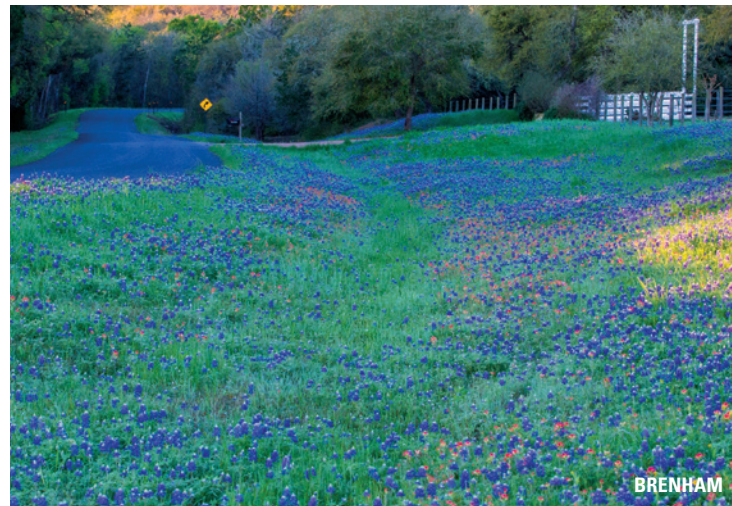


DESTINATION: WASHINGTON COUNTY

By JULIE CATALANO



BREHAM



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FESTIVAL INSTITUTE



THE INN AT DOS BRISAS

Named for the father of our country, Washington County is a top destination for history buffs, antique hunters, music lovers and wildflower enthusiasts. Small towns with evocative names like Independence, Mount Vernon and William Penn dot the rolling landscape in southeast Central Texas, and the county seat of Brenham draws visitors to its historic downtown. Visit a working ranch, attend a world-renowned concert series, or enjoy a quiet stroll through a history-making spot by the Brazos River — none other than the birthplace of the Lone Star State itself.



2015 ROUND TOP MUSIC FESTIVAL
May 31-July 15
Round Top
Festivalhill.org
Photography courtesy of
Round Top Festival Institute

Every summer, the tiny town of Round Top turns into a classical music Mecca that draws audiences from all over Texas and beyond with



the Round Top Music Festival, an internationally acclaimed gathering of renowned conductors, esteemed faculty and brilliant young talent. Celebrating its 45th year, the Round Top Festival Institute will once again host a dazzling array of more than 30 concerts from May 31-July 15, 2015 featuring a diverse repertoire from ancient to 21st century music.

Internationally acclaimed concert pianist,



founder and artistic director James Dick can hardly believe this signature Texas event he created in 1971 has spanned almost five decades, but the success of his brainchild is indisputable. In addition to the physical growth of the Festival Institute campus to a 200-acre haven of gardens, historic buildings, library and museum collections, Dick is both proud and happy to witness the growth by leaps and bounds of the Festival Institute's reputation, putting it on par with legendary music festivals at Tanglewood and Aspen. Of the 700 applications the Festival Institute received this year, about 98 were accepted to study and perform.

They've also made full use of social media, he says, adding that their YouTube channel has more than a half million views. Still, there's no substitute for the real thing, and that includes the experience of attending performances in what is unquestionably one of the most architecturally and acoustically perfect venues anywhere — the magnificent 1,000-seat Round Top Concert Hall.

"It's like sitting inside a glorious instrument," he says, "and hearing that sound whether it's orchestral or choral." Dick says he gets outstanding feedback from visiting conductors who have played some of the greatest venues in the world. "It truly stands out as one-of-a-kind. It was built

and fashioned by hand, the wood cut either with a knife or router, every inch of it." If you miss the summer series, you can make plans for the April to August series which can include everything from western music to the holiday favorite The Nutcracker ballet.

Visitors are enthralled not only with the concert hall but also the ambiance of the grounds, with one of the highlights being the 1883 Edythe Bates Old Chapel. The various flora are also popular, most notably the McAshan Herb Gardens, along with herbs, medicinal plants, roses and more. Year-round events at

the Festival Institute include forums in theater, museums, poetry and herbs.

Growing up in Kansas, James Dick says he's always loved nature. "I even sold vegetables door to door so I know the value of land and how precious it is. I wanted a place that the public could enjoy as a green space. Over the years we have planted 24,000 trees." He delights in the surroundings and hopes that audiences do, too. "Where else can you picnic on real grass under glorious live oaks and then walk a few feet into a concert hall of such magnificence?" No place but Round Top. ❖



For program and ticket info,
Festivalhill.org, 979.249.3129

PLENTY TO SEE, DO, BUY AND TRY, SO STAY AND PLAY FOR AWHILE:

WASHINGTON-ON-THE-BRAZOS STATE HISTORIC SITE, WASHINGTON, BIRTHPLACE

Photography courtesy of Brenham/Washington County Chamber and Convention & Visitors Bureau



On March 2, 1836, a group of Texas delegates met at a hall by the Brazos River, declared independence from Mexico and a republic was born. The aptly-named Washington-on-the-Brazos is a significant and popular spot that draws nature lovers, birdwatchers, picnickers and anybody interested in standing at the spot where the Texas Declaration of Independence was signed. Expert and knowledgeable guides make history come alive as they take visitors through what led up to that historic event. The award-winning Star of the Republic Museum showcases a fascinating collection of cultural artifacts from 1836 to 1846. Don't leave without driving over to Barrington Living History Farm where the original restored home of Anson Jones — the last president of the Republic of Texas — features costumed interpreters of life on a 19th century farm. Admission fee: Combo tickets are available for Independence Hall, Star of the Republic Museum and Barrington Farm.

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Antique Rose Emporium photo by Mike Shoup

The county seat of Washington County, Brenham makes an ideal base from which to explore the nearby sights. The charming Ant Street Inn (antstreetinn.com) is a longtime favorite in the heart of downtown. Stop at Must Be Heaven (mustbeheaven.com) for freshmade soups, sandwiches and pie straight from the



pastry gods. Ranch Interiors (ranchinteriorstx.com) specializes in custom ranch, modern, Western and transitional design. And no visit to Brenham is complete without a trip to the enchanting Antique Rose Emporium (antiqueroseemporium.com), where “Rose Rustler” and owner Mike Shoup will regale with tales of “rescued” roses from days gone by.

TEXAS RANCH LIFE, CHAPPELL HILL, TEXASRANGLIFE.COM

No drugstore cowboys here — this is the real deal. Warm and welcoming owners John and Taunia Elick have preserved a working ranch and opened it to visitors looking for an authentic ranch experience. Nine historic Texas homes from the 1800s were saved from demolition, carefully moved to the ranch, and restored and decorated with antiques, rugs and unique Texas furnishings to serve as well-appointed residences for overnight guests (the largest sleep up to 10 or 13). Activities are extra and include day fishing, mountain biking, skeet shooting and open range horseback riding for all skill levels, undoubtedly one of the most popular pastimes on the 1,800-acre ranch that features one of the largest covered horse arenas in the state. Six organic gardens supply the kitchen with fresh produce. A nice down-home touch is the “meet the horses” section on their website, with notes from the ranch hands, pictures of the nursery, the moms and horses in training.

THE INN AT DOS BRISAS, WASHINGTON, DOSBRISAS.COM

Photography courtesy of The Inn at Dos Brisas

Luxury to the max. There's no other way to describe what began as a ranch retreat and grew into the ultimate indulgent (and ultra-romantic) stay. The only Forbes five-star restaurant in the state is here, with a 7,000-bottle wine cellar that earned “Wine Spectator” magazine's Best of Award of Excellence. An eight-course grand tasting menu is served on custom Bernardaud china in an elegant but relaxed dining room in the main building. The inn touts its 42 acres (out of 300 total) of organic farms that produce vegetables, herbs and fruit that turn up on both your plate and in creative cocktails. Accommodations are off-the-chart gorgeous — nine individual haciendas and casitas feature overstuffed leather chairs, stone fireplaces, steam showers, luxe linens, private patios and golf carts should you need to get to the infinity pool, tennis courts or to take a cooking or wine class. Golf privileges are available at nearby clubs. Better yet, stay “home” and have an in-room massage.

For more info, Visitbrenhamtexas.com.

