

COWBOYS, GRAPES AND *Southern charm*

THE NORTH TEXAS TOWN OF GRAPEVINE POSSESSES AN INHERENT CHARM THAT'S AS DIFFICULT TO RESIST AS A STETSON HAT IS TO A COWBOY. BY JENNIFER JOHNSTON

Clusters of cold, full-bodied, firm grapes lie underfoot. Standing inside an upturned wine barrel, I'm waiting for the countdown to begin pulverising eight kilograms of fruit with my bare feet. As a novice participant in the GrapeStomp competition, I'm about to stomp into one of the many festivities at the 32nd Annual GrapeFest. The family-friendly festival is held over four days every September in the Historic Main Street of Downtown Grapevine. A perfectly named place to hold the largest wine festival in America's Southwest.

Located midway between the north Texas cities of Dallas and Fort Worth, Grapevine is a city many have flown into, possibly without realising. The city's boundaries lie within the Dallas Fort Worth International Airport (DFW) — something I appreciated, when I made my way from DFW to Grapevine's Main Street. Within ten-minutes I was transported from the confines of a busy airport terminal to strolling along a quiet footpath. The stress-free quick journey felt surreal, as if I'd stepped into Doctor Who's TARDIS time machine and had been teleported into a new world called Grapevine.

FOR THE HISTORY LOVER

Prior to 1844, the Grape Vine Prairie in North Texas had been a meeting place for Native Americans passing through the region. Texas President Sam Houston (1793–1863) opened the area to settlers when met with the leaders

of 10 Native American Nations in 1843 at Grape Vine Springs and signed a 'Peace Treaty.' The first settlement was named Grape Vine for the wild mustang grapes growing in the area and its proximity to the Prairie. The agriculture based-community expanded when the Cotton Belt Rail Line built in 1888, added a Depot in the town. The name altered to Grapevine in 1914. Fast forward to 2018, the original town consisting of a Post Office, Church and School, has grown to a metropolis of nearly 54,000 residents.

FAMILY TIES

After picking off the squashed grape remnants from my feet following GrapeStomp (achieving a satisfying third) I explore Main Street. Stretching for almost two kilometres, the street has an eclectic collection of shops, wineries, eateries and numerous historical landmarks. Feeling hungry, I head into Tolbert's Restaurant and Chili Parlour. I'm keen to try some of their famous Southwestern cuisine. Owner Kathleen Tolbert has continued the family tradition of Chili parlours begun by her late father, Frank X Tolbert who opened the first Tolbert Chili Parlour in 1976 in Downtown Dallas. Over a bowl of their most popular dish, *Tolbert's Texas Red Chili* I chat to local business owner Debi Meek. As a fifth generation Texan and active member of Grapevine's Historical, Debi is passionate about the area. "Cities in Texas try to duplicate what we have here in Grapevine,



but we're the real deal, because we've retained our historical buildings and preserved our heritage," Debi explains, her Southern accent warm and friendly.

With the Historical Society's help, Debi rescued one of the first homes built in the area in 1845, the Torian log cabin from being demolished by developers. "We took the cabin apart, log by log, relocating it and re-building it to where it now stands on Main Street," says Debi. The cabin is where circuit-rider preacher, the Reverend David Myers met to discuss organising the region's first Evangelical Church. The Lonesome Dove Baptist Church built in 1846 still maintains a small congregation in Southlake on Grapevine's border. "As Reverend Myers' great, great, great granddaughter, I'm the keeper of the Torian cabin," says Debi smiling proudly.

UNSAVOURY CHARACTERS

Across the road from Tolbert's stands another preserved piece of heritage, the Grapevine Calaboose. The small concrete building was built in 1909 as a one-room jail to hold the town's petty criminals. The town has experienced a few encounters with law breakers. The most infamous occurred on 30 December, 1932 when two members of Bonnie and Clyde's gang robbed the Grapevine Home Bank on Main Street. Debi's family owned jewellery business operates in the old Bank building. Inside her store hangs a framed front-page newspaper clipping about the incident. "Our current Mayor's father, Gordon Tate along with two others helped apprehend one of the robbers retrieving the getaway car and the money," she explains.

LONG SERVING MAYOR

William D Tate first served as Mayor of Grapevine in 1973, the year before the DFW Airport opened. As Mayor for 42 years, his longevity in office has been instrumental in Grapevine's growth in the 'Metroplex.' The term (combining *metropolis* and *complex*) was created to promote the sprawling Dallas-Fort Worth region, when the DFW Airport opened. Incorporating 12 counties the Metroplex is currently the largest metropolitan area in Texas and the fourth largest in the USA. The 76-year-old bastion of the Grapevine community credits the appeal of the area to three things, "People love the history of the cowboy, they love the Gaylord Texan Resort and they follow the Dallas Cowboys," explains Mayor Tate.

COWBOY CULTURE

The Fort Worth Stockyards National Historic District is where you'll find a slice of Texan heritage dedicated to the cowboy. Grapevine's Vintage Train departs from the original 1888 Cotton Belt Railroad Depot on Main Street, travelling most weekends to the Stockyards. The hour and a half train trip will take more time than driving down State Highway 121, but you'll travel in one of the preserved vintage rail cars and possibly be held to ransom by a rogue cowboy.

The 98-acre area north of Fort Worth's CBD was the centre for buying and selling of livestock. Today the livestock (and the animal smells) have departed but the legacy of the cowboy lingers. You can comfortably don your Stetson cowboy hat, shiny belt buckle and Texan boots and not feel out of place. Most people in town are either wearing or buying cowboy gear. For a pair of special handmade Texan boots, head to

Opening image: Cowboys and longhorns in town at Fort Worth's Historic Stockyards.

From below left to top right: Historic Downtown Main Street; GrapeFest's GrapeStomp; Grapevine's Vintage Train; Grapevine's giant glockenspiel where two life-size gun slinging cowboys appear for a shootout at designated times during the day.





M.L. Leddy's boot making company on North Main Street. Across the road is the Stockyards Hotel, built in 1907, where the infamous Bonnie Parker and Clyde Barrow once stayed.

The twice daily Fort Worth Herd Cattle Drive (11.30am and 4pm) involves a few Longhorns being coerced along East Exchange Avenue by Cowboys on horseback. Not far from the Longhorn trail is the famous Billy Bob's Texas. Originally a barn holding prized cattle, the building is now the world's largest honky-tonk (aka country and western nightclub) where fans of live country music, boot scooting and drinking congregate under one very large roof.

OUTDOORS AND INDOORS

Adjacent to the town centre is Grapevine Lake, a water reservoir popular for nature, biking and equestrian trails. Should the outdoor Texan humidity become too uncomfortable an intriguing place to escape is inside the huge glass atrium at the Gaylord Texan Resort, located next to the Lake. Inside the 18,000-square-metre central atrium atmosphere is set at a constant 26 degrees celsius. There are walking paths lined with lush gardens, a couple of waterfalls and a man-made river, making it feel like you're in a 21st century version of the City of Atlantis. Closer to Christmas, even though outside Texan temperatures are soaring, the resort transforms into a festive winter wonderland with an outdoor ice-skating rink, ice sculptures and a 12-lane snow tubing hill. The Gaylord Texan is on my Santa wish-list to return for Christmas.

Local lore has it the Dallas Cowboys football team use the Gaylord Texan as the pre-game venue when playing a home game in nearby Arlington. A chance sighting of a player is unlikely though, because they have their own private area with a 'secret' entrance and exit.

MORE THAN A PLACE TO MEET

"The city of Grapevine is openly welcoming," says Mayor William D Tate. "It's a place where people meet, although this is not a new ideal, native Americans met here for hundreds of years, hunting, fishing and trading goods." Today people meet in this part of the metroplex to enjoy themselves. The 32nd Grapefest was my introduction to the Metroplex. Not



only did I discover squashing grapes is a tonne of fun, I uncovered a proud community overflowing with Southern charm and hospitality. •

Photography by Jennifer Johnston and Grapevine Convention & Visitor Bureau.

TRAVEL FACTS

GETTING THERE

Qantas operates direct non-stop flights from Sydney to Dallas Fort Worth International Airport. qantas.com.au

United operates flights from Sydney to Dallas Fort Worth International Airport via Los Angeles, San Francisco or Houston. united.com

WHEN TO GO

- **Mild comfortable weather:** March-May and September-November
- **Texas Winter:** December-February may require a warm jacket

WHERE TO STAY

- Gaylord Texan Resort: marriott.com
- Hilton DFW Grapevine: www3.hilton.com
- Stockyards Hotel Fort Worth: stockyardshotel.com

THINGS TO DO

- Grapevine Vintage Railroad: grapevinetexasusa.com/grapevine-vintage-railroad
- Fort Worth Historic Stockyards: fortworthstockyards.org

FURTHER INFORMATION

- Grapevine Convention & Visitor Bureau: grapevinetexasusa.com