



INSIDER
GUIDES
from VisitTheUSA

SECRET TRAILS – BACK ROADS, BEACHES AND BAYOUS

TEXAS – LOUISIANA

SECRET TRAILS – BACK ROADS, BEACHES AND BAYOUS



Austin, Texas to Houston, Texas

3 hours/265 kilometres

Houston, Texas to Lake Charles, Louisiana

2.5 hours/232 kilometres

Lake Charles, Louisiana to New Orleans, Louisiana

3 hours/330 kilometres



AUSTIN, TEXAS

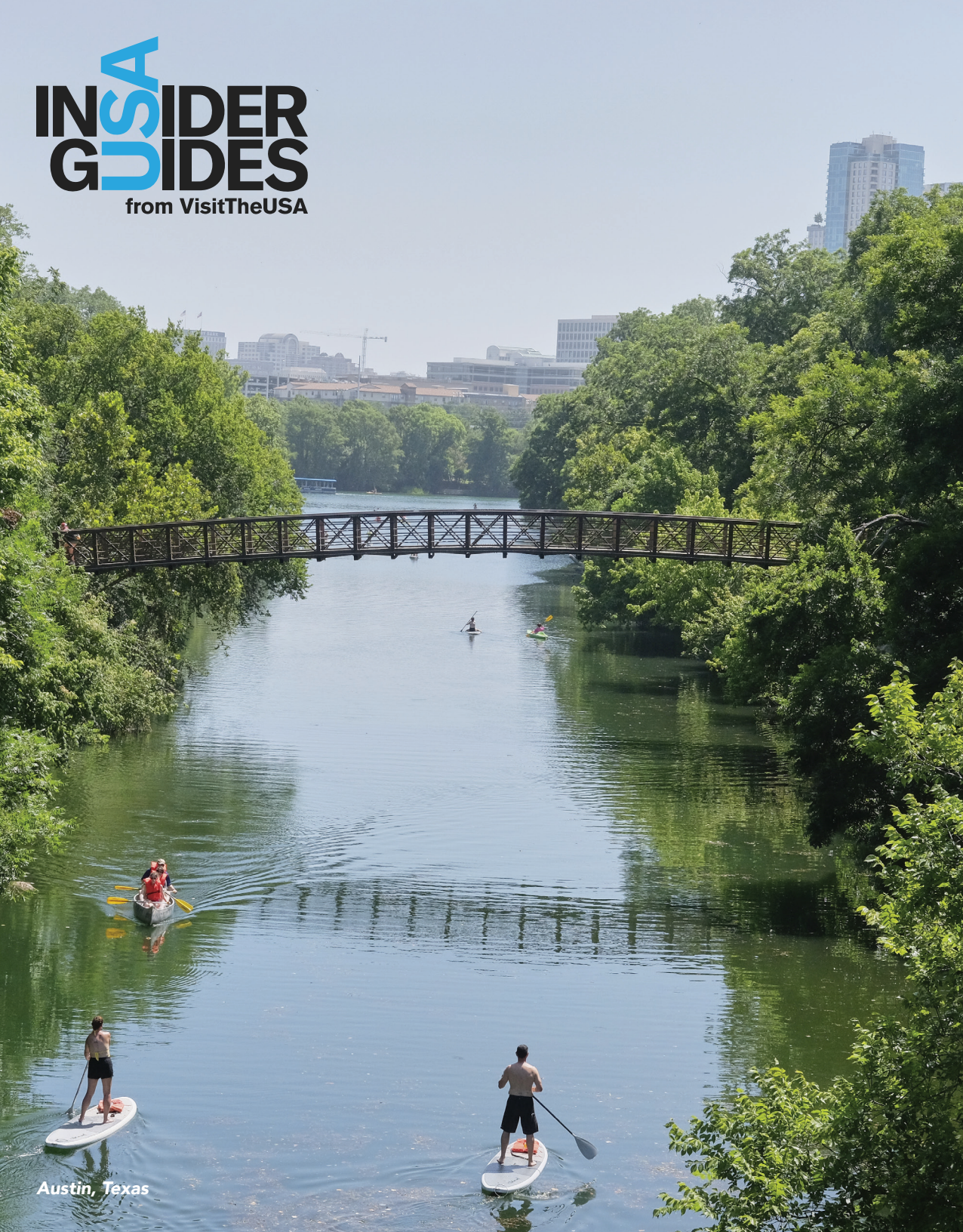
Days 1 and 2

After arriving at the Austin-Bergstrom International Airport in Austin, Texas, it's likely you'll hear live music played by local musicians in the terminal. Rent a vehicle at the airport, then drive to your accommodation to rest up for the road trip ahead. Wake up and enjoy a relaxing morning and unforgettable experience at **Barton Springs**, a natural swimming spot in **Zilker Metropolitan Park** near downtown Austin. The spring-fed water is a constant 20-21 degrees Celsius year-round, making it perfect for families to enjoy. Order lunch from one of the many food trucks in Austin; you're sure to find what you are craving at reasonable prices. Explore the city on foot, starting at the Texas State Capitol. Pose in front of fantastic

murals that include "I love you so much" at **Jo's Coffee** and "Greetings from Austin" at South First Street. Head to South Congress Avenue to browse in cowboy boot stores, then go to the **Congress Avenue Bridge** and watch 1.5 million bats take flight during a spectacular violet crown sunset. Eat dinner at one of the converted cottages in the **Rainey Street Historic District**, then head a few blocks east and boot scoot the night away at **The White Horse**.

Accommodation: Austin, Texas

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Austin, Texas

Day 3

Today, leave the city for the breathtaking beauty of **Texas Hill Country**. Explore back roads and ranch roads as you go off the beaten path and discover this region, where the experience is as much about the drive as the stops you will make. The Texas countryside will be the star with its cliffs, valleys and meadows covered with colorful wildflowers. Stop for breakfast at the **Rolling in Thyme & Dough** restaurant in **Dripping Springs**, known as "The Gateway to the Hill Country." If you want a quick dip after breakfast, head to nearby **Hamilton Pool Preserve**, a natural swimming pool with a waterfall. Continue along country roads to **Johnson City**, once the home of former U.S. President Lyndon Johnson, and on to **Willow City**. Explore the 21-kilometre **Willow City Loop** scenic drive, a profusion of flower-filled meadows, green rolling hills and crystal creeks. Next up is **Fredericksburg**, whose German heritage stretches back more than 170 years, and can be discovered at the **Pioneer Museum** in the heart of town. Try German cuisine while you're here; **Otto's German Bistro** is a favorite. Stroll along historic **Main Street** with shops selling everything from antiques to art and clothes – don't miss stopping in **The Fredericksburg Christmas Store**. Back in Austin, taste authentic Texas barbecue at **Lamberts** or **Cooper's Old Time Pit Bar-B-Que** before exploring music venues and bars in downtown Austin.

Accommodation: Austin, Texas

AUSTIN TO HOUSTON, TEXAS

• • • • • ● 3 hours/265 kilometres

Day 4

Before leaving town, eat breakfast tacos at an Austin favorite, **Juan in a Million**. Head back into Texas Hill Country before driving to Houston. The first stop will be in historic **Elgin**, often called the "Sausage Capital of Texas" because of its two famous barbecue restaurants, **Meyer's Elgin Smokehouse** and **Southside Market & Barbeque**. Explore historic **Main Street** with its unique boutiques. A stop in **Serbin**, the heart of German Wendish country, is a must to see a beautiful example of one of the Painted Churches of Texas, **St. Paul Lutheran Church**. Continue to **Brenham**, an excellent city to stop for lunch. Try the ice cream at **Blue Bell Creamery** before leaving for Houston. If you arrive in Houston before sunset, visit **James Turrell's "Twilight Epiphany" Skyspace** at Moody Center for the Arts on Rice University's campus; the light and sound installation is mesmerizing. For dinner, experience Houston's multicultural melting pot of flavors in the city's Chinatown by eating Vietnamese-style crawfish and oysters at either **Crawfish & Noodles** or **Cajun Kitchen**.

Accommodation: Houston, Texas

Day 5

Today, snap Instagram-worthy photographs of Houston's street art while learning about the city's murals, their makers and their stories on an electric cart tour with **Joyride Houston**. Relax in the back seat as a guide shows you **Downtown, Midtown** and **East Downtown** (EaDo) buildings adorned with fantastic paintings, such as the "Houston is Inspired" mural, inspired by the local culture. Stop for lunch at **The Original Ninfa's** on Navigation Boulevard; no visit to Houston would be complete without sampling Tex-Mex fare such as fajitas, enchiladas and margaritas. After lunch, head to the **Buffalo Bayou Park Cistern**. Once an underground reservoir, this attraction now hosts ever-changing art exhibits that bring the space to life and play with color and

reflection. After exploring the exhibit, get ready for biking. Meet a **Tour De Brewery Houston** guide at the cistern's entrance to get outfitted with bikes and helmets. The tour includes one of Houston's most beautiful green spaces, **Buffalo Bayou**, in addition to the historic downtown and 11 kilometres of park trails. After all that biking, head to the new downtown food hall, **Bravery Chef Hall**, where you can order sushi, barbecue, diner food, Vietnamese food, pasta and more. Other great dinner options are **Hugo's**, **Pondicheri** and **Nancy's Hustle**.

Accommodation: Houston, Texas

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Houston, Texas





Space Center Houston, Texas

Day 6

Visiting **Space Center Houston** is a must when you're in the city. Permanent and rotating exhibits tell the story of the USA's space flight program in the home of **NASA's Mission Control Center**. Take a behind-the-scenes look at **Johnson Space Center**, where history was made with the Apollo 11 moon landing over 50 years ago. Explore the replica of the space shuttle Independence, visit a model of Skylab, the USA's first space station, and even touch a moon rock. Next, head to nearby **Kemah Boardwalk**, a waterfront theme park built along the shores of **Galveston Bay**. Enjoy boardwalk snacks while playing games or riding the Ferris wheel overlooking the water. Work up an appetite because your next stop is for juicy, big steaks at **B&B Butchers & Restaurant**. Finish the night at **Anvil Bar & Refuge**, where master mixologists create innovative cocktails and offer a Captain's List of rare spirits.

Accommodation: Houston, Texas

HOUSTON, TEXAS TO LAKE CHARLES, LOUISIANA

● ● ● ● ● 2.5 hours/232 kilometres

Day 7

Depart Houston today and head southeast across Galveston Bay to the beautiful beaches of **Galveston Island**. Explore the **Strand Historic District**, enjoy a late breakfast or early lunch at one of the waterfront restaurants and take a stroll to admire the beautiful Gulf of Mexico waters. With your car, board a ferry for a 4.3-kilometre ride to the Bolivar Peninsula. Continue along the Gulf Coast, stopping at **Fort Travis** to explore the fantastic historical site. Enjoy a picnic lunch in **Crystal Beach**, then drive through Port Arthur and cross the state line into Louisiana, entering the **Louisiana's Outback** region that teems with wildlife. Notice the Sabine Pass Lighthouse as you travel toward Peveto Woods Sanctuary, a hot spot for birders. Stop at **Holly Beach**, part of 42 kilometres of beaches known for the remote, tranquil setting and shelling. Leaving Holly Beach, follow the **Creole Nature Trail** through spectacular bayous and marshes of Southwest Louisiana along **Calcasieu Lake** to Lake Charles. Stop and view myriad species of wildlife along the way.

Accommodation: Lake Charles, Louisiana

LAKE CHARLES, LOUISIANA

Day 8

Explore the culture, cuisine and history of Lake Charles today. Every day should start with breakfast, and **The Bekery** is an excellent choice with cinnamon rolls, quiche and much more baked fresh daily. Visit the **Mardi Gras Museum of Imperial Calcasieu** to understand the importance of Mardi Gras in the region's rich history. View spectacular costumes and even board a Mardi Gras float. In Lake Charles, you don't only eat fabulous food, but you also learn how to make it. For lunch, go to **The Velvet Pig on Oak Park** and take a cooking class while preparing your own lunch. Learn about the local foodie culture that's a mix of German, Cajun, Native American and French cuisine. After lunch, explore the history of Lake Charles in the **Charpentier Historic District**; download a walking tour app to guide you to some of Southwest Louisiana's most elegant homes and buildings. Mule-drawn carriage rides are also available if you are looking for that unique experience. When you have finished sightseeing and shopping, enjoy dinner at one of the many restaurants; an excellent downtown choice for local cuisine is **Luna Bar and Grill**.

Accommodation: Lake Charles, Louisiana

Day 9

The wildlife and natural environment surrounding Lake Charles includes over 400 bird species, alligators, bobcats and raptors. Take a guided tour to get close to wildlife and explore the marshes and coastline of this diverse area. There is something for nearly everyone; options include eco-tours, charter fishing and nature photography. Try a full-day experience that includes wildlife watching in addition to learning about Cajun culture and customs, perhaps going fishing or crabbing. Most importantly, bring your camera. If you are a professional or just an avid amateur photographer, the results will be breathtaking. End your day at **Calla** for a special fine dining experience with a local twist.

Accommodation: Lake Charles, Louisiana





New Orleans, Louisiana

NEW ORLEANS, LOUISIANA

Day 11

Begin with breakfast and a tasty Bloody Mary at the **Royal Oyster House**, then explore New Orleans. From centuries-old cottages to elaborate historic cemeteries, everything in this city tells a story of history and heritage. Stroll through the historic **French Quarter** and listen to street musicians around **Jackson Square** while viewing the amazing art from local artists. Explore **Royal Street**, photograph its spectacular balconies and shop in eclectic boutiques. Food is crucial to the culture of the city, and the restaurants offer excellent experiences to match their cuisine. Stop for lunch at **Muriel's Jackson Square** and enjoy eating etrouffee on a balcony with great views. Take a guided tour this afternoon and explore the **Garden District's** oak-lined streets and mansions that reflect so many architectural

styles, including Gothic, Georgian and Greek Revival. Ride the **St. Charles Streetcar** past magnificent homes and settings for many movies. Next, visit the **St. Louis Cemetery**; local lore says it's the final resting place of a legendary voodoo queen, Marie Leveau. The labyrinth of above-ground tombs was the setting for "Interview with a Vampire" and other movies. No trip to New Orleans would be complete without a night on **Royal and Bourbon streets**. Start early with dinner at **Arnaud's**, a New Orleans institution, then revel in the party atmosphere as you experience the live music culture of this fantastic destination.

Accommodation: New Orleans, Louisiana

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Day 12

New Orleans is at the heart of a diverse ecosystem, making a swamp tour a must to experience and appreciate it fully. Depending on your level of adventure, you can take a boat ride, sign up for an airboat tour or paddle a kayak or canoe. You'll have the opportunity to get close to alligators, wild boars, owls, snakes, egrets and other species. Return to New Orleans this afternoon and explore the **French Quarter** further before heading to **Frenchmen Street**, a hub for live music. Venues include **The Spotted Cat Music Club**, a cozy room with as many as three bands nightly, spotlighting

various forms of jazz. For dinner, try local flavors at **Marigny Brasserie** and listen to great live music. If you have not made it to **Café du Monde** for café au lait and beignets, it is not too late. It's the perfect 24-hour stop to end an amazing visit to New Orleans. Don't stay up too late, though, as you'll want to wake up refreshed tomorrow to catch your flight home at the Louis Armstrong New Orleans International Airport.

Accommodation: New Orleans, Louisiana

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Swamp tour, Louisiana

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