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Things to Do in Goliad

When you get home from a weekend in Goliad, you'll bring a little bit of it with you. We're not talking about souvenirs—though you're sure to bring home a few of those too—but rather the feelings that Goliad elicits. When you're walking through the fort where more than 300 ill-fated soldiers called home, when you're marveling at the interior of a Spanish Colonial mission, or when you're paddling down the graceful San Antonio River, there's a certain gravity to it all. An emotional weight that doesn't feel overbearing, but, rather, strengthening. You'll thank those big and bright stars that a touchstone to this state's swashbuckling history is still standing, and its name is the city of Goliad.

Walk Through the Presidio La Bahía

When was the last time you walked through a real 19th-century military fort? Whether your answer is "never," "too long," or "I'm in one right now," the next time should be the Presidio La Bahía in Goliad. It's the only fully restored Spanish presidio (Spanish for "fort") west of the Mississippi River. The presidio is so old, in fact, that it was a working fort for almost 100 years before the event that made it famous. The event, you ask? On March 27, 1836, Colonel Fannin and his soldiers were taken captive by the Mexican army and executed, giving the Texas army the rallying cry it needed to win the Battle of San Jacinto.

While the men are gone, the fort remains. It's been fully restored to match its 1836 appearance, with both it, the grounds, and the Our Lady of Loreto Chapel open to the public year-round. Walking through the area gives you an immense sense of the passage of time and the echo of our choices. If you have children in school, visiting the fort is a way to communicate the excitement and majesty of Texas history in a way that a textbook can't. If you can swing it, plan your trip in March, as that's when living historians take over the site for the Goliad Massacre & Living History Program, which includes a battle reenactment, camp demonstrations, and a candlelight tour after dark.

Explore Goliad State Park and Mission Espíritu Santo

Goliad State Park & Historic Site sits alongside the San Antonio River and is where you'll find the Mission Nuestra Señora del Espíritu Santo de Zúñiga. Yes, that's a lot of words, but not nearly as many as the mission had head of cattle, which reached up to 40,000 at one point. For all the military history in Goliad, it's this feat that also made the town known far and wide as the birthplace of Texas ranching. The mission, featuring an elegant interior of colors, designs, and figurines, was restored in the 1930s by the Civilian Conservation Corps. Inside, you'll also find exhibits with artifacts from the daily life of the missionaries and Native Americans who once lived there.

All around the mission are wooded campgrounds along the San Antonio River. The history of the location aside, the park is a spot year-round for fishing in the river, picnicking under the oak trees, and hikers taking on the Aranama Trail. If your visit has gotten you in the mission mood, about four miles away is another one: the Mission Nuestra Señora del Rosario. Unlike with the Mission Espíritu Santo, only the ruins remain of the Mission Nuestra Señora del Rosario.

Paddle the Goliad Paddling Trail

The San Antonio River has carved a deep, shady channel through the sandy plains of Goliad. While you can go fishing in the river and hiking beside it, the best view is from within. The Goliad Paddling Trail runs six miles through town with a gentle current conducive to beginners and those just looking to relax. Far from the big city, there are long stretches where the only sound you'll hear is your paddle hitting the water. From your boat, you'll get an unbeatable view of the lush foliage and mature oak trees, as well as local wildlife like herons and kingfishers.

Make Your Way Down the Angel of Goliad Trail

In the afternoon, before dinner, maybe you'd like to burn off a few calories while still experiencing the town. Way better than the treadmill in your hotel, the Angel of Goliad Hike and Bike Trail is about two and a half paved miles, starting at a trailhead near the courthouse square and going all the way to Goliad State Park. Along the way are quaint wooden bridges and towering oak trees. The trail is named after Francita Alavéz, known better as the Angel of Goliad. She earned this name after intervening in the massacre at Goliad and saving a few men from being among the executed. Her statue stands south of the park, looking over the area with a gesture of mercy.

Spend a Morning at the Courthouse Square

Goliad's historic downtown district is listed on the National Register of Historic Places, and deservedly so. It has more than forty historic buildings still standing, all within nine walkable blocks, with the 1894 county courthouse as the centerpiece. The courthouse was restored in 2003 and the public is free to walk its storied halls.

Another can't miss stop at the square is the Market House Museum, which not only provides you with a handy walking map for the rest of your day, but has its own collection of historic maps, a 19th-century broom factory, and an antique static electricity generator. You don't see those every day.

And if you're getting around by car, you might have noticed that you had to drive around an oak tree or two. No, you're not hallucinating. Those oak trees that look like they're growing straight out of the pavement were actually there before the road. Paving around them was just easier on the back than moving them and easier on the soul than cutting them down.

Do Some Shopping at Goliad Market Days

On the second Saturday of every month, the courthouse square fills up with one of the biggest open-air markets in Texas. With all the vendors selling homemade foods, crafts, and clothing, you'll have a hard time deciding where to throw down your cash. If you miss Market Days, don't fret. The many boutiques and antique stores open year-round at the square are more than enough to satiate your desire to bring home a one-of-a-kind souvenir or check off a few people on your Christmas list.

Hit the Links at the Goliad Golf Club

If you're one of those people who pack your clubs before your suitcase, you'll be happy to know about the Goliad Golf Club. It's a walkable nine-hole course that's been open since 1971. And guess what? There's not a single bunker on the entire course. Sure, there's still a lot of mature oak trees and water, but at least those hazards are pretty to look at.