

# Waco... *who knew?*

BY PAMELA HAMMONDS

In the heart of Texas you'll find a city often overlooked, while its swankier cousins—Dallas, Fort Worth, Houston and San Antonio—draw folks with their big city dazzle. Even offbeat sister city Austin attracts music aficionados, foodies and outdoor enthusiasts. But Waco is home to more than just Baylor University and HGTV darlings Chip and Joanna Gaines of “Fixer Upper” fame. Discover why Waco is the perfect weekend retreat or mini vacation getaway for families across Texas.



## WHO KNEW THE ZOO WAS SO CHARMING?

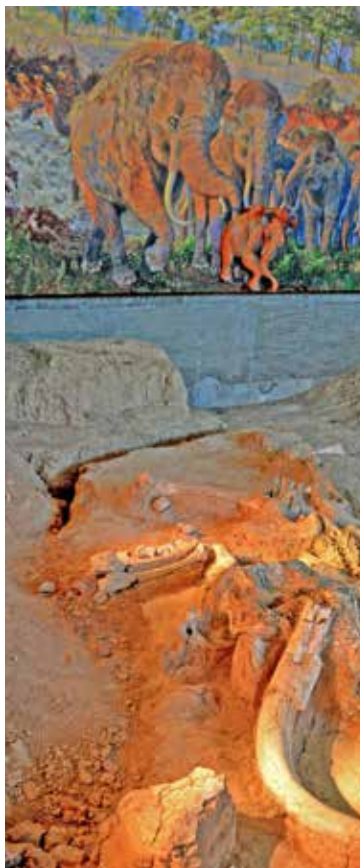
Stroll along the paths of Cameron Park Zoo for a delightful time amid animals both exotic and adorable. Well-maintained habitats and walkways wide enough for maneuvering a double stroller or a rented zoo wagon

feature plenty of welcomed shade. Insider tip: Get there when the zoo opens and enjoy watching the animals eat breakfast. You'll find the zoo staff engaging and the animals delightful, especially if you get there before it's too hot. Best of all, the zoo is absent of over-commercialization, so you don't have to tell your kiddos no at every turn when encountering vendors selling the latest animal-themed swag. [CameronParkZoo.com](http://CameronParkZoo.com)

## WHO KNEW PREHISTORIC BEASTS ROAMED WACO?

In 1978, two teenage boys were hiking in the woods when they came across a half-buried bone. A really big bone. Turns out it was the femur of a mammoth. Turns out that mammoth had nearly two dozen mammoth buddies with him that tragic day (plus a saber tooth cat and a camel! Yes, a camel!) when they became trapped in what was probably wet clay and then a flood.

Today the Waco Mammoth Site features a dig shelter that has preserved the original find, allowing visitors to see what's been heralded as ‘the nation's first and only recorded discovery of a nursery herd of Pleisto-



## Other must-see sites

- Texas Ranger Hall of Fame & Museum; [TexasRanger.org](http://TexasRanger.org)
- Texas Sports Hall of Fame; [TSHOF.org](http://TSHOF.org)
- Free spray parks at several local Waco parks; [Waco-Texas.com](http://Waco-Texas.com)
- The Hippodrome Theatre; [WacoHippodromeTheatre.com](http://WacoHippodromeTheatre.com)
- Spice Village for eclectic shopping; [SpiceWaco.com](http://SpiceWaco.com)
- Bosque River Stage for free open-air concerts each Thursday in June; [BosqueRiverStage.com](http://BosqueRiverStage.com)

cene mammoths.' To see the dig replicated and a cast of mammoth tusks, head to the Mayborn Museum on the Baylor University campus. [WacoMammoth.com](http://WacoMammoth.com)

## WHO KNEW A UNIVERSITY HAD SUCH A GREAT AFFECTION FOR KIDS?

Baylor University is pretty proud of their new football stadium, but adjacent to the Bears' field is a treasure every parent of a pre-college-age kid should know about. The Mayborn Museum houses room after room of hands-on science-themed activities for children of all ages, plus historic displays including a late-1800s outdoor village. Who wouldn't love to pump water from a real well or ring the bell in the old church?

Indoors you'll discover

casts of the mammoth bones and even a whale skull. Be sure to check out the revolving exhibit in the Jeanes Discovery Center, matey! This summer they'll feature SHIPWRECK! Pirates & Treasure with over 500 authentic artefacts plus hands-on science and technology. [MaybornMuseum.com](http://MaybornMuseum.com)

## WHO KNEW THE DR PEPPER MUSEUM HAD AN ARTESIAN WELL?

Most Texans know their favorite soft drink has Waco roots and was founded by a pharmacist, but who knew the building where it was bottled has a brick-lined well right in the floor? Before the city had a dedicated water system, many buildings supplied their own water by pumping from an interior well.



You'll see this and three floors of Dr Pepper history when you tour the museum. Don't skip the third floor, where you'll find oodles of movie memorabilia and old bottles of the soft drink used in dozens of films over the decades. #PhotoOp

Be sure to stop by the soda fountain for a drink or a float but, please, don't expect to sample the product. The museum is a nonprofit founded to commemorate the drink's 100th birthday and does not give out free sips. [DrPepperMuseum.com](http://DrPepperMuseum.com)

**WHO KNEW YOU COULD STAY CONNECTED WITHOUT TECHNOLOGY?**

If you are tired of telling your kids to put down the iPad or worry their fingers will turn to nubs from too much texting, you'll absolutely embrace Homestead Heritage. Plan to spend several hours, if not all day,

at this Christian agriculture settlement that embraces a lifestyle focused on family and friends. In a nutshell—they were sustainable before sustainability was cool. Resident Nathan Tittley hopes visitors are inspired to grow closer to each other. "Instead of simply letting others observe how we live, we've created an outlet for people to learn from us as well," Nathan said. The over 500-acre property features around 40 homesteads, locally-sourced organic Café Homestead, and workshops for observing gifted craftsmen (pottery, woodworking, weaving, blacksmithing, etc.) and for purchasing wares created onsite. Plus you can buy food grown on the land and cheese made in an underground smokehouse.

Marvel at the old east-coast barns rescued from certain demolition

and reassembled here. If you want one put on your property, their Historic Timberframes team will be happy to oblige. Or if you'd like to learn a craft, such as woodworking or basket weaving, they'll be happy to teach you. Be sure to check out their newest Community Supported Agriculture project: aquaponics—where fish poo and water feed the plants that in turn filter the water for the fish. Just one of many symbiotic relationships you'll find at Homestead Heritage—a place that's truly a must-see during any trip to Waco; closed on Sundays.

Before you leave the settlement, take the road a bit deeper into the woods to Brazos Bluffs Ranch for hiking, canoeing or horseback riding. The Brazos River's bluffs provide an incredible view of the countryside. [Homestead-Heritage.com](http://Homestead-Heritage.com), [SustainLife.org](http://SustainLife.org) and [BrazosBluffsRanch.com](http://BrazosBluffsRanch.com)

**WHO KNEW WACO'S OUTDOOR FARMERS' MARKET WAS SO ENTERTAINING?**

Every Saturday, rain or shine, hot or cold, Waconians head downtown to their local farmers' market by the river for the freshest breads, fruits and veggies as well as artisan wares including goat milk soap, crafts and artwork. Folks form a line early for the made-to-order

**Got a hungry belly?**

Feed the family without spending a fortune at Vitek's BBQ. Order a Gut Pak—basically a Frito Pie with barbeque not chili—or a sandwich and sides like the triple cheese macaroni. Eat in, take it to-go or dine al fresco like the college kids do on picnic tables under the patio. [VitekBBQ.com](http://VitekBBQ.com)

omelets, but no one seems to mind—local musicians provide free entertainment. Sample your wares on picnic tables and, if you want to burn off some steam, grab a hula-hoop and show the young folks how it's done. [WacoDowntownFarmers-Market.com](http://WacoDowntownFarmers-Market.com) ///



**Hotel Indigo Waco is the grooviest**

In downtown Waco and convenient to every place you'll want to visit, Hotel Indigo provides a hip alternative to the usual overnight options. You'll find Hotel Indigo a refreshing place to kick back and relax after a long day of touring [Waco. IHG.com/HotelIndigo](http://Waco.IHG.com/HotelIndigo)

