

CRUSHING ON CANDY

By JULIE CATALANO



BIG TOP CANDY SHOP

Texas is filled to overflowing with candy stores, candy companies, candy to buy for yourself and candy to mail to lucky others as the gifting season approaches. After studying, researching, sampling and savoring, we have come to one conclusion: Candy is good. Thinking about it, eating it, thinking about eating it — it's the best. Check out these selected sweet shops, and feel like a kid in a candy store again.



BIG TOP CANDY SHOP, AUSTIN
512.462.2220
[facebook.com/bigtopcandyshop](https://www.facebook.com/bigtopcandyshop)

Brandon Hodge absolutely loves to talk about candy, and that's a good thing considering he's surrounded by it in his very own store on South Congress Avenue in Austin. "I thought it would be a cool thing to have," he says of the 1,600-square-foot space he opened in 2007, never anticipating the resurgence of candy stores that was well on its way at the time, along with the impending rebirth of the soda fountain (which occupies one wall). The circus-themed atmosphere with posters, cutouts and banners in maroon and gold hues reminiscent of vintage big tops boasts thousands of varieties of packaged candies, along with their biggest seller — chocolate covered bacon. Hodge waxes poetic on the nature of candy: "A candy

store puts candy back the way it should be, as opposed to going down the sugar bomb cereal aisle in the grocery store. Candy is a treat, not a meal." Tell that to his scads of repeat customers loading up on nostalgic favorites ("Retro is not going away," says Hodge) and newer products that feature a bit of a kick. "Spicy and sweet is the new salty and sweet," says Hodge, who has plans to remodel in early 2017 in anticipation of their tenth anniversary.

DOWN UNDA TRADING POST, LAMPASAS
512.540.2814
[facebook.com/downundatradingpost](https://www.facebook.com/downundatradingpost)

Come for the famous Aussie meat pies, stay for the candy. That's what owner Emmalee Ambrose says about her colorfully eclectic convenience store about an hour north of Austin on Highway 281 that features a tantalizing selection of Aussie sweets made with pure sugar cane. Ambrose — originally from East Perth in the true Land Down Under — fell in love with the Texas capital city ("and the beautiful Hill Country") almost three years ago and decided to stay. She offers such Australian classics as Violet Crumble, a honeycomb center covered with two layers of milk chocolate and one of Australia's favorite candy bars; Redskins, a raspberry flavored chewy candy; and Allen's Lollies (which is as fun to say as to eat), includ-

ing the popular Minties and their "party mix" varieties. The Cadbury Cherryripe, "a shredded cherry, coconut and dark chocolate bar," is very popular, says Ambrose. The allure of Australian candy is "the scarcity of it. It's hard to find in America and there aren't many similar products."

SEE'S CANDIES, SAN ANTONIO | 210.541.0230
SEE'S CANDIES, AUSTIN | 512.372.1048
sees.com



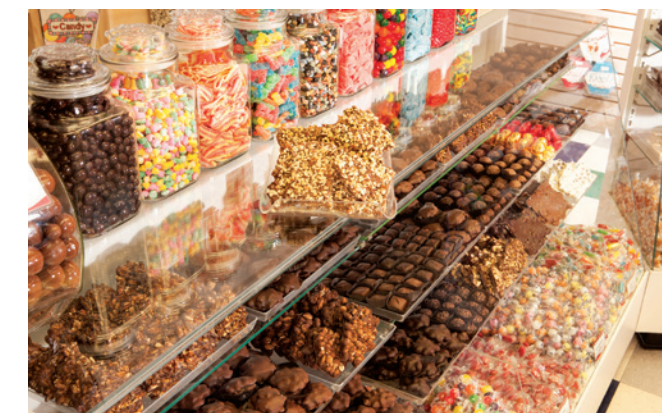
A household word on the West Coast where the company was born in 1921, See's Candies has earned a reputation for top-shelf chocolates and other confections thanks to the company's insistence on staying true to many of the family founders' original recipes, even after the company was bought by Warren Buffett's Berkshire Hathaway Corporation in 1972. "There's a lot of candy out there," says San Antonio's North Star Mall store manager Mark Gonzalez, "but what sets us apart is there are no added preservatives, no high fructose corn syrup, everything is gluten free and we use free trade chocolate." Touted as "the only chocolatier that ages its chocolate before we sell it," See's offers a mouthwatering selection of assorted chocolates, toffees, butterscotch squares, peppermints, even semi-sweet chocolate chips — the better to make your own See's-inspired fudge ("the recipe is online," says Gonzalez). Throw in nut-free, kosher and sugar-free products and there is literally candy for almost everyone. The sugar-free peanut brittle is a favorite, with some preferring it over the sugared variety, says Gonzalez, "and the café latte lollipops are world famous."

LOLLI AND POPS, SAN ANTONIO
210.561.7858 | loliandpops.com

Located at the Shops at La Cantera, the San Francisco-based Lolli and Pops call themselves "the purveyors of sweetness," and are they ever. The spacious store is bursting with delectable goodies from all over the world — gummies, sours, chocolates, truffles, bars, bags, drops, sticks, beans (of the jelly variety), and of course, lollipops. Dreaming of a chocolate covered room? You got it. Fantasizing about jumping into a mountain of gummy bears and rolling around to your heart's content? Well, you can't do that, but you can feast your eyes on probably one of the biggest gummy gatherings around, in tons of colors and flavors. Exotic candy from Japan and Spain happily co-exist with retro sweets in a vintage atmosphere. Shopping tips: 1) Be prepared for sweet childhood flashbacks, and 2) leave your willpower at the door. Resistance is futile. ❖

MADE IN TEXAS

LAMMES CANDIES SINCE 1885, INC., AUSTIN
512.453.2899 | lammes.com



Their name is quite a mouthful, and so are their products. But all you really have to say is Lammes and most Texans recognize it as "a tradition in households for more than 100 years," says Pam Teich, president and co-owner with two siblings as the fifth generation of this family-owned institution. Known for their Texas Chewy Pecan Pralines, the signature caramel-based treat "was developed in the late 1800s by my great-great-grandfather," says Teich, "and has a clean bite and not real, real sweet." Their top chocolate product is the turtle-style Longhorn with caramel and both milk and dark chocolates, along with the popular peppermint taffy kisses and chocolate-covered strawberries, "a trend we started in the late 70s," says Teich. Making candy since 1957, the company has five stores in the Austin/Round Rock area, "with customers that span generations. A while back we were concerned that the younger generation wouldn't discover us, but they have."

ALAMO CANDY COMPANY, SAN ANTONIO
210.734.8672 | alamocandy.com

A Mexican candy lover's dream, featuring South Texas faves like dulce de leche, tamarindos, leche quemada and more. Also a big selection of American and Chinese candies.

BLISS CANDY COMPANY, BRENHAM
281.222.2131 | blisscandycompany.com

Toffee lovers, here you go: simple, fresh ingredients with no preservatives or artificial flavors produce delightful concoctions in almond, pecan, white chocolate mocha and more.

BERDOLL PECAN CANDY & GIFT COMPANY, CEDAR CREEK
800.518.3870 | berdollpecanfarm.com

This family-owned business produces handmade pecan candies in 21 flavors — milk chocolate covered clusters, dark chocolate brittle, sugar-free milk and dark chocolate, their best-selling honey glazed pecans and more.