

Alpine, Texas

Thanks to Hollywood movies, many people think of the Lone Star State as a land of treeless and endless prairies and deserts. But here in West Texas there is a town called Alpine, nestled in the mountains at an elevation of almost a mile. It is the center of the ranching industry for the West Texas region known as the Big Bend Country, and home to Sul Ross State University, one of the smallest state-supported schools in Texas. Sul Ross has an enrollment of around 2,000 students with educational emphases on geology and range management. For those that like the thrill of an eight second ride, the university offers scholarships in the sport of rodeo. You can see the campus scattered along the hillside on the north side of the train. Look for the white washed rocks on the mountain side bearing the school's "bar-S-bar" logo.

Alpine is Amtrak's stop for exploring West Texas. There are two national park areas nearby, a state park and several other attractions. About 30 miles to the north of Alpine is Fort Davis National Historic Site. It is one of the finest examples of an Indian Wars military fort. It was home to the Buffalo Soldiers - African-American soldiers who were part of the Army's cavalry and infantry military units. At the fort, you can see restored officer's quarters and enlisted men's barracks. There is a small visitor center and museum located in one of the barracks. Alpine is also the station stop for Big Bend National Park, about 110 miles to the south.

Davis Mountain State Park, operated by the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, is also located near the town of Fort Davis - this happens to be the highest town in Texas at just over a mile above sea level. There are plenty of hiking trails, campgrounds and fantastic views. Indian Lodge, a rustic resort hotel in the state park, was built by the Civilian Conservation Corps in the 1930's, and has been restored to create a luxurious experience for guests. You can reach for the stars at the University of Texas McDonald Observatory at an elevation of nearly 7,000 feet, sitting atop the Davis Mountains. It is home to some of the largest telescopes in the United States. Tours are available as well as weekly star parties where visitors have a chance to look through some of the telescopes.

Source(s):

Author(s):

Written by James E. Miculka with the National Park Service based with the Department of Recreation, Park and Tourism Sciences at Texas A&M University, as part of a National Park Service Trails and Rails project funded by Amtrak, 2009.