

# The ABCs of Texas' EFG

**Whether you're looking** for a quiet escape or the excitement of a popular festival, it's possible to run the alphabet of Texas towns and find attractive destinations everywhere. My husband, Jack, and I love history and heritage, and these three Texas towns treasure their pasts. Best of all, they love sharing their legacies with visitors.

## Czech Magnet

Although it was the railroad that created Ennis in the early 1870s, the fertile farmland around the area quickly attracted the attention of Czech immigrants. The newcomers brought their language, customs and costumes with them and now, 140 years later, all these things can still be enjoyed in Ennis.

## Three small Texas towns—Ennis, Fredericksburg and Graham—offer extra-fun getaways.

We sampled some traditional treats at the Kolache Depot Cafe and Bakery. Owner Greg McElroy uses a number of his Czech grandmother's recipes—including her sauerkraut, a sweet-sour concoction spangled with caraway seeds, sliced *klobase* (spicy Czech sausage) and seasoned green beans. You'll even find Czech-Mex touches here: Texas brisket with a Czech barbecue sauce.

For cultural immersion, the Czech Music Festival (Feb. 12) and the National Polka Festival (May 27–29) draw thousands for the music and dancing. In lieu of that, we visited the displays in the Visitors Center, at the Railroad and Cultural Heritage Museum and the (by appointment only) museum at the Sokol Hall, one of several Czech dance halls in town.

In addition to Czech heritage, bluebonnets are big in Ennis. This year, the annual Bluebonnet Trails Festival is April 16–17. Nature can be fickle, so always contact the Convention and Visitors Bureau for the latest information about where the blooms are best. Call (888) 366-4748 or visit [www.visitennis.org](http://www.visitennis.org).

Ennis, just 30 miles south of Dallas, is an easy drive from Oklahoma City. When we learned that the La

Quinta is pet-friendly, we packed up our pup for our quick visit. I can also recommend Don Jose's Mexicant Restaurant—and no, that's not misspelled. Stop by for the story and some excellent Mexican food.

## Ja Wohl, Y'all

BY ELAINE WARNER

Think German in Texas and Fredericksburg has to be at the top of the list. Settled by German immigrants, the community has nurtured its Old World heritage. Festivals like Night in Old Fredericksburg, June 8–9, offer opportunities to enjoy polka dancing, beer, brats and more. Beer again features prominently in the annual Oktoberfest—as do the local wines. For the ultimate in oompah, check out the okTUBAfest and chicken dance around the square, Oct. 5–7. There's more than just adult beverages at Fredericksburg's festivals—all have activities for the whole family.

Another high point is the St. Nikolaus Markt, Dec 7–8. Like a European, open-air Christmas market, the event features shopping, plenty of food and lots of entertainment.

Planning a trip this spring to Fredericksburg? Good idea. The roadways will be surrounded by a riot of wildflower color. Now, combine that with visits to local wineries... and you have a winning combination. Go online to [www.texaswinetrail.com](http://www.texaswinetrail.com), click on Trails, and then look at the Wine & Wildflower Trail that's planned for April. This year, 27 hill country wineries will be participating.

And any time of year, check out the Pioneer Museum.

For a different kind of history, don't miss the spectacular National Museum of the Pacific War. And to complete the experience, spend the night at the Hangar Hotel, new but built like a World War II hangar and outfitted with '40s nostalgia.

## Cowboy Up

When they first came to the area, the founders of Graham, Texas, found vast herds of buffalo grazing on lush grass. They took this as a sign that the country was ideal for raising cattle. It was and is.

The town played a major role in the story of the Marlow brothers—Oklahomans accused of cattle rustling. The story's too long to tell here—but you'll hear it in Graham. And if you stay, like I did, at the



ELAINE WARNER

Elaine Warner is a freelance writer based in Edmond, Okla.



SANDY ANDERSON



LAURA SHORT



STEVE RAWLS

Riding above the Brazos River (top) gives folks a great idea about what drew immigrants to Graham. In Fredericksburg, holidays and celebrations stand out—whether it's the yuletide, with its festive Christmas pyramids (above right) or Oktoberfest and its associated fun (right). Meanwhile, it's the carpet of bluebonnets (above left) that sets spring apart in Ennis.

Wildcatter Ranch outside of town, you can stay in the Marlow Brothers Suite.

Wildcatter's a wonderful place to channel your inner cowboy. On 1,500 rolling acres along the Brazos River, it has all the amenities for a great, relaxing getaway.

When I visited in April, an ocean of bluebonnets rippled in the fields and it was warm enough to enjoy the ranch's rock-rimmed infinity pool. A trail ride took us up into the hills above the Brazos, through pleasant pastures and groves of trees. At the end of the day, a great meal awaited in the ranch's Steakhouse—so popular that diners come from Fort Worth and Dallas to sink their teeth into one of Chef Bob Bratcher's excellent steaks, or ribs, or any one of his other tasty creations.

Little Graham has its own charms with "the largest

courthouse square in the country" surrounded by interesting shops.

If you like history—and antiques—you can't miss at Our Neck of the Woods, located in the historic jail. Bellaford Gallery is an upscale art gallery in the 1885 building that was the first church in Graham. J. Doolittle's, a couple of blocks off the square, is a do-not-miss for offbeat items and accessories.

Be sure to stop by your nearby AAA Travel office or visit [AAA.com](http://AAA.com) for more information about Texas, along with *TourBook* guides and maps.

Texas is chock-full of these little treasure towns. Try a trip and check out Texas from Abilene to Zorn. **H&A**