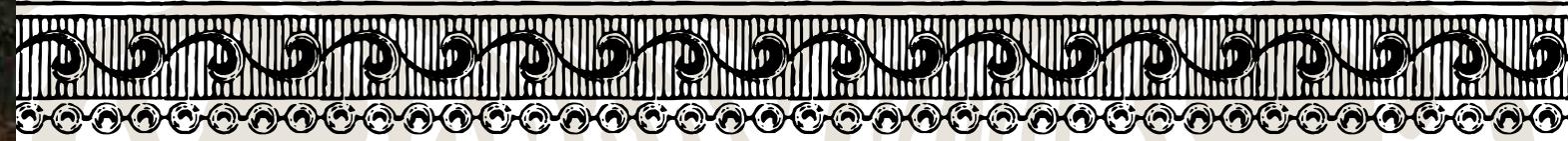




← 8 GREAT →
Q U I R K Y
S T A Y S



IN THE BIG BEND FEEDER TOWN OF MARATHON, a lone, multicolored mirage appears on the horizon. Luckily, the fanciful sight gives way to a very real, if unlikely, organic bed-and-breakfast made almost entirely of recycled paper, Styrofoam, and sand.

Eve's Garden (left) belongs to an unconventional breed of Texas hotels that continue to crop up across the state, winning over travelers with their novelty and sense of adventure. While these hotels may look a little different, they aren't the result of hoteliers gone mad; their owners are forward-thinking Texans inspired to share their strange yet magical little corners of the world. Break free from hotel chains and escape to one of these eight locales for a truly memorable summer vacation.



EVE'S GARDEN BED AND BREAKFAST, MARATHON

KATE THAYER, co-owner, artist, and creative force behind Eve's Garden, entertains a particularly mesmerizing aesthetic. Her canvas is the B&B itself, a rambling arcadia of grottos, domes, patios, terraces, and blooming patches evolving across an entire square block. Original artworks and oddities cover the walls, and a 24-hour coffee alcove offers the local Big Bend java. Rooms open onto a massive covered garden where Thayer grows flowers, vegetables, and herbs year round, much of it featured each morning in Thayer's delectable (and complimentary) breakfasts.

Remarkably, most of the labyrinthine structure is constructed from papercrete, an adobe-like building material. "At first, we built with adobe, wanting to use local and natural materials," Thayer explains. "But adobe blocks weigh about 40 pounds each! So we began to experiment with papercrete—a mixture of recycled paper and Styrofoam, sand, water, clay, Portland cement, and perlite."

Thayer's creative output is a likely but antithetical result of her heritage. She's a great-granddaughter of the late-19th-century American painter Abbott Handerson Thayer, often considered the "father of camouflage." Thayer has turned Abbott's camouflage on its head by making sure her own creation can't be missed.

\$185-\$215/night. 200 NW Third St., Marathon. 432/386-4165; www.evesgarden.org.

—E. Dan Klepper



GOODNIGHT CABIN, PALO DURO CANYON

WAKE UP TO A SWEET BREEZE, birdsong, and a dizzy, cliff-hanging view of the second-largest canyon in the country after an overnight in Palo Duro Canyon State Park's Goodnight Cabin. Constructed from the surrounding rock along a slender edge of the canyon's lip, the cabin is often cited as having the best view in the entire state park system. It's one of seven cabins located in the park, all built by Civilian Conservation Corps crews in the early 1930s. Franklin D. Roosevelt created the CCC in 1933, putting many Americans back to work on conservation projects like Palo Duro Canyon State Park, which opened to the public in 1934.

The Goodnight sleeps four, and amenities include a fireplace, air conditioning and heater unit, bathroom with shower, and outdoor grill. The park features over 50 miles of hiking, mountain biking, and equestrian trails. During the summer months, guests can enjoy a barbecue dinner and watch *TEXAS*, an outdoor musical drama featuring dancing, singing, and fireworks. Reservations fill up fast, so park staff recommends reserving the cabin at least six months in advance.

\$110/night. Palo Duro Canyon State Park, 11450 Park Road 5, Canyon. 806/488-2227; www.tpwd.texas.gov.

—E. Dan Klepper



CHINATI HOT SPRINGS, PRESIDIO

A FAR-FLUNG SANCTUARY tucked into a rugged canyon between the Chinati Mountains and the Rio Grande, this remote resort offers a funky, handmade aesthetic surrounded by Big Bend wilderness. It's an invitation to turn off your cellphones (they won't work here) and revel in natural spring-fed hot tubs, homey cabins, overnight camping, and a relaxed atmosphere. The outdoor hot pool, deep enough for a seated, full-body soak and at just the right temperature for long-term lounging, provides the consummate, late-night bliss. Early risers often have the pool to themselves, along with filtered sunlight through cottonwoods and a breathtaking view of the Sierra Madres. Brisk desert nights make Chinati Hot Springs a destination for hot-tubbers year-round, and the addition of a cold pool (open March through October), perched high above the canyon, transforms the summer heat like an afternoon at the beach.

The earliest known published reference to the hot springs occurred in an 1885 report to the Texas State Land Board. "Several families are camped on the ground now, testing its medicinal virtues," inspector William M. Baines wrote during his visit. But don't take his word for it. Test them yourself.

\$105-\$140/night. 1 Hot Springs Road, Presidio. 432/229-4165; www.chinatihotsprings.net.

—E. Dan Klepper



Photos: © E. Dan Klepper, Michael Amador (Goodnight Cabin)

RANCHO PILLOW, ROUND TOP

SHEILA YOUNGBLOOD has loved shopping the worldly treasures in Round Top since her grandmother introduced it to her as a little girl. During one of her twice-yearly shopping trips, Youngblood decided to make her biggest purchase yet: a home on 20 secluded acres. For a decade, it served as a private family retreat, hosting musicians and other creative types. “One year, a little girl came up to me and said, ‘Wow, you must really like to share things,’” Youngblood recalls. “That really struck me because I realized I was sharing this place with only the people who were close to me. I thought, I wonder what it would feel like to open it up and invite people in to a new way to see things.”



She opened Rancho Pillow to the public in March of last year. The whimsical wonderland is stocked with fun amenities: luxurious outdoor bathtubs, a heated saltwater wading pool, a poetry library, and a treehouse for the retreat’s tiniest guests. Rental offerings include a 2,300-square-foot home and an air-conditioned teepee furnished with a king-size bed. The heart of Rancho Pillow is the barn, which doubles as a community gathering spot. “When you’re here, you get the sense

that it wasn’t made to be this giant moneymaker,” Youngblood says. “It’s just a place to come and be.”

Rates start at \$300/night. 11222 Schuster Road, Round Top. www.ranchopillow.com.

—Jane Kellogg Murray



Photo: © Matthew Johnson

THE QUARTERS AT PRESIDIO LA BAHÍA, GOLIAD

DURING THE DAY, Texas history lovers flock to this Spanish Colonial mission and presidio to soak in the site’s centuries-long past. Built in 1721 and moved to its current location in 1749, the fortress has high stone walls that were garrisoned by soldiers from several revolutions over the years. It’s perhaps best remembered as the site of the Goliad Massacre: In 1836, the Mexican army captured Colonel James Fannin and more than 300 Texian troops, marched them to the presidio, and executed them.

In the 1980s, the site was restored to its original glory, and builders installed a two-bedroom apartment for the fortress chapel’s priests to reside. The priests have since relocated



closer to town, so now you can rent the cozy quarters for yourself. The space can sleep up to four guests, and after the park closes to visitors at 4:45 p.m., you’re given the freedom to explore the grounds solo. These days, weekend reservations tend to fill up four months in advance, but there’s the occasional vacancy during the week. The rental offers a kitchenette, a fireplace, and—given the site’s bloody history—a reported spiritual energy.

There’s no reason to feel unsafe here, however—it’s a fortress, remember?

\$212.50/night. 217 U.S. 183, Goliad. 361/645-3752; www.presidiolabahia.org.

—Jane Kellogg Murray



Photo: © Erich Schlegel



THE CELL BLOCK, CLIFTON

DOING TIME IN SOLITARY CONFINEMENT never felt so good as in The Cell Block, a 1930s-era jail converted into a modern luxury boutique hotel in the artists' colony of Clifton, 35 miles north of Waco. Tucked in an alleyway painted with colorful murals, The Cell Block stands out with its stark black-and-white boxy structure. Not used as a jail since the 1970s, the building found new life when Kaye Robinson Callaway opened it in 2014. "I just didn't want it torn down," says Callaway, who owns several downtown buildings. She updated the space but kept the original heavy steel doors, which function as working doors between the sleek sitting area, full bathroom, and bedroom with a queen bed, all decorated in black and white with pops of color. The music selection by the vintage phonograph includes Johnny Cash's *Live from Folsom Prison* and Elvis Presley's *Jailhouse Rock*. Try out the handcuffs—they come with a key—and guests can take their "mug shots" with an old-timey camera or relax on the rooftop deck with gas fire pit, aka the "prison yard." This is not a bed-and-breakfast—no food is served—but guests can sip small bottles of whiskey from Balcones Distilling or a complimentary bottle of tempranillo from nearby Red Caboose Winery.

\$225 weekdays, \$265 weekends. 120 Clifton Art Alley, Clifton. 254/227-5656; www.stayatthecellblock.com

—Kathryn Jones



THE B C L E O L C L K



SALMON LAKE PARK, GRAPELAND

RUSTIC BARNWOOD BUILDINGS with pitched metal roofs dot the winding trails at Salmon Lake Park, nestled among the East Texas pines between Crockett and Palestine. The collection of restored buildings, pavilions, and reunion halls designed like saloons, a schoolhouse, town hall, and an old hotel draws families to a place that feels like it belongs in another time. Floyd and Fannie Salmon created this mini historic village with 21 cabins, RV sites, tent camping, and a small lake for swimming (no fishing, though).

Kids can slide and swing on a playground, ride on the miniature "Lost Dutchman Railway," or treat themselves to snow cones at the snack bar housed in a bright yellow cottage. Floyd's whimsical creations in metal and wood decorate the park—a wooden burro sculpture holds "saddlebags" of flowers, while metal birds and fanciful insects keep watch. One of the most unusual places to stay is the Tree House, which sleeps four and is built of tree limbs perched on tall tree trunks. The sounds of bluegrass music swell in the park during regular jams, and the Memorial Day bluegrass gospel festival and Labor Day bluegrass festival draw fans from Texas and beyond.

\$50-\$200/night for cabins. 357 Salmon Lake Road, Grapeland. 936/687-2594; www.salmonlakepark.com.

—Kathryn Jones



Photos: © Robert W. Hart, © Matthew Johnson (Cypress Valley Canopy)



CYPRESS VALLEY CANOPY SPICEWOOD

IN 1998, David Beilharz was living a charmed life in Austin's upscale Westlake Hills with his wife, Amy, and their four kids. But a spiritual quest in South America shifted his mindset in an instant. "After being in the pristine nature of the Amazon jungle for several weeks," he says, "flying back into Austin was like coming back into a bubble on the foam of the latte of life." The Beilharzes uprooted the family to an 88-acre, cypress-lined oasis in the Texas Hill Country. By 2004, they knew they wanted to share their sustainable lifestyle with others, and on July 4, 2005, Cypress Valley Canopy Tours opened as the first zip-line canopy tour in the continental United States.

The Nest treehouse, the largest of their rental offerings, is a two-bedroom sanctuary ideal for families, nestled high up above the creek near a small waterfall. Couples in search of a romantic getaway head to The Lofthaven—a treetop yurt with a canopy bed, connected to a bathhouse built into the rock. "There's something about being up in a tree," David explains, "whether it's some instinctive monkey evolution or it's feeling like *The Swiss Family Robinson*."

Rates start at \$200/night. 1223 Paleface Ranch Road, Spicewood. 512/264-8880; www.cypressvalleycanopytours.com.

—Jane Kellogg Murray