

Photo Itinerary...

A Photographer's Oasis - Brazos Bend State Park

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New Beginnings

"The morning sun bursts forth with streams of light....
Wakening the day and chasing the night.
Drops of glistening dew reflect a new day coming..bringing
New Life
New Hope
New Beginnings

Passion's flames rise from night's glowing embers...
Ne'er to die again.
Nature's sweet song echoes through the forest...
rustling leaves in the still morning air.

Cool, rippling waters lap gently at the shore...
schools of minnows playfully wakening to the Great Heron's trumpeting call.
Night makes way for a new day triumphant...
full of glory...enveloped in light.
New Life....
New Hope....
New Beginnings."

That was a poem I wrote back in early 1999 - little did I know that I would experience the peace and tranquility Nature created and brought forth at Brazos Bend State Park. I had just moved to the Houston area (Sugar Land to be exact) in May 1999 and wanted to explore photo opportunities in my new environment. Nature is ever loving, ever forgiving and can survive the most destructive holocaust Man can devise - always bouncing back with "New Beginnings". Hence, when I discovered Brazos Bend, it was like a new day - enlightening, invigorating and refreshing to my soul. Visiting the park is like stepping back in time - the land that time forgot (almost). Texas Parks and Wildlife have left many of the areas untouched by human hands, but have done an excellent job of providing adequate trails throughout the area (many are handicapped-accessible).



Brazos Bend State Park is nestled on approximately 4,900 acres about 30 miles south of Houston, Texas (the United States' 4th largest city with approximately 4 million residents) close to Needville (I think this consists of about 1 gas station and no full-time residents, and I have yet to see a city limit sign!). The park borders the Brazos River for a short distance (3.2 miles) and was the site of Texas' first Anglo settlement. Contrary to belief that Texans are first in everything (grins), archeologists have determined that Man inhabited this area as early as 300 B.C. The river served early settlers as one of the main tributaries for cotton brokers shipping their goods to points north and south. The land for the park was acquired by the State of Texas in 1976 and opened to the public in 1984. This is a relatively "young" park by anyone's standards!

The park has 7 lakes, two of which are oxbow lakes. These "horseshoe-shaped" lakes are formed by the meanderings of creeks or streams.



They are cut off from the main flow of the creek (generally by flooding), then left to fill with water, mud and other debris. Old Horseshoe Lake and New Horseshoe Lake are great areas to view some of the 270 species of birds that frequent the park, as well as alligators, frogs, turtles, and other aquatic life. The other major bodies of water (mostly marshes and swamps) are 40-Acre Lake, Elm Lake, Pilant Lake, Creekfield Lake and Hale Lake - all accessible through a vast network of trails with the exception of Pilant Lake which is basically a very large marshy area filled with cattails and trees (and lots of gators I'm sure!). The park also offers campsites with water and electricity, a group camping area complete with cabins and dining hall, a visitors center with vast information about the flora and fauna, an observatory (George Observatory) for stargazing and various weekend programs for children, as well as adults.

For the photographer, Brazos Bend is the Garden of Eden - an Oasis near the concrete and steel of the city. Many of the 270 species of birds live here year round - including Ibises, Cormorants, Great Blue Herons, Moorhens, Pied-billed Grebes, American Coots, Egrets and many more. The Spring and Fall migrations bring in warblers, bluebirds, robins and various species of sparrows. The park is also home to several herds of Whitetail Deer, Nine-banded Armadillos, Feral hogs, many species of butterflies, snakes (both venomous and non-venomous), fox and even an occasional coyote or two. The most famous residents of the park are the American Alligators. Unlike their cousins the crocodile (who are very aggressive by the way), the alligators at Brazos are relatively docile and will allow you to get very close. Caution must be used, however, since they can be extremely protective of their young. In addition, the Coastal Plain is a favorite habitat of native wildflowers suitable for scenic, as well as macro photography.

One big advantage to shooting at Brazos Bend is that the creatures and avians who make this their home are relatively accustomed to humans meandering the trails. This makes it easy to get frame-filling images without having extremely large glass. I generally use my Sigma 400mm APO Telephoto/Macro lens and sometimes couple it with either a 1.4x or 2.0x teleconverter. I've found it's best to hit the trails early in the morning to shoot since the park is a favorite spot for visitors and bicyclists - getting there early will provide you with the best photo opportunities sans the crowds.

Another big advantage to shooting at Brazos Bend is the climate. Great photo opportunities are available year round since we rarely have much of a winter. Temperatures are still in the 60s and 70s much of the time during the winter months. However, with the warmer temps also come the mosquitoes! It's wise to bring repellent with you as you walk the trails since the moist ecosystem is conducive for the pesky little critters to thrive. If you are ever in the Houston area, be sure to make a side trip to Brazos Bend - it will be well worth the extra time and you'll leave with a smile on your face vowing to come back again. Be sure to let me know if you are coming and I'll be glad to give you the grand tour!

For more information on Brazos Bend and other state parks in Texas, please visit the following links:

- [Brazos Bend State Park](#)
- [Texas Parks and Wildlife](#)

I also invite you to visit my website where you can find many more images of the various flora and fauna of Brazos Bend, the Hill Country and Southeast Texas: [Michael's Natural Images](#)

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