

The night sky is big and starry in Texas Hill Country, the region of central Texas between Austin and San Antonio. Daytime highs are in the 60s making the region a wonderful place to park your Airstream, hike, bike... and dine during the winter.

Hill Country sits on the Edwards Plateau, generally between 500 and 2,250 feet above sea level. A hundred million years ago, it was under an ocean which left behind sandstone, limestone, shales, and dolomites. Today, spring-fed streams flow into sparkling rivers, and massive oaks dot the rolling hills. The eclectic food scene in Texas Hill Country is as diverse as the landscape—part cowboy BBQ, a little Tex Mex, plus classic German comfort food. When you drive the rural roads of Hill Country, you'll find cattle ranches, vineyards, and peach orchards. The towns exude German and Hispanic heritages, serving up both time-honored foods and ethnic dishes with new twists.

Enchanted Rock Natural Area is a designated Dark Sky Park.

INSET: Enchanted Rock offers stunning views of Hill Country. Texas' Indigenous people consider it sacred, and it's listed on the National Register of Historic Places.



Hill Country TEXAS STYLE!

By Sarah Miller

WANDERING FOODIES



Trish Rawls

Texas Hill Country is a big region, and Texans can't seem to agree on its boundaries. It's as disputed as who makes the best BBQ. Some claim 10,000 square miles, while others put the area as big as 31,000 square miles. One thing's for sure, Hill Country is larger than some states. For Airstream foodies, here are the prime spots not to be missed:

FREDERICKSBURG

Fredericksburg is at the heart of the Hill Country food scene. It's centrally located about 70 miles north of San Antonio and 75 miles west of Austin. German immigrants settled in Fredericksburg in 1846 with the promise of land. Today, the town's German heritage is showcased in its architecture, food, and culture.

Fredericksburg's walkable Main Street oozes character. On the National Register of Historic Places, no chains or franchises are allowed. **The National Museum of the Pacific War** is on the east end, and the **Pioneer Museum** is on the west end, with 150 shops and galleries in between.

Fredericksburg's reputation as "best small town for foodies" is well deserved. Take **Emi's on Austin**. Owner Emi Harper brings the same love to her heavenly tacos, tortas, and chiquitos as her grandmothers did.

Eaker BBQ blends Texan and Korean cultures. You can order down-home Texas BBQ and traditional Korean kimchi and cucumber salad.

The Restaurant at Hill Country Herb Garden is a magical spot, where patrons indulge in a spa treatment, stroll acres of botanical gardens bursting with native Texas herbs, then, savor brunch or a garden-inspired craft cocktail for happy hour.

In historic downtown Fredericksburg, visitors step inside **Chocolat** to inhale the intoxicating scent of liquor or wine-filled chocolates. Texas-made for over 27 years, it's the sole American manufacturer—under the brand name, Quintessential Chocolates Company—of this European chocolate-making method that dates back to the mid-1600's.

In the historic district, in a retrofitted 1950's gas station, **Piccolina** scoops up decadent small-batch Italian ices made from local ingredients.

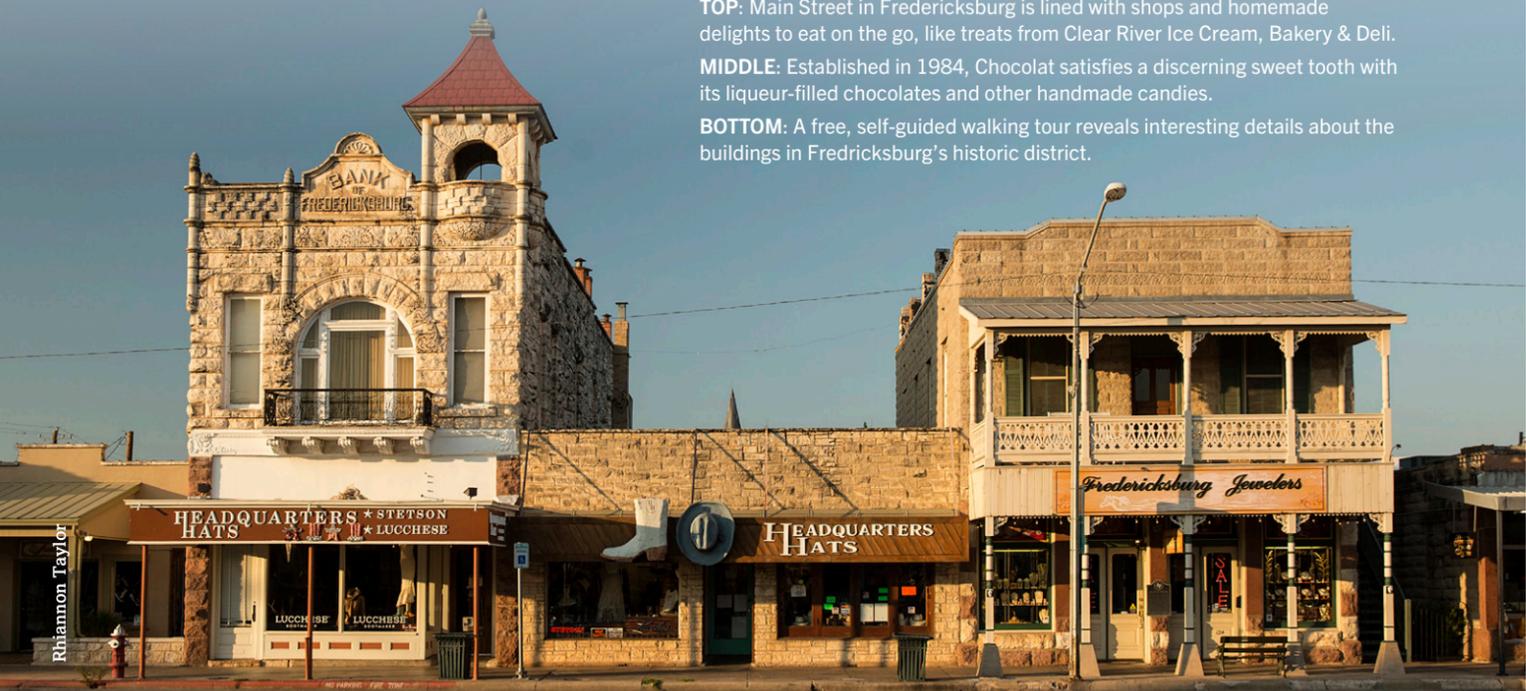
TOP: Main Street in Fredericksburg is lined with shops and homemade delights to eat on the go, like treats from Clear River Ice Cream, Bakery & Deli.

MIDDLE: Established in 1984, Chocolat satisfies a discerning sweet tooth with its liqueur-filled chocolates and other handmade candies.

BOTTOM: A free, self-guided walking tour reveals interesting details about the buildings in Fredericksburg's historic district.



Eva Simpson



Rhannon Taylor



Fredericksburg Convention and Visitors Bureau



Fredericksburg Convention and Visitors Bureau

Texas Hill Country is known for its sweet, juicy peaches thanks to the region's climate, elevation, and mineral-rich soil. One of the best places to find Hill Country peaches is at the family-owned **Fischer & Wieser's Das Peachhaus**. The historic building looks like it was plucked out of an old western movie. Constructed in 1913 as a warehouse for Lone Star Beer, it was abandoned during Prohibition. During the mid-1900's, it became a grocery store where Mark Wieser's mother worked while his father, a German immigrant, tended the family's peach orchard. In 1976, Mark bought the building and moved it to the orchard where it became the region's first permanent roadside fruit stand, selling fresh peaches and peach preserves. Today, the company produces over 150 handcrafted food products, all of which can be sampled in Das Peachhaus. You can also taste wines, take culinary classes, listen to live music, and have a picnic by the pond under pines.

TOP: Das Peachhaus is home to an historic store, wine tasting room, and fruit stand.

BOTTOM: Peach cobbler with a creamy scoop of vanilla ice cream from Blue Bell Creameries is the quintessential Hill Country dessert.

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Dietz Distillery, located next door to Das Peachhaus, is the spot for fruit-based spirits. Founder Case Dietz Fischer, a fifth-generation Texan, crafts Dietz's flagship Five Judges Gin, a London-style gin with a Texas twist, in his distillery. After studying at Texas A&M and then in Scotland, Case brought his experience back to Fredericksburg, where you'll find him working alongside his sister, Elle. These two master distillers also create peach brandy, raspberry vodka, and other liquors, all using Hill Country fruits.

John Washburn is another native Texan who attended a university in Scotland and travelled extensively in Europe, particularly in Germany. He returned to Hill Country to open **Otto's German Bistro** and raise a family. He and his wife serve European-inspired, farm-to-table fare that changes based on the time of the year. "While Germans love their schnitzels and sausages, they also have a lot of seasonality and regional specialties," says Washburn. The bistro added a wine cellar in 2013 with a collection of wines from Germany, Austria, Hungary, France, Italy, and... Texas!

Hill Country as wine country does not disappoint. Fredericksburg's **Cabernet Grill** is rated America's best 100 wine restaurants by *Wine Enthusiast*, and the best place to sample Texas wines by *My Table Houston*. This rustic, tranquil, countryside retreat is pure Texas enchantment. The food is good, too. For a starter, try Texas Twinkies, bacon-wrapped jalapenos stuffed with Beer Sausage Redneck Cheddar and dunked in Jezebel Dip, a fruity Southern dip that's sweet and spicy. Entrees include ribeye steaks, Texas quail, and a variety of seafood and vegetarian choices.

To taste local wine where it's made, **Wildseed Farms**, a 200-acre wildflower farm and vineyard, offers samples of their estate grapes and award-winning wines.



TOP: Case Dietz Fischer uses local fruits to make old world liqueurs at Dietz Distillery.

BOTTOM: Signor Vineyards, a 200-acre estate near Fredericksburg, is in the heart of Texas wine country.

SAN ANTONIO

Famous For: The Alamo, a Spanish mission where the pivotal battle of the Texas Revolution took place in 1836.

Best Tourist Spot: River Walk. Boat tours on the San Antonio River.

Food Scene: San Antonio is known for having some of the best Mexican food in the country.

Places to Visit: Brankenridge Park. San Antonio National Missions Historic Park. San Fernando Cathedral. San Antonio Botanical Garden. Six Flags Fiesta Texas. Sea World San Antonio.



INSET: Airstream-friendly Camp Fimfo has full hook-ups and Texas-sized amenities like a waterpark, pool, and mini-golf.

AUSTIN

Famous For: Texas state capitol. Live music every night of the week.

Best Tourist Spot: Barton Springs Pool, a spring-fed swimming hole that stays at an average of 68 degrees Fahrenheit year-round.

Food Scene: Texas BBQ. Tex Mex.

Places to Visit: Texas State Capitol. Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library. Lady Bird Lake Hike & Bike Trail. Austin Nature & Science Center. Austin Zoo.

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BEYOND FREDERICKSBURG

Southeast of Fredericksburg lies New Braunfels, the oldest German settlement in Texas. Get warm apple strudel at **Naeglin's Bakery**, the oldest bakery in Texas, established in 1868.

Upstream from New Braunfels on the Guadalupe River, don't miss historic Gruene. Settled in 1872, this cultural gem has 15 walkable acres in its nationally designated historic district, where you can shop, dine, and dance inside its original buildings. Listen to live music and learn to swing your partner at **Gruene Hall**, the oldest continually operating dance hall in Texas since 1878.

Gristmill River Restaurant, also in Gruene in an 1870's cotton gin, serves such favorites as chicken fried steak, tomatillo chicken, and bronzed catfish. Top off dinner with a slice of fudge pie, a Texas-sized piece of strawberry shortcake, or their signature Jack Daniel's Pecan Pie.

Though technically just outside of Hill Country, **Lockhart** is the BBQ Capitol of Texas. "The debate for the best barbecue gets quickly heated among Texans. Everyone has their opinion," says Anthony Collins, editor of the *Lockhart Post Register* and an Airstream owner. "Some will say there's places in Austin that have the best BBQ, but that's yuppie BBQ. If you want good old barbecue, then it'll be here [in Lockhart]." Collins, a BBQ aficionado, advises other Airstreamers in search of the best BBQ to avoid chain restaurants and to look at stand-alone places that get their meat from local cattle ranches. "Like, **Terry Black's**," he says. "They have maybe 12 smokers outside. They're out there 24 hours a day, seven days a week... Smoke comes out, that's what good BBQ is like." 🚗



Visit NBTX

TOP: In New Braunfels, Naegelin's is the oldest bakery in Texas. Since 1868, they've made the same original German strudel recipes.

MIDDLE: Built beside the Guadalupe River to look like the original Gruene cotton gin, The Gristmill River Restaurant & Bar serves up Texas-sized burgers, steaks, and more.

BOTTOM: Texas bluebonnets welcome road trippers in the spring.

