historic Site, which holds a reconstructed birthplace and statue of this famous Mexican military figure. During the battle of Puebla, Gen. Ignacio

Zaragoza led an army that forced the withdrawal of the French troops in a victory that is celebrated today as Cinco de Mayo.

Other sights to see while traveling include the mass grave of Fannin and his men, the Market House Museum, and Fannin Plaza with its historical markers, Texas Revolution cannon and memorial.

CUERO

During the 1730s to 1790s, El Camino Real de los Tejas followed a route along the San Antonio River and turned east to cross the Guadalupe River near what is now Cuero.

The city, named after the Spanish translation of the Indian word for rawhide, was founded in 1872. The location also served as a round-up point for a leg of the Chisholm Trail. Cuero is home to 50 historic structures on the National Register of Historic Places, including the 1896 Romanesque-style courthouse, plus three historic districts. While in Cuero, stop by the Historic Federal Building of Cuero, which houses the Cuero Heritage Museum — exhibiting city memorabilia — and Cuero Chamber of Commerce & Agriculture. Also visit the Dewitt County Historical Museum with its World War II Bryton Flying Field exhibit about the pilot training school during 1941–1945; Cattle and Cowhands exhibit; and Cuero Talks Turkey exhibit, highlighting more than 30 years of Turkeyfest celebrations. The Turkeyfest Celebration is held annually around the second weekend in October. The area also provides exciting opportunities to see wildflowers during the spring.

VICTORIA

Presidio La Bahia was originally constructed in 1721 on the site of the destroyed Fort St. Louis near present-day Port Lavaca. The site proved unsuitable, however, and the presidio relocated to northwest of Victoria in 1726 and remained there for more than a decade before a final move to its location near Goliad. La Bahia was established to protect the mission and guard against French encroachment upon land claimed by Spain. Those interested in learning more about Presidio La Bahia, Fort St. Louis and the French presence in Texas may want to stop by the Museum of the Coastal Bend in Victoria, which holds artifacts and information about both forts and contains items recovered from *La Belle*, a ship of Rene Robert Cavellier, Sieur La Salle. While here, also plan visits to the McNamara House Museum, with items and furniture representative of everyday life in the late 19th-century South Texas; Nave Museum, which houses paintings by Royston Nave and features contemporary art, sculpture and traveling exhibits; Riverside Park woodland area; the Texas Zoo, devoted to native Texas species in a natural environment; and Victoria Memorial Square with its landmark gristmill.

The cities along what was once El Camino Real de los Tejas present so much to see and do that it is easy to plan day trips to one or more of the cities along the trail or a lengthier visit along the route. So, hit the road, explore a part of Texas' past and indulge in some of what this great state has to experience.



View across the Rio Grande near Eagle Pass

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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National Historic Trail Association

www.elcaminorealdelostejas.org

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San Augustine

San Augustine County Chamber of Commerce

www.sanaugustinetx.com

611 W. Columbia St.

San Augustine, TX 75972

(936) 275-3610

Nacogdoches

Nacogdoches Convention and Visitors Bureau

www.visitnacogdoches.org

200 E. Main St.

Nacogdoches, TX 75961

(888) OLDEST-TOWN, (888-653-3788)

Alto

Caddoan Mounds State Historic Site

www.thc.state.tx.us/hsites/hsdefault.shtml

1649 State Hwy. 21W

Alto, TX 75925

(936) 858-3218

Crockett

Crockett Area Chamber of Commerce

www.crockettareachamber.com

1100 Edmiston Dr.

Crockett, TX 75835

(936) 544-2359

Bryan

Bryan-College Station Convention & Visitors Bureau

www.visitaggieland.com

715 University Dr. E

College Station, TX 77840

(979) 260-9898, (800) 777-8292

Bastrop

Bastrop 'Old Town' Visitor Center

www.visitbastrop.org

1016 Main St.

Bastrop, TX 78602

(512) 303-0904

Austin

Austin Convention and Visitors Bureau

www.austintexas.org

209 E. Sixth St.

Austin, TX 78701

(800) 926-2282

San Marcos

San Marcos Area Convention and Visitors Bureau

www.toursanmarcos.com

202 N. C.M. Allen Parkway

San Marcos, TX 78667

(512) 393-5900

New Braunfels

New Braunfels Chamber of Commerce

www.nbjumpin.com

390 S. Seguin Ave.

New Braunfels, TX 78130

(800) 572-2626

San Antonio

San Antonio Convention and Visitors Bureau

www.visitsanantonio.com

317 Alamo Plaza

San Antonio, TX 78205

(210) 207-6700, (800) 447-3372

Laredo

Laredo Convention and Visitors Bureau

www.visitlaredo.com

501 San Agustin Ave.

Laredo, TX 78040

(956) 795-2200, (800) 361-3360

Goliad

Goliad County Chamber of Commerce

www.goliadcc.org

231 S. Market St.

Goliad, TX 77963

(361) 645-3563, (800) 848-8674

Cuero

Cuero Chamber of Commerce and Agriculture

www.cuero.org

124 E. Church St.

Cuero, TX 77954

(361) 275-2112

Victoria

Victoria Convention and Visitors Bureau

www.victoriatexasinfo.com

3404 N. Ben Wilson St.

Victoria, TX 77901

(361) 582-4285, (800) 926-5774

Milam

Milam Settlers Day Organization

(409) 625-4472

Mission Tejas State Park

www.tpwd.state.tx.us/spdest/findadest/parks/mission_tejas

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