



The secret to happy teenagers and... life

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TRAVEL

On the Lone Star trail

Isabel Conway goes in search of the old Texan west... its cowboys, Comanches and an Irish flag dispute



SADDLE UP: Isabel Conway, left, visited the Stockyards at Fort Worth, Texas



The voice at the Fort Worth Dallas airport luggage belt drawls: 'Howdy ma'am, can I help you young lady?' A pair of tanned hands, protruding from braided cuffs is already

grabbing my bulging suitcase.

Under his wide-brimmed Stetson the owner of those helping hands has the look of Bobby Ewing. Baby-faced little brother Ewing was the first TV soap star I had a youthful crush on during those 13 addictive years of Dallas.

I am here in the Lone Star state to relive the excitement of spaghetti westerns, get out there in that colossal landscape with the cowboys, pay homage at the Alamo shrine to the Texan rebels in San Antonio.

After a visit to the Cowgirl

museum and Cowgirl Hall of Fame in Fort Worth I aim to pick up some fab western fashion (including shiny boots) fit for a rodeo queen before heading down to Billy Bob's, the world's largest honky-tonk.

'Texas... they still think they're a republic, they're always brag-▶



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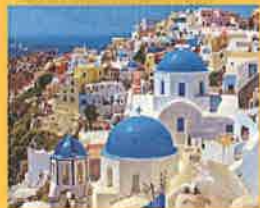


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TRAVEL

Great ESCAPES



HISTORY CRUISE: Take in the history and culture of Greece and combine it with the decadent delights of Mykonos on this eight-night city break/mini-cruise. Your Athens hotel for three nights is the luxurious Divani Caravel, before sailing off to Mykonos, Kusadasi, Santorini, Patmos and Heraklion. The departure date is August 27, and the cost, including breakfast, three lunches and two table d'hôte dinners, is €1,149pp. Return flights ex Dublin to Athens, on selected date €383. See ineightvacations.com

LISBON

LIVE: The Portuguese capital comes alive this month for the Festas de Lisboa with a series of events including street art and entertainment, musical and theatrical performances and folk parades, in the city's oldest neighbourhoods. The more familiar delights of fado and freshly grilled sardines also feature, along with free concerts of Brazilian jazz, world music and rock. Aer Lingus runs flights daily to Lisbon. For more details see visitalisboa.com



NORDIC ROCK:

If you're bored with Ireland's summer festivals, Roskilde in Denmark could be for you. Travel Creations is offering a four-night B&B package from July 1 to 5 at Ibsen's Hotel, Copenhagen for €498pp. The concert, featuring Stevie Wonder, The Rolling Stones, Arctic Monkeys and Outkast, is just a 20-minute train ride away from the Danish capital. Day tickets cost around €130 and can be purchased at <http://roskilde-festival.dk/>. See also <http://taaz.ie/festival-fever/> for details

NOW GET WALKING:

Wonderful walking country lies just behind the Côte D'Azur. Try a seven-day route from Breil-sur-Roya to Villefranche-sur-Mer with Adventure Holidays, which is offering six nights double occupancy with private facilities in two star hotels, plus six breakfasts, two dinners and one picnic lunch. There are five walks (up to five hours a day) and on day three a taxi transfer from Sospel to the Castillon pass. Prices start at €695. Flights extra. See adventure-holidays.ie

►ging about being so big,' I was warned back East. Texans do revel in their history and being big (one advertisement for toilet paper says 'big enough for Texans'). I expect they can chomp through steaks the size of an iceberg and they deliver a big hearty welcome.

Jacki Loyall, 'Journey Ambassador' at Hilton Hotel Fort Worth says: 'You've come awl daat way from Euuroop... miih.' Marking my card about the men who strut around the stockyards, she adds: Just cause they wear the boots aan big haats don' makem cowboys honey.'

Directly across from the front entrance to hotel Hilton is John F Kennedy Tribute Park. The hotel has a JFK suite, walls bedecked in photos. John F Kennedy spent his last night here in the then-Hotel Texas.

After addressing a large waiting crowd outside next morning his motorcade departed for nearby Dallas on November 22, 1963, the final moments of a more innocent America ticking away.

Fort Worth began life as a rough and tumble frontier stop of muddy streets and clapboard shacks, dusty and lawless where men were measured by how fast they could draw their gun and how much whiskey they could drink.

Today it is a stylish city of gleaming oil-rich skyscrapers, museums supported by wealthy benefactors, outstanding downtown urban renewal and an authentic 15-block historic stockyards area with an original indoor rodeo among its many western attractions.

A walking tour at your own pace is a good introduction to downtown, following a heritage

trail of bronze plaques honouring people and events that shaped Fort Worth's chequered history.

One plaque tells the story of Cynthia Ann Parker, captured by Comanches at the age of nine, who married a war chief with whom she had three children (one of whom, Quanah, became friend of US Presidents and a businessman). Cynthia died lonely and sad, yearning for her life in the tribe after being recaptured by Texan Rangers decades later and returned to the white community.

Another sign marks Hell's Half Acre, Fort Worth's notorious district of saloons, dance halls, gambling parlours and bordellos where 'the ordinary murderer and the average cowboy' parted.

At Lonesome Dove western bistro I meet writer-historian Douglas Harman who points out the two entrance doors and a

'Boots and a big hat don' makem cowboys – honey'



HERO: The tribute park to JFK who spent his last night alive in Fort Worth

separated dining area that used to segregate the races. Taking a bite from his 'delicious' local speciality rabbit and rattlesnake

sausage he says: 'Irish Kate was one of the most notable and successful ladies of the night, a high earning prostitute, here in the

MONTREAL'S MARRIAGE OF



QUAINT: Cobblestones of Old Montreal

I hadn't been to Montreal for more than 30 years. I'd always wanted to go back but, to paraphrase John Lennon, life got in the way.

In 1982, as part of my degree, I'd organised a six-week work experience placement at CHOM-FM, a legendary radio station in the city that pumped out rock 24 hours a day. We didn't have radio stations like that here back then.

As a 21-year-old, I'd organised a six-week work experience at CHOM-FM in the city as part of my degree. I was thrilled to finally be going back to see some things I hadn't the first time around.

I stayed at the Place D'Armes

By Tim Smith

Hotel close to Old Montreal. A bank in the 19th Century, it's now the sort of hotel for which the word boutique was invented – complete with a shower in our room big enough for six!

You don't expect cobbled streets in North America, but that's exactly what you get in Old Montreal. It's a lively, touristy area and a good introduction to the history of the city.

For a more extensive explanation of how Montreal was founded in 1642, stroll to Pointe-à-Callière, a national historic site housing the remains of the city's

TRAVEL

GETTING THERE

United Airlines flies from Ireland to Fort Worth Dallas (via Newark) from about €630, united.com. British Airways flies via London Heathrow for the same price, britishairways.com. Rooms at the historic Stockyards hotel (stockyardshotel.com) and the Fort Worth Hilton (fortworth.hilton.com) cost from \$169 (€125). See fortworth.com and sistersgrinningghosttour.com. For the Wildcatter, see wildcatterranch.com and for San Antonio, see visitsanantonio.com. Also see visitusa.ie. Rooms at the Crockett Hotel, next to the Alamo, cost \$129, see crocketthotel.com.

FRONTIER: Taking the evening sun and watching the Brazos River slip by at Wildcatter Ranch

1880s. Our records show a lot of the soldiers and newcomers came from Ireland.'

Arriving at Wildcatter Ranch hidden away in rugged hill country peppered with Blue Bonnies (the Texan national flower) 90 miles northwest of Fort Worth, we might have stumbled in exhausted off the Chisholm cattle trail, survived an Indian skirmish or even a stage coach hold up (all possible back in the day) such was the welcome and hospitality here.

A modern-day pioneer, Ann Street Skipper created Wildcatter (the oil term for those who take a chance and drill without knowing what might be down there) a working ranch hotel resort and spa overlooking the Brazos River from virgin territory. The last Indian



RUSTIC: A spacious room at Wildcatter Ranch

reservation of Texas was located on the other side of the river.

Each of Wildcatter's rustic luxury log cabins has a different theme

drawn from the history of the area. Ann's forefathers founded the nearby town of Graham and she grew up on the stories of frontier

life – gunfights, posses chasing outlaws across the range, Indian ambushes and dramatic breakouts from the county jail.

My cabin was devoted to the legendary saga of the Marlow brothers whose tragic and violent story inspired the John Wayne movie *The Sons Of Katie Elder*. After escaping from jail they were captured close by in a shoot out with 'the law'.

A trail ride on a placid horse curiously named Wildfire through some of the 1,500-acre ranch with real-life cowboy Clint West was like being in a western movie. Buzzards circle above us 'looking for some dead critters' as I hope and pray that sudden noise like scattering pebbles among the cacti is not a rattlesnake.

San Antonio is a 45-minute flight south of Fort Worth. Remember the Alamo? Of course you do and so do more than 2.5 million visitors who

visit the historic site each year. Yet it comes as something of a shock to find the Alamo is bang in the centre of this charming city of canals and Spanish-style buildings surrounded by hotels and plenty of souvenir shops.

There are lots of guided tours, also down to the famous mission of San Jose a few miles south and a nightly \$15 ghost tour conducted by the costumed Grimm Sisters which I took.

Expect some ghoulish entertainment, while you find your bearings and walk off that great dinner from one of the nearby River Walk restaurants.

The Alamo was the scene of a 13-day siege and bloody battle back in 1836 led by Davy Crockett and James Bowie. Most of the hardy ragtag of Texan rebels who remained to the bitter end were from Scotland and Northern Ireland.

Dr Bruce Winders, curator of the Alamo explains: 'We hung the Ulster flag inside the church to honour the Irish heroes but changed it to the tricolour 17 years ago. We do get protests from Ulster people who want their flag back. We say we're looking into it... and I guess we are.'

Stay at least four or five days in San Antonio to see the sights properly. The Pearl Brewery district of cosy cafés and upscale dining is a nice detour and you should explore by river taxi.

The Missions of San Antonio aiming for world heritage UNESCO status are also a must. Here, like nowhere else, Texan history truly stands still.

● Isabel Conway is Ireland's long haul travel journalist of the year.

OLD AND NEW IS MAGNETIC

first buildings. It's home to the brilliant Montreal Museum of Archaeology and History, where a multimedia show explains its French heritage.

Close by the old town is 19th Century Notre Dame Basilica, a masterpiece of Gothic Revival architecture.

Downtown, there's a very different scene, the modern face of Montreal I remember vividly from before. If it's shopping you want, you'll have no trouble finding it, above ground and below. The underground city was started in 1962 and is still

a work in progress. Aimed at providing a more comfortable environment during the cold winters, it's a warren of shops that even the locals get lost in.

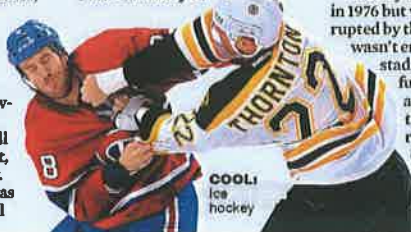
Next stop the Mount Royal Park. Landscaped

in the 1870s by Frederick Law Olmstead, who also had a hand in New York's Central Park, it occupies part of the mountain that dominates the island on which Montreal stands.

The city staged the Olympics in 1976 but was almost bankrupted by the event. Our guide wasn't entirely sure that the stadium had even been fully paid for yet. It's a magnificent sight, though, and easy to reach on the highly efficient metro system. But we plumped instead for the adjacent

Montreal Biodome with its four eco-systems of the Americas, complete with plants and penguins, all under one roof.

Montreal is sports-mad and the highlight of our trip was to see the Montreal Canadiens play ice hockey at the Bell Centre. But there was one other thing to do – sample 'Poutine' or chips covered in gravy with curd cheese on top. La Banquise, a 24-hour greasy spoon offers 28 varieties. Mine had toppings of mushrooms and bacon. I rather liked it. I hope it isn't another 30 years before I get to try it again. ● Air Canada flies to Montreal from Dublin from €620 return.



COOL: Ice hockey