



THE HOUSTON SEMINAR

'Round the Big Bend: A Study Tour of the Towns Around Big Bend National Park

May 5–9, 2027

\$4100 pp/dbl

\$4850 pp/single

In May, the Houston Seminar will travel to one of the most picturesque regions of Texas: a landscape of striking contrasts, layered history, and continuing debate. This four-day journey will explore the origins of Fort Davis, the cutting-edge McDonald Observatory, the protection of fragile natural environments, the historic and contemporary architecture and art of Marfa, archaeological sites near Big Bend, and the distinctive towns that shape this remote corner of the state. The tour will also take us through Big Bend National Park to Marathon, once an important railroad stop, and conclude with a visit to Alpine, the largest of the surrounding towns.

Guides:

Stephen Fox will provide architectural and historical context throughout the tour. **Joe Holley** will bring perspective from his many years of reporting on the border, West Texas, and regional culture.

Wednesday, May 5 Travel Day – Midland - Marfa

The tour will originate in Midland on Wednesday morning. Many fortunes have been made in Midland, and we will begin with a short driving tour before gathering for a welcome lunch at the Midland Petroleum Club.

We will then settle in for the drive to Marfa, arriving in the late afternoon. Our hotel will be Hotel Saint George, designed by Carlos Jimenez. This evening, we will celebrate Cinco de Mayo with a Mexican buffet poolside at the hotel!

Thursday, May 6 Marfa

This morning, Stephen Fox will lead a walking tour of Highland Avenue, Marfa's main street. We have arranged special visits to the recently restored Judd Foundation offices and apartments, followed by a tour of one of the Chinati Foundation's installations featuring the iconic work of artist John Chamberlain.

Lunch will be at the recently renovated El Paisano Hotel, where Joe Holley and Marfa local Liz Rogers will lead a lively discussion of Marfa lore. We will then visit Ballroom Marfa, a converted 1920s dance hall that now serves as a contemporary arts space. Following free time for independent exploration, we will gather to visit a selection of design-forward private residences and conclude the day with a casual outdoor reception and dinner.

Friday, May 7 Fort Davis, McDonald Observatory

We will begin the day with a drive to Fort Davis State Park, where we will visit the original site established in 1854. From there, we will continue into the Davis Mountains to McDonald Observatory, where astronomers will introduce us to their current research projects.

On our return from the mountain range, we will stop for lunch at the historic Indian Lodge. Representatives from The Nature Conservancy will join us to discuss their work in the region and their collaborations to protect this distinctive landscape.

In the afternoon, we will make a brief visit to the town of Fort Davis, followed by a stop at a private home before returning to Marfa. Dinner this evening will be at Cochineal, once described as “the most remote fine dining in America.”

Saturday, May 8 Big Bend National Park – Marathon

After saying goodbye to Marfa, we will head south toward the Big Bend region. In Redford, archaeologist David Keller will introduce us to an area inhabited since the Paleo-Indian Period, approximately 8,000 to 6,500 BC.

We will continue with a scenic drive through Big Bend National Park, stopping for lunch in Terlingua before arriving in Marathon in the late afternoon. There, we will settle into the historic Gage Hotel, commissioned by rancher Alfred Gage, designed by architect Henry Trost, and completed in 1927. Houstonian J.P. Bryan bought the Gage in 1978, initiating the restoration. We will see how Mr. Bryan has additional plans for Marathon.

The day will conclude with an evening of Texas barbecue and music.

Sunday, May 9 Alpine – Midland – Houston

Our final morning will begin with a tour of Marathon before we drive to Alpine, the largest town surrounding Big Bend National Park. In Alpine, we will pass through the Sul Ross State University campus and make a brief visit to The Holland Hotel, another notable example of Henry Trost architecture.

We will pick up boxed lunches for the drive back to the airport, where we will depart on an early evening flight to Houston.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

What's included: All entrance fees, guides, hotel, lunches, dinners and receptions.

Airfare is not included. We recommend the following flights:

Departure:

5/5/27 Southwest #2293 (Hobby) 9:00 AM – 10:30 AM

Return:

5/9/27 Southwest #647 6:15 PM – 7:45 PM

We anticipate moderate walking on the tour. Please plan on comfortable shoes and layered clothing. Temperatures will range from 60-85 degrees.