
TRIP IDEAS

This Small Texas Town Has Less Than 1,000 Residents — and It's the 'Cowboy Capital of the World'

Rodeos, Southern fare, and sprawling outdoor spaces come together in Bandera, Texas.

By [Amanda Ogle](#) | Published on March 23, 2023



PHOTO: DHUGHES9/GETTY IMAGES

In [Texas Hill Country](#), about an hour northwest of San Antonio, lies Bandera, where Western history, stunning outdoor spaces, and adventure meet.

destination got its actual name, however, from the numerous battles between the Comanche and Apache nations and the Spanish conquistadors that took place here in Bandera Pass. As the story goes, for years after these battles, a red *bandera* (flag in Spanish) was flown at the site to mark the boundary between Spanish and Indian hunting grounds.

Today, Bandera is a must-visit when traveling through South Texas, thanks to its outdoor recreation, delicious bites, and dude ranches. Here's how to plan the perfect trip.

Best Things to Do in Bandera



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If you're looking to spend some time outdoors, Bandera has plenty of ways to explore. There's [Hill Country State Natural Area](#), where more than 5,000

town, allowing those who want a quiet oasis to float or kayak underneath the towering bald cypress trees lining the water. Outfitters such as [The Medina River Company](#) can set you up with kayaks, tubes, and shuttle service. Back in town, [Bandera City Park](#) offers swimming, fishing, picnic areas, and barbecue pits — an ideal place to let the kids roam.



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For even more fun, hop in the saddle and head out for a [horseback ride](#). Bandera is full of riding facilities where you can explore a variety of trails and learn about how to connect with your horse. If you've never seen a [rodeo](#), Bandera hosts them periodically throughout the year. You can also learn more about Bandera's pioneer history at the [Frontier Times Museum](#), where weekly activities include Pioneer Day, rodeo demonstrations, and more.

Families with kids will especially enjoy the [Bandera Natural History Museum](#), home to life-size replica dinosaurs and Ice Age animals along the walking trails, bone-digging play stations, more than 100 full-body animal mounts, a pollinator garden, Latin American ceremonial masks, a 20,000-year-old mammoth femur bone, and the New Spain Art Collection, which showcases works from Juan Correa, Cristóbal de Villalpando, José de Ibarra, and more.



PHOTO: MARK AIKIN/500PX/GETTY IMAGES

Bandera is home to an array of [dude ranches](#) that welcome guests to stay overnight. [Dixie Dude Ranch](#) is a working ranch on 725 acres where visitors enjoy home-cooked meals, hiking, campfire singalongs, swimming, fishing, and even hayrides. [Mayan Dude Ranch](#) offers open-range breakfasts, fossil finding, bird-watching, horseback riding, hiking, and more. [Rancho Cortez](#), meanwhile, markets itself as a dude ranch and “fitness farm,” where guests can enroll in the wellness program and partake in healthy meals, yoga, strength training, guided meditation, and campfire time.

At the [Flying L Ranch Resort](#), families will love the wagon rides, pool, golf course, driving range, fishing, s’mores by the campfire, playgrounds, and more. Just off Main Street back in town, [The Vaquero Motel](#) is dotted with rustic cabins complete with their own fire pits, plus access to the Medina River and ample places for a picnic and hiking. Just outside of town, the

Best Time to Visit Bandera

Summer in Texas can be brutally hot, and more travelers tend to hop through Hill Country during this time because of school vacations. Spring, fall, and even winter are all great times to visit Bandera. Spring brings a yearly abundance of [gorgeous wildflowers](#) (bluebonnets, Indian paintbrushes, and firewheels, to name a few) that paint the landscape in vibrant hues. Fall provides a break from the Texas heat, making it a great time for outdoor exploration, and winter in Hill Country is generally mild as well, with crisp mornings and moderately chilly afternoons that still allow visitors to shop, dine on patios, and enjoy their days in Bandera.

Best Places to Eat and Drink



PHOTO: BANDERA COUNTY CONVENTION AND VISITORS BUREAU.

such as chicken fried steak and hamburger steak, as well as Tex-Mex staples like enchiladas and chile rellenos. [TJ's at the Old Forge](#) offers fresh seafood and prime meats, plus pastas and burgers. [Brick's River Cafe](#) is loved by locals and visitors alike, and has a beautiful location right on the Medina River. For a true Bandera experience, head to [11th Street Cowboy Bar](#) for live music, nightly drink specials, and guitar pickin' on the patio. Another great option for live music and drinks is [Arkey Blue's Silver Dollar](#), the oldest continuously operated honky-tonk in Texas.
