



**TEXAS' LARGEST, NATURAL BRIDGE CAVERNS
OFFERS FAMILY FUN AND ADVENTURE**

Living Caverns' Extraordinary Formations Delight and Engage Guests of All Ages

On March 27, 1960, four college students from St. Mary's University in San Antonio began an underground exploration that ultimately would reveal the largest cavern system in Texas. Led to the site after hearing of an amazing 60-foot limestone bridge which would become the caverns' namesake, the students obtained permission from the Wuest family to investigate what laid beneath their ranch. Initially the students didn't make any remarkable finds, but on their fourth expedition they uncovered a long, narrow crawlspace that ultimately opened up into two miles of virgin caverns. Today, their discovery is recognized as a National Natural Landmark by the U.S. Department of the Interior and one of the world's premier show caverns.

Guests of Natural Bridge Caverns can choose from two daily tours – the *Discovery Tour* and the *Illuminations Tour* – each quite different and offering its own unique enchantments. "We've taken great care to preserve the cavern environment and develop for our guests two unforgettable cavern experiences, each with its own personality," explains Brad Wuest, president and chief executive officer of Natural Bridge Caverns. "We believe we are giving people an experience they haven't seen anywhere else in Texas."

Both tours are led by trained Natural Bridge guides down to a depth of 180 feet below the surface, through passages and rooms of glistening cave formations revealed in succession, beautifully unfolding long-held secrets of the caverns. Many of the formations actually sparkle from the light reflecting off calcite crystals that adorn them. First-time cavern visitors may be surprised by the colors of some formations, sometimes subtle, sometimes deeper, depending upon the mineral content.

"Natural Bridge Caverns is called a living cave because the cave formations are still being formed by water dissolving rock," explains Brian Vauter, Cave Geologist for Natural Bridge Caverns. In actuality a complex process of variables, a simple explanation of cave formation is that as rainwater falls from the sky and seeps through the soil, it picks up carbon dioxide and makes carbonic acid. This slightly acidic water then seeps through the ground absorbing minerals like calcium carbonate along the way. Inside the cave, the mixture drips from the ceiling and the minerals in the water are left behind. Over hundreds of thousands of years they create the cave's formations, including icicle-like stalactites on the ceiling and pillar-like stalagmites on the floor. The rate of growth varies, but currently it's about one inch every 100 years.

Cavern tours feature vast rooms and winding passages of geologic treasures, from gigantic, towering stone monuments like Sherwood Forest and the Castle of the White Giants, to delicate and rare formations of soda straws and cave ribbon. The formations are plentiful and beautiful, even breath-taking, and nearly all of them are still growing.

The *Discovery Tour* lasts approximately 75 minutes and boasts the largest rooms of the two tours, one the size of a football field. The *Illuminations Tour* lasts approximately 70 minutes and features a total darkness experience.

A family-oriented attraction, Natural Bridge Caverns offers a variety of activities for all ages. Two unique *Adventure Tours* allow the more daring an opportunity to don rappelling gear, helmets and headlamps for a guided cave excursion that gives participants a chance to get dirty and appreciate the experience of exploring the unknown. These three-to-four-hour *Adventure Tours* are by reservation only and are not for the faint of heart.

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Natural Bridge Mining Company is an authentic mining sluice where guests can pan for gems, minerals and fossils, just like miners once did in their search for gold. Sparkling quartz, sapphire, ruby, topaz, emerald, crystal and many other gems and minerals, as well as arrowheads and fossils are among the treasures that can be discovered at this attraction. The more adventurous might want to try the *Watchtower Challenge*, season and weather permitting, and test their climbing skills on one of the largest outdoor climbing and zip line towers in Texas.

Natural Bridge Caverns is open daily from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m., with extended hours for spring and summer. The year-round temperature in the caverns is 70 degrees with high humidity. Guests should wear lightweight clothing and comfortable walking shoes which provide good traction on steep, wet surfaces. Strollers are not recommended for the *Discovery Tour*, and not permitted on the *Illuminations Tour*. The caverns are located 30 miles north of downtown San Antonio and eight miles west of IH-35 at exit 175/Natural Bridge Caverns Road. For additional information, visit www.naturalbridgecaverns.com or phone 210-651-6101.

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