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Goliad

Everyone remembers "remember the Alamo," but let's not forget the second part of that legendary Texan battle cry: "remember Goliad." Goliad's place in Texas history is cemented forever and remains one of the state's great historic towns. On Palm Sunday, way back in 1836, more than 300 Texan soldiers were executed on the orders of Mexican General, Santa Anna. The tragedy reverberated throughout the state and fueled the pivotal Texan victory six weeks later at the Battle of San Jacinto.

For those hoping to retrace the steps of old Texas, the very fort where the soldiers spent their final days is still standing. That's right. It's not a sign in the ground or a plaque; it's not a reconstruction of what the fort looked like. It's the actual, real-deal Presidio La Bahía, restored to the way it looked when it was populated with Texan freedom fighters.

Goliad is the third-oldest town in Texas and also happens to be the birthplace of Texas ranching. Just around an hour's drive away from San Antonio, Austin, Houston, and Corpus Christi, there's no excuse not to make room one weekend for a stay in one of the Lone Star State's most important cities. And if you've got some kids learning about Texas history in school, the real thing is always going to capture their attention better than a textbook.

History You Can Step Inside

Most of Texas' storied history has to be read in a book or on a historical marker. But in Goliad, you can walk into the actual buildings.

Presidio La Bahía is the only fully restored Spanish presidio this side of the Mississippi, established at its spot in 1749. It's a fully walkable, Spanish colonial fort complete with a gorgeous chapel and artifacts from the period. Right next door to the presidio—sharing the same parking lot, in fact—is the Zaragoza Birthplace State Historic Site. This small museum marks the spot where Mexican General, Ignacio Zaragoza, was born. What's so important about Zaragoza, you might be wondering? The victory he led against the French at the Battle of Puebla occurred on May 5th. Yes, that May 5th, known to most as Cinco de Mayo.

Along the San Antonio River, you'll find the Goliad State Park & Historic Site, which is home to the Mission Espíritu Santo, a Spanish Colonial mission that the Presidio La Bahía was meant to protect. This mission once ran 40,000 head of cattle and earned Goliad its reputation as a ranching town. While the mission has a stark beauty from the outside, the interior is a serene combination of spirituality and aesthetics—the kind that's become increasingly rare in our modern age.

Trees Growing Out of the Road

Downtown Goliad fits more than forty historic buildings into a nine-block district—with the city's restored 19th-century courthouse as the centerpiece—giving you plenty of reason to park your car and explore on foot. One of those old-town quirks that you won't find in the suburbs is that some streets appear to have oak trees growing out of the middle of them. That's because when it came time to pave the roads, they simply paved around them rather than attempt to move the trees or wind the road. Sure, it makes driving a little trickier, but you can't put a price on charm. Legend has it that the ladies of Goliad were the ones who prevented the trees from being cut down, going so far as to chain themselves to the trees. That's dedication.

Along the downtown square, you'll find all sorts of antique stores and boutiques that carry one-of-a-kind items. If you're looking to bring home a souvenir, this is the way to do it. Be sure to stop by the Market House Museum if you want a walking tour map or want to check out a local history collection.

The River Runs Right Through It

One look at the Goliad Paddling Trail and it'll become all too clear why the Spanish chose here to settle. The trail is six miles along the beautiful San Antonio River, complete with three landing sites and the odd heron hanging out along the bank. If you're more into hiking than paddling, make your way to the Angel of Goliad Hike and Bike Trail, which runs two and a half paved miles from downtown along the San Antonio River, all the way to the state park. It's a great way to see much of what Goliad is known for while getting in those elusive 10,000 steps.

Pick the Right Weekend for You

Goliad hosts Market Days on the square the second Saturday of every month, making it an easy event to plan your trip around. Other events are a bit more exclusive include the battle reenactments at the Presidio La Bahía, an October bike ride past the missions, and a holiday parade in which Santa comes to town riding a longhorn steer. In Texas, we just wouldn't find a reindeer all that impressive.