

DESTINATION: DRIPPING SPRINGS

By **JULIE CATALANO**
Photography courtesy of **DRIPPING SPRINGS
CHAMBER OF COMMERCE AND VISITORS BUREAU**



FOTOLUMINATE LLC / SHUTTERSTOCK.COM

About 25 miles west of Austin lies an idyllic small town (pop. 1,870) that proud residents call the gateway to the Texas Hill Country. And it's got a picturesque name to match: Dripping Springs, a perfect summer destination to cool off at nearby parks, sip locally handcrafted adult beverages and enjoy unique lodging, boutique shopping, and a true Texas dance hall. No wonder it's known as the Wedding Capital of Texas®. We can't think of a better place to start happily ever after.



BACK TO NATURE

HAMILTON POOL NATURE PRESERVE 512.264.2740

A visit to one of the most popular swimming holes in the state will take some planning, but it's well worth it. About 14 miles north of Dripping Springs, the 232-acre preserve is part of the Travis County park system and a study in pure, unspoiled nature. No fishing, camping or biking is allowed in order to maintain its timeless quality and fragile ecosystem; hiking is permitted.

Limestone cliffs and the pool's cave and grotto are a photographer's dream. Open daily, 9:00-6:00, weather permitting; no entry after 5:30. Admission fees range from \$15-\$26 per vehicle; \$5 if vehicle has anyone age 62+ or a (60%) disabled vet. Absolutely no pets are allowed here—not on leashes, in vehicles or anywhere. Tip: From May 15 through September 30, 2016, non-refundable morning/afternoon reservations are required to enter the preserve. Call ahead for daily updates about swimming conditions and weather advisories.



PEDERNALES FALLS STATE PARK, JOHNSON CITY 830.868.7304

Just 13 miles west of Dripping Springs off US 290, this 5,211-acre state park is a favorite spot to swim, hike, fish, camp and much more. The highlight here is the namesake falls, where the Pedernales River cascades over 300 million-year-old layered limestone slabs (no swimming, wading or tubing here due to strong currents). Best view is from the scenic overlook at the north end of the park. Birders might spot some of the more than 150 species in the park, including ravens, herons, quail, owls and wild turkeys. Open year-round, seven days a week. Admission is \$6 a day, age 13 and older; age 12 and under are free. Camping fees apply. Call ahead for weather conditions (this is flash flood country) and road construction.

SPIRITED STOPS

Here are just a few of the cool wineries, craft breweries and distilleries where talented Texans are creating some very special spirits. Happy sipping!

TREATY OAK DISTILLING 512.599.0335 | TREATYOAKDISTILLING.COM

Named after a 500-year-old oak tree where Stephen F. Austin signed a border agreement, Treaty Oak occupies a 30-acre ranch north of town. Tours on Friday-Sunday (tickets, \$15) give a behind-the-scenes look at the process and award-winning spirits



PHOTO BY LINDSAY THORNE

— rum, vodka, gin and whiskey — with a complimentary tasting. The ranch features cocktail classes, tasting room, gift shop, food truck and restaurant that celebrates the state's German and Mexican heritage using locally sourced meats and cheeses.

Also check out: San Luis Spirits, drippingspringsvodka.com, 512.858.1199. Dripping Springs' award-winning vodka and gin. Distillery tours on selected days (tickets, \$10) includes tasting.

TWISTED X BREWING COMPANY 512.829.5323 | TEXMEXBEER.COM

Small batch Tex-Mex Beer™ is a popular new category of beer featured along with Vienna-style lager, jalapeño pilsner, India pale ale, prickly pear lager and premium black lager aged in Dulce Vida tequila barrels — brewed in Texas by Texans. Tasting room open Thursday-Sunday, free brewery tours.

Also check out: The Barber Shop, barbershopbar.com, 512.829.4636. Former garage, gas station and barber shop serves craft beers from area breweries including its own Barber Shop label brewed one at a time.

HAWK'S SHADOW ESTATE WINERY 512.587.9085, 866.551.9463 | HAWKSSHADOW.COM

The newest kid on the winery block, this hidden gem is fast making a name for itself in the scenic hills west of Dripping Springs. The tasting room can be booked online for private tastings featuring red, white and rosé wines. The Winemaker Experience includes a tour and barrel tasting (tickets, \$25). The horse on their wine label is a photograph of the real Hawk's Shadow, the family's beloved quarter horse who passed in 2010. Open 12:00-6:00 Saturdays; other days by appointment.

Also check out: Bell Springs Winery, bellspringswinery.com, 512.643.7398. Tasting room, meat/cheese/olive plates, winery tour available (tickets, \$20). Open daily. Their Sidecar Tasting Room (age 21+) in downtown Dripping Springs features wine, small plates, patio and live music.

STAY, PLAY, PARTY AND DANCE AT THE DRIP'!

CAMP LUCY

512.894.4400 | CAMPLUCY.COM

Luxury cottages and a stellar wedding and special event venue featuring a repurposed 1800s Amish barn, 18th century chapel, pavilion, gardens and Sacred Oaks ceremony site.

STAR HOUSE BED AND BREAKFAST

512.858.4395

STARHOUSEBANDB.COM

Set on 35 hilltop acres with lavender, olive and butterfly gardens, guests choose from two accommodations: cozy guesthouse for up to five, or Stella's Vintage Airstream (up to three adults) for a night under the stars and views for miles.



THE TERRACE CLUB

512.894.4009 | THETERRACECLUB.COM

An out-of-this-world wedding venue for up to 300 with three ceremony areas (indoor and outdoor), bridal party prep suites, spectacular Hill Country views, 7,000-square foot ballroom with three walls of windows, 25-foot cathedral ceilings and four grand chandeliers. No onsite lodging; hotel within walking distance with private pathway access.

TOMATO ROUND-UP

JULY 9, 10-1, 512.858.4725.



It is all about the tomato here: tasting tables, growing tips from Hays County Master Gardeners, Judges' favorites and

people's choice awards for Heirloom, Cherry, Yellow, Red Slicer and Roma. At "the Triangle," convergence of Hwy 290, RR12 and Mercer Street.

DRIPPING WITH TASTE WINE & FOOD FESTIVAL

SEPTEMBER 10, DRIPPINGWITHTASTE.COM.

Premier wine and food event in the area, featuring more than 75 vendors showcasing local food, vineyards, breweries and distilleries (vodka, rum, gin, whiskey and this year — tequila!). Cooking demonstrations, Wine 101, grape stomping, live music, more. Dripping Springs Ranch Park & Event Center.

DRIPPING SPRINGS FIRST THURSDAYS

APRIL-DECEMBER, 5:00-9:00PM.

Shopaholics get their fix the first Thursday of every month visiting the growing number of merchants on Mercer and Old Fitzhugh streets. Clothing, accessories, gifts, food, galleries and more. Sidewalk sales, live music.



MERCER STREET DANCE HALL

512.858.4314 | MERCERSTREETDANCEHALL.COM

A real-deal dance hall with top-notch bands and a family-friendly vibe. Guitarist Jimmie Vaughn calls it "the best honky tonk in Texas." Spacious dance floor, cold beer, wine, soft drinks and really cool air conditioning. Smoke-free. Cash only at the door; plastic accepted at the bar.

For more info, destinationdrippingsprings.com ❖