

Beat the Heat in West Texas

COOL. CALM.

Fort Davis and Balmorhea beguile travelers with crisp mountain air, spectacular scenery, and crystalline water.



The roads through the Davis Mountains have no shortage of spectacular views.

MOSEYING AROUND THE MILE-HIGH CITY

It may be cool in Fort Davis, but it's still a mile high and almost always sunny, so you're flirting with a sunburn if you're not sporting a hat. If you've left your lid at home, make a stop at Fort Davis' Limplia Creek Hats, which sits on State Street next to the Helping Hand thrift store and within hollering distance of the Sunrise Bakery, where the blueberry muffins can't be beat. Limplia Creek Hats sells a number of straw, palm-leaf, and leather hats off the shelf, starting at about

\$35, but the shop's custom-made, beaver-felt hats are what makes owner Kelly Owens most proud. "We make hats by measurement, and you can choose your own crown height and brim style," says Kelly. "And everything's done by hand." At 601 N. State St. Call 888/878-HATS; www.limpliacreekhats.com.

Known as the "highest winery in Texas," Fort Davis' tiny Blue Mountain

Winery lies on a 1,000-acre ranch nearly a mile down a cholla-forested trail, off scenic Texas 166 and just west of Texas 17. Don't miss the chance to explore this private pocket of the Davis Mountains and sample Blue Mountain's four tasty wines, including a light and summery white table wine and a feisty Cabernet Sauvignon. By August, the grapes in the 11-acre vineyard should be just about ready to harvest. We can all toast to that! Hours: Mon-Sat noon-4. Call 432/426-3763.



Everybody needs a good hat. Drop by Limplia Creek Hats in Fort Davis to choose yours.

nately, much of the original *ciénega* ecosystem was forever altered years ago. Today, though, a three-acre, re-created wetland at the park demonstrates the variety of animal and plant life once found here in abundance. Rustling cattails and bulrushes harbor birds, butterflies, and spiders galore, and an underwater viewing window—best experienced in the early evening or morning—reveals pupfish, gambusia, sunfish, and the odd blotched water snake. Drama, indeed!

In the morning, after one final swim and a stroll through the park's playground and camping areas, Randy and I took our leave and headed south to the picturesque town of Fort Davis, in the heart of the Davis Mountains. We had heard for years that the Scenic Loop Drive, a 75-mile jaunt through the mountains, was one of the most spectacular drives in Texas, and it didn't disappoint us. We drove, slack-jawed, as each twist and turn revealed another rugged mountain view (the highest elevation on the loop is about 6,700 feet), canyon vista, or majestic rock formation, all of which were formed millions of years ago by volcanic activity.

High on the summits of 6,650-foot