

Outdoor Activities Bring Healthy Beat to Heart of Texas

After a single plunge into Barton Springs Pool, you're hooked. Fortunately, that's just the beginning. With its walking paths, biking roads, swimming holes and Hill Country surroundings, Austin is a mecca of outdoor activity. The average 68-degree temperature welcomes visitors from Northern, coastal and international destinations to the Texas capital year-round. Here, city officials and local celebrities jog alongside locals on the Lady Bird Lake Hike & Bike Trail. Wakeboarders coast over the waters of Lake Austin or Lake Travis. Cyclists pedal to the outskirts of the city to train on roads traversed by Tour de France champion Lance Armstrong.

Austin has already benefited from a reputation as an active, healthy hub with over 10 farmers' markets, exciting activities such as **Cypress Valley Canopy Tours** and 8 miles of hiking trail along the **Barton Creek Greenbelt**. *National Geographic Adventure* names Austin as the #1 adventure town in America because of its ability to combine the great outdoors with its unique culture.

Always striving to improve the quality of life for everyone, Austin was listed as the top "Greenest City" in America by MSN.com. The city currently leads the country in wind power and biodiesel production. The recently announced Austin Climate Protection Plan intends to make all facilities, fleets and operations carbon-neutral by 2020, which eliminates carbon dioxide emissions from virtually all municipal activities.

As the home of seven-time Tour de France winner Lance Armstrong, Austin is a favorite among cycling enthusiasts. The roads surrounding the city weave through the Texas Hill Country, providing challenging, open-road courses for training athletes. The **Veloway**, located in South Austin, offers a three-mile course for bikers and roller-bladers. The 23-foot wide trail winds through scenic Slaughter Creek Metropolitan Park, and provides a pleasant path for an easy ride. For more information on coordinated rides and maps of great Austin bike paths, visit www.austincycling.org.

Austin offers plenty of hiking options within the city limits. With over 220 parks and a combined shoreline of 405 miles, it is no wonder that Austin was listed as the #2 “city for taking a stroll,” by *Prevention Magazine*. Outdoorsy types can enjoy the **Lady Bird Lake Hike & Bike Trail**, which lines the shores of Lady Bird Lake with more than 10 miles of downtown off-road path for runners, bikers and walkers.

Residents and visitors can take in the breathtaking view of the Austin skyline from Auditorium Shores, a popular park along the trail. Another of Austin’s most traveled trails, the **Barton Creek Green Belt** provides 8 miles of twisting flat routes and rocky creek crossings that weave throughout West Austin. Sheer cliff walls, lush vegetation, and popular swimming areas offer more activity along the way. The trail is most crowded in the spring months, when the water in the creek is running.

Runners and hikers can also explore **Zilker Park**, Austin’s 68-acre park on the west side of the city. Here, **Barton Springs Pool** combines a lake-like atmosphere with a neighborhood swimming pool to create a 959-foot playground for tanning, cooling off, and enjoying the outdoors. The constant 68-degree water temperature encourages pool visitors to plunge in, especially during the hotter summer months. Still, other options abound. The Austin Parks and Recreation Department oversees more than 200 parks, many of which offer a cool dip in a natural setting. The cave-like rock formation of **Hamilton Pool** serves as a unique backdrop and overhang to cool, blue-green water, which flows down a tree-lined creek to the Pedernales River. Visitors swim, picnic, bird watch and climb the rocks surrounding the water. Pool-goers lie on rafts or swim underneath the partial dome of rock overhang. Visitors can also relax on a boulder underneath the beads of water splashing from the 42-foot waterfall.

Krause Springs remains one of the most beautiful swimming holes in the state. Two holes in one, the elevated spring is shallow and a great place to relax before sliding down the flowing brook or meandering down the rocks into the 8-foot-deep bottom spring. A camping area includes picnic tables, barbeque pits and restrooms. For a full listing of Austin swimming holes and park facilities, visit www.ci.austin.tx.us/parks.

Austin’s **Lady Bird Lake**, located in the heart of the city, offers residents and visitors a chance to cool off in kayaks or canoes available for rental through Zilker Park. Those interested in diving in a little

deeper can take on wakeboarding, waterskiing, swimming or tubing on **Lake Austin** or **Lake Travis**, two larger lakes located just outside of town.

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