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Amarillo, Texas—Cadillacs, Canyons & Cowboys

Palo Duro Canyon has been described as a 120-mile-long, 800-foot-deep, copper-colored smile that dramatically illuminates the face of the Texas Panhandle.

Palo Duro Canyon is a geological surprise that has been 90 million years in the making. It's a surprise because it literally bushwhacks travelers as they make their way across the face of the Texas Plains. Just when you're convinced that the earth really is flat, there it is, "The Grand Canyon of Texas." And unlike other grand canyons, you can drive into Palo Duro Canyon on well-maintained, paved roads. You'll see anything from the largest RV's to mountain bikes meandering along the same trails used by the Comanche, Apache, buffalo hunters and early Spanish explorers.

Described as "A brilliantly colored sculpture of ravines, cliffs, hoodoos (fantastically shaped rock pillars), pinnacles, and mesas..." Palo Duro Canyon is more than just another pretty face. It teems with activity. The 26,000-acre Palo Duro Canyon State Park is a favorite recreation and camping area for nearly half a million visitors each year. There are campsites for RV's and tents, riding stables, picnic areas, miles of picturesque hiking and biking trails and an outstanding visitor center.

The epic outdoor theatre TEXAS, performed in a natural amphitheater on the floor of the canyon, last year welcomed visitors from around the world and every state in the nation. A cast of 80 brings TEXAS to life beneath a towering 600-foot canyon wall. The special effects are so real that guests have been known to reach for their umbrellas during the thunderstorm scene.

Lest you get the impression that Amarillo is a one-attraction town, let's saddle up and take the nickel tour of Amarillo and the area. The American Quarter Horse Association, headquartered in Amarillo, has created a truly world-class facility—The American Quarter Horse Hall of Fame and Museum. Entertaining exhibits, hands-on displays and captivating video productions showcase the rich heritage and modern activities of the American Quarter Horse.

Another venerable form of Texas transportation is the Cadillac. A unique tribute to this Texas icon welcomes travelers approaching Amarillo from the west on Interstate 40. It's the one-and-only Cadillac Ranch—ten Cadillacs buried nose down in a field at the same angle as the Cheops Pyramid. This "bumper crop" is one of the most asked-about attractions in town. Press inquiries about the Cadillac Ranch can be made to Marsh Enterprises at 806-372-5555; ask for Virginia Cave.

Speaking of unique attractions, the Big Texan Steak Ranch and Brewery certainly qualifies. Where else on the planet can you get a free 72-oz. steak? All you have to do is eat the whole thing with all the trimmings in less than an hour. Klondike Bill, a professional wrestler, downed

two steaks (that's nine pounds of Texas beef), and the record for the fastest consumption is 9 ½ minutes. And the Big Texan Brewery is the city's only microbrewery.

Other great Amarillo attractions include the Amarillo Botanical gardens, with a tropical plant conservatory; Amarillo Museum of Art with a wide variety of items in its collection; Don Harrington Discovery Center, a fine educational facility for all ages; Wonderland Amusement Art, routinely named a great amusement park experience; Splash Amarillo, the only water park in the Texas Panhandle; and new in 2012 is The RV Museum at Jack Sisemore Traveland, a unique museum with vintage RVs and motorcycles.

Canyon, Texas, just 20-minutes south of Amarillo on I-27, is the home of the largest history museum in Texas, the Panhandle-Plains Historical Museum. From dinosaurs to conquistadors, you'll find it in this showcase of western history. Exhibits include a life-size reconstruction of a typical frontier town of the 1880's, one of the southwest's finest collections of western art, an enchanting history of the oil and gas industry and much more.

Amarillo is a modern, sophisticated city that exudes a strong western heritage. Amarilloans have been entertained by the Amarillo Symphony since 1924 as well as the longest continuously-performing little theatre in the United States. The Amarillo Opera, the Lone Star Ballet and the Amarillo Museum of Art are also popular area attractions. The new Globe-News Center for the Performing Arts is home to many performing arts groups. Wonderland Amusement Park offers one of the best double-loop steel roller coasters in the country.

No trip to Texas would be complete without rubbing elbows with Texas cattlemen at the Amarillo Livestock Auction, the largest in Texas. In business since 1939, more than 100,000 head of cattle pass through the auction each year. Be sure your plans include lunch at the Stockyards Café—the steaks are delicious and the price is right.

After seeing the cowboys, take in the Kwahadi Museum of the American Indian and enjoy the world renowned Kwahadi Indian Dancers. They perform most summer weekends and have special performances in the fall and winter. The museum has a fine collection of Native American artifacts and art

You can even “get your kicks on Route 66.” Over one mile of antiques and collectibles await the visitor along Historic Route 66. Buildings that once housed theaters, cafes, and drug stores are now quaint antique, craft and specialty shops. Numerous unique dining experiences are also available at Route 66 eateries, on 6th Avenue between Georgia and Western.

For kicks of a different kind, Amarillo offers an array of exciting rodeos. The Working Ranch Cowboy Association, headquartered in Amarillo, hosts the World Championship Ranch Rodeo every November. This exciting event features genuine cowboys who actually earn their livings on real working ranches. It is this intriguing combination of the old and the new that has made Amarillo the most visited tourist center on the Texas High Plains. Pick any spot on the compass and there's something unique to the Amarillo area. You have a standing invitation “Step Into The Real Texas.”

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Visit the Amarillo CVC web site at www.visitamarillotx.com

