

THE MAGAZINE FOR AAA MEMBERS



# Texas

## JOURNEY

### Escape to the Lake

Houseboating on Lake Amistad



Glacier  
National Park  
Turns **100**

**Dig It!**  
Diamond hunting  
in Arkansas

AAA Texas  
Annual Review

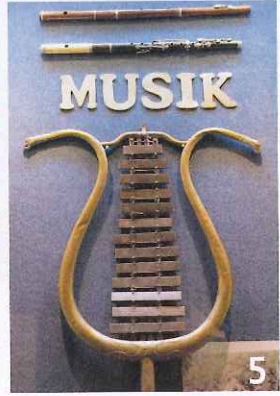
MAY/JUNE 2010

NEW BRAUNFELS/GRUENE

# Beyond Tubing

BY KENDRA STREY

**H**ere comes the heat. And for New Braunfels, about 30 miles north of San Antonio, this means throngs of flush-faced visitors are on their way, seeking relief at Schlitterbahn Waterpark or on a tube float down the local rivers. But after you've sufficiently cooled down, stick around to explore other draws, such as mysterious caverns and historic buildings. You'll find the state's oldest dance hall in the Gruene Historic District (within New Braunfels city limits). Once all but a ghost town, Gruene is celebrating the 35th anniversary of its rebirth as a center for arts, shopping, and other leisure activities. Special events are scheduled all year. (800) 572-2626; [nbcham.org](http://nbcham.org).



**1 Gruene Hall** Smart road trippers entering a 100-mile radius of this area know to turn their wheels toward this legendary dance hall. Built in 1878, Gruene Hall has hosted early performances of such greats as George Strait and Hal Ketchum. Though big names still flood the calendar, the free shows of up-and-comers are less crowded and provide fun times to practice your dance moves. (830) 606-1281; [gruenehall.com](http://gruenehall.com).

**2 Friesenhaus Restaurant and Bakery** Owners Günter and Cornelia Dirks (pictured) moved here from Germany in 2005. Their many travels to the United States fueled their desire to relocate, and a trip through the Texas Hill Country sealed the deal. They opened this German restaurant soon after, naming it in honor of Otsfriesland, Günter's birthplace. (830) 237-8862; [friesenhausnb.com](http://friesenhausnb.com).

**3 Natural Bridge Caverns** In 1960, students from nearby St. Mary's University got permission to search this area for cave passages. On one expedition, they felt an updraft coming from a crawlway. What they found below was a cavern full of otherworldly rock formations. The site was developed for tours, including one that lets visitors rappel down a shaft. (210) 651-6101; [naturalbridgecaverns.com](http://naturalbridgecaverns.com).

**4 Walking/Driving Tour** Forty-six stops in downtown relate the city's early growth. Begin your tour at First Protestant Church, erected in 1846, one year after the German settlers' arrival. The church's Heritage Room (appointment needed, 830-608-0971) exhibits memorabilia. Twenty-seven stained-glass windows (pictured) tell the story of Christ. For free maps: (800) 572-2626; [nbcham.org](http://nbcham.org).

**5 Museums** Study the city's roots at four heritage museums. Only time for one? Don't miss the Sophienburg Museum and Archives. Exhibited artifacts such as antique musical instruments (pictured) reveal the lives of the first settlers, and the archives represent one of the largest repositories of information chronicling German immigration to Texas. (830) 629-1572; [sophienburg.com](http://sophienburg.com).