



Big Secret BIG BEND

The Chisos Mountains and Chihuahuan Desert – Tucked like a hidden treasure into a sweeping turn of the Rio Grande in far West Texas, Big Bend National Park is one of the least visited and most pristine wilderness areas in North America. Encompassing more than 800,000 acres, the park includes three distinct environments: the Chihuahuan Desert, the Chisos Mountains, and snaking river canyons.

On this adventure you dig deeply into the region's cultural and natural history with your naturalist guide, hiking sandy washes, exploring the dramatic limestone formations of Boquillas and Santa Elena canyons, walking cottonwood-lined riverbanks, hiking mountain trails, watching for painted buntings and vermilion flycatchers, and listening for the distant howl of coyotes. Your lodge inside the park makes a great base of exploration and allows you to really settle in. Come with us to explore this off-the-beaten-path treasure of the U.S. National Park system.



BIG BEND IS A REMARKABLE PARK, TRULY WORTH EXPLORING.
-JARED DIAL, NPCA TRAVEL MANAGER



PRICING & DETAILS

\$3,675 per person
double occupancy

Single Supplement: \$730

Trip Length: 7 days, 7 nights

Group Size: 8-16

2020 Trip Dates
Nov 6 - Nov 13



WHAT'S INCLUDED IN THE PRICE

Trip price includes all lodging, meals, ground transportation, guide services and activities as described in this itinerary. An end-of-trip gratuity for your guide is at your discretion. Ask your Travel Advisor for full terms and conditions

JOURNEY HIGHLIGHTS

Desert nature: The vast Chihuahuan Desert is one of the most biologically diverse arid regions in the world, thanks in part to elevations that range from 1,000 to over 10,000 feet.

Island mountains: Birds, bears, deer, javelina, lizards, and other wildlife find refuge in the forested Chisos Mountains.

Buffalo Soldiers: Visit the restored cavalry post where the African-American "Buffalo Soldiers" were stationed after the Civil War.

Seasonal highlights: Spring brings a flow of neotropical migrant birds, and wildflowers bloom in fall after the monsoons have passed.

YOUR *Itinerary*

YOUR JOURNEY BEGINS / ENDS:
EL PASO, TEXAS

Arrive in El Paso, Texas, any time prior to Day 1 of your Small Group Adventure. We are happy to help arrange your pre-trip hotel, and can also arrange pre- or post-trip extensions.

DAY 1 / EL PASO, FORT DAVIS Your guide picks you up at a designated hotel, and you get to know your traveling companions on the 200-mile drive to the tiny town of Fort Davis, situated at an elevation of nearly 5,000 feet in the Davis Mountains. The route travels through the wide-open ranching country of West Texas.

Our first stop in Fort Davis will be the McDonald Observatory. This is one of the world's leading centers for astronomical research, teaching, and public education and outreach—and is the force behind the "StarDate" radio program on National Public Radio. We'll see what programs are available, and at the very least enjoy displays in the Visitors Center, and examine the observatory's 362-inch Hobby-Eberly Telescope.

It's a short hop from the observatory to our historic accommodations right in Fort Davis. This evening you will get an enticing sense of the adventure to come at a welcome dinner and orientation at the hotel. *Veranda Historic Inn*

DAY 2 / BIG BEND NATIONAL PARK The day begins with a visit to Fort Davis National Historic Site, an extensively restored West Texas cavalry post where African-American soldiers were stationed. Named "Buffalo Soldiers" by the Cheyenne and Comanche Indians, the soldiers played a critical role in western history as they subdued Mexican revolutionaries, fought Indians, chased outlaws, and caught rustlers. Until the early 1890s, Buffalo Soldiers constituted nearly 20 percent of all cavalry forces on the American Frontier.

If there's time, we'll stop at the Museum of the Big Bend before our drive through Persimmon Gap into the

hauntingly beautiful topography of Big Bend National Park. Imagine a prominent landscape where rugged mountains, deep river canyons, and stretching desert vistas are all within view—a mosaic of purples, blues, violets, deep reds, and yellows warmed by the soothing desert air. One of the park's finest features

is its silence; it's hard to find a quieter place on the planet. We stop at the Panther Junction Visitor Center for an overview, then settle into our accommodations in Chisos Basin at the heart of the park. *Chisos Mountain Lodge*

DAY 3 / BIG BEND NATIONAL PARK First thing this morning we venture out to Big Bend's legendary Rio Grande Village area, where we hike amid huge cottonwood trees lining the river corridor. This part of the river is home to a rare desert fish once thought to be extinct, known as the Big Bend gambusia. A picnic lunch and siesta in a shady campground leave us refreshed and ready to explore the dramatic cliffs of Boquillas Canyon. We'll also try to visit the old homestead oasis of Dugout Wells, which was once the cultural and social center of the area, and had one of the few schools. *Chisos Mountain Lodge*

DAY 4 / BIG BEND NATIONAL PARK There's time to enjoy a leisurely breakfast this morning before our hike in the Chisos Basin. The Chisos Mountains are an "island" mountain range—a fascinating forest oasis rising above the landscape sheltering unique flora and fauna. Extensive shrubs at these higher elevations provide habitat for the Sierra del Carmen white-tailed deer, as well as mountain lion and bobcat. Watch for other wildlife uniquely adapted to the region, including mule deer, coyotes, javelina, Big Bend geckos, and Texas horned lizards.

An early dinner leaves time for those who wish to stroll into the desert to stargaze and listen for coyotes and common poorwills. *Chisos Mountain Lodge*

DAY 5 / BIG BEND NATIONAL PARK A variety of experiences await today, beginning with a hike along the massive





walls of Santa Elena Canyon, a magnificent limestone gorge carved by the Rio Grande. This afternoon we take a "guide's choice" hike, possibly to Cattail Falls. This trail leads to a surprise waterfall, which sometimes is only a trickle, but nevertheless forms a pool, with ferns growing from rocks.

For a special treat this evening, we have dinner at the Starlight Theatre, a restaurant and bar in the small town of Terlingua at the edge of the park. This lively restaurant has great food and there's often live music. Enjoy the shifting dusk colors or evening's first stars as we return to the hotel. *Chisos Mountain Lodge*

DAY 6 / BIG BEND AND MARFA A final early morning hike in the Chisos Basin sets the panoramic views of the Chihuahuan Desert into your memory.

Bidding adios to Big Bend, we take the scenic route through Big Bend Ranch State Park on the way to Marfa. Our guide breaks up the 2.5-hour drive with short walks and stops at scenic viewpoints, and we arrive at our historic hotel in time to freshen up. Tonight we celebrate the trip with a festive farewell dinner. *Hotel Paisano*

DAY 7 / EL PASO FOR DEPARTURES HOME We'll head for the El Paso airport after breakfast, setting our lasting memories and unforgettable impressions of the wild and surprising Big Bend National Park. If you think you might not be ready to leave this magical region, we invite you to extend your stay on our fully guided El Paso Loop, which includes three more parks! (See page 4 for details.)




ENERGY INDEX

No Sweat ————— Nice & Active ————— High Five



We will spend 4 to 6 hours each day outdoors in warm temperatures and an arid climate. Temperatures average 75f during the day at 56f at night in the Big Bend region.

We will accomdate activity levels for travelers on this trip as needed

-  **No Sweat** – 1 to 2 miles of walking or hiking per day, plus easy activities
-  **Nice & Active** – 2 to 4 miles of hiking or walking per day, plus physically active exploration
-  **High Five!** – 5 to 12 miles of hiking per day, plus possible peak bagging or other action-oriented fun

LODGING

Rest easy on this journey in small-town historic hotels and comfortable park lodging.



VERANDA HISTORIC INN, FORT DAVIS

Occupying most of a town block (for only ten rooms), the adobe inn's walled gardens and quiet courtyards welcome you to slow down and relax. (Apr. 27 trip)



CHISOS MOUNTAIN LODGE, BIG BEND NATIONAL PARK

Located in the Chisos Mountains, this is the only lodging in the park. The laid-back atmosphere is an invitation to enjoy life outdoors.



HOTEL PAISANO, MARFA

This "Texas cattleman's elegant" hotel originally opened in 1930. It served as the headquarters for James Dean, Elizabeth Taylor, and Rock Hudson in 1955, during the filming of *Giant*, directed by George Stevens.

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WHAT TO EXPECT & HOW TO PREPARE

Q. What will the weather be like?

A. In both the spring and fall, expect midday temperatures in the low to high 80s, with lows in the 50s to 60s. Some days can feel pretty hot, so keep your water bottle handy.

Q. Will I need hiking boots?

A. Some of the trails can be rough and uneven, and many of the trails you'll be on gain and lose elevation, so we recommend lightweight hiking boots with good ankle support. There will be cactus, so sandals (even sport sandals) aren't a good choice.

Q. Should I bring a day pack?

A. Yes. In this hot, dry climate you'll want to always have a water bottle or hydration pack within reach. You'll also want to carry sunscreen, clothing layers, and binoculars.

Q. Is this trip appropriate for children?

A. This isn't the best trip for young children because days can be long, the hiking can be somewhat demanding, and there is a fair amount of driving time to cover distances. However if you have teenagers interested in bird-watching, wildlife-viewing, and hiking, they would be most welcome.

Note: Please refer to the OBP Terms and Conditions, which apply to all bookings.

HOW TO RESERVE YOUR SPOT To join this Small Group Adventure, call Off the Beaten Path at (800) 445-2995 or email travel@offthebeatenpath.com. One of our experienced Travel Advisors will walk you through the entire process and forward confirmation materials to you within one week.

WHAT'S INCLUDED IN THE PRICE Trip price includes all lodging, meals, ground transportation, guide services and activities as described in this itinerary (optional activities and meals on your own are not included). An end-of-trip gratuity for your guide is at your discretion. Ask your Travel Advisor for full terms and conditions.

PAYMENT SCHEDULE FOR YOUR GROUP JOURNEY A \$500 non-refundable (but transferable) deposit secures space for each traveler. This deposit is applied to the trip price and can be applied to travel for a two-year period. Final payment is due 90 days prior to departure.

PLANNING YOUR AIR TRAVEL If you'd like, our friends at Travel Cafe can help you book the flights into and out of the gateway cities for your trip. Call Travel Cafe directly at (800) 247-3538 and tell them you'll be traveling with us. If your journey includes any regional air travel, Off the Beaten Path will book your on-trip air, to be paid with your final invoice.

TRAVEL INSURANCE No one expects to have to cancel a trip, but we encourage our clients to buy trip interruption/cancellation insurance just in case. Coverage protects you from losing your deposit and having to pay cancellation fees. Trip insurance can be purchased directly through Off the Beaten Path when you reserve your journey. Ask your Travel Advisor for more details.

CANCELLATIONS AND REFUNDS Cancellation fees are necessary to cover losses associated with nonrefundable advance payments made on your behalf and other costs incurred in developing the trip. If you are unable to begin your trip, refunds are based on OBP's Terms and Conditions, and the date of written notice. See offthebeatenpath.com, or ask your Travel Advisor for detailed refund information.

LATE BOOKINGS Trip reservations made within 30 days of departure may be subject to additional fees to allow for the cost of expediting trip materials.

EXTEND YOUR Stay

If you have time for further explorations before or after your trip, we hope you'll join us on our fully guided El Paso Loop extension, that includes three additional national parklands: Carlsbad National Park, Guadalupe Mountains National Park, and White Sands National Monument. Ask your Travel Advisor for 2019 dates and pricing.

EL PASO LOOP HIGHLIGHTS

Historic Hotels: Retreat to historic lodges at the end of each day. The Trinity Hotel, in the small town of Carlsbad, was built in 1892 as the First National Bank Building. The 36-room Hotel

El Capitan in Van Horn was built in 1930 and restored in 2007.

Carlsbad Caverns: Watch thousands of Mexican free-tailed bats swirl out of the caverns into the dusky sky. The spectacular flight begins with a few bats fluttering out of the cave entrance, and quickly builds to a thick whirlwind of the flying mammals spiraling up into the darkening sky.

Guadalupe Mountains National Park: Discover the Permian fossil reefs, faults, peaks, and unique flora and fauna of these mountains that rise from the desert floor.

White Sands National Monument: Constantly changing, brilliant, snow-white gypsum sand dunes make up the world's largest gypsum dune field.

Come Away with Us!

For more information or to reserve your space today, email conservation@houstonzoo.org or call 713-533-6745



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