

MAYBE IT'S THE UNCROWDED ROADS.

Maybe it's the larger-than-life skies. Perhaps the unbelievable vistas or great weather. Whatever it is that has drawn motorcyclists from around the globe out to Far West Texas, here's how to discover this piece of paradise with your favorite sidekick.

DAY 1 :: ARRIVE IN MARATHON

No matter which direction you approach Marathon from, you'll feel you're nearing something special as grass-covered mountains take over the ultra-flat horizon to its north. Towering ocotillo wave a hello as you arrive in this tiny Texas town of 430 on the edge of the Chihuahuan Desert, the largest desert in North America.

The Gage Hotel, built in 1927 by legendary architect Henry Trost, can be thought of as the magnetic center of Marathon. With its stylish accommodation options, heated swimming pool, outdoor fire pit, and one of the best hotel bars in the state, the Gage is a gathering place for visitors and locals to share a meal and swap tall tales underneath a star-studded night sky.

Within a few steps of your hotel you'll stumble into fine art and photography galleries, shops and eateries. Head south on Post Road to Post Park—once Camp Peña Colorado in the late 1800s, now a secluded park around a large pond that attracts wildlife of all kinds. The surrounding fossil-studded Glass Mountains were once part of the colossal coral “Capitan Reef” during the Permian Period millions of years ago.

DAY 2 :: BIG BEND & THE RIVER ROAD

Grab strong coffee and migas at the V6 Coffee Bar before hitting the road for one of the most beautiful drives in the country. Take 385 south and within 40 miles you'll enter the 801,163-acre Big Bend National Park. The park is quite diverse, ranging in elevation from 1,800 to 8,000 feet and encompassing vast desert landscapes, giant canyons, forested mountains, and a wild and scenic river.

There are a number of scenic drives within the park. Request a map at one of the visitor centers and explore this remote and wildly beautiful corner of Earth.

Proceed west on 118 toward the Terlingua Ghost Town. Yes, that Terlingua—home to the world-famous chili cookoff the first Saturday every November. Stop at Lajitas Golf Resort for a satisfying meal on the patio overlooking a surreal green golf course with a backdrop of mountains. The resort also offers hunting, river expeditions, shooting sports, horseback rides, and a zip line.

Continue on FM 170—aka “The River Road”—whose curls carry you through stunning terrain along the edge of the country. This ride tops most motorcycle trip bucket lists, and once you experience it you'll understand why. A ride on this road is more romantic than any date you could plan. At Presidio, veer north on Highway 67 to famed Marfa.

At this point, it's hard to pinpoint exactly what put Marfa on the map. In the 1800s, people started spotting the Marfa Mystery Lights. The 1956 movie *Giant* was filmed here, bringing in movie stars Elizabeth Taylor and James Dean to the once quiet community. In 1971, minimalist artist Donald Judd discovered this place and forever solidified it as a top international art destination.

In Marfa you can take your pick of fanciful accommodations from plush hotels and hip motels to luxury teepees and vintage travel trailers. This cool little city has plenty of watering holes, live music venues, and posh restaurants to keep you happy.



PHOTOGRAPHS:

Opposite page – Bikes in the Big Bend by Voni Glaves. This page – Top: River Road by Voni Glaves; Left: Gage Hotel exterior courtesy of the Gage Hotel; Middle: El Paisano Hotel courtesy of Visit Marfa; Right: Century Bar & Grill courtyard courtesy of the Holland Hotel.

DAY 3 :: SCENIC LOOP TO ALPINE

Head toward Fort Davis on Highway 17 then ride the 75-mile Scenic Loop (comprised of highways 166 and 118) through the Davis Mountains. The Scenic Loop features dramatic elevation changes with gorgeous views and takes you past attractions like McDonald Observatory and the Fort Davis National Historic Site. Split a milkshake at the Fort Davis Drug Store then take 118 to Alpine.

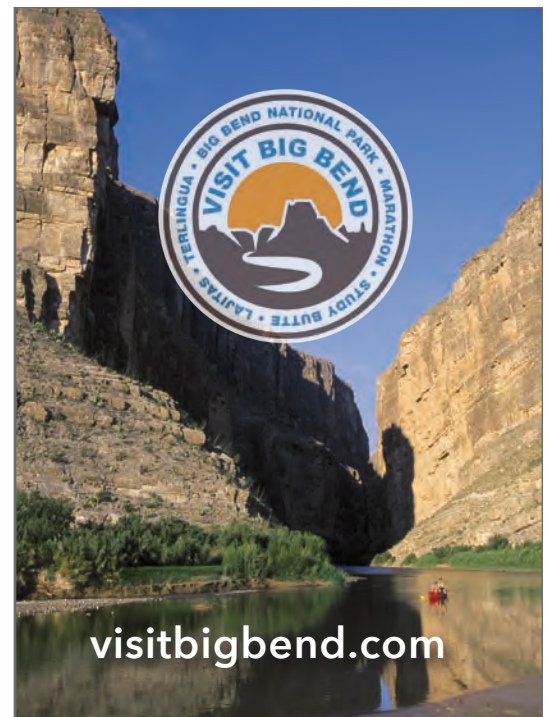
Alpine is home to Sul Ross State University and the Museum of the Big Bend. It's the largest of the towns on your Big Bend excursion and offers ample dining and nightlife opportunities. Whether you're craving cheesy Tex-Mex, a juicy steak, or sizzling barbecue, you'll find it all here.

Park your bike at the dapper Holland Hotel—another historic hotel designed by Trost—and take advantage of the fact that Alpine is a walkable destination. Enjoy drinks and bar bites from the on-site Century Bar & Grill before venturing out to discover live music venues, breezy patios, and eclectic shops. After soaking in the laid-back attitude of this city, pick a place to lay your head. The Holland, the Quarter Circle Seven boutique hotel, and The Maverick Inn, a fashionably-updated motor court, are all popular with motorcyclists. Take in one last sunset together before heading home.

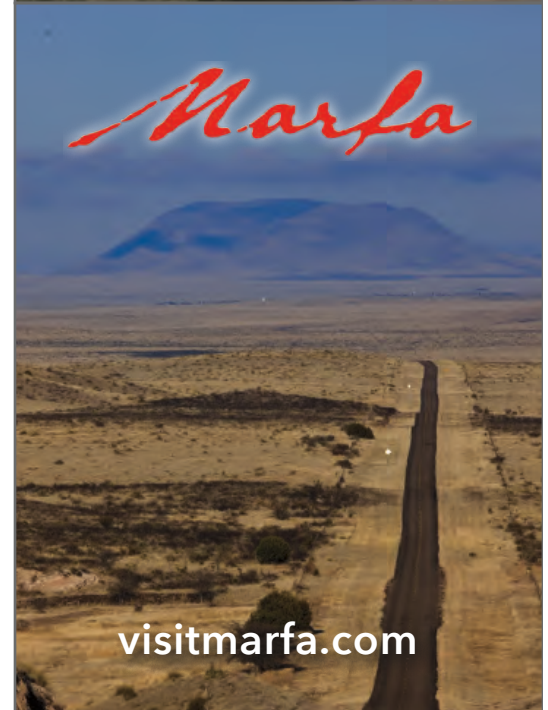
This ride works just as well in reverse coming from the west, and every season brings a new experience, giving couples reason to return again and again.

More information on the locations described in this article can be found at: visitbigbend.com, visitmarfa.com and visitalpinetx.com.

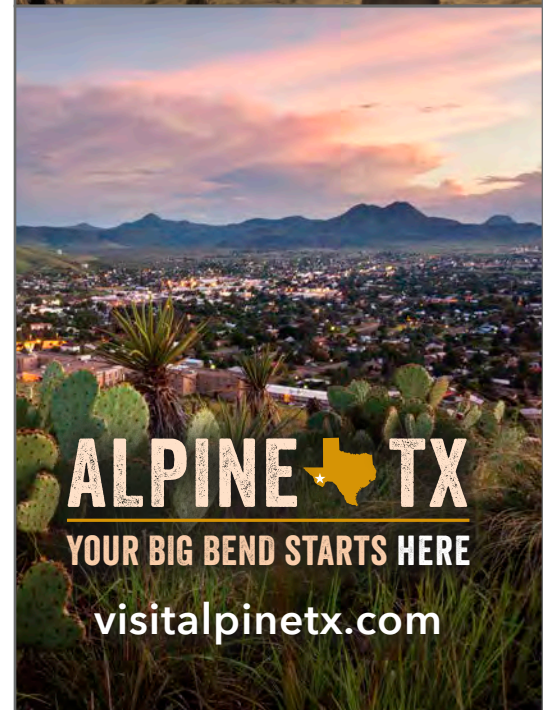
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