

Touchdown getaways

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The drama leading into college football season was especially choice in Texas. The big news — that the University of Texas Longhorns and Oklahoma Sooners will leave the Big 12 for the SEC in 2025 — rattled the sports world.

This season brings a host of beloved traditions back in play that were compromised during last year's lockdowns and remote learning. Tailgate partying is back; stadiums will

be full; and travel to the college towns of Austin, Dallas, Fort Worth, College Station, Lubbock and Waco should have football fans crisscrossing the state for pigskin action.

But the biggest opponent for all remains COVID-19. With the delta variant spreading, especially in states where vaccination rates are lacking, college football 2021 could be one big wide receiver.

If you're traveling to your favorite college town, here are some experiences the new football season affords.

GEORGE'S, THE CLASSIC BAR AND RESTAURANT LOCATED NEAR THE BAYLOR CAMPUS, HAS BEEN A WACO INSTITUTION SINCE 1930.

BRYAN/COLLEGE STATION

EAT

Christopher's World Grille: This charming fine-dining destination from chef Christopher Lampo is considered one of the area's top tables. The menu includes crab cake with shrimp bisque sauce, blackened shrimp and crawfish fondue, and a Texas cheese and charcuterie board. The steak and seafood entrées do not disappoint: house filet topped with crawfish tails and sauce bearnaise; Delmonico rib-eye with au gratin potatoes; snapper with lump crab and chardonnay butter sauce; bacon-wrapped salmon; and Texas shrimp and lobster pasta arrabiata spiced with dried pequin peppers and flambéed with Tito's vodka. 5001 Boonville, Bryan, 979-776-2181; christophersworldgrille.com

DIVE

Dixie Chicken: College Station's Northgate entertainment district, located just across from A&M, has plenty of nightlife options, but none is more beloved than this rambling dive bar with a honky-tonk décor. Walk through the swinging doors for some longneck beers and burgers and discover why the Chicken has been part of Aggie history and lore since 1974. 307 University Drive, College Station, 979-846-2322; dixiechicken.com

Layne's Chicken Fingers: This College Station institution, known for its hand-cut, marinated and breaded chicken strips and crispy fries, has spread beyond Aggieland and recently opened its first Houston-area location in Katy. Three College Station locations; layneschickenfingers.com

STAY

The Stella Hotel: This 176-room Bryan hotel mixes contemporary design with Texas hospitality. The Stella includes Campfire, an upscale farm-to-table restaurant, and Hershel's, a craft cocktail bar with one of the best selections of bourbons in the Brazos Valley. Guest rooms feature beds with Frette linens and floor-to-ceiling views of Bryan and College Station (including Kyle Field). 4100 Lake Atlas, 979-421-4000; thestellahotel.com

LUBBOCK

EAT

The West Table: Husband-and-wife team Cameron and Rachel West are behind this refined restaurant, where Lubbock roots run deep. Cameron is a Texas Tech alum and the grandson of Dirk West, a famous Lubbock cartoonist and former mayor who was known for his collegiate mascot caricatures. The West Table team puts an emphasis on fresh, local



THE DIXIE CHICKEN BAR IN COLLEGE STATION IS THE OLDEST AND MOST BELOVED AGGIE TRADITION.



THE STELLA HOTEL IN BRYAN WAS NAMED THE NO. 3 HOTEL IN TEXAS IN A CONDE NAST READERS' POLL.



THE COTTON COURT IS A NEW RETRO-CHIC MOTEL IN LUBBOCK.



LUBBOCK'S WEST TABLE SERVES CHARBROILED BEEF TENDERLOIN WITH FINGERLING POTATOES.

ingredients, and the food menus change daily and with the seasons. Recent dishes have included a grilled double bone-in pork chop with cheddar grits; tomato-okra stew and green beans; as well as lamb loin chop with cilantro-lime rice, masala curry vegetables and cucumber-mint raita. The beverage list features many local Texas High Plains wine selections and a dozen specialty cocktails. *1204 Broadway, Lubbock, 806-993-9378; thewesttable.com*

DIVE

Chimy's: Some say Red Raiders are almost as fanatical about Chimy's as they are about the team itself. Now a franchise with several locations in Texas, Chimy's originally opened in Lubbock in 2002. The food menu is full of Tex-Mex favorites: queso, guac, fajitas, quesadillas, nachos, tacos and more. The bar serves a few different margaritas and other mixed drinks like Ranch Water and the Chilton, Lubbock's signature cocktail. On game day, Chimy's is the perfect place to wreck 'em. *2417 Broadway, Lubbock, 806-763-7369; chimys.com*

STAY

The Cotton Court Hotel: Opened in September 2020, the Cotton Court is the newest place to stay in downtown Lubbock, minutes away from Texas Tech and the popular Depot District. The 165 rooms are outfitted in a retro-chic motel style with large porches and views of the courtyard and pool. The hotel's restaurant, Midnight Shift, serves Texan-American dishes with global influences, such as sweet and sour baby back ribs and pork tenderloin fried rice. Cotton Court is a hotel from the Valencia Group, a Houston-based company. Room rates range from \$129 to \$359 per night. *1610 Broadway, Lubbock, 806-758-5800; cottoncourthotel.com*

WACO

EAT

Revival Eastside Eatery: Housed in a former Baptist church with exposed rafters and antique brickwork, the restaurant opened in 2019 within walking distance of the Silos in Waco's historic, well-preserved downtown. Some might find the menu, with a focus on fresh, locally sourced ingredients, downright spiritual, with offerings such as the Prodigal Son and Technicolor Dreamcoat sandwiches or the Garden of Eating salad. Brioche-bun burgers and healthy butcher-paper specials round on the menu. Hallelujah, you'll also find Texas craft beers and wine. *704 Elm, Waco; revivaleastsideeatery.com*

DIVE

George's: "Home of the Big O," the classic bar and restaurant located near campus has been a Waco institution since 1930. Expect to wait among crowds of revelers in the indoor-outdoor setup, where ice-cold beer and cocktails are served in fishbowl-size globets, or Big Os. On game day, multigenerational families of Baylor alum wearing green and gold meet for burgers, steaks and other bar eats. *1925 Speight, Waco; georgesrestaurant.com*

STAY

Magnolia Vacation Rentals: Chip and Joanna Gaines' signature "Fixer Upper" stamp is evident in their trio of homes available for overnight stays, a hot ticket while the TV-and-publishing stars complete their highly anticipated hotel project. Depending on the property, the charming houses — dubbed Magnolia House, Carriage House and Hillcrest Estate — accommodate groups of six to 12, who can cozy up in Gaines' clean, white shiplap-and-subway tile aesthetic accented with designer finishes, funky tile and welcoming front porches. Carriage House was renovated on Season 3 of the HGTV series. *From \$695/night; magnolia.com*



STAY IN A "FIXER UPPER" SUCH AS MAGNOLIA'S CARRIAGE HOUSE IN WACO.



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FORT WORTH

EAT

B&B Butchers: Fans of Benjamin Berg's Houston steakhouse will want to stop by the Fort Worth location for its signature top-quality wagyu and prime. The stellar shellfish tower and Steak á la Berg, sliced and served over hash browns with sautéed mushrooms, are also on the menu. 5212 Marathon, Fort Worth; 817-737-5212; bbbutchers.com

DIVE

Lola's Saloon and Trailer Park: Lola's Saloon, in the Cultural District, is the kind of dark, divey bar that's a perfect hangout after a rowdy football game. Lola's is actually three bars: the inside spot where you can catch live local music onstage; a patio bar; and a pet-friendly trailer park for bigger crowds. Wander in for happy hour, 2-8 p.m. Monday-Friday and noon-8 p.m. Saturday and Sunday. Or get there early for Dayne's Craft Barbecue, 11 a.m.-4 p.m. (or until it's sold out) Friday-Sunday. 2736 Sixth, Fort Worth, 817-759-9100; lolasfw.com

STAY

The Kimpton Harper: The boutique hotel opened near Sundance Square in June, and already, it's a Fort Worth favorite. Its 226 guest rooms and suites have high-end details, including works by Texas artists, handcrafted furniture and historic details that are distinctly Fort Worth. The 24th-floor lobby of the 1921 building offers expansive views of the city. Have a craft cocktail at the bar or check out the daily social hour with coffee and tea service. The downtown location makes it easy to explore the city's museums, restaurants and shops. 714 Main, Fort Worth; 800-482-8372; theharperfortworth.com

DALLAS

EAT

Rooftop Restaurant at RH Dallas: Housed in an atrium with retractable glass walls allowing for sunlight to nourish the lush garden, the upper level restaurant is the crown jewel of the new three-story RH Dallas. With a European-inspired fountain, chandeliers dotting the tree tops and enviable designer furnishings available on the gallery floors, the setting is picturesque for a rosé- or bellini-fueled meal of gem lettuce salads, lobster rolls, seafood and burgers. 3133 Knox, Dallas; rh.com

DIVE

The Old Monk: With a reverence for quality beer from around the globe, the Irish pub on trendy Knox-Henderson offers ample



FORT WORTH'S B&B BUTCHERS OFFERS TEMPTING DISHES SUCH AS FRIED OYSTERS AND FILET MIGNON.



THE NEW KIMPTON HARPER IN FORT WORTH HAS A DAILY SOCIAL HOUR.



GO EARLY TO THE LONE STAR SALOON ON SATURDAYS FOR DAYNE'S CRAFT BARBECUE.



THOMPSON HOTEL IN DOWNTOWN DALLAS IS FILLED WITH MODERN ART.



ROOFTOP RESTAURANT IS THE CROWN JEWEL AT RH DALLAS.



EACH OF THE COMMODORE PERRY'S ROOMS HAS ITS OWN LOOK.



COMMODORE PERRY ESTATE IS AUSTIN'S NEWEST, SWANKIEST RESORT.



SUERTE RESTAURANT IN AUSTIN FEATURES TRADITIONAL MEXICAN COOKING.

twinkle-lit patio space and a full bar menu. Dimly lit inside, thanks to lighting plucked from a monastery, the setting is as comforting as menu items such as fish and chips, soft pretzels, whiskey-cheddar burgers and bratwurst, along with salads and lighter fare. 2847 N. Henderson, Dallas; oldmonkdallas.com

STAY

Thompson Hotel: The modern art-filled lobby sets expectations for the stylish guest floors at Thompson Hotel downtown. Outfitted with Sferra linens, luxurious robes, brass-accented headboards, leather furnishings and DS & Durga Bowmakers bath amenities, the rooms are sleek but comfortable. The uber-buzzy 49th-floor Monarch restaurant draws a glittering crowd, as does the cutting-edge spa offering celeb-approved services and hot and cold plunge pools on the terrace overlooking the skyline. 205 N. Akard, Dallas; thompsondallas.com

AUSTIN

EAT

Suerte: Reservations are a good idea at this close-in East Austin hot spot. The ever-evolving menu includes dishes made with traditional Mexican cooking techniques, using Texas ingredients and housemade masa — think tacos with confit brisket and avocado crudo; oak-smoked snapper collar with tortillas to go along; or shrimp aguachile with a grilled apple-habanero broth. Pair with a Suerte's tasty paloma for optimal results. 1800 E. Sixth, 512-953-0092; suerteatx.com

DIVE

Crown and Anchor: Tailgating rules before games at Darrell K Royal-Texas Memorial Stadium, but this lively bar has been around for nearly 35 years. Expect a vast selection of beer, craft and otherwise, alongside pub grub, including burgers and tacos, all within walking distance of the stadium. 2911 San Jacinto, Austin; crownandanchorpub.com

STAY

Commodore Perry Estate: Austin's newest, swankiest resort — a 10 acre property a few blocks north of the University of Texas campus — features cascading formal gardens and lawns and a gorgeous pool area. The, 42 rooms and 12 suites each have their own look; some have bar carts and four-poster beds, others have courtyards or balconies. Complimentary bicycles are available. It's a popular spot for weddings (and home games), so best to book far in advance. 4100 Red River, Austin; aubergeresorts.com/commodoreperry