



This remote stretch of the Chihuahuan Desert offers countless options for the active-minded.

Terlingua, TX

TEXAS'S BEST-KEPT SECRET

Find both adventure and comfort in the middle of Big Bend country.

BETWEEN THE RATTLESNAKES AND cacti, the Big Bend region of Texas, along the Mexican border, is not for tenderfeet. But for those in search of great hiking, biking, and rafting amid scenery that rivals the Grand Canyon — but without the accompanying throngs — the slightly seedy throw-back town of Terlingua can't be beat.

Stay

Those seeking modern comfort will appreciate **Lajitas Resort**, which got a new lease on life a year ago when investors bought the 25,000-acre spread. The new owners cut



prices: A king now starts at \$149. Sandwiched between Big Bend Ranch State Park and Big Bend National Park, the resort offers lodging in the main hotel as well as in the historic cavalry post. Amenities include a golf course and a full-service spa (lajitas.com).

Bike

The highlight for bikers is the **Lajitas Trail System**. Pick up your "Trails and Tribulations" guide at Desert Sports, which rents bikes as well (\$35 per day; desertsportstx.com). There's also the 25-mile Contrabando Loop in Big Bend Ranch State Park.

Hike

The classic hike is **Mesa de Anguila**, a 15-mile loop that soars above the Rio Grande. The trailhead is behind the resort and starts with a 1.5-mile lung-busting climb — bring a topo map. For backcountry camping, get a \$10 overnight permit (nps.gov/bibe).

Float

Running the Rio Grande is sort of like paddling the Grand Canyon: The scenery is stunning, but you'll rarely find anything beyond Class II. The longest canyon in Big Bend is Boquillas; closer to Lajitas is the grandeur of Santa Elena Canyon. **Far Flung Outdoor Center** has everything you need except beer to knock off a half-day on the U.S.-Mexico border (\$66; farflungoutdoorcenter.com). —DAN OKO



GO BEFORE IT'S GONE

Isla Guadalupe

This island 210 miles south of San Diego is possibly the greatest place on Earth to view great white sharks in action — drop a cage in the water, add some chum, then jump in and watch the show thrash around you. But all of that is changing, and fast: The Mexican government last year banned chumming to protect the sharks. The irony is that no chum means fewer sharks, less tourist interest, and therefore more illegal fishing that the dive boats once held at bay. Outfitters are already alarmed by an increase in poaching and fear the great white population there is on the verge of collapse. "I'm cutting back on the number of trips," says Patric Douglas, owner of outfitter Shark Diver. "But they're filling up fast. People want to see these animals while they still have the chance" (\$3,100 for five days; sharkdiver.com).

Two Travel Sites to Try



WHOLETRAVEL.COM

This site lets you search for your next vacation in a new way: Plug in where you'd like to go, an experience you'd like to have, or an activity you'd like to do (for example, "relax," "fly-fish," "Rome," or even just "challenge"), and you'll pull up lists of sustainable lodging. Once you make your selection, Whole Travel directs you to the hotel or outfitter's website to book directly with them.

POINTS.COM

If you have managed to rack up reward points with companies like American Airlines and Marriott, this site will help you spend them. After signing up and registering your rewards accounts, you can trade points on the site's Global Points Exchange. So long as the values match, you could trade your backlog of Alaska Airlines points for a round-trip flight with Delta.