

# GARDEN&GUN

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TRAVEL

## Explore Lake Travis, a Lone Star State Retreat

Luxe digs make savoring this Texas Hill Country recreational paradise a breeze

by **JORDAN BREAL**

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PHOTO: WYNN MYERS

On the water at Lake Travis.

**LAKE:** Travis

**LOCATION:** Travis and Burnet Counties, Texas

**SIZE:** 18,930 acres

**SHORELINE:** 270 miles

**ELEVATION:** 681 feet

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PHOTO: WYNN MYERS

Paddling.

**WHY WE LOVE IT:** From a satellite’s view, Lake Travis looks like an emerald snake wriggling its way through Texas’s lush midsection. Its skinny sixty-five-mile-long body is notched with gullies and inlets, and its sizable tributaries, if you let loose your imagination, conjure up a dragon’s tail and wings. Though it can seem like a river gone wild, Lake Travis is, like so many lakes, a river tamed. For generations, the Colorado River ran amok in the verdant Hill Country, until a series of dams arose in the thirties and forties, creating a chain of six reservoirs called the Highland Lakes. Lake Travis, along Austin’s northwestern edge, is the one most likely to lure you into staying a good long while. Officially, Lake Travis came into being to control floods and build up water reserves and churn out hydroelectric profits. But tell that to the sailors, divers, skiers, wakeboarders, windsurfers, paddlers, anglers, and skinny-dippers (more on them later) who delight in its nearly 19,000 watery acres. Or to the hikers, birders, rock hounds, golfers, tennis players, and oenophiles who enjoy the land-based delights along its 270 miles of shoreline. Or to Willie Nelson, longtime area homeowner, who can drive from his working ranch to the water’s edge in four minutes. Not only is Lake Travis rich in recreation and natural amusements—near-hairpin curves, dramatic limestone cliffs, underwater canyons—but the amenity-laden resorts that have set up camp here make relishing the lake’s “come as you are, do as you want” disposition effortless.



PHOTO: WYNN MYERS

Lake Travis coves.

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**HOW TO DO IT:** So few lakes have true resort experiences—so skip the vacation rental sites and check in to one of the got-it-all luxury options that offer waterfront views and robust itineraries. At the **Lakeway Resort and Spa**, kids have the run of three pools and a looping waterslide, while parents can enjoy the spa or one of two golf courses nearby. The adjacent **Lakeway Marina** will get you into your preferred watercraft (kayak, paddleboard, Jet Ski, runabout) and out on the lake in next to no time. Groups who like a little more room can rent a cabin at **the Reserve at Lake Travis**, where guests have access to the same lazy river, tennis courts, and marina that year-round residents use.

For a restorative, adults-only getaway, consider **Miraval Austin**, an immersive wellness retreat set to open in the fall. Formerly Travaasa Austin, the secluded property, which is perched on a hilltop amid the Balcones Canyonlands Preserve, is expanding to 120 rooms, and its upgraded spa will offer pampering massages and ayurvedic therapy

sessions. Though technically on the next lake over, the forty-room **Lake Austin Spa Resort** is close enough to entice. In between head-to-toe treatments and organic meals, you can hike nearby trails, practice yoga on the dock, or take a water bike for a spin.



PHOTO: WYNN MYERS

A pool at Lake Austin Spa Resort.

At any of these resorts, you'll run the risk of never wanting to leave your sybaritic confines. But Lake Travis beckons. Its wide basin alone offers an ample buffet of adventures: prime windsurfing at **Bob Wentz Park**, scuba diving among sunken sculptures at the adjacent **Windy Point Park**, naked sunbathing at **Hippie Hollow**, the state's only clothing-optional public park. Of the more than a dozen marinas, two of Lake Travis's oldest are **Commanders Point Yacht Basin**, where you can rent a sloop or charter a pontoon to take you out to raucous **Devil's Cove**, and the **Austin Yacht Club**, which caters to both students and spectators with its sailing school, regattas, and "beer can" races.

The lake's signature limestone cliffs make for dramatic vistas, whether you're speeding along a skinny galvanized cable from twenty stories up at **Lake Travis Zipline Adventures** or peering out from your tent at **Pace Bend Park**, a particularly scenic expanse with more than nine miles of shoreline and several swimmers-only coves. In the evenings, everyone jock-eyes to get into position to see the sherbet-hued Hill Country sunsets. You can watch the show with margarita in hand from the tiered deck at **the Oasis**, a Tex-Mex restaurant high above the water. Or you can book a private cruise (try **Sail Austin Charters** or **Outbound Sailing**) and have your captain navigate you to one of Lake Travis's tranquil nooks while you sip champagne, glide by the palatial waterfront estates, and begin to calculate how exactly to parlay your visit to this five-star lake into a perma-vacation.



PHOTO: WYNN MYERS

The Oasis restaurant.

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**LOCALS KNOW:** Like Mallorca’s rocky coastline, Lake Travis’s limestone overhangs are ideal for the type of rock climbing known as deep-water soloing. The pros at **Rock-About Climbing Adventures** will take you to their secret spots and show you the ropes of this ropeless sport.

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