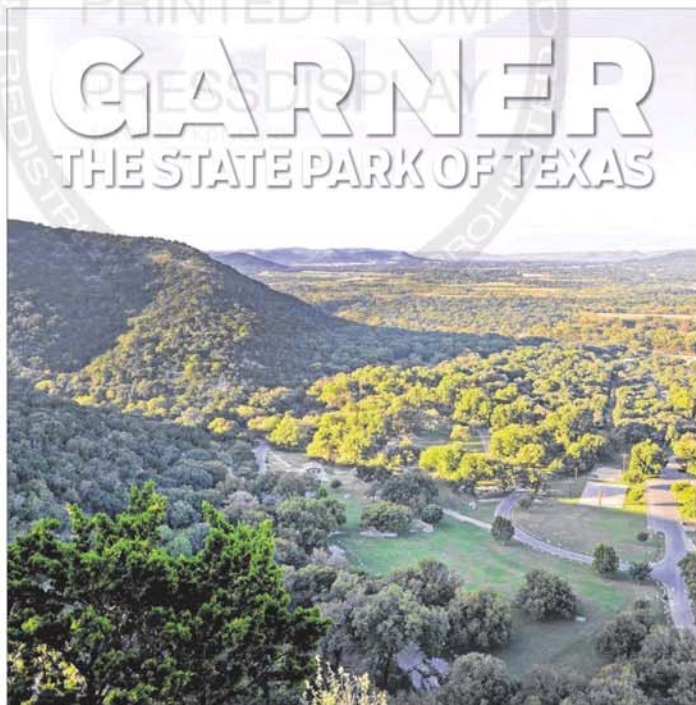


# TRAVEL

TEXAS



It used to be trespassing to see the view from the top of Old Baldy. Now the state owns the land and everyone can have a look. CONTRIBUTED BY CHASE FOUNTAIN

## Romance sparks at summer dances in park's old pavilion.

By Pam LeBlanc  
pleblanc@statesman.com

From the top of Old Baldy, Garner State Park unfolds in miniature — tiny tents staked beneath grand old trees, a glinting blue-green slice of river and miles of hills that look, from up here, like a rumpled green carpet far below.

I've visited this park half a dozen times over the years, but this marks my first foray to the top of the steep bluffs that jut up behind a bend in the Frio River. I feel like a billy goat, scampering over rugged limestone and catching the eye of a turkey vulture riding an air thermal.

Garner State Park records more overnight visitors than any other state park in Texas, and it's easy to see why. It's not just the river, which is crisp and cool and perfect for tubing, or even the 11 miles of trails, including the well-worn jaunt up Baldy.

At Garner, it's all about tradition. And while some parks draw regionally, this one draws statewide, with the most visitors coming from, in order, San Antonio, Houston, Austin and the Rio Grande Valley.

"Garner is pretty much the state park of Texas," says Superintendent Steve Killian. "We had someone come in this morning who said, 'We're here for a family reunion and this is our 47th year.' That's



The cabins at Garner State Park were renovated as part of a \$2 million project in 2011-2012. CONTRIBUTED BY CHRIS LEBLANC

## IF YOU GO

Garner State Park is located at 234 RR 1050, about 30 miles north of Uvalde and nine miles south of Leakey along the Frio River. Entrance fee is \$7 per day or \$5 per night for adults; ages 12 and younger free. Campsites are \$15-\$26 per night, screened shelters are \$25-\$35 per night and cabins are \$130 per night. For reservations, call 512-389-8900.

common. We have new people beginning to create their own memories, but this other contingent that's been coming year after year."

A family of German immigrants who owned the property first opened it to camping in the 1920s, then later donated it to the state. The Civilian Conservation Corps set to work, building cabins, trails, park benches and, most famously, a much-loved community building and outdoor

dance pavilion. The park officially opened in 1941, named for John Nance "Cactus Jack" Garner, a Uvalde man who served as vice president of the United States in the 1930s.

The park has more than doubled in size since then, and it's still growing. The state added 184 acres, including the top of Old Baldy, in 2010. Another 114 were added in 2011, bringing the park's

Garner continued on D12

BUCKET LIST TRIPS

## In India, blending monkey business, meditation

Discover relaxation, sense of peace at Himalayan yoga resort.

By Becca Hensley  
Special to the Austin American-Statesman

When a monkey the size of a toddler sneaks into my room to steal apples, I have a moment. Maybe it's the curry from the night before, but I swear he's the part-simian Hindu god Hanuman, come to pull blossoms and petals into the air and turn the sky I see outside my window a scorching, sizzling red. He jumps up on my chair and natters at me.

I'm at Ananda in the Himalayas, one of the world's premier yoga and Ayurveda retreats, 100 acres of garden on

a hill hovering over the undulating Ganges and the sacred city of Rishikesh in northeast India. Majestic, snow-capped peaks pierce the horizon behind. This is the city the Beatles made famous with their pilgrimage to practice under their master, Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, back in the day, set in a region known as the birthplace of yoga.

Yes, the staff at Ananda — who also utter "namaskar" (a greeting made with hands held at the heart in prayer and meaning: "I bow to the divine in you") at every turn — have warned me of the peripatency of monkeys. "Lock your door, mum," they have said. I thought I had. But still that white-faced fellow enters and we engage in our own

India continued on D11



An Ananda staff member looks out on a landscape that includes the holy Ganges River, the village of Rishikesh and a smattering of wild elephants. CONTRIBUTED BY KEVIN GARRETT

TEXAS

## From outlaws to 'Old Yeller,' Mason has it all

Texas town an easy getaway from Austin.

By Carolyn Lindell  
Special to the Austin American-Statesman

I've got outlaw in my blood, so I traveled to Mason to find out more about my gunslinging ancestor, Johnny Ringo, who spent time in this small town about 115 miles northwest of Austin.

I found several museum exhibits that included the ne'er-do-well Ringo, with a long

mustache and high forehead. But additionally, I discovered that this charming city has much more to offer than stories of bad guys and bloody feuding.

Beyond visiting the typical small-town antique and sundry stores, tourists in Mason can relax and enjoy the area's mix of quaint and whimsical things to do, such as hunting for gems, reminiscing about "Old Yeller," taking in the view from a fort overlook or just watching the stars in

Mason continued on D11



## India

continued from D10

scene from a romantic comedy. Eyes meet, dialogue begins. The problem is that I've been reading the Ramayana, where the monkey-like deity Hanuman aids Lord Rama in his expedition against the world's evil forces. So, I wait for this monkey to do something magical, like reach for the sun because he thinks it's a mango. Instead, he shrieks — did he say namaskar? — and runs out the balcony door he'd left ajar.

I decide it's a sign. My stay at Ananda will include a modicum of monkey business — that is, a laid-back release from my daily toils. Now, I'll ponder the deeper meaning while listening to my heart. That's something others have done at Ananda — people you've heard about, like Oprah Winfrey and Prince Charles. It isn't hard here. This is a place awash in fantastical elements, a spot where anything might happen. Wild elephants wander the plain below, tigers roam nearby and the rare flying fox, which resembles a floating blanket when airborne, soars from pine trees to earth at dusk. A profusion of peacocks adorn the grounds, part of a Maharajah's regal estate.

Wearing freshly pressed kurtas (pajama-like yoga clothes delivered each day to our room), my fellow guests and I purposefully engage the days: taking yoga classes in an outdoor amphitheater, meditating on slips of green grass under the tutelage of a spiritual adviser, attending optional lectures and reveling in the spa. We must look a bit like cult members, but there's a liberation in wearing this uniform, a blast of white light that marks us as seekers. Ri-



Dressed in kurtas, the white yoga clothes or pajamas given to guests at check-in, a couple explore the resort. A typical day at Ananda consists of yoga classes, meditation, spa treatments, leisurely meals and lectures or performances.

CONTRIBUTED PHOTOS BY KEVIN GARRETT

shikesh and the surrounding expanses, including Ananda's landscape, have been a pilgrimage destination for eons, touted for a mystical energy that legend says comes from centuries of yogis leaving something behind after practicing here. I feel it in the blood orange sunrise, in the birdsong and in the harmony of so many disparate voices in chant.

"The mind is clouded with thousands of thoughts," says Shanant Pandey, director of Ananda's yoga program and my meditation instructor. "The point is to find clarity, to use meditation to keep the mind fit."

I sit with him on a number of occasions during my weeklong stay, refining my technique and learning new ways to enter mindfulness — such as chakra shuddhi, a mental process that deliberately cleanses the chakras. One-on-one meditation

classes and group meditations are integral parts of a stay at Ananda, where guests are urged to linger for at least a week for full benefits. Ayurveda, India's thousands-of-years-old science of wellness and healing, begins with determining your dosha, or mind/body type, believed to be composed of the five elements: space, air, fire, water and earth.

Each guest starts a stay at Ananda with an Ayurvedic doctor who determines an individual program based on whether they are Vata, Pitta, Kapha or a combination. Goals, from detox to renewal to relaxation, are set. Airy and fiery at once, I am Vata-Pitta, and what I really want to take home is a sense of grounding, something that's hard to achieve when one travels as much as I do.

With nearly 80 treatments offered at the multi-tiered, tranquil spa,



Part of Ananda resort, the Maharaja of Tehri Garhwal's palace commands attention and holds the hotel's reception and one guest suite. The grounds also include a spa, villas, an intimate hotel complex, swimming pools and peacocks.



A couple watch the sunset as a bagpiper plays a tune at Ananda in the Himalayas.

Ananda draws not just from Tibetan lore and western techniques. My program mixes and matches the modalities, and I glean as much from Ayurvedic Shirodhara as a Tibetan massage ritual that uses hot Himalayan salt poultices infused with cardamom, lavender and jatamansi across the body in measured, slow taps. Many treatments begin and end with a blessing or prayer sung in harmony by multiple therapists. Scheduled around the complimentary Ananda activities, from yoga to hikes to hydrotherapy pools, my spa time is the highlight of my stay.

Not a place of privation, Ananda follows the Ayurvedic mantra that there are no rules, only suggestions. Part of what guests here learn about

their dosha is how to achieve balance and what symptoms, from rashes to angry outbursts to inability to concentrate, might convey an out-of-kilter system. They discover what to do to re-establish equilibrium. Much of that can be achieved via diet, according to Ayurveda, and when and what people ought to eat varies according to their unique composition.

My last morning, a troop of monkeys gather on a rooftop above the terrace where I eat breakfast. They gaze hungrily at my fruit plate and toast, poised to spring, should I leave my food unattended. It's then that I remember that Hanuman's best known for making the greatest leap ever taken, a jump that took him from the southern tip of India to Sri Lanka. That's

## IF YOU GO

**Stay:** Ananda in the Himalayas is a destination spa worth the long flight to India. Sign up for one of the Wellness Experience Packages, from Weight Management to Renewal. [www.anandaspa.com](http://www.anandaspa.com).

**Do:** Combine a trip to Ananda with a longer trek through India. Outfitter Micato Safaris can organize an itinerary that takes you from Mumbai to Kerala to Jaipur, bookending your adventure with a stay at Ananda. [micatosafaris.com](http://micatosafaris.com).

**Don't miss:** Ganga Aarti, a ceremony at sundown on the banks of the Ganges, which involves the lighting of lamps as a demonstration of illumination and truth.

**Take home:** Upon checkout, you'll receive a kalava, a sacred, red thread tied around your wrist after a blessing. Its presence will remind you of your experience for days to come.

why hatha yoga's monkey pose is a yogic version of the splits, recalling a leap of faith.

And that's what a stay at Ananda turns out to be — a leap into well-being, a visit packed with knowledge to jump-start your new beginning, an inward journey into your soul. And a monkey nattering about shiny apples and golden sunlight.

## Mason

continued from D10

a dark sky from the comfort of an outdoor bathtub.

On the edge of the Hill Country, Mason is about a two-hour drive from Austin, depending on the route, at least for those willing to hit the legal limit of 70 mph on part of the trip. In springtime, the sides of the roads were bursting with bluebonnets and other wildflowers.

Mason, population about 2,100, sits nearly smack-dab in the center of sparsely inhabited Mason County.

"We're not big. We like it that way," said Sabin Nelson of the Mason County Chamber of Commerce. "People say we're what Fredericksburg used to be."

Mason, sloganed "the gem of the Hill Country" for the topaz found there, has many facets that seem to converge in the town square. The square, once listed as one of the state's best town squares by Texas Monthly magazine, fea-



At night, guests at the Covered Wagon Guest House in Mason can sit in these tubs and stare at the stars.

CONTRIBUTED PHOTOS BY CAROLYN LINDELL

long and loaded history. The Mason Square Museum, in a storefront across from the courthouse, offers a tidy and succinct look at Mason's story. A wall display on the "Mason County War" (also known as the "Hoodoo War") features a photo of Johnny Ringo (my third cousin, three times removed) along with

ber of commerce. Ranches in Mason County offer topaz hunting at certain times of year.

Off the square, the larger Mason County Museum tells a fuller story of life long ago in the area, including the re-creation of a general store.

"Old Yeller": Visitors shouldn't forget to bring their hanky when mak-



A statue of the boy and the dog from "Old Yeller." The book was written by Fred Gipson, who lived in the Mason area.

fast options. My friends and I were fortunate in selecting the Covered Wagon Guest House, just blocks from the square. Most of the space in the rented room was consumed with a queen-size bed built like a covered wagon, complete with wheels. (Owner Bridget Langdale said the bed-wagon moved across

(We did not make it out to the Eckert James River Bat Cave Preserve, about 16 miles from Mason, where more than a million Mexican free-tailed bats live through the summer. In the evenings, just as in Austin, the bats emerge from the cave to feed in a grand show for viewers.)

... We did spend a com-

wildflowers, the topaz or the history.

"They are realizing Mason is less expensive than Fredericksburg," she said. "It has a charm. The history is incredible."

**Food and shops:** The square has several places to eat. The Willow Creek Café served up large plates of chicken-fried chicken and delicious French fries, as well as a decent vegetarian burger. Topaz Confections also sold us scrumptious breakfast wraps in yeasty rolls. Customers can also watch the baking activity in the back of the deep, old building as they eat the delectables.

Visitors ambling the square will find antiques and boutiques among the shops. Some businesses opt for cute names such as Reigning Cats and Dogs (for pet supplies) and Southern Britches (apparel shop).

Other attractions in Mason include the Sequist Home, a Texas Historic Landmark, that is not open to the public. The lavish mansion, begun in 1887, has a third-floor ballroom.

... The Mason County