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Visit the giraffes at Frank Buck Zoo (above) photo from Dreamstime.com
A little too close for comfort at Fossil Rim (right) photo by Leah Ratliff

Vacationing at Home

By Linda Haschke

DOROTHY HAD IT RIGHT, there is no place like home, even for a vacation. With gas prices soaring and air travel an inconvenience you might want to consider looking instead for prime vacation adventures in this vast backyard we call North Texas. Texas ranks second only to California as a pleasure travel destination for U.S. residents and the Metroplex is the #1 visitor and leisure destination in the state. So what's the big attraction? Happily for your gas budget, there's a ton to do within a tank or two.

THE GREAT OUTDOORS

Yes, summer in Texas is hot. But temperatures don't reach their annual peak until late July, so you've got a couple of months to explore the region called "prairies and lakes" by the state's tourism department. And, thanks to abundant rainfall this past year, the lakes are full and the prairies are bursting with flora

and fauna.

The Texas Parks and Wildlife website makes it easy for you to find a nearby park for boating, fishing, hiking or just sitting. Click on the "Find a Park" feature on the home page, choose the "Prairies and Lakes" region and up pops a map showing you the exact location of each area park. Click on the active links to the left of the map to get all the details about each park.

If you've done the big Metroplex zoos, head up I-35 to Gainesville to visit the Frank Buck Zoo. More than 100 animals – including giraffes, zebras, gazelles, ostriches, kangaroos, pygmy goats and parrots – are grouped by habitat: African Savannah, Australia, South America and North America. The facility has a number of summer programs, including Zoo Camps for kids aged 6-8 and 9-13, and a Breakfast with the Animals that



is offered on the first Saturday of every month. The Frank Buck Zoo is open daily.

Now that the family is excited about unusual wildlife sightings, pack them up and head for Glen Rose and the Fossil Rim Wildlife Center. If you have kids and have never made the trip, well, a charge of child neglect might not be too far off the mark. Fossil Rim boasts more than 1,000 animals representing 50 species on 1,800 acres and is first and foremost a wildlife conservation organization. But your grumpy grandpa will become as enthralled as your awestruck five-year-old when a giraffe leans gracefully down and extends a treat-seeking tongue into your sunroof as you navigate the park.



A Few More Ideas

CAVANAUGH FLIGHT MUSEUM
www.cavanaughflightmuseum.com

FISHING
www.tpwd.state.tx.us/fishboat/fish/recreational/lakes/inplains.phtml
www.tpwd.state.tx.us

FOSSIL RIM
www.fossilrim.org or 254.8972960

FRANK BUCK ZOO
www.frankbuckzoo.com

FRISCO FREEDOM FEST
www.friscofreedomfest.org

**FRISCO GROOVES
 CONCERT SERIES**
www.friscogrooves.org

FRISCO PARKS & RECREATION
www.friscotexas.gov/uploadedFiles/Departments/Parks_Recreation/FunGuide.pdf

**MCKINNEY THIRD
 MONDAY TRADE DAYS**
www.tmtd.com

TEXAS TOURISM
www.traveltex.com
 Click on Prairies & Lakes region for events in June, July and August.

TOP 100 ATTRACTIONS IN DFW
www.guidelive.com/feature/6/

You can do Fossil Rim in a day, either in your own car or as part of a tour. Reservations are a must for the tours and there are several from which to choose. Prices vary by season and day of the week. If you

really want to treat yourself, spend the night at Fossil Rim, either in one of the well-appointed rooms in The Lodge or in an air-conditioned Tent Cabin in the Foothills Safari Camp overlooking one of Fossil Rim's most popular watering holes. Lodging rates include a full breakfast; Friday and Saturday night dinners are available for an extra charge. If you want to rough it, you can reserve a Wolf Ridge Camp bunkhouse. There's no air conditioning and you need to bring your own bedding, but a bunkhouse sleeps 10-14 people and there are restrooms and showers available in a nearby building.

Closer to home the American Bank of Texas presents the 3rd annual Frisco Grooves concert series every Friday night in June. Warren Sports Complex will host the family fun, barefoot dancing and picnics including some of the best free entertainment all summer. Bands performing this summer include Terri Hendrix, Lloyd Maines and friends, the South Austin Jug Band, Sister Morales and the Derailers.

Frisco Square will host its annual "Movies in the Square" again this year every Saturday night during June and July. Residents can enjoy family-oriented movies for free on a giant 26' x 13' screen at City Hall Plaza. Guests are asked to bring their lawn chairs and stretch out under the stars. The Farmers' Market is also in full swing every Saturday from 8 a.m. until 2 p.m., featuring locally grown fresh produce and honey.

The 6th Annual Frisco Freedom Fest will pack your 4th of July with plenty of action starting with a "Party on the Plaza" featuring the Taste of Frisco, live

music, a children's expo and Hometown Heroes Exhibit at City Hall Plaza. Head to Pizza Hut Park for an evening FC Dallas soccer match, followed by a live concert featuring Clay Aiken with the Philharmonic Orchestra all leading up to the fireworks extravaganza at 9:45 p.m.

THE GREAT INDOORS

If the summer heat makes your family wilt (and whine), cure the complaints at Great Wolf Lodge in Grapevine. You need to be a guest to access all resort activities, but they're making it easier for families by running two summer stay promotions: the "Early Bird Savings" for a Family Suite and the "Make It Three with a Night for Free" for a Family Suite with the third night free. A Family Suite sleeps up to six with two queen beds and a living area with sleeper sofa.

All rooms include water park passes for the entire stay, pay-per-view movies and Nintendo. The 80,000 square foot indoor water park features nine waterslides, six pools and a four-story treehouse waterfort. Additional activities include the Northern Lights Arcade, Iron Horse Fitness Center and Elements, an Aveda Concept Spa. Restaurant offerings include The Loose Moose Cottage gourmet buffet, Camp Critter Bar & Grille, Bear Claw Café, Spirit Island Snack Shop, a Pizza Hut Express and Starbucks.

Ken Broom, Great Wolf Lodge director of sales and marketing, said the local response to the facility has been beyond expectation. "We've had so much feedback from guests telling us they feel like they've gotten away for a real 'up north' vacation and we've had a number of repeat visits already in our first few months of operation," said Mr. Broom. He credits the resort's authentic and consistent theme – which runs from the drive up to the resort to the guest rooms and throughout the facility – with making locals feel as if they're in the north woods.

If you can't bring yourself to leave the city limits, go to visitfrisco.com and check out the Frisco Vacation Packages for the shopper, golfer or sports nut in your family. Each package includes accommodations at one of five Frisco hotels – the Westin Stonebriar Resort, Sheraton Stonebriar, Homewood Suites



Great Wolf Lodge Waterpark (far left) photo provided by Great Wolfe Lodge; Dancing at Frisco Grooves (left) photo provided by Frisco Grooves; Assistant Director Kevin Raulie in N2S-4 Stearman (right) photo provided by Cavanaugh Flight Museum

by Hilton, Holiday Inn Express Inn & Suites Frisco or Hampton Inn & Suites. The Signature Shopping package features shopping discounts at IKEA and Stein Mart, free movie passes and ice skating at Stonebriar Centre and local dining discounts. The Tee/Tea time package includes golf at The Trails of Frisco Golf Club and a choice of five spa services. The Sports in Frisco package features sporting event tickets, an activity card at Strikz and restaurant discount coupons.

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Denise Stokes, PR/Communications Manager for the Frisco Convention & Visitors Bureau, reports that there is more than ever to do in Frisco this summer. "Frisco is full of fun all year," she noted, encouraging residents to get

a glimpse of Frisco through the years by visiting the new Heritage Center Museum. Exhibits include period furniture and automobiles, a replica of an Eli Whitney cotton gin, a loom, spinning wheel and carding station and a working newspaper press that is a replica of the one used to produce Frisco's first newspaper, the *Frisco Journal*.

Ms. Stokes also provided what's tops on her list this summer: the opening of Babe's Chicken Dinner House. "There's one in Carrollton and one in Roanoke, but we're getting our own in mid-July and it is just the best fried chicken you've ever tasted," said Ms. Stokes. "I'd been going there for a year before I realized there were other things on the menu!" Babe's is moving in next to the Heritage Center Museum and, according to Ms. Stokes, is expected to attract 300,000 visitors its first year in Frisco.

The Frisco Parks & Recreation Department has the answer to the "there's nothing to do!" complaint with programs, camps and athletics for kids, adults and seniors. You can choose several from the 38-page guide of activities in categories that include athletics, health, aquatics, fitness, dance and art.

Many activities take place at the

Frisco Athletic Center, a membership facility with basketball gyms, racquetball courts, a 22,000 square foot fitness area with the latest in workout equipment, two aerobics rooms, a childcare area, locker rooms and meeting rooms. The center offers daily, monthly and annual membership rates.

Satisfy your fancy for flight at the Cavanaugh Flight Museum in Addison, where the history of aviation comes alive through up-close and personal tours of vintage aircraft. You can also hitch a ride in one of two distinctive warbirds, the N2S-4 Stearman or the AT-6 Texan.

Dallas is famous as a shopping mecca but all the interesting places to shop aren't in the city. You can travel to McKinney on the weekend before the Third Monday of each month for North Texas' oldest and largest monthly trade days/flea market. More than 400 vendors will make you believe that if you can't find it there, it doesn't exist. Creative food concessions also add to the "fair" atmosphere.

Vacations close to home or at home can be loads of fun, especially with so much to see and do in our own backyard.

Lynda Haschke is a freelance writer living in Little Elm.