



Second homes: Lakeshore living in Texas Hill Country

By Larry Olmsted, Special for USA TODAY

Hill Country is like many things in the Lone Star State: It's big. The region stretches about 165 miles across, west from Austin, and 100 miles north from San Antonio. Dotted with small-town charm, natural beauty and fair weather, the region has become one of the most popular retirement, vacation and second-home areas in the nation. But some parts are more popular than others.

Though most of the Hill Country lives up to its rugged and rocky name, there is a section in the northeast where the Highland Lakes chain of seven lakes offers beaches, water sports and waterfront property.

"There are several lakes that connect," says Abby Mureen, a top broker with Keller Williams Realty in Austin. The biggest are Lake Travis and Lake LBJ, both man-made by dams on the Colorado River. Lake LBJ is known for its waterfront, golf community living, while Lake Travis offers the better fishing and aquatic sports, including jet skiing, sailing, speed boating and wakeboarding.

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Lake Travis is closer to Austin, and on its south shore are bedroom communities. "Everything on the south shore, including the city of Lakeway, is about 30% more expensive because it's closer to downtown and the airport," Mureen says.

Second-home communities run alongside the north side of Lake Travis and around Lake LBJ. Though there is a premium on lakefront, with homes hard to find for under \$1 million, Mureen says prices drop sharply inland: Attractive off-water homes are available for \$400,000 to \$500,000 and condos for under \$200,000.

A look at three Hill Country neighborhoods

- **Horseshoe Bay:** A resort development on Lake LBJ that includes marinas, several residential communities, a full-service Marriott resort hotel and more than 10 bars and restaurants, Horseshoe Bay (horseshoebaytexas.com) also has three Robert Trent Jones-designed golf courses. Just outside the waterfront community of Marble Falls, the resort spans 7,000 acres and even has its own private airport. Most waterfront homes run from \$1 million to \$2.5 million, while waterfront and inland condos begin at around \$200,000.
- **The Hollows:** Perhaps the premier water-oriented community on Lake Travis, the upscale 1,400-acre community (hollowslaketraavis.com) has 6 miles of shoreline. It has a beach club, extensive fitness facilities and 18 miles of hiking and biking trails. Condos run \$250,000 to \$500,000, single-family cottages and casitas \$400,000 to more than \$600,000, and lots from \$90,000 to \$250,000.
- **Cedar Park:** Inland from Lake Travis, Cedar Park is the largest town in the lakes region, and while many full-time residents are attracted by its quality schools and planned communities, it also appeals to second-home owners who want more restaurants, shops and infrastructure. Prices are much lower than in

lakefront communities, with single-family homes beginning at \$200,000 and large (four- to five-bedroom) homes in the \$300,000s. Homes in gated and golf communities around town can run up to \$1 million.

TEXAS HILL COUNTRY

Best for: Boaters, anglers, golfers and weekenders from nearby Dallas, Houston, San Antonio and Austin.

Claim to fame: Hill Country is Texas' premier wine region, with three designated American Viticultural Areas.

Don't miss: Austin City Limits, one of the nation's longest-running music festivals, every fall.

Getting there: The heart of the Hill County lakes region is 30-45 miles from the Austin airport.

Tourism information: lakesandhills.com