

East Texas

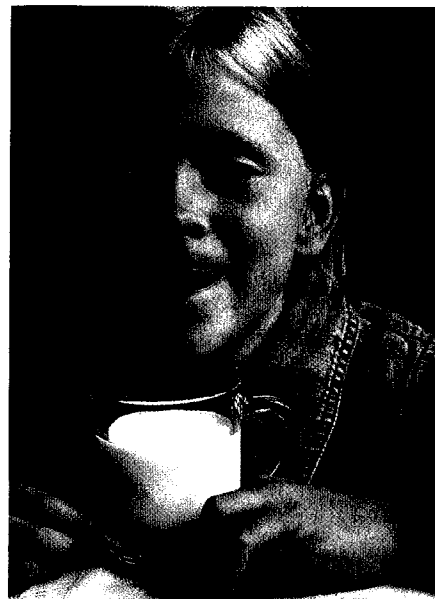
Nature's a cappella chorus washes over Caddo Lake's hallowed setting

Slipping through Stumpy Slough in a pontoon boat at sunset, it's easy to get lost in time. The silence is big ... then there's the first flop of a fish, followed by frogs and birds chiming in to create a natural symphony that feels more restful to the soul than a chorus of "Amazing Grace." The soaring, moss-draped cypress trees of **Caddo Lake** frame often narrow boat roads filled with hidden treasures—a fisherman's dream, a bird lover's paradise, a wildlife enthusiast's nirvana and a weary traveler's respite.

Caddo Lake is known for many things—as the only natural lake in Texas, it boasts 71 species of fish and 42 miles of boat roads, or passages—but the real notoriety should come from the way it makes you feel. Be sure to spend time on the water—whether you rent a kayak or join fellow visitors on a paddle-boat tour. Slowly glide through the watery maze and soak it all in. Look high—at the feathery moss on the trees—and low—at the glistening lily pads and the prehistoric bumps on an alligator. Spend an afternoon casting a line to discover what lies beneath still waters. When night falls, gather around a fire pit, watch the fireflies and be serenaded by owls.

Pitch a tent, rent a cabin or park your RV at **Caddo Lake State Park** (www.tpwd.state.tx.us). Explore the hiking and nature trails. The easy bank access—complete with lakeside benches—is great for fishing or reading the latest bestseller. Dotted along the edge of the lake, you'll find inviting lodging at places like **MoonShadows Hideaway**, **Hodge Podge Cottages** and **Spatterdock Guest Houses**, among others, (www.caddolake.org, www.caddolake.info).

Lake Fork has many claims to fame as well, and among them is the family-owned **Fisherman's Cove Marina** in Alba. Out on the docks and around the campfires, fish tales (and tails) abound, and anglers from around the country readily share tips and tricks on how to catch the big one. After a day on the water, you don't have to travel far to



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find gourmet and down-home dishes. Just stop in the Cove's award-winning restaurant for a perfectly cooked steak, the lobster pasta special or Cajun fried catfish. Then amble outside to the fire, sit a spell and share a fish story or two before turning in for the night. (www.fishermanscovelakefork.com)

SEASONAL WONDERS

Any time of year is a good time to visit East Texas, but here are some seasonal highlights you won't want to miss:

Mrs. Lee's Daffodil Garden, Gladewater, early spring. A four-mile trail through 800 acres of golden blooms. (903) 845-5780, www.daffodilgarden.com

Azalea Trail, Nacogdoches, spring, 1-888-653-3788, www.nacogdochesazaleas.com

Splash Kingdom Family Waterpark, Canton. Christian-themed, family-oriented summer fun. (903) 567-0044, www.splashkingdomwaterpark.com

Tomato Fest, Jacksonville, June, 1-800-376-2217, www.jacksonvilletexas.com

Heritage Syrup Festival, Henderson, November, (903) 657-4303, www.depotmuseum.com/syrup

Santa Land: The Magic Forest, Tyler, November and December. Christmas trail of lights illuminated by more than 2.5 million glowing spheres. (903) 882-1518, www.santalantexas.com

SCRUMPTIOUS STOPS

Mamaw's Fried Pies, Whitehouse. 29 flavors of fried wonderfulness. Try the cherry cheesecake. (903) 871-8100,

www.mamawsfriedpies.com

Four Winds Steakhouse, Wills Point. Excellent food in a warm, refined-ranch atmosphere. (903) 873-2225, www.fourwindssteakhouse.com

Golden Gals' Candy Company, Mount Pleasant. Fudge, cakes and a wall of jellybeans. 1-888-318-4171, www.goldengalscandy.com

Jersey Girls Milk Company, Winnsboro. Who knew "unpasteurized" could taste so good! (903) 365-2449, www.jerseygirlsmilk.com

Pickett House at Heritage Village, Woodville. Boarding-house-style dining on some serious Southern vittles. 1-800-323-0389, www.heritage-village.org

Laura's Cheesecake & Bakery, Mount Pleasant. The creamiest cheesecake ever is found in a wonderful store that also serves lunch. 1-800-252-8727, www.laurascheesecakes.com

Janie's Cakes, Tyler. Melt-in-your-mouth good. Be sure to try the biscotti. 1-866-452-6437, www.janiescakes.com

Texas Tea Room & Grill, Quitman. Good eating and shopping under one roof. (903) 763-5154

KAREN NEJTEK

Production Manager

TOP: There's nothing like a cold glass of milk from Winnsboro's Jersey Girls Milk Company.
BOTTOM: Dip a paddle and leisurely float under mossy canopies on magical Caddo Lake.



COURTESY TEXAS PARKS AND WILDLIFE DEPARTMENT