

HAVE CAMERA — WILL TRAVEL

TIPS AND TRICKS
TO MAKE
YOUR VACATION
PHOTOS SPARKLE

by RHONDA OSTERTAG

Sunrise at Parrish Park, Fla. To complement the sunrise color and give focus to your image, look for boats, piers and other subjects. Inset: Roseate spoonbill in Merritt Island National Wildlife Refuge, Titusville, Fla. Wildlife refuges expand the photographic opportunity for visitors to Florida's Space Coast.



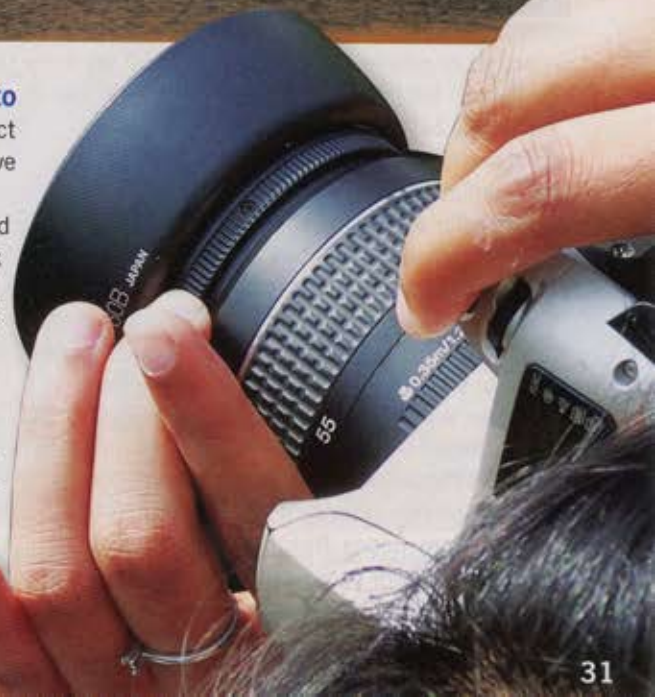
With a good camera and your motorhome's ticket to adventure, you have all the ingredients to whip up the perfect martini to lasting memories. But a few photography tips to improve the concoction couldn't hurt.

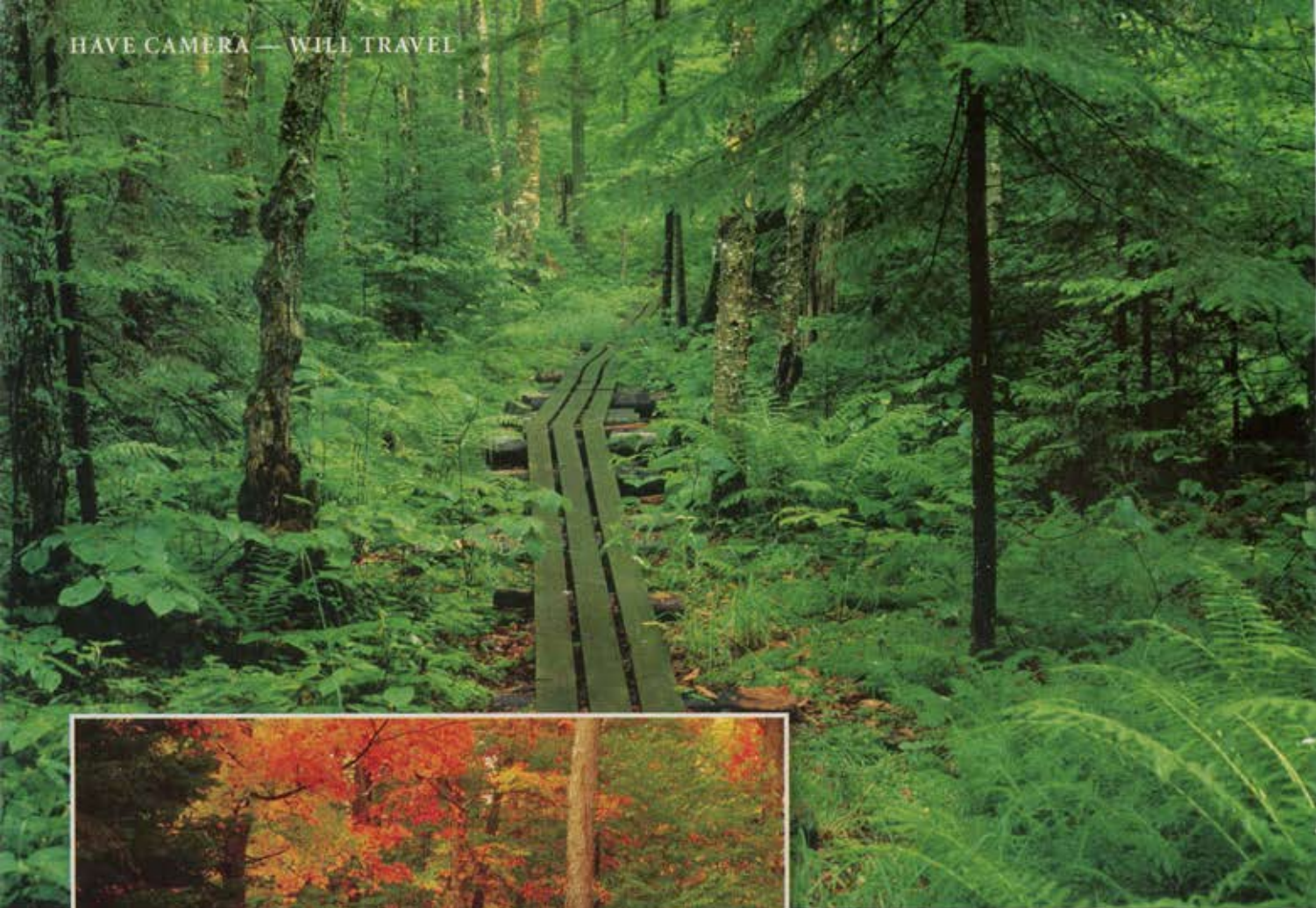
For those who do not travel with an in-house photographer, I tapped my personal professional to let you in on a secret or two. Whether you seek mountain or sea, forest or desert or prefer a good rummage in the past, professional outdoor photographer George Ostertag, with his decades of book, calendar and editorial experience, has tips for you.

COASTS

If you are drawn to shorelines, nationwide there are plenty of destinations: lake, ocean and gulf. Space Coast on Florida's east-central Atlantic shore, the sunrise coast, is one that inspires.

Coasts are big subjects made up of visual planes and lines. When photographing, pay attention to the horizon. Keep it straight, and avoid having the horizon split your image in half





Above: Ha-De-Ron-Dah Wilderness Area in Adirondack Park, N.Y. Look for features such as this boardwalk trail, which leads the eye into the photograph. Left: Eighth Lake Campground, Inlet, N.Y. When shooting interior forests, muted light and overcast skies work best.

or decapitate people. Occasionally, a 50-50 sky-water ratio can have impact but generally it fails to win praise. Use it sparingly. For the best imagery, plan your schedule to avoid shooting during the harsh light of midday. It overpowers natural subjects and is unflattering to people. Use your midday strolls to select your shots for sunrise or sunset. Although color is great, look for subjects such as trees, piers or boats for focal interest in the otherwise flat landscapes of water, beach and sky.

Also, be aware of the sun's movement and know what you want to record. Along the sunrise coast, offshore objects will appear in silhouette in morning and lit at sunset.

Lower your stance to add foregrounds. Washed pebbles, ripples, scalloped tide lines, roaming gulls, disappearing footprints, shells and flotsam will help draw your audience into the scene.

For practice, Florida's Space Coast offers 72 miles of beaches from Cocoa Beach to Sebastian Inlet. Canaveral National Seashore (a 24-mile-long wilderness beach to the north), NASA's Kennedy Space Center, Merritt Island National

Wildlife Refuge and hammock shade invite excursions. Sunning, beach strolling, hiking, water sports and wildlife watching, as well as the urban pursuits of the coastal communities, may further summon your photographic muse. Public and private campgrounds offer attractive bases.

Space Coast, 877-572-3224, www.visitspacecoast.com.

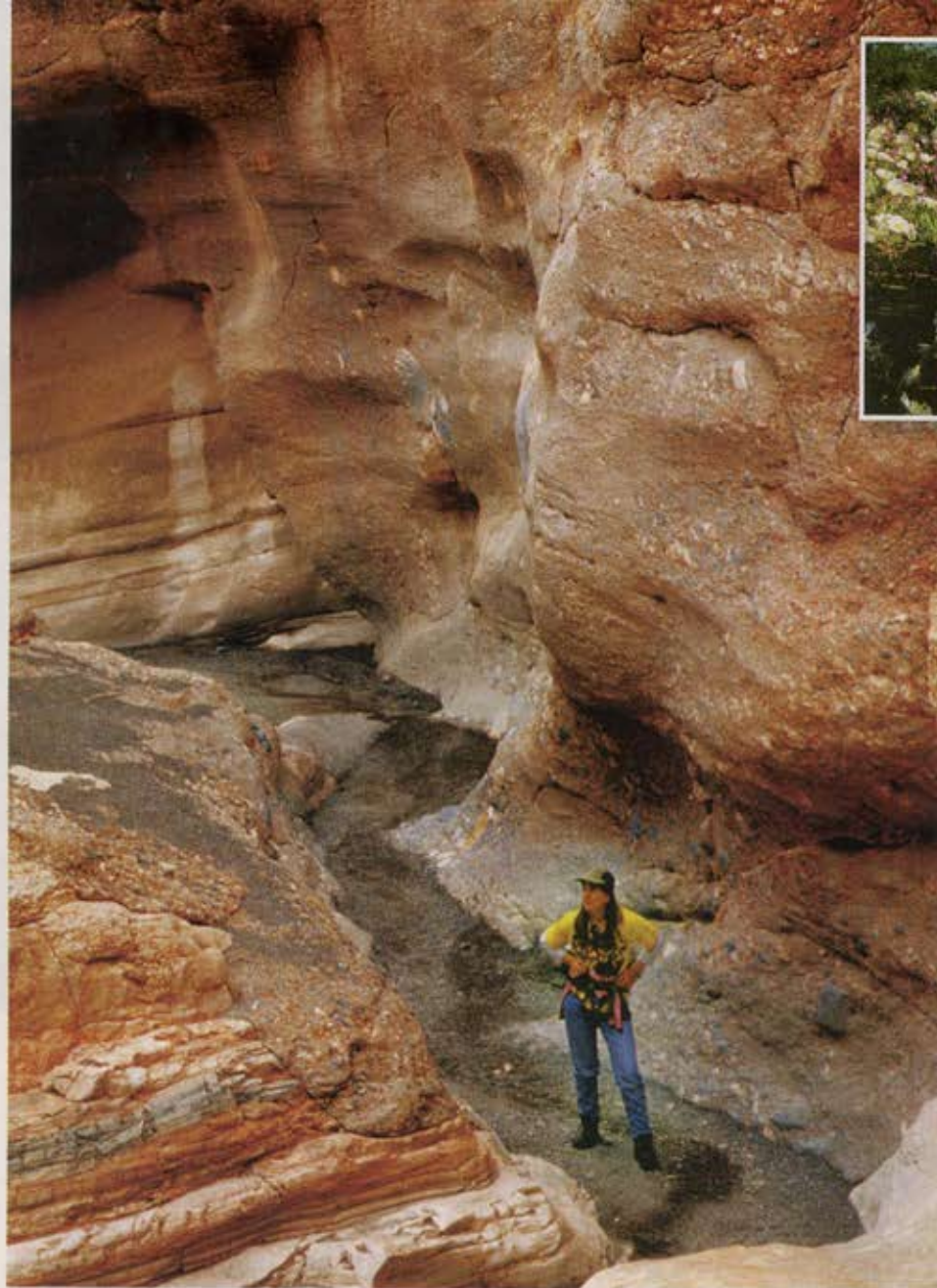
FORESTS

Forests compose a big part of the American fabric and outdoor playground. With both conifer and broadleaf species and distinct four-season discovery, New York's Adirondack Park shapes an ideal photo destination.

As in almost all photography, lighting is key, and interior forests shoot best under the muted light of overcast skies and rainy days. Under full sun, the contrast between shadow and light is too strong and detail is lost. But, sunlight does allow you to create effect, with sunbursts, spotlights, backlit elements and shots up through the canopy. When shooting across forest



Left: Mosaic Canyon, Death Valley National Park, Calif. Look for interesting ways to convey scale and perspective, as well as tell the story of a place. Above: Sand verbena and desert primrose in Desert Lily Sanctuary, Riverside County, Calif. Chasing the seasons serves photographers. Spring blooms lend color, vibrancy and a wow-factor to the usually dusky desert.



Take plenty of shots to improve your chances for success. This is one of the true advantages of digital photography. Afterward, be ruthless when you review your images, keeping only the very best. You won't have regrets for missing the moment, and friends and family will be willing future subjects if you keep only the most flattering images.

expanses, low angle light brings out dimension.

In forests, noise (unwanted distractions) can creep into images. An errant branch or grass, a detractive background, a movement, an unexplained shadow or sun spot, all can steal impact. So study shots carefully and minimize the unwanted. The cleaner the shot, the better, especially if you intend to enlarge the image, which only amplifies the problem.

Another common error is overloading your image. While the stunning tree, the babbling brook, the wildflower, the rock and your child all engage, take a moment to decide your point of interest. You always have the option of multiple shots. Also, give your image breathing space around the edges. When the combining of subjects requires the use of the far edges of your photograph, feature each subject separately.

Flowing water is a common complement to forest photography. If your camera has the capability, a slow shutter speed gives water a desirable blurred effect. Polarizers can help reduce light to slow shutter speeds. They also remove glare from leaves,

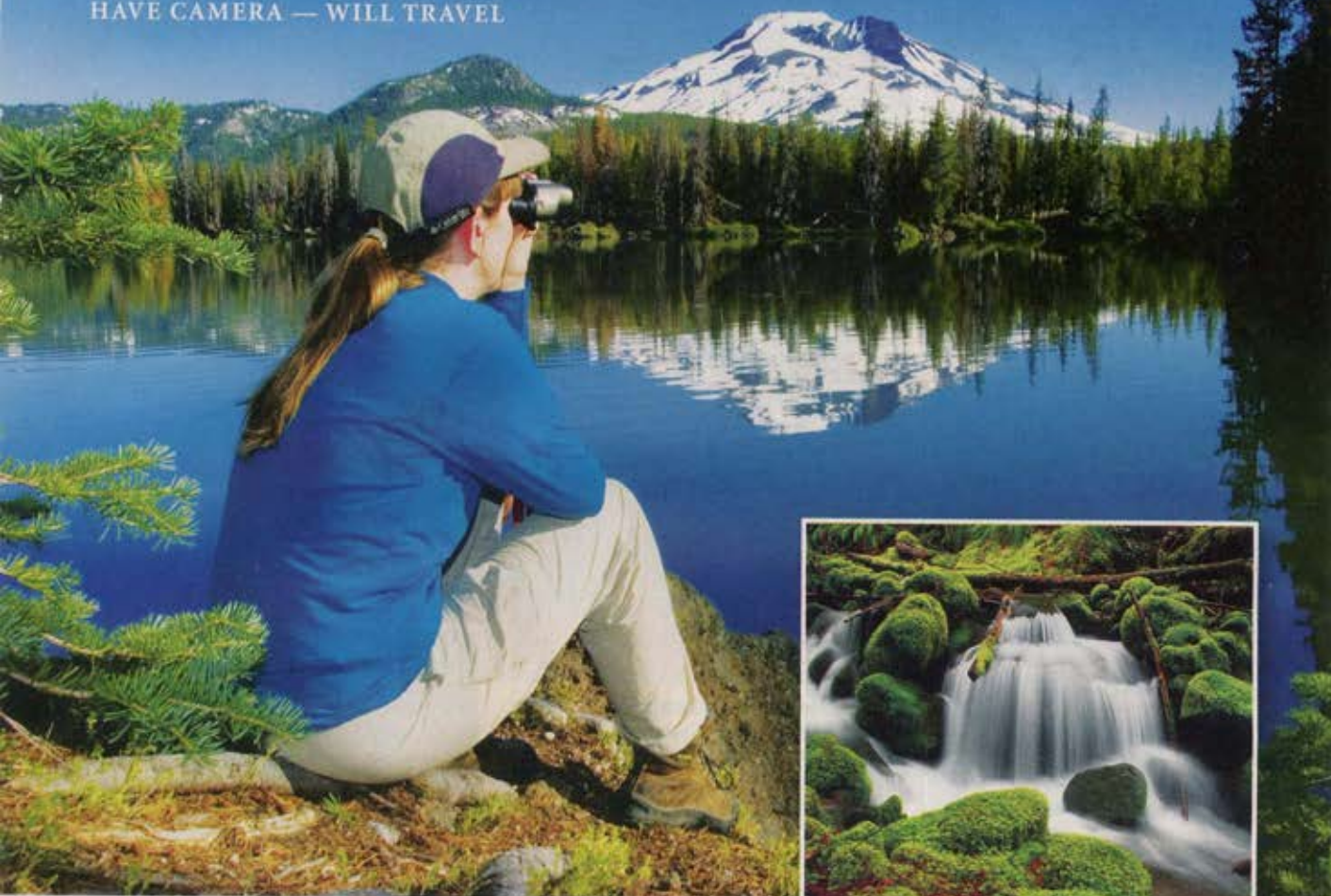
water surfaces and wet rocks.

Adirondack Park pops with special places to port the camera. Within its forest are cobalt lakes and summit peaks, the Adirondack Museum at Blue Mountain Lake, Lake Placid's Olympic history, charming hamlets and Camp Santononi (a classic Adirondack Great Camp and National Historic Place). Trails, canoe routes and driving routes open discovery. Adirondack Park Visitor Interpretive Centers at Paul Smiths and Newcomb will help you sort options.

Private and public campgrounds serve the region, with three-season camping for the most part. For more information, call 800-487-6867, or go to www.visitadirondacks.com.

DESERTS

Deserts, such as California's Mojave, enchant and inspire photographers, but require some accommodation to get the best shots. In this land of harsh light, you will want to adjust your personal clock, rising to take advantage of pre-dawn/early morn-



Above: View of South Sister and Sparks Lake along Cascade Lakes National Scenic Byway, Deschutes National Forest, Ore. Don't always insist on having people look into the camera. Instead, allow their gaze to draw your audience into the moment. **Right:** A waterfall along French Pete Creek Trail in Three Sisters Wilderness, Willamette National Forest, Ore. Slow shutter speeds give water a flowing appearance, while the use of a foreground and a setting clean of noise gives the image full play.



ing light and late afternoon shadows and sunset. Midday is for siestas or an air-conditioned trip to your next photo spot.

The low-angled light at the day's edges softens shadows and warms tones to reveal the dimension and detail of the dusky arid expanse, while showing humans at their photogenic best. A bath of warm light or halo of backlighting lends magic to a desert's thorny subject matter.

Matching your travel to the bloom season broadens shooting options. Wet winters bring desert annuals and cactus flowers (February to April), for stunning images contrasting the soft and the sharp, the colorful and the muted.

Train your lens on both big and small scale subjects. But, before stooping for your shot, be sure to check behind and below you for any pointed messages. Most things that grow in the desert wear thorns, claws, spines and blades for protection and water conservation.

The Mojave's reach across southeastern California encompasses such named places as Death Valley and Joshua Tree National Parks, Mojave National Preserve (the desert's heart), and ghost towns, alkali flats, blowing dunes, imploring Joshua trees, needling cacti and rocky jumbles. Desert rambles,

history-tracking and nature and wildlife study fill days and memory cards, while public and private campgrounds roll out restful nights under the stars.

Contact California Tourism, 877-225-4367, www.visitcalifornia.com or www.nps.gov for information on Mojave National Preserve and Death Valley and Joshua Tree National Parks.

MOUNTAINS

Motorhome travelers have a host of great mountaintops and ranges to explore, with the Oregon Central Cascades being representative. Mountains make grand subjects, as well as shot backdrops, and changes in weather and season broaden the possibilities. Mountains are ideal to convey height, scale and distance. You can capture them head-on or in the wavy duplicate of a lake reflection. Whether you sleep on the mountain's breast or in the valley bottom, there are winning images.

When photographing mountains, do not forget to capture the environment: the raised flag over a lonesome lookout, the breakaway rock of a cliff, the wind-sculpted tree, the Alpine meadow, the larcenous jay or industrious grass-gathering pika. Each adds to the mosaic of place.



Above: Mariachi band at Mission San Jose in San Antonio Missions National Historical Park, San Antonio, Texas. Take advantage of re-enactments and performances to bring life to history. Right: A Mexican cannon along Battlefield Trail in Palo Alto Battlefield National Historical Park, Texas. Choosing contrasting colors can draw interest to the main subject.



When photographing friends and family on a mountain, it is often more moving to have them look away from the camera. Face them toward the mountain — the view it delivers or one of the mountain's many aspects — and let the observers' gaze carry you into the moment.

Posed shots are too often stiff shots. When friends are engaged in an activity, keep shooting and experiment with the shots to get the perfect expression, movement or mood. Remember, you, the photographer, also can move to capture the right angle of light and the right expression.

As in all photography, pay attention to lighting. A great subject under flat or harsh light is disappointing, whereas good lighting can render even a dumpster photogenic.

Oregon's Central Cascades skyline engages with such volcanic peaks as Newberry Crater, Black Butte, Mount Bachelor, Mount Jefferson, Mount Washington, Three Sisters and Three-fingered Jack. High lakes, tumbling waterfalls, lava flows, wild and scenic rivers and untouched wilds urge forth visitors and await capture in pixels (or film).

Forest service and state park campgrounds and private RV resorts allow campers to choose their preferred mix of comfort to wild and proximity to their chosen subject. Hiking, fishing, mountain biking, rafting, boating, horseback riding, golf and a host of winter activities suggest outings and photographs. You can also shop, dine or visit a desert museum.

By driving Cascade Lakes Scenic Byway south from Bend to Sparks Lake, you can walk Ray Atkeson Memorial Trail. (Trailhead parking is best reached by dinghy vehicle.) The short memorial trail leads to a favorite photography spot of Atkeson, Oregon's former photographer laureate. Morning light is best.

Central Oregon Visitors Association, 800-800-8334, www.visitcentraloregon.com.

THE PAST

Historical places have great visual and emotional appeal and the historical missions,



forts and battlefields of Texas encapsulate this. Each has a story to tell. By working the camera to show overviews and close-ups, foregrounds and backdrops, candid and enactments, you uncover that story.

Shooting at unconventional times or angles or juxtaposing modern and old lends a personal spin or interpretation. When photographing historical features, do not forget the signs. They allow you both to track your travels and caption images. Some may suggest photographs you may not have considered.

Lighting is again important to convey the richest image. Tripods (when allowed) or well placed beanbags can help steady the necessarily slow shots under dim conditions.

Whenever possible, photograph historical sites during sobering quiet as well as the stir of enactment. For enactments, consider a tightened focus on hands, feet, guns, tools and costumes as well as the big scene.

While exploring Texas's history, you can take in the state's wildflowers and colorful birds, gardens, zoos, dining and nightlife. RV resorts and state park campgrounds serve nomads.

Travel Texas, 800-452-9292, www.traveltexas.com. ♦



Rhonda Ostertag is a freelance writer who travels and collaborates with her husband, photographer George Ostertag. The couple lives in Oregon when not on the road.