

**BONUS: Parenting Survival Guide N thru Q**

July / August 2007

# Texas Family

## Back To School

Are Your Kids Ready? (Are You?)

### Fall Fashions

The latest trends for kids & mom

### ¿Habla Español?

Reasons for raising bilingual children

### Home Field Advantage

The truth about homeschoolers and standardized tests

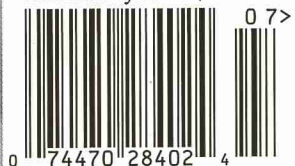
### Pitch Perfect

How, when and why to start musical instruction

### PLUS

Discovering SeaWorld San Antonio & the City of Beaumont

texasfamily.com/ \$4.95



The #1 Family Resource in Texas

## FAMILY FUN & TRAVEL

Just 25 miles from the Louisiana border, Beaumont is heavy on the Cajun flavor. The city's motto is "Texas With a Little Something Extra," and the newly revitalized city is living up to that slogan.

Beaumont came onto the scene in 1901, when the Lucas Gusher blew in at Spindletop, ushering in the energy age by proving that large enough quantities of oil were available to fuel industrial development and giving rise to major petroleum companies. As Spindletop gushed, opportunity seekers rushed to the area—the population grew from 2000 to 20,000 in a month. More recently, Beaumont has been in the public eye for the destruction caused by Hurricane Rita in 2005. The storm, however, proved to be a blessing in disguise for the area. Local hotels have undertaken \$10 million in renovations since Rita, and Beaumont is once again booming, attracting those seeking adventure and fun.

Ecotourism Is One of Beaumont's Many Charms

# Gators and Swamps and Snakes, Oh My!

## Get Out There

It's easy being, and seeing, green in Beaumont. Thrilling outdoor adventures await families. Kids will have a blast at Gator Country, home to Big Al, an ornery 13-footer certified as the largest captive alligator in Texas. Owner Gary Saurage delights crowds with his considerable bravery (and perhaps questionable sanity) as he hops into Big Al's pond and lures him out of the water with nothing more than a PVC pipe and a hunk of chicken. Dozens more gators lurk in the murky waters of the gator pond which is crisscrossed by an elevator boardwalk fitted with feeding lines. Visitors can dangle chunks of hot dog into the water and feed the alligators from a safe distance. For those who want to get more hands-on, there's a tank full of lovable footlong baby gators and dwarf crocodiles that even the smallest kids can safely hold. Don't leave Gator Country without taking a once-in-a-lifetime souvenir photo of your kids astride Mama Gator. Gary wrangles her out of the water and, with her giant jaw safely taped shut, allows visitors to hop on her back for a quick pic. For one week in August, kids can actually hatch the latest crop of gators. Call Gator Country at (409) 794-WILD or visit [www.gatorcountrytx.com](http://www.gatorcountrytx.com) for hours, dates,

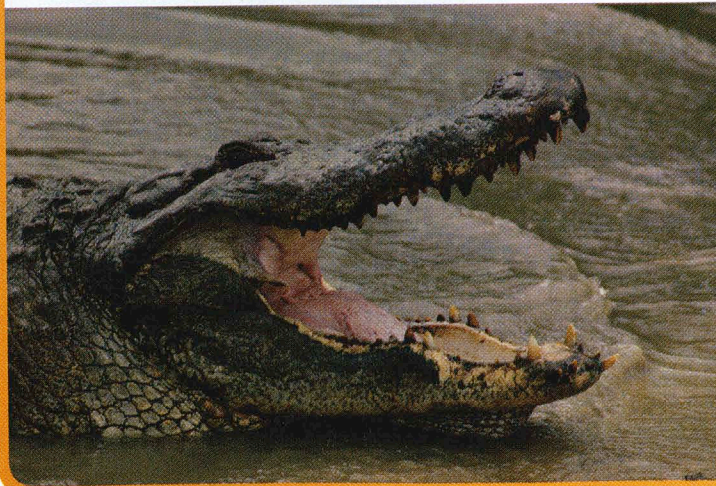


and birthday party information.

After interacting with the captive gators, head up the highway to Adventures 2000+ Swamp & River Tours to see them in the wild. Guide and biologist Eli Tate runs a first-class tour in a covered boat that slides along so silently the alligators don't even budge. You'll see snakes, eagles, a site formerly occupied by Native American cannibals, a ship graveyard, and stunning foliage. The swamp is surprisingly mosquito-free by day and the boat's canopy keeps the sun at bay during the almost 2-hour tour that crosses into Louisiana and back. Be prepared for top speeds of about 50 miles an hour during some stretches of the tour. Kids

under 13 must wear life jackets under Coast Guard regulations, and Eli will provide them, but most kids don't like the bulky jackets that pull over their heads. Invest in a slimmer vest-style life jacket at a sporting goods store ahead of time to avoid a big dust-up when it's time for kids to board the boat. For the very adventurous, check out Eli's nighttime "critter watch" tours and special Halloween after-dark cruises. Reservations are recommended and group rates are available. Call (409) 883-0856 or visit [www.swamprivertour.com](http://www.swamprivertour.com).

Big Thicket National Preserve, established by Congress in 1974, is remarkable as a "biological crossroads" where flora and fauna characteristic of many different regions converge. Southwest desert, central plains, eastern forest and southeastern swamp ecozones are all represented in the 97,000-acre Big Thicket. Coral snakes, armadillos, bobcats, coyotes, cuckoos, roadrunners, and four of the five kinds of carnivorous plants known to the U.S. can all be found in Big Thicket. Hiking, biking, backcountry camping, canoeing, horseback riding and fishing, group tours or self-guided tours are available. Call (409) 246-2337 for more information.



**Left, Big Al smiles for the camera; above, a visitor to Gator Country gets face time with a baby gator. Opposite page, Big Thicket National Preserve.**



## Around the Town

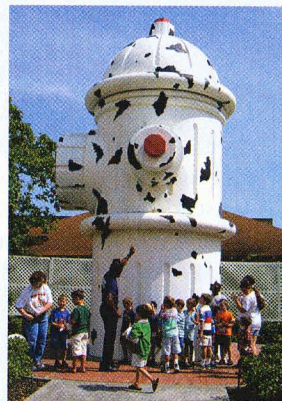
Come hungry, because Beaumont has no shortage of restaurants, from Cajun to seafood to BBQ. Try the Crockett Street Entertainment District, a quaint block lined with restaurants, closed to traffic, and within walking distance from the energy and art museums. Try Spindletop Restaurant on Crockett Street, which has something for everyone in the family, or look for the region's famous barbecue crabs.

Beaumont is an easy drive along I-10, 90 miles from Houston, 280 miles from San Antonio, and accessible by air or Amtrak. For visitor information and special packages, visit the Beaumont Convention & Visitors Bureau website at [www.beaumontcvb.com](http://www.beaumontcvb.com). ★

## Museum Capital of Texas

If your family is more of the indoor type, head to Beaumont for the vast selection and variety of museums. Beaumont has more museums per capita than any other city in Texas. Some family-friendly museums to try:

- **Texas Energy Museum:** Kids will be fascinated by the detailed dioramas of oil refineries and the "cinematic robots" that recount the history of the oil industry from Spindletop to present day. [www.texasenergymuseum.org](http://www.texasenergymuseum.org) or (409) 833-5100.
- **Babe Didrikson Zaharias Museum & Visitors Center:** This museum pays tribute to hometown hero and Olympic gold medalist Mildred "Babe" Didrikson Zaharias, considered the greatest female athlete ever. (409) 833-4622 or [www.babedidriksonzaharias.org/museum.cfm](http://www.babedidriksonzaharias.org/museum.cfm).
- **Museum of the Gulf Coast:** Located in nearby Port Arthur, the museum recounts the natural, geographical and cultural history of the Texas and Louisiana Gulf Coast and celebrates local legends like Janis Joplin and The Big Bopper. (409) 982-7000 or [www.museumofthegulfcoast.org](http://www.museumofthegulfcoast.org).
- **Art Museum of Southeast Texas:** AMSET features 1,000 works of art from the 19<sup>th</sup>, 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries with an emphasis on American art and a growing collection of regional folk art. (409) 832-3432 or [www.amset.org](http://www.amset.org).



## Upcoming Events

July 4  
Independence Day Celebration at Riverfront Park  
(409) 838-3435

July 28  
2<sup>nd</sup> Annual Orleans Street Jazz Festival  
(409) 838-3435

August 18  
Free Family Arts Day at the Art Museum of Southeast Texas  
(409) 832-3432

September 1  
5<sup>th</sup> Annual Labor Day Music Festival at Ford Park  
(409) 951-5400

### Texas Energy Museum

