

There's nothing more historical than Texas bluebonnets, which are in bloom March through May

Take a Texas History Trip

HISTORICAL SITES ONLY A CAR RIDE AWAY

Written by Jeff Lee



Baby Ian's first time in the bluebonnets

With Spring Break just around the corner, you may be thinking about a vacation with the kids, but not feeling like taking a long and draining trip far from home. The good news is spring time in Texas is perhaps the best time to get out and enjoy the Lone Star State and some of its rich offerings.

It's also the perfect time to give school-aged kids, who are in the midst of learning about Texas history, an up-close and personal look at some major historical sites. And while it is not always easy to get the kiddos fired up about an educational excursion while on a break from school, thankfully some of the best historical destinations in Texas can be mixed with other family fun venues to form a memorable trip and learning experience.

BRAZOS, BLUEBONNETS AND BLUE BELL

Texas declared its independence from Mexico on March 2, 1836, at a convention meeting in an unfinished building located in Washington. Close to Brenham, Washington has an excellent and informative visitors' center with a replica of the Independence Hall. There are picnic areas and beautiful nature trails as well.

Pack up the kids and head to Brenham to take the Blue Bell Ice Cream tour, which offers free ice cream samples, and then stop off in Washington on the way home. And, if the weather cooperates, Mom can take that postcard-perfect "kids in the bluebonnets" picture along the way too!

A MONUMENTAL TRIP WITH A SHIP

San Jacinto Battle Ground and Monument sticks out along a coastal marsh, near the Texas

Katy kids can step away from school books and touch a real piece of Texas history



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The San Jacinto Monument is the tallest
freestanding monument in the world



refineries. Here, Sam Houston led the Texas Army to a decisive victory over Santa Anna and the Mexican Army and secured independence. The monument itself is the tallest freestanding monument in the world. Newly renovated, there's a terrific view from the top, and a great museum on the ground floor. An action packed movie about the battle shows in the theatre, which will entertain the youngsters. The Battleship Texas saw action in both World Wars and is anchored on the site, open to the public for tours.

BIG-TIME CAMPING AND BIG SAM

If camping has crossed your mind, then pack up the tent and head toward some of the State Parks in the area that adjoin major historical sites. Stephen F. Austin, the Father of Texas, made the capitol of his colony, San Felipe de Austin, not far from Sealy off I-10. Down some very scenic back roads, the original town site is now a museum. Besides the golf course next door, Stephen F. Austin State Park stands ready for overnight camping. Or, head up to Huntsville State Park. The "Big Sam" statue greets you on I-45, along with a multitude of museums about Sam Houston and the prison system, and Huntsville's town square, which includes several great shops for antiques and other curiosities.

On Palm Sunday in 1836, Colonel James Fannin and more than 300 soldiers were captured, marched out, and killed by Mexican soldiers for participating in the Texas Revolution. Goliad State Park is near

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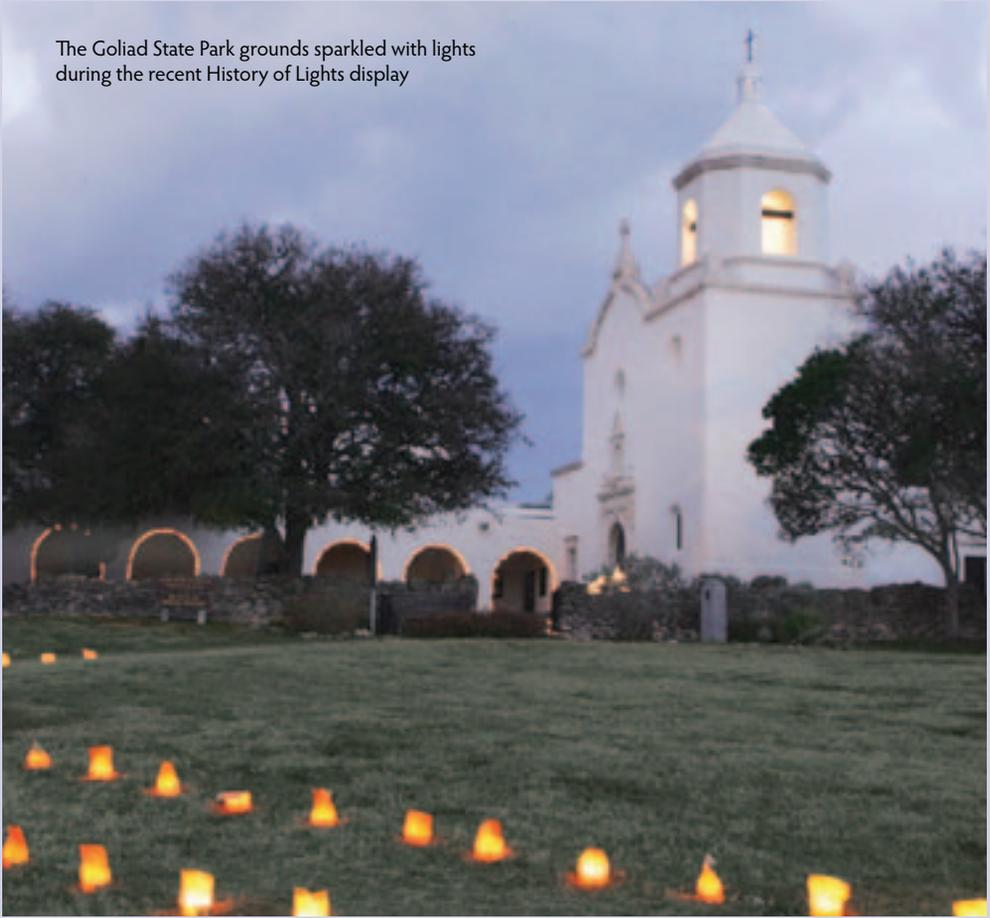
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both the monument to Fannin and his soldiers and the mission/fort that they were defending. Goliad, not far from Victoria, is on the way to Corpus Christi's beautiful beaches.

REMEMBER THE ALAMO

No exploration of Texas history is complete without a visit to the Alamo in San Antonio. With a bustling modern city all around, it is hard to imagine those days in 1836, where Alamo commander William Barrett Travis, folk hero and woodsman David Crockett, famed knife owner James Bowie, around 180 other Texans, and untold numbers of the Mexican Army died in this important battle on the march to Texas Independence. But they did so heroically, tragically, and quickly. The whole battle lasted just around two early morning hours on March 6, 1836. None of the defenders survived, so it's no surprise that visitors are strongly encouraged to remove their hats upon entry and to speak only in whispers while in the chapel building.



The Goliad State Park grounds sparkled with lights during the recent History of Lights display

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Lots of affordable hotel rooms can be found in the San Antonio area with a little advanced planning. Cap off the trip with a few days at Fiesta Texas or SeaWorld, and shopping and fine dining on the famed River Walk.

APPRECIATING THE PAST

In a state as big as ours, with cities like Lubbock and Abilene being closer to five other state capitols than they are to Austin, Katy residents are lucky to have such historic locales so close to home. From setting up camp along some of the state's most historic sites to hiking on the grounds of famous Texas battles, there will be something fun for everyone while learning along the way. And, be sure to have your kids beef up their school history reports with all the free brochures, pictures, and first hand experiences at the places they read about in class. **KM**

JEFF LEE has been a peace officer with Harris County for the past eight years, studying Texas and American History on the side. He and his wife, Kim, have three boys.

Taking your school aged kids to state historical sites such as the Alamo can be a fun family learning experience

