



INSIDE

TOM PARSONS: The family that sits together, pays, **2K**

CANADA: Walking on glass, **3K**

ITALY: A cafe full of cats, **6K**

TEXAS

HILL COUNTRY TRIFECTA



BANDERA
Population 870
Cowboy up, y'all. **5K**

There's plenty of room for two-stepping to live music on the open-air patio at the 11th Street Cowboy Bar in Bandera.

Photo: Andrea/Amelia Contreras

Choose one for a long weekend or take a road trip to all three

The Hill Country burgs of Comfort, Boerne and Bandera form a rough triangle to the northwest of San Antonio. Each exudes that particular charm that makes the Hill Country a favorite destination for weekenders.

Bandera is known for its dude ranches and cowboy bars. Comfort, long a favorite of antiques, now boasts an award-winning winery. And Boerne is working to make its downtown more pedestrian-friendly.

You could spend a day or a week exploring them all. Read on to find out how new and old blend splendidly in the trio.

Travel staff



COMFORT
Population 2,504
A walkable antiques lover's haven. **5K**

Rent a bike for \$8 a day at Comfort Plaza on Hill Street in downtown Comfort.

Photo: Andrea/Amelia Contreras

BOERNE
Population 11,384
Mix of old and new. **4K**

Rinolo Ranch offers luxury suites and spa treatments 15 minutes from downtown Boerne.

Photo: Andrea/Amelia Contreras

ECUADOR

Biologists have nose for finding the Pinocchio lizard

Join the pros on a herp walk in a cloud forest

By **KAREN CATCHPOLE**
Horizon Writers' Group

MINDO VALLEY, Ecuador — In the video, several young biologists stand around in the cloud forest wearing T-shirts while watching an odd little lizard — no, two odd little lizards — hanging out on a branch. They could have been in someone's backyard with a

new pet.

So I headed into the Ecuadorian cloud forest on a "herping" tour in search of the Pinocchio lizard.

It looked so easy. "Herping," "herp" and "herps" are terms used by herpetologists who study reptiles, frogs and snakes. As far as herps go, the Pinocchio lizard is cuter than most. Like other members of the anole family, it can change color. It gets its name from the long, hornlike proboscis sported by males

and used to deter rivals and attract females.

The species is one of the most narrowly distributed in all of Ecuador, endemic to a 20-square-mile plot of cloud forest in the Mindo Valley 2 hours north of Quito. Until 1963, the distinctive lizard was routinely seen in the valley; then it disappeared for more than 40 years. Talk of endangerment or extinction persisted even after a bird-watcher spotted a lone Pinocchio lizard in 2005.

Back then, Venezuelan biologist Alejandro Arteaga was just 15 years old and Ecuadorian biologist Lucas Bustamante was 17. However, in 2013, while they were part of a team of biologists researching a book called *The Amphibians and Reptiles of Mindo: Life in the Cloud Forest* (Universidad Tecnológica Indoamérica, \$49) sightings of new and rare species of frogs made them hopeful that the Pi-



Eric Mohl/Horizon Writers' Group

A Pinocchio lizard, once feared extinct, shows off its distinctive namesake nose in Ecuador's Mindo Valley.

See **A NEW** Page 3K



Eric Mohl/Horizontal Writers' Group
Biologist Alejandro Arteaga admires a Pinocchio lizard, a species rediscovered in 2013 in Ecuador's Mindo Valley.

A new kind of tourism: herping

Continued from Page 1K

nocchio was still alive and well.

Gut feeling and youthful optimism carried them through three years of searching. Finally one rainy night in October 2013 they spotted a lone male clinging to a tree branch, doing its best to blend in.

"It was the holy grail of herping," said Arteaga, who cried when they confirmed the species of the strange lizard. "For us it was the herp symbol of Mindo."

In fact, they shouldn't have seen the Pinocchio at all. Existing scientific literature indicated that the Pinocchio lizard preferred roadsides and secondary growth forest, but Arteaga and Bustamante made their sighting in primary growth forest far from any road.

Arteaga and Bustamante resolved to help people experience the thrill of spotting frogs, snakes and lizards.

"We need to change the perception of reptiles and amphibians," said Arteaga. They've formed a tour company called Tropical Herping to promote herping as a reptilian version of bird-watching.

"Reptiles and amphibians are way more endangered than birds," Bustamante said.

Nighttime is the best time for hunting herps because frogs and snakes are generally out looking for food or mates while lizards, including the Pinocchio, are asleep and surprisingly docile. At 8 p.m. I joined Arteaga and Bustamante, who both speak fluent English. We put on rubber boots and raincoats and headed out on the muddy, slippery trails that wind through a 1,040-acre private reserve in the Mindo Valley that is owned by El Septimo Paraiso Lodge.

We were armed with headlamps and hope.

Both biologists have permits from Ecuador's Ministry of the Environment to handle frogs, snakes and lizards. They quickly spotted a potpourri of frogs, but we stayed focused on finding Pinocchio. This turned out to be even more unlikely than I'd feared because the Pinocchio lizard likes to spend the night on

When you go

■ Alejandro Arteaga, Lucas Bustamante and their partners have created a tour company called Tropical Herping (tropicalherping.com) that is dedicated to fostering frog-, snake- and lizard-watching tourism. Tours can be tailored to include "herpetography" tips for capturing the best photographs of frogs, snakes and lizards. Their book, *The Amphibians and Reptiles of Mindo: Life in the Cloud Forest*, can be purchased in English from their site.

■ Tropic Journeys in Nature (destinationecuador.com/pinocchio-lizard-photography-trip.html) has just debuted an all-inclusive three-night photography-focused herping tour to the Mindo Valley guided by Arteaga and Bustamante (\$880, not including airfare to Quito).

■ El Septimo Paraiso (septimoparaiso.com) is a lovingly run, 25-room, antique-filled lodge that feels like an English country manor transported to the cloud forest. There are extensive trails through the private cloud forest reserve, which is where Arteaga, Bustamante and their colleagues made their rediscovery of the Pinocchio lizard.

■ The Mariscal Sucre International Airport in Quito was inaugurated in February 2013 and is serviced from North America by American Airlines, LAN Airlines, Avianca, TACA Airlines, Delta, United and TAME Airlines. It's a four-hour drive from the airport to the Mindo Valley or a two-hour drive from the center of Quito.

leafy tree limbs up to 25 feet above the ground. Did I mention that it was dark?

Arteaga and Bustamante believe this hard-to-spot perch is the main reason the species wasn't seen for so long.

Raindrops splashed into our eyes and our necks ached as we peered upward, sweeping branches with our headlamp beams.

By 9 p.m., we were scrambling single file up a steep, slippery slope when Arteaga called a halt. We were near the spot where they had their first sighting in October, but we were not having any luck.

Around 10 p.m. we slid back down the hill and got into a small SUV for the short, bumpy drive to another section of cloud forest. Arteaga and Bustamante remained enthusiastic, but I was beginning to have my doubts.

Ten minutes later, we parked the SUV and started walking along a dirt road, searching the branches on either side. Less than 300 yards from the SUV, Arteaga finally spotted the pale green underbelly of the lizard we'd come to see. It was 15 feet off the ground, clinging to a branch, exactly as advertised.

After trying to coax the lizard off the branch and onto

a not-quite-long-enough bamboo pole, Bustamante accidentally knocked it out of the tree. Arteaga carefully cupped the now fully awake but still strangely calm lizard in his hands when it landed in the tall grass.

"Put out your finger," Arteaga said. At 11 p.m. I had a 7-inch, very much not extinct Pinocchio lizard clinging to my finger. It was unexpectedly heavy, and close up I could see the light green bands on its tail; the ridge of dinosaurlike spikes along its spine; the dark spots, which are unique to each lizard, along its round belly; and, of course, that nose, pale and oddly flexible.

Arteaga and Bustamante had seen merely 12 Pinocchio lizards since their initial rediscovery, and each one had been carefully documented and identified. They examined the particularly large male on my hand and said they believed he was a new find for them — lucky No. 13. The discovery thrilled them. The Pinocchio lizard seemed equally thrilled with his new, warmer perch.

And then a thrilling realization dawned on me: I was one of only a handful of people who have seen this creature in recent memory.



The glass-floored observation platform is 900 feet above the world's largest glacier in western Canada's Yukon Territory. A viewing platform is 900 feet above the world's largest glacier in western Canada's Yukon Territory. A viewing platform is 900 feet above the world's largest glacier in western Canada's Yukon Territory.

Glacier Skywalk will send chills through you

See spectacular ice fields from a glass window

By JAMES HIRN

ALBUQUERQUE, N.M. — I've found the walk in 2013. The new Glacier Skywalk, which opened May 1, is a glass walkway that extends 900 feet above the surface and provides a unique view of the world's largest glacier.

The walkway is a 900-foot-long, 10-foot-wide, glass-floored walkway that extends 900 feet above the surface and provides a unique view of the world's largest glacier.

The walkway is a 900-foot-long, 10-foot-wide, glass-floored walkway that extends 900 feet above the surface and provides a unique view of the world's largest glacier.

The walkway is a 900-foot-long, 10-foot-wide, glass-floored walkway that extends 900 feet above the surface and provides a unique view of the world's largest glacier.

The walkway is a 900-foot-long, 10-foot-wide, glass-floored walkway that extends 900 feet above the surface and provides a unique view of the world's largest glacier.

For both, the Skywalk delivers an adrenaline rush. Endorsed by Parks Canada, the Glacier Skywalk stands at the junction of the Yukon and Klondike rivers, and is 900 feet from Jasper and 277 miles from Banff, along the world's longest railway line.

From Lake Louise to the town of Jasper, the walkway is a 900-foot-long, 10-foot-wide, glass-floored walkway that extends 900 feet above the surface and provides a unique view of the world's largest glacier.

The Glacier Skywalk has a 900-foot-long, 10-foot-wide, glass-floored walkway that extends 900 feet above the surface and provides a unique view of the world's largest glacier.

The walkway is a 900-foot-long, 10-foot-wide, glass-floored walkway that extends 900 feet above the surface and provides a unique view of the world's largest glacier.

The walkway is a 900-foot-long, 10-foot-wide, glass-floored walkway that extends 900 feet above the surface and provides a unique view of the world's largest glacier.

The walkway is a 900-foot-long, 10-foot-wide, glass-floored walkway that extends 900 feet above the surface and provides a unique view of the world's largest glacier.

When you go

The walkway is a 900-foot-long, 10-foot-wide, glass-floored walkway that extends 900 feet above the surface and provides a unique view of the world's largest glacier.

The walkway is a 900-foot-long, 10-foot-wide, glass-floored walkway that extends 900 feet above the surface and provides a unique view of the world's largest glacier.

The walkway is a 900-foot-long, 10-foot-wide, glass-floored walkway that extends 900 feet above the surface and provides a unique view of the world's largest glacier.

The walkway is a 900-foot-long, 10-foot-wide, glass-floored walkway that extends 900 feet above the surface and provides a unique view of the world's largest glacier.

The walkway is a 900-foot-long, 10-foot-wide, glass-floored walkway that extends 900 feet above the surface and provides a unique view of the world's largest glacier.

The walkway is a 900-foot-long, 10-foot-wide, glass-floored walkway that extends 900 feet above the surface and provides a unique view of the world's largest glacier.

The walkway is a 900-foot-long, 10-foot-wide, glass-floored walkway that extends 900 feet above the surface and provides a unique view of the world's largest glacier.

The walkway is a 900-foot-long, 10-foot-wide, glass-floored walkway that extends 900 feet above the surface and provides a unique view of the world's largest glacier.

The walkway is a 900-foot-long, 10-foot-wide, glass-floored walkway that extends 900 feet above the surface and provides a unique view of the world's largest glacier.

The walkway is a 900-foot-long, 10-foot-wide, glass-floored walkway that extends 900 feet above the surface and provides a unique view of the world's largest glacier.

It's Your Time to Celebrate with up to a \$100 Resort Credit!

Make any occasion special at Gaylord Texas Resort

When you spend \$100 on any dining or shopping at Gaylord Texas Resort, you'll receive a \$100 resort credit to use on any dining or shopping at Gaylord Texas Resort. The credit is valid for 90 days from the date of your purchase.

With just \$100, you'll enjoy a relaxing vacation at Gaylord Texas Resort. The resort is located in the heart of Texas, just west of Austin. It's a beautiful resort with a variety of amenities, including a pool, spa, and golf course. The resort is also a great place to enjoy the outdoors, with hiking trails and a playground.

Gaylord Texas Resort

10000 Gaylord Blvd, Gaylord, TX 76843

817-524-1234

www.gaylordtexasresort.com