

# DESTINATION: THE HIGHLAND LAKES

By JULIE CATALANO



A thousand square miles of natural goodness, the endlessly intriguing Highland Lakes region of the Texas Hill Country takes its name from six freshwater lakes: Lake Buchanan, Inks Lake, Lake LBJ, Lake Marble Falls, Lake Travis and Lake Austin. Nature lovers flock to the scenic region for outstanding fishing, diving, hiking, biking, wildlife-watching or just chilling out in laid-back small towns. Not even the Texas legislature is immune to the area's charms, designating Burnet the official Bluebonnet Capital of Texas®.



**CANYON OF THE EAGLES,  
A CALIBRE RESORT, BURNET**  
512.334.2070 | CANYONOFTHEEAGLES.COM

Relax. That's the word of the day at this fabulously private 940-acre eco-lodge and nature park on the shores of Lake Buchanan. Porches with rocking chairs adorn the rustic cabin-style buildings that house 61 standard-to-deluxe nonsmoking rooms. Spacious guest rooms are comfy-homey, with down comforters and pillows and large windows to view the surrounding landscape (you just

might spot an American Bald Eagle). Meeting and banquet facilities, park store, Eagles Nest Lounge and the Overlook Restaurant with signature dishes and cocktails round out the indoor amenities. Outside, there are more than 14 miles of picturesque trails, guided nature walks, a fishing pier, hands-on reptile programs, birding, arts and crafts, movies under the stars, a pool and a not-to-be-missed stargazing trip up the hill to Eagle Eye Observatory. Extras: RV park, primitive camping, pet friendly, complimentary parking.

**VANISHING TEXAS RIVER CRUISE, BURNET**  
512.756.6986 | VTRC.COM

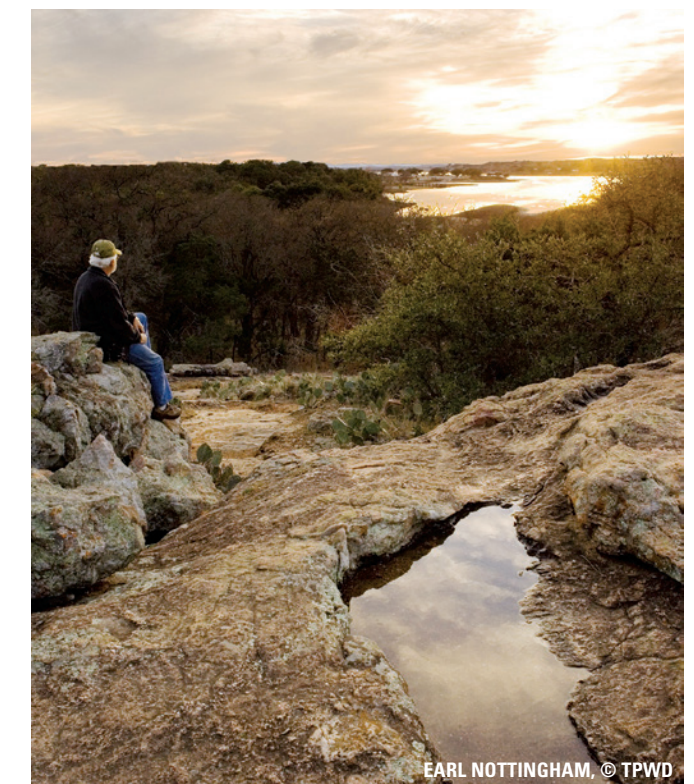
Even if you don't give a hoot about seeing owls, hawks, great blue herons and other fowl, you can't pass up the chance to spot a colony of American Bald Eagles that migrate to the Texas Colorado River Canyon between November and March on this enjoyable guided eco-tour. If the four-hour, 30-mile Ultimate Eagle Tour is too much, check out two-hour lake or river tours where you might catch a glimpse of the majestic bird. With or without fowl, rain or shine, you'll see waterfalls, cliffs and a variety of wildlife in a peaceful glide on a double decker Texas Eagle II with a climate controlled lower cabin, restrooms and an open air but covered top deck. Specialty cruises include Freedom Flight cruises in partnership with Last Chance Forever/The Bird of Prey Conservancy where rescued, rehabbed birds are released back into the wild; a two-hour Sunset Cruise with live music and optional dinner May-October; or a Hill Country Great Escape package that includes cruise, lunch, overnight lodging accommodations, breakfast and tickets to Longhorn Caverns State Park. Don't forget your camera.

**INKS LAKE STATE PARK, BURNET**  
512.793.2223 | TPWD.TEXAS.GOV/STATE-PARKS-INKS-LAKE

A perennial favorite among campers and nature lovers, first-time visitors marvel at how much this little gem of a state park has to offer — ancient geology (600 million+ years), pink rock "islands" and ample wildlife. Campsites, limited use cabins, boat rentals and group facilities are available. A special two-night event from September 9-11 introduces families to the joys of camping with individual car camping sites for each family and a ranger present each night. Basic camping equipment is included for a fun-filled weekend of building a base camp, geocaching, fishing, kayaking, a ranger presentation of nature's night sounds and much more (including restrooms with hot showers!). Call 512.389.8903 for more info on Texas Outdoor Family programs.

**HEART OF TEXAS WINE TOURS, MARBLE FALLS**  
512.755.0937 | HEARTOFTEXASWINETOURS.COM

Climb aboard one of two 15-passenger Mercedes-Benz sprinters for one of the most popular year-round wine tours in the Hill Country. Many of the stops are located in area towns like Fredericksburg, but there's plenty to see in the Burnet/Marble Falls area if you want to stay purely local. Tours typically visit four wineries — which can include lunch or pairing plates for an additional fee — but the company prides itself on customizing the wine experience, so feel free to talk to them about what you'd like to see, try, taste and do.



**WINE TOUR HIGHLIGHTS: Perissos Vineyard and Winery** (perissosvineyards.com, 512.820.2950). Perissos (meaning “exceeding abundantly”) is a 16-acre family vineyard in Burnet with a fascinating story going back three generations of farming and forward to their first harvest in 2006. Since then, 75 percent of their reds and whites have been from estate-grown fruit.

**Torr Na Lochs Vineyard & Winery** (torrnalochs.com, 832.606.7575). Gaelic for “hill over lakes” — fitting for the Highland Lakes region — the 180-acre ranch was originally purchased for retirement. With water as a key resource in Texas, the focus is on environmentally friendly practices, including soil sensors to avoid overwatering and rainwater collection. Reds, whites, rose.

**Flat Creek Estate** (flatcreekestate.com, 512.267.6310). This beautiful 80-acre vineyard estate 20 miles east of Marble Falls offers guided production tours by reservation and bistro dining by reservation. Their wine portfolio includes about 10,000 barrels made entirely at the estate using 70-80 percent Texas-sourced fruit; and a selection of wines imported from Italy.

## BURNET COUNTY: HOME OF CRANES, PLANES, PIES AND SKIES



STEVE MASLOWSKI

### BALCONES CANYONLANDS NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE, MARBLE FALLS

512.339.9432 |

FWS.GOV/REFUGE/

BALCONES\_CANYONLANDS

Some of the best birdwatching habitats in Texas for endangered songbirds Black-capped Vireo and the Golden-Cheeked Warbler, along with spoonbills, red-tailed hawks, sandpipers, cranes and more. The fall brings thousands of Monarch butterflies and hawks as they migrate south. Walking trails and a leisurely drive along scenic Cow Creek Road make for a full day of meandering among the flora and fauna. A true wildlife refuge, there is no



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camping, no fishing, no pets, no firearms and no collecting of plants, animals, fossils or artifacts.

### HIGHLAND LAKES SQUADRON COMMEMORATIVE AIR FORCE MUSEUM, BURNET

715.756.2226 | HIGHLANDLAKESSQUADRON.COM

Located at Burnet Municipal Kate Craddock Field, this small museum is jam-packed with authentic WWII artifacts including guns and other weapons from the U.S., Germany and Japan, uniforms, newspapers with headlines of the day and much more. Knowledgeable guides can walk you through the working hanger where WWII aircraft are resurrected and restored.

### BLUEBONNET CAFE, MARBLE FALLS

830.693.2344 | BLUEBONNETCAFE.NET

Crazy popular, so be prepared to wait at peak times. Salads, soup, sandwiches, steak, burgers, chicken, catfish, veggies, chicken fried steak and daily house specials round out the menu. Breakfast is served all day. But the pies are to die for and have their own Pie Happy Hour weekdays from 3-5pm. No credit or debit cards; cash and checks only.

### PAINTED SKY INN, BURNET

512.715.9896 | PAINTEDSKYINN.COM

As pretty as it sounds, Painted Sky is located on the eastern shore of Lake Buchanan. Fully remodeled in 2011, the clean, simple rooms — all facing the lake with sunset views — feature kitchens, table and chairs, back doors and patio areas, and are perfect for intimate weekend getaways, family reunions, small weddings or small group retreats. Five RV sites with full hook-up connections. Pet friendly. ❖

For more info, [Burnetcountytexas.org](http://Burnetcountytexas.org).