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Photograph by Iain Bagwell
Prop Styling by Mindi Shapiro Levine
Food Styling by Torie Cox

TRAVEL & CULTURE

YOUR GUIDE TO THE SOUTH NOW

Chillin' on the River

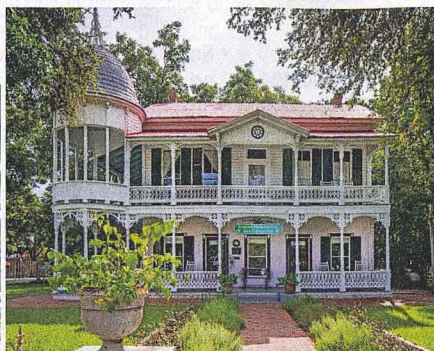
Spend afternoons floating, kayaking, or going on other outdoor escapades on the Guadalupe.

ROAD TRIP

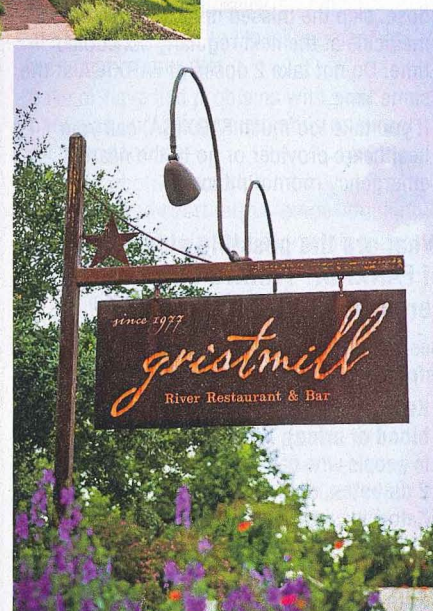
The Great Guadalupe

The spring-fed waters of this Texas river are a magnet for adventurers

BY JENNIFER CHAPPELL SMITH | PHOTOGRAPHS BY ROBBIE CAPONETTO



Clockwise from top: Enjoy a riverside stay at the Gruene Mansion Inn. At the Gristmill in Gruene, signs advise "No dancing on the table with spurs."



The river is divided into the Upper and Lower Guadalupe. In between, a dam captures river water to create a scenic playground called Canyon Lake. The upper portion sloshes over low, rocky falls, the intensity of which is determined by rainfall. Dam-controlled flows provide more consistent water and rich trout fishing on the lower stretch of river below Canyon Lake.

"We went down River Road on Fourth of July weekend last summer," says local Judi Temple. "There were just thousands of people down there camping and barbecuing and tubing, and I thought, 'This is such a vital part of the Texas Hill Country.'" Temple and her husband, Lee, own a century-old dance hall in Kendalia, just one of the small towns that offer access to the Guadalupe and flourish beside it.

BORDERED BY LIMESTONE bluffs and stitched to the soil with gnarled cypress roots, the Guadalupe River has come to symbolize the Hill Country, curling through this part of Texas like the lifeline on the palm of your hand.

Beyond the 10 ½-mile stretch of River Road near New Braunfels, a tubing and paddling mecca, the river winds from Kerr County past city parklands, private ranches, state park grounds, and farm-to-market road crossings, finally pouring itself out near Seadrift, Texas. "The top of the Guadalupe watershed is at 2,400 feet, and it drops from there to the Gulf," says Susan Sander, naturalist at the nonprofit Riverside Nature Center in Kerrville. "It's about 400 river miles, including all the wiggles."



In 1689, a Spanish explorer named the river, but people still debate how to pronounce it. Newcomers might say “Gua-da-LOOP”; those going for a Spanish inflection say “Gua-da-LOO-pay.” But Hill Country natives insist on “Gua-da-LOO-pee”—or simply “the Guad.” In any case, this river with a Spanish name winds through Texas hills steeped in German heritage, a gift of the settlers who flooded here in the mid-1800s. (There’s a lot of bratwurst and bock consumed in these parts.)

Today, the Guadalupe attracts lots of tubers, kayakers, and hikers along with day-trippers headed to downtowns and dance halls, vineyards and icehouses

(that’s Texas speak for brewhouses) all along the river. A favorite is **River Road Ice House** in New Braunfels, which has a pavilion for live music.

Longtime kayaking guide Stacey Banta, whose ancestors paddled the river in the 1820s, knows it better than most. “It’s easy to reach from San Antonio and Austin, but most of it still has the small-town vibe,” says Banta, owner of **Texas Pack & Paddle** (meetup.com/texas-packnpaddle). She prefers to take people

“This river with a Spanish name winds through Texas hills steeped in German heritage.”

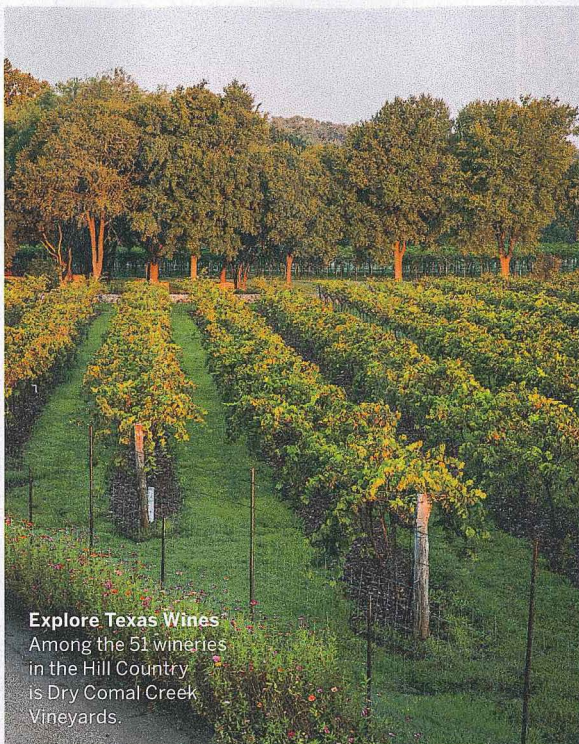
out on the Upper Guadalupe: “You’re out, you’re remote, yet you’re 45 minutes from town.”

Go with a guide on this part of the river, as it has just a few rural access points. Feeling more adventurous? Try nonprofit American Whitewater’s recommendation: a 7.8-mile trek from Bergheim (Farm Road 3351) to Guadalupe River State Park. “In Texas, we don’t have a whole lot of white water,” Banta says, estimating there are just a few spots of easier Class 1 and Class 2 rapids between the town of Comfort and the Rebecca Creek Road crossing. “You can walk



Clockwise from top: Beneath an iconic water tower in New Braunfels’ Gruene Historic District, you’ll find live music and dancing at Gruene Hall, Texas’ oldest continuously operating dance hall.





Explore Texas Wines
Among the 51 wineries in the Hill Country is Dry Comal Creek Vineyards.

around them, or, if you don't mind an involuntary swim, it's less than knee-deep if you fall out," she says.

The Lower Guad near New Braunfels can feel crowded, teeming with tubers and an often raucous college crowd. Elizabeth and Elliot Ross of San Antonio tried tubing for the first time last summer. Both physicians in their mid-thirties, they recommend going early on weekend mornings to avoid afternoon partiers and long lines at outfitters such as **Rockin' R River Rides** (rockinr.com), which provides your tube as well as transportation at the end of your float.

On land, explore riverside trails at **Guadalupe River State Park** and its Bauer Unit, an old homestead (tpwd.texas.gov). Or hike the Verada Real walking trail along the Canyon Dam at **Overlook Park** (wildtexas.com), operated by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. An easier paved path for hikers and bikers, the River Trail in

Kerrville runs along the Guadalupe and connects city parks with an entrance at the **Riverside Nature Center** (riversidenaturecenter.org).

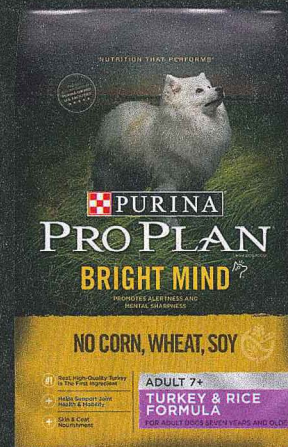
In Kerrville, dams form pretty lakes from the river (kerrvilletexas.cub.com). Dine waterside at **1011 Bistro**. Then giddyap to **The Museum of Western Art** for a photo op at the bucking bronco statue. Downriver at **Sister Creek Vineyards** in Sisterdale, sip wines in a rustic, barnlike setting. Then head to **Kendalia Halle**, the 1903 dance hall now owned by the Temples. It's reservation only, so you're guaranteed a table, barbecue tacos, and a spot on the dance floor.

New Braunfels' Gruene (pronounced "green") Historic District is the heart of the Lower Guad (gruene.texas.com). Dine at the **Gristmill** beneath the iconic Gruene water tower. Signs at the restaurant admonish "No dancing on the table with spurs." But that's okay: You can



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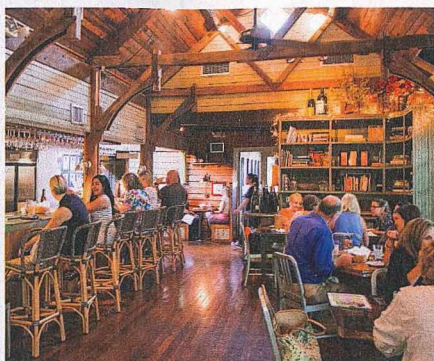


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Clockwise from top:
At Huisache Grill in New Braunfels, enjoy dishes like the Charbroiled Lamb Burger with house-made sweet potato wedges, plus Texas-friendly service.



dance later at **Gruene Hall** next door (gruenehall.com).

Stay at **Gruene Mansion Inn** bed-and-breakfast, the 1872 residence of community founder Henry D. Gruene, which has 31 rooms in the mansion and its outbuildings, some with river views (gruenemansioninn.com). For a quieter stay, choose **River Road Treehouses**, gussied-up cabins secured to tall hardwood trees (riverroadcabins.com).

Located in New Braunfels proper, **Schlitterbahn Waterpark & Resort** beckons with slides, rides, and lazy-river fun, powered by the waters of the Comal River, which feeds into the Guadalupe. The park plays on the region's German heritage. ("Schlitterbahn" itself means "slippery road.") Resort lodging comes with free access to the water park and ranges from the **SchlitterStein Lofts**,



with a contemporary vibe, to **Riverbend Cabins**, located near the park's tubing attraction, The Falls (schlitterbahn.com).

In downtown New Braunfels, historic buildings recall more German heritage (innewbraunfels.com). The 150-year-old **Henne Hardware** satisfies fans of sturdy rope and tools; **Saints Peter and Paul Catholic Church** was built in 1871; and the **Phoenix Saloon** was first among Texas bars to serve women. Dining options in the area include eclectic

Huisache Grill—an upscale bistro—and **Alpine Haus Restaurant**, with sophisticated Bavarian fare, including a variety of schnitzels. Stop outside New Braunfels at the family-run **Dry Comal Creek Vineyards**, another testament to the creative businesses that the fertile Guadalupe River Basin has inspired.

Given all the fun you can have in this part of Texas, both on the river and off, the Guadalupe is bound to inspire you as well—to plan your return trip. **SL**