

## Key City Area- Young Couples & Friends

Right in the heart of the Texas Forts Trail and the home base for the Texas Forts Trail office is the city of Abilene. Abilene and the surrounding area is vibrant and full of life. You can enjoy some of the best attractions and sites that the Forts Trail has to offer starting in Buffalo Gap at **Buffalo Gap Historic Village**.

### Buffalo Gap

The first stop of the day is **Buffalo Gap Historic Village**, which is south of Abilene off Buffalo Gap Road. Originally, the structure housed the Taylor County courthouse and jail. The village is now comprised of a doctor's office, barbershop, railroad depot, bank, post office, print shop, private homes, and the Nazarene Church and it prides itself on teaching history through their villages living history. Make sure to stop by the admission desk and pick up a sound wand for an interactive audio tour of the grounds. Guests of all ages are sure to enjoy **Buffalo Gap Historic Village** because of their dedication to history and the well-preserved buildings.

While you're in Buffalo Gap, stop in for an early lunch at **Perini Ranch Steakhouse**. Just 5 minutes southwest of Buffalo Gap, is the acclaimed Perini Ranch Steakhouse, which is a true hidden treasure of the Abilene area. You might want to make a reservation, even if you're just going for lunch because it's the home of the best steak in the area. If you're not a big fan of red meat, they also have some tasty catfish. Take some time to sit back and relax and enjoy the simple beauty of West Texas.

### Abilene

Next head north to downtown Abilene and the **National Center for Children's Illustrated Literature (NCCIL)**. The museum was created to celebrate the best of the best when it comes to original art published in children's literature. The **NCCIL** collaborates with award-winning artists to produce exhibitions of their artwork that are distinctive, appealing to museum visitors of all ages, and of the highest quality. Their permanent collection houses over 150 pieces and there are always traveling exhibits to see as well. Make sure you also walk around the grounds to see storybook character bronze statues. It's the perfect photo op for your trip.



Just one block away is the infamous **Grace Museum**. The museum prides itself on building connections through experiences in art, history and science within the

ever evolving Texas story. The museum houses three different but interrelated museums. The Grace Hotel was built in 1909 and was known as the finest and best-equipped hotel between Fort Worth and El Paso. With passenger train traffic eventually coming to an end, the

hotel closed its doors in 1973. In 1986, it was saved from being torn down and made into the **Grace Museum**. Stroll the exhibits and see the historic and contemporary art.

If you feel like getting a little exercise, walk less than 10 minutes to **Frontier Texas!** This interactive museum lets visitors see what life on the Texas frontier was like through innovative exhibits and unique encounters. Visitors can experience things like wolf attacks, stampeding bison, shootouts and West

Texas thunderstorms with the museum's state of the art technology. Actors portraying frontier personalities guide the audience through interactive exhibits, vignettes of frontier life, and the “Big

Picture” where an entire hundred-year history is consolidated into less than five minutes. It’s a lot to take in, so don’t wear yourself out.

While you’re downtown, grab a snack at **Candies by Vletas** in downtown Abilene. Nick and George Vletas immigrated from Greece and moved to Abilene to start a candy business in 1912. Since then, the business continued to pass down its candy making secrets from generation to generation and has continued to remain strong. Make sure to check out their caramels and definitely don’t miss out on their chocolates, they are to die for.

Take some candies with you and head to **Texas Star Trading Co.** In 2004, **Texas Star Trading Co.** opened and have been flying their Texas Flags ever since. They have a one of a kind selection of Texas themed and Texas inspired gifts that are sure to be of interest to all. Stroll around the store and see if anything catches your eye for a friend, family member or even yourself.

While you’re downtown, grab dinner at one of Abilene’s favorite restaurants **The Beehive**. The friendly staff, great service, and tasty food will make for a great dinner stop before you head to the theater.

From the moment you walk through the door, you walk into a warm and welcoming atmosphere, and the smell will take your taste buds happy. Their superbly tasty food will fill you up and then you can head to the **Paramount Theatre** for a show.



Built in 1930 by H. O. Wooten, the Paramount is the only theater of this size and grandness between El Paso and Fort Worth. Fully restored in 1986, the Paramount is now an icon for the revitalization of downtown Abilene. Check their calendar when you’re planning your trip to see what is going on at the theater. The 1,200-seat theater is home to a wide variety of events including films, concerts, musical productions, opera, and dance. When you walk into the theater, you’re blown away by the breathtaking architecture, beautify painted ceiling and hand-

blown glass chandeliers. Enjoy a show then head to the **Sayles Ranch Guesthouses**.

Catch some Z’s at the **Sayles Ranch Guesthouses** just south of downtown. There are a variety of guesthouses to choose from, and the atmosphere really features the West Texas heritage. Enjoy your night at one of Abilene’s true treasures. Make sure to rest up, the next day is full of adventure with stops at two frontier forts.

Originally known as the “Post on the Clear Fork of the Brazos,” the **Fort Phantom Hill** was established in 1851 by the U.S. Army and later abandoned by the army in 1854. The post also served as a stop on the Butterfield Overland Mail Route and was a resting post for the Goodnight-Loving Cattle Trail. On the 38 acre property now sits stacks of chimneys as the only reminisce left of former buildings. Let the kids run around and imagine what it was like to live life on the Texas frontier.

## Albany

From the fort, get on HWY 180 and head east to the **Aztec Theatre** in Albany. Built in 1927, The Aztec Theatre was the cultural gem of Albany. The theater was originally built to show western movies, but since then has become a community hub and an important part of Albany's heritage. If you have time, stop and take in the beautiful building before heading just down the street to the **Old Jail Art Center**.

With free admission, this is a place you just can't pass up. Take some time walk amongst their wonderfully laid out internationally acclaimed permanent collection and outdoor sculpture garden as well as their captivating rotating exhibits. Housed in an old stone jailhouse, the artistic atmosphere is sure to inspire you.

Take a short break and make your way to **The Icehouse Restaurant**, which is right next door. Located in a historic building off of the square, the restaurant is known for its wide variety menu with Tex-Mex specialties, a whopping chicken fried steak, and some pretty good catfish. Don't be ashamed to lick your plate clean; it's just that good. Plus, you'll need a full stomach for your last stop at **Fort Griffin**.

The next stop is about 20 minutes north on US-283 at **Fort Griffin**. The fort held command over the southern plains. The rugged structures were frowned upon but after a negative evaluation, not much changed seeing as how only six of the 90 structures were changed to stone buildings. Lucky for us, though, the brick parts of multiple buildings are left standing and scatter the grounds of the complex. The complex boasts a visitor's center with interpretive exhibits, campsites, nature trails, the official Texas Longhorn Herd, and access to the Clear Fork of the Brazos River.

Now that you've explored a couple of forts, enjoyed the beautiful countryside and phenomenal food at Perini's and explored two frontier forts, it's time to get back to reality. Don't forget; there are still more forts to see and more adventure to be had along the rest of the Texas Forts Trail.

Buffalo Gap Historic Village  
133 William St, Buffalo Gap, TX 79508  
(325) 572-3365

[www.tfhcc.com](http://www.tfhcc.com)

Admission: Adult \$7

Seniors and Military \$6

Students \$4 Ages 5 and under free

Perini Ranch Steakhouse  
3002 FM 89, Buffalo Gap, TX 79508  
(325) 572-3339  
[www.store.periniranch.com/steakhouse](http://www.store.periniranch.com/steakhouse)

National Center for Children's Illustrated Literate (NCCIL)  
102 Cedar St, Abilene, TX 79601  
(325) 673-4586  
[www.nccil.org](http://www.nccil.org)

The Grace Museum  
102 Cypress St, Abilene, TX 79601  
(325) 673-4587  
[www.thegracemuseum.org](http://www.thegracemuseum.org)  
Admission: Adults \$6  
Seniors/Students/Non-Active Duty Military \$3  
Children ages 3 and under Free

Frontier Texas!  
625 N 1st St, Abilene, TX 79601  
(325) 437-2800  
[www.frontiertexas.com](http://www.frontiertexas.com)  
Admission: Adults \$10  
Seniors (60+) and Military \$7  
Students and Teachers \$6  
Children (ages 3-12) \$5  
Ages 2 and Under Free

Candies by Vletas  
1201 N 1st St, Abilene, TX 79601  
(325) 673-2005  
[www.candiesbyvletas.com](http://www.candiesbyvletas.com)

Texas Star Trading Co.  
174 Cypress St # 101, Abilene, TX 79601  
(325) 672-9696  
[www.texasstartrading.com](http://www.texasstartrading.com)

Beehive Restaurant  
442 Cedar St, Abilene, TX 79601  
(325) 675-0600  
[www.beehivesaloon.com](http://www.beehivesaloon.com)

Paramount Theatre  
352 Cypress St, Abilene, TX 79601  
(325) 676-9620  
[www.paramount-abilene.org](http://www.paramount-abilene.org)

Sayles Ranch Guesthouses  
1001 Sayles Blvd, Abilene, TX 79605  
(325) 669-6856  
[www.saylesranch.com](http://www.saylesranch.com)

Fort Phantom Hill  
10818 FM 600, Abilene, TX 79601  
(325) 677-1309  
[www.fortphantom.org](http://www.fortphantom.org)

Aztec Theatre  
141 South Main, Albany, Texas 76430  
(325) 762-3133  
[www.aztectheater.org](http://www.aztectheater.org)

Old Jail Art Center  
201 S 2nd St, Albany, TX 76430  
(325) 762-2269  
[www.theojac.org/#about](http://www.theojac.org/#about)

The Icehouse Restaurant  
200 S 2nd St, Albany, TX 76430  
(325) 762-3287

Fort Griffin State Historical Site  
1701 N. US Hwy 283, Albany, Texas 76430  
(325) 762-3592