

Take an Unforgettable Texas Road Trip to Visit San Saba

April 18, 2018 by Samantha Saenz

I was told by a local that if you open your heart to San Saba, the little town will wrap its everloving arms around you in a tight embrace. For the 48 hours I spent there, that's precisely what I experienced. I knew no stranger, and no stranger knew me. As I headed back to Austin, I knew I'd just had one of the best Texas weekends of my life.

The rustic town of San Saba is located at the corner of 190 and 16 along the San Saba River, one-and-a-half hours northwest of Austin. There are only two traffic lights to direct the nearly 3,100 people who call San Saba home: the big light and the light at the school.

The self-proclaimed Pecan Capital of the World offers a gentle reminder of the way things used to be, with posted store hours that are more of a suggestion and everything moving at a slower pace.

If you're eager for a Texas road trip, I encourage you to explore the five blocks of Historic Downtown, 23 stores and shops, 200 acres of park space, and two award-winning wineries. All are listed on the <u>Visit San Saba</u>, <u>Texas</u> website. I also suggest you explore a few off-the-beaten-path places recommended by locals, in this town I'm calling the next Fredricksburg meets Marfa. *Thank you to Dofflemeyr Hotel and various other businesses featured in this article for hosting me at no charge. All opinions are my own.*



VISIT SAN SABA

take an unforgettable texas road trip

What to Do in San Saba

Whether you're a shopper, history buff, or lover of the outdoors, there's a little something for everyone to do in San Saba. Don't skip town before seeing the sights below.

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Harry's Boots

The Weather Wall at Harry's Boots details significant weather-related events in the area (Credit: @dollarsaenz)

Smack in the middle of town, at the intersection of Highway 16 and 190, sits Harry's Boots. This boot and western wear store was founded in 1939, although the buildings were constructed by J.W. McConnell in 1907, and operated for a while as a grocery store and San Saba's first men's clothing store.

Today, Harry's Boots is owned and operated by the Jordan family, occupying two floors and five buildings. Stop in to shop an incredible selection of boots, hats, and Western wear

for the whole family. And don't miss the Weather Wall, a section of the building where significant weather-related events have been hand-recorded. The entries go all the way back to the 1920s, so it's a must-see!

Millican Pecan Company

Millican Pecan Orchard in San Saba, Texas (Credit: @dollarsaenz)

The history of Millican Pecan Company goes back five generations to an Englishman named Edmond E. Risien who discovered the Mother Pecan Tree. Shortly after discovering the Mother Tree, Risien held a pecan show in San Saba County, in order to find the best pecan specimen. Following that event, he started the first pecan nursery in San Saba County on the land containing the Mother Tree.



Since then, the orchard and its trees have produced notable pecan varieties including No. 60, Western Schley, and the Texas Prolific, to name a few that have solidified San Saba as The Pecan Capital of the World. Currently, Risien's great-great-grandson Winston Millican, and his wife Kristen, own and operate the orchard.

Millican Pecan Company offers customers pecans (whole and halved), plus a plethora of baked goodies for purchase instore or online. San Saba visitors can even stop by to bake their own pecan pie from scratch or tour the orchard. Give the Millican family a call to put in your request. Who knows, you might even get a glimpse of the Mother Tree and see the spot where it all began. `



Mill Pond Park

The water wheel at Mill Pond makes for a scenic backdrop (Credit: @dollarsaenz)

Mill Pond Park was started in 1875 when E. Guy Risien (son of Edmond E. Risien) dammed the lake to provide water for his garden. Later on, the dam provided water to his neighbors' homes and even the water troughs at the city courthouse.

Today, this three-acre park features nature trails and a spring-fed lake, complete with a water wheel and stunning waterfall. You can even see Risien's dam, as the majority of it is still intact.

In the summertime, visitors can enjoy the pond's sandy beach area, and rent kayaks and stand-up paddle boards. After Thanksgiving, the park dons a blanket made of <u>millions of lights</u> for the annual Christmas Extravaganza. *110 Thomas Stewart Dr.*

Risien Park

Walk the trails of Risien Park to the natural springs (Credit: @dollarsaenz)

Eighty acres of park space gifted by E. Guy Risien and the LCRA, plus another 38 acres of greenbelt (San Saba Nature Park) along the banks of the San Saba River, provide a stunning backdrop for leisurely walks, picnics, and bird watching.





The Regency Suspension Bridge

The Regency Bridge is the last suspension bridge in Texas open to traffic (Credit: @dollarsaenz)

Although not on my initial itinerary, several locals in town put The Regency Bridge on my radar.

The last suspension bridge in the state that's open to traffic is located about 18 miles northwest of San Saba. The one-lane wooden bridge was built in 1939 and has since provided a safe means for cars

to cross the Colorado River. I highly recommend parking on the side before the bridge begins and walking across—just mind the occasional car. You'll be treated to stunning views of the surrounding countryside.

Also, as tempting as it is to take in the views from the very edge, be extra careful! I was told several times the story of the local who fell off the side of the bridge. Although the person lived, locals would like to avoid seeing this happen again. *18 miles west of Goldthwaite on FM 574W*

The Wedding Oak Tree

The Wedding Oak was the site of many Indian and settler weddings (Credit: @dollarsaenz)

Take five minutes to drive down County Road 200 and you'll run smack into a majestic oak tree whose branches span the entire road. The tree is called The Wedding Oak, and it has been around since before the town of San Saba existed.



Legend has it that The Wedding Oak served as a meeting spot for Indians and early settlers, and many couples entered into matrimony under its ancient limbs. Besides The Regency Bridge, I'd say it's one of San Saba's best places for a photo opp.

Where to Eat and Drink in San Saba

You're bound to work up quite the appetite with all the sight-seeing, shopping, and exploring there is to do in San Saba—I know I did. Here are my top recommendations for places to quench your thirst and fill your belly.

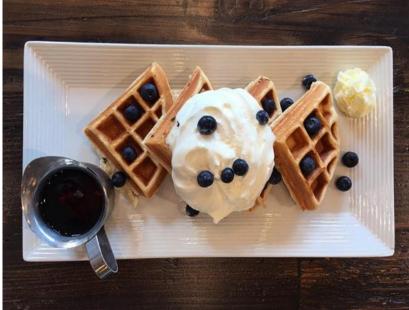


pecan in their shop, as they offer raw pecans, tins and trays, candy and pie, flavored pecans, and gift baskets. I highly recommend the Texas Pecan Coffee if you want to get a true taste of San Saba (and a little caffeine buzz). 601 E Wallace St.

Diggs

Diggs is where the locals, nightlife, and mesquite-grilled steaks are. Head over for a filling meal, and stay for some live music. Who knows, you might end up in a pool tournament with someone born and raised in San Saba, or two-steppin' the night away. 1035 US-190





Oliver & Co.

Blueberry waffles, anyone? They're on the menu at Oliver and Co. in case you need them in your life (Credit: @dollarsaenz)

Since 2014, Oliver & Co. has been serving breakfast and lunch to residents and visitors alike. The eatery is connected to Dofflemyer Hotel, and features baked goods, sandwiches, soups, ice creams, and coffee on the menu. Stop on in for some good ole' San Saba sustenance. Your taste buds definitely won't be disappointed. *320 E. Wallace St.*

Alamo Pecan & Coffee Co.

Alamo Texas Pecan Coffee is heaven in a cup (Credit: @dollarsaenz)

If you want to know what heaven smells like, beeline for Alamo Pecan & Coffee Company. Upon entering, you'll be greeted by the delightful and warm smell of coffee and pecans.

This pecan purveyor was started in 1999 by Bob and Martha Whitten. Today, you can find just about anything

Old Man Scary Wine Cellars

Whether you prefer a glass of red or white, Old Man Scary Cellars has you covered (Credit: @dollarsaenz)

"Within the human condition exists a desire to grow something, build something, make something. To us, at Old Man Scary Cellars these desires are innate, undeniable, and eternally yearn for expression." According to owner Gabe Hisel, that is the philosophical underpinning of Old Man Scary Cellars.

Together, Hisel and his wife Carrie started Rattlesnake Road Vineyards in Hockley, Texas. The couple offers



tastings by the glass or bottle at their San Saba shop, Old Man Scary Cellars. 302 E Wallace St.



Wedding Oak Winery

Wedding Oak Winery named its delicious red after The Regency Bridge just outside San Saba (Credit: @dollarsaenz)

"Wine is about the shared pleasure of life slowing down long enough to appreciate the blessings of the land while enjoying local food and wine with friends, family, and community" is the outlook at <u>Wedding Oak</u> <u>Winery</u>. Given the beautiful cheese spreads, and even more beautiful red and white wines, this winery sure does practice what it preaches.

Slow down and sip from inside Wedding Oak Winery's revitalized 1926 tasting room. The wines here celebrate the unique terroir and wine-growing conditions of Texas. *316 E Wallace St.*

Youngs Burritos & BBQ

Everything is homemade at Youngs Burritos & BBQ, including the red and green salsas (Credit: @dollarsaenz)

I'm convinced you will not find better people or food in San Saba than at Youngs Burritos & BBQ. Lisa Young and her family are doing things right. As a result, I ate at her family's burrito and BBQ joint twice during my visit to the town. I usually don't eat meat, so let that be a testament to you!

America's Singing Cowboy, Steve Mitchell, can often be found serenading the lunch crowd at Youngs (Credit: dollarsaenz)





Youngs opened in 2015 and has been serving up homemade everything ever since, including burritos, loaded baked potatoes, and mesquite-smoked BBQ. My recommendations include the loaded baked potato with juicy brisket and cardamom ice cream.

And don't miss the musical stylings of Steve Mitchell, America's Singing Cowboy, who's appeared on both CBS This Morning and Good Morning America. 806 N High St.

Where to Stay in San Saba

Dofflemyer Hotel provides a fabulous home away from home (Credit: dollarsaenz)

Some of the best nights of sleep I've ever had were at San Saba's historic Dofflemyer Hotel.

The building was originally built in 1913 and served as the San Saba National Bank. Today, the boutique hotel is a plush, six-room, keyless entree oasis to rest well, in between all the sightseeing, winedrinking, and pecan-eating you'll do in town. *108 S. St.*



Honorable Mentions

I didn't make it to the attractions and activities below, but the locals say they're a must! Guess I'll just have to return to see them for myself.

- <u>Catkins Ball</u>: The Community Foundation of San Saba County cordially invites you to get gussied up for its annual fundraising event in April. Ticket and auction sales benefit revitalization projects around town.
- J.C. Campbell & Co. Mercantile: Shop 13 different vendors offering everything from clothes to antiques to beauty products.
- <u>Oliver Pecan Co.</u>: The result of 40,000 pecan trees and a lot of determination. Stop in to shop for pecans, candy, pies, and more.
- <u>San Saba County Historical Museum</u>: This volunteer-operated museum houses relics from a bygone era collected from all over San Saba Country.
- <u>Gorman Falls</u>: Colorado Bend State Park is located approximately 24 miles southeast of San Saba. Stop to take a hike to Gorman Falls and cool off in its refreshing waters.
- <u>Hotel San Saba</u>: Although I had the incredible opportunity to privately tour this three-story hotel, it's currently under construction and not open to the public. I must say, it's absolutely stunning and scheduled to open sometime in 2019, so stay tuned!
- <u>Sip and Stroll</u>: Leisurely walk the streets of San Saba, enjoy wine from local vineyards, and take in the sights and sounds of the holidays during this annual event.

Set Your Sights on San Saba

Get back to the basics, and enjoy the tranquility and rich history of this small Hill Country town just a short drive from Austin. Whether you're looking for a day trip destination or weekend getaway, you can't go wrong by heading to The Pecan Capital of the World. It's truly more than you can imagine.