

# Presidential Road Trip

## Discovering the Historical and Political Traditions of Texas

by Tonyia Cone

As Texans, we are renowned for taking pride in our history and traditions, and the Presidential Corridor - the area surrounding the five counties connecting the Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library and Museum in Austin and the George Bush Presidential Library and Museum in College Station - sets the stage for young Texans to learn about the sights, sounds, tastes, and especially the people who have shaped this independent-minded state. Spend a day or a week on this route, bringing Texas History textbooks to life with interactive attractions highlighting our rich agricultural, artistic, cultural, and political traditions.

Janice Langlinais, account director at Vollmer Public Relations, explains that the Presidential Corridor, which includes Bastrop, Brazos, Burleson, Lee, and Travis Counties, offers families a unique opportunity to learn about the Lone Star State. "You can see how Texas has played a role in America's history with two presidential museums. There are not many states, if there are any others, with two presidential museums."

### Touring the Presidential Corridor of Texas

The Office of the Governor, Economic Development and Tourism ([www.traveltex.com](http://www.traveltex.com)) and the Presidential Corridor Association ([www.presidentialcorridor.org](http://www.presidentialcorridor.org))

suggest various driving tours and offer information and maps of the region. As the Texas capital, we think Austin is the natural place to start our adventure in learning about the people and events that have shaped this state.

The LBJ Presidential Library and Museum, located on the University of Texas campus, features artwork, personal belongings, official items, and political memorabilia related to the President and First Lady, as well as a replica of the Oval Office. Through May 2008, the temporary exhibit "Bills, Bills, Bills: Lyndon Johnson as Senate Majority Leader" gives visitors the opportunity to interact with an actor portraying LBJ as Senate Majority Leader in a replica of the U.S. Senate Chamber. The unrehearsed event, held hourly from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m., is a chance to talk to the senator about issues of his day. The actor also reads children's books to those who visit the museum, which is open from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. every day except Christmas and offers free parking and admission.

History and political buffs will want to visit the nearby Bob Bullock Texas State History Museum, the Texas Capitol, the Governor's Mansion, and the Texas State Cemetery. For those wanting a change of scenery (and for energetic little ones needing to blow off some steam), the gardens, woodlands, ponds, and meadows at the Lady Bird Johnson National Wildflower

Research Center in southwest Austin offer a fun, educational environment for all ages. At its "Little House," kids can dig in sand, play in a teepee, and participate in activities that teach them about native plants, flowers, wildlife, and the environment - like planting a tomato plant in a flowerpot made of newspaper. Admission to the center is \$7 for adults, \$3 for children ages 5-12, and kids under 5 are free.

No Texas road trip would be complete without some traditional Texas fare. After leaving Austin, stop at Elgin's Southside Market and Barbeque for lunch. Famous for the hot sausage they've been making since 1882, the restaurant, with its picnic table seating, is casual and noisy - perfect for families with rambunctious kids of all ages. Not only is the food great and reasonably priced, the walls are covered with mounted game, historical news clippings, and shelves full of goodies, like canned peaches and pears, barbeque and hot sauce, pecan brittle, and spicy pickled garlic that visitors can purchase.

The Presidential Corridor next winds through Lexington, Dime Box, and Caldwell, several small towns rich in their own historical sites, before arriving about an hour up the road at the Blue Bell Creameries in Brenham. Time for dessert! Celebrating its 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary this year, Blue Bell offers a 45-minute guided tour of the ice cream plant (which uses milk from

*Fill up the gas tank, and hit the road! Texas' Presidential Corridor features attractions designed to give your family a true taste of the Lone Star State's traditions, history, and politics.*



Dallas

Fort Worth

Abilene

College Station

Austin



The Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library and Museum in Austin.



An actor portraying LBJ as Senate Majority Leader in the exhibit "Bills, Bills, Bills: Lyndon Johnson as Senate Majority Leader."



The George Bush Presidential Library and Museum in College Station.



A TBM Avenger, like the one Bush flew during World War II, "flies" overhead at the Bush Museum.

almost 60,000 Texas cows for each day's production!) and a short film about the history of the company. The tour, offered Monday through Friday from 10 a.m. to 2:30 p.m., costs \$3 for adults and \$2 for children ages 6-14. It ends with a complimentary scoop of one of about 24 flavors of Blue Bell Ice Cream and a visit to the Blue Bell Country Store.

Head just east of Brenham to Washington-on-the-Brazos, site of the signing of the Texas Declaration of Independence and capital of the Republic of Texas until 1845. Families can experience what life was like in the Republic of Texas at the Star of the Republic Museum, which features two floors of exhibits, including a hands-on discovery center with clothing, toys, and puzzles from the era. Also located on the 300-acre Washington-on-the-Brazos State Historic Site are a replica of Independence Hall and the Barrington Living History Farm, which offers visitors a chance to learn about life on a farm during the same historical period. Staff members dressed in period costumes tend to crops and animals, and kids can try their hand at chores like shucking corn and picking cotton. Visit [www.starmuseum.org](http://www.starmuseum.org) for hours and admission fees.

Finally, drive north to College Station, where the Presidential Corridor officially ends at the Bush Presidential Library and Museum on the Texas A&M University campus. See a TBM Avenger, like the one Bush flew during World War II, a section of the Berlin Wall, a Gulf War exhibit, and a White House in Miniature

(55 feet long and 20 feet wide.) Celebrating its tenth anniversary and just having completed an \$8.3 million renovation, the Bush Museum now features the only Oval Office exhibit allowing visitors to sit in the "seat of power" and have their photo taken behind the President's desk. Museum hours are Monday through Saturday, 9:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. and Sunday from noon until 5 p.m. Admission is \$7 for adults, \$3 for children 6 and older, and children under 6 are free.

### Plan Ahead

Although adults tend to enjoy the Texas country scenery along the Presidential Corridor, kids may need some help appreciating the miles of rolling fields and farms. To plan ahead for a few hours in the car, parents can call the Texas Department of Transportation at 1-800-452-9292 for a copy of "Texas: A Quick Look," a travel guide geared towards children. Texas Education Vacation is another great resource for those planning a Presidential Corridor road trip. Their website, [www.texaseducationvacation.com](http://www.texaseducationvacation.com), provides information about sites throughout Texas, including a trivia game about the state for young Texans.

Whether your family visits the Presidential Corridor as a day trip or savors its many attractions over a longer period, Texans of all ages are sure to leave with a deeper understanding of the historical legacy, rich cultural traditions, and strong state identity that have led the Lone Star State to become such a powerful player on the national political stage. ★