

The Houston Seminar Study Tour
The Heart of Texas: Exploring the Brazos River Basin
March 12 – 15, 2026
Itinerary

Join The Houston Seminar in March 2026 as we continue our deep dive into Texas roots when we travel the backroads of Central Texas through the fertile Brazos River Basin. This draft itinerary offers a preview of our plans for the trip.

Thursday March 12
Hitting the road / early Texas history

We depart Houston by motor coach in the morning. We will be joined on our journey by Texas historian Deborah Liles and architectural historian Stephen Fox who will enlighten us during the trip with Texas lore. We will make several stops along the way, including the newly-renovated Washington-on-the Brazos historical site and old Fort Parker, the scene of the famed Comanche raid and kidnapping of Cynthia Ann Parker, the mother of Chief Quanah Parker. After arriving in Waco and settling in at the AC Marriott Hotel, we will spend the evening at the historic Hotel 1928, recently restored by Joanna and Chip Gaines of Fixer-Upper fame. The evening will begin with an introduction to Waco over cocktails at the hotel's rooftop bar which overlooks the city and will be followed by a relaxing dinner.

Friday March 13
Meet Waco!

We will spend the morning exploring Waco, first with a driving tour, which will include the Waco Suspension Bridge, which at the time of its completion was the longest single-span suspension bridge west of the Mississippi, and served as a crossing on the Chisholm Trail. The driving tour will also include historic downtown buildings, well-preserved neighborhoods dating back to the prosperous days of "King Cotton," and the Magnolia (Fixer-Upper) District. We will arrive mid-morning at Baylor University for a walking tour of the campus led by Ken Hafertepe, professor of museum studies, and a tour of the beautiful Armstrong-Browning Library. The afternoon will be spent with a drive through Cameron Park, ending at Waco Mammoth National Monument Museum, where we will have a guided tour of this significant paleontological site. Dinner will be at Ridgewood Country Club.

Saturday March 14
Churches, Homes, Architecture

The morning will include visits to architecturally interesting churches and a driving tour of the Austin Avenue neighborhood, which is rich in history and architectural diversity and includes the Castle Heights historic district with its namesake Cottonland Castle. The morning will conclude with a visit to the charming turn-of-the-century Cooper House. Following a Texas barbecue lunch, the afternoon will be unstructured with free to explore attractions near the hotel, such as the Dr. Pepper Museum or the Silos shopping district. The evening will begin with a reception at the Rotan-Dossett house, an ornately-detailed and beautifully-preserved

nineteenth century home. Descendants of the Dossett family continue to reside in the home. Dinner will be at the Red Herring Restaurant in the Hotel Herringbone, another prime example of the downtown revitalization effort.

Sunday March 15

Temple, Salado and Homeward Bound

Our final day will take us south with a brief tour of Temple. Founded in 1881 as a railroad town, Temple is the original home of Scott & White Hospital, founded in 1904 as Temple Sanitarium, and of the hometown of former Astros owner Drayton McLane.

Our lunch will be at the Stagecoach Inn, where such legendary figures as Sam Houston, Robert E. Lee and Jesse James have dined before us! Local architect Stephen Gist will join us and showcase some of the new and historic sites in Salado before our return drive to Houston.

We expect to arrive in Houston by 6:30 p.m.

The trip includes buffet breakfasts at the AC Marriott Friday through Sunday, lunches Friday through Sunday and dinners Thursday through Saturday. Wine and cocktails at dinners are also included.

Additional Background

El río de los Brazos de Dios (the River of the Arms of God) is the longest river entirely within the state of Texas, flowing 840 miles from its headwaters in Stonewall County to its mouth near Freeport in Brazoria County, sixty-five miles south of Houston. Called Tokonohono by the Caddoan Indigenous, whose traditional territory included east-central Texas, the river was known by the 1760s by the Catholic name that Spanish explorers gave it. Beginning in the 1820s, the Brazos became the axis along which settler colonialists from the United States, introduced to Mexico by the impresario Stephen F. Austin, established farms and small communities such as Independence and Washington-on-the-Brazos. The river was the axis of sugar cane and cotton production in Texas, the site where enslaved African Americans worked the cane and cotton fields, and the center of Anglo-American rebellion against Mexico, which led to the establishment of the Republic of Texas in 1836, and Texas' annexation by the United States in 1845.

The Brazos was also a vector of modernization in the nineteenth century. The first Texan railroad line to connect to the national railroad grid, the Houston & Texas Central, followed the east bank of the Brazos as it progressed in stages from Houston north to Dallas and Denison between 1853 and 1873. The railroad established towns at intervals along its route named for such Houstonians as Abraham Groesbeck and Theodore Kosse. Institutions of higher education gravitated to the Brazos: Baylor University, founded in 1845 in Independence and transferred in 1886 to Waco; Trinity University, founded in 1869 in Tehuacana; Texas A&M University, founded at the College Station of the Houston & Texas Central Railway in 1876; and Prairie View A&M University, founded at Alta Vista plantation near Hempstead in 1876. Cotton enriched the communities of the Brazos River basin until the Great Depression of the 1930s; the architectural impact of the cotton economy is evident in such small towns as Calvert and in Waco, the metropolis of the mid-Brazos.