

Northern Hill Country- Family Itinerary

Brady, Mason, and Menard are in the south part of the Texas Forts Trail Region and boast a fascinating glimpse into local and statewide history. Even if country music isn't your thing, you'll still enjoy taking a walk through the fascinating world of Texas Country music at the **Heart of Texas Country Music Museum**.

Brady

Start your day at the **Heart of Texas Country Music Museum** in Brady. The museum represents more than 100 country artists through memorabilia including stage costumes, autographs, instruments, and other collectible items that embrace the soul of country music.

Next, head five minutes north to the **Heart of Texas Historical Museum** in the refurbished McCulloch County Jail. The museum, once called "the best small town museum" by the Fort Worth Star-Telegram, is 3-stories tall and is filled with history from around the county. A control tower used in WWII was recently dedicated to the 10,000 men and women who served our country from McCulloch County during the war.

After stepping back into the past of McCullough county and country music, recharge your batteries at **The Spread** in Brady. You can smell this barbeque from over a mile away, and your taste buds will surely thank you for stopping in. Take a moment to enjoy the good ol' fashioned Texas barbecue and don't forget about their homemade pies.

Menard

Next, travel west on US-190 to **Presidio de San Saba** in Menard. The fortress was built in 1757 to protect Spanish interests in the region but was burnt down only a year after it was established. Though the presidio's term as an active military institution was short-lived, the 1936 Texas Centennial Commission revitalized the site in an effort to preserve this enchanting piece of Texas history. Today, the 18-acre site has been restored and comes complete with picnic tables, a pavilion and tour guides to help you take full advantage of San Saba's past, present and future.

Mason

Fort Mason was established in 1851 and is most famous for being the last command post under General Robert E. Lee before he left the United States military to serve as the primary commander of the Confederate forces during the Civil War. Even though this fort is tied to confederate history, it was largely left unmanned throughout the war. The modern **Fort Mason** includes refurbished officers' quarters as a part of the on-site museum.

Even today, there is still some debate about who the fort is named after. Lt. George T. Mason and Gen. Richard Barnes Mason are thought to be the two most likely namesakes for the fort. Both men perished before the fort was opened at Brownsville during the Mexican War and of cholera respectively. In addition to the minor role the fort played during the Civil War, Fort Mason served as a frontier outpost that was influential in securing land for settlers moving westward.

Once you've soaked in the history of this noteworthy outpost, make sure to refuel at **Willow Creek Café**. The home-style cooking available at Willow Creek Café is sure to tantalize your taste buds and leave you

feeling full. Whether you choose the steak fingers, burgers or chicken strips, you can be sure that the friendly wait staff will make you feel like family.

After you've filled up your stomach and rested your legs, you'll want to make sure you head southwest of town on Highway 29 to the **Eckert James River Bat Cave Preserve**. This is one of the largest bat nurseries in the United States with about four million female bats inhabiting the caves from May through September.

Be sure to give yourself enough time to reach the mouth of the cave about an hour or two before sunset to see what has been affectionately named a "bat tornado." Around dusk, these magnificent creatures begin to emerge from the cave, hovering in a circle near the ground before spiraling upwards hundreds of feet into the pink and orange Texas sky. These columns of bats draw your eyes towards the beautiful canvas backdrop painted by the setting Texas sun. If you follow the dark streams of bats as they reach towards the stars, which are just beginning to peer through the sky, you will be sure to be left in awe.

Now that you've seen the sights and sounds of the history of Texas country music, explored a Presidio and a fort and seen the wonderful world of bats at the bat cave, 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.

Heart of Texas Country Music Museum
1701 S Bridge St, Brady, TX 76825
(325) 597-1895
www.hillbillyhits.com/museum.htm

Heart of Texas Historical Museum
17 N High St, Brady, TX 76825
(325) 597-0526
www.heartoftexasmuseum.com

The Spread
2010 S Bridge St, Brady, TX 76825
(325) 597-1111
www.thespreadpitbbq.com

Presidio de San Saba
191 Presidio Rd, Menard, TX 76859

Fort Mason
302, 314 Spruce St, Mason, TX 76856
(325) 347-5758

Willow Street Café
106 Fort McKavitt St, Mason, TX 76856
(325) 347-6124

Eckert James River Bat Cave Preserve
James River Rd, Mason, TX 76856
325-347-5970

www.texasfortstrail.com/plan-your-adventure/historic-sites-and-cities/sites/eckert-james-river-bat-cave-preserve