

Find respite and prime rib in Buffalo Gap

By **JUNE NAYLOR**
SPECIAL TO THE STAR-TELEGRAM

BUFFALO GAP — Every so often, I get a serious hankerin' to run off to the Hill Country for some soul restoration. Sometimes I crave a reconnection with the scrubby swells of land and a quietness I can't find at home.

But I can rarely spare a weekend or find the time to drive four hours. So, I gratefully point my car toward Buffalo Gap, about two hours west. It's a great overnight escape.

Buffalo Gap, a teensy burg in Abilene's shadows, looks more like Hill Country than mid-West Texas. Ancient oaks shade the town's cute-but-creaky shops and historic village, surrounded by rocky outcroppings, reddish dirt and a mini-valley cut by Elk Creek, once used by buffalo as a watering hole.

A walk through the village is reminiscent of the settlement that began in 1857 and boomed during the 1860s and 1870s, when buffalo hunters camped here en route to trading sites at nearby Fort Griffin and beyond. Wandering through the old train depot, jail and courthouse, a post office and a tiny cabin that sheltered a family of 13, I



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Only two hours west are the Harvest Home bed-and-breakfast (pictured), Buffalo Gap's cute shops and the Perini Ranch Steakhouse, home of sophisticated comfort food.

marvel at the brave, hardy pioneers who carved out a life in this lonely terrain.

A pair of friendly tabby cats nap by the front door of the general store, which sells Texana literature and gifts for the collector of Lone Star knickknacks. I'll browse here and a handful of neighboring antique stores before heading off to my hideout for the night.

Crafted as a log barn in Kentucky in 1804, Harvest Home is a bed-and-breakfast cabin where you can sit on the back porch and watch the sun set beyond the trees. In summer, hummingbirds and fireflies provide company, whereas fall supplies a tableau of copper and plum foliage.

The only reason for leaving the cabin is to feast on a plate of mesquite-roasted prime rib with a side of green-chile hominy down the road at Perini Ranch Steakhouse, where I've had to dodge a few lazy longhorns in the gravel parking lot. Cowboy cook Tom Perini, a five-time guest chef at the James Beard House in New York, has perfected the art of serving sophisticated comfort food, topped with down-home hospitality.

Back at the cabin, flames in the stone fireplace flicker as I drift off to sleep beneath a pretty quilt in a big iron bed. The next morning, I return home with enough soul restoration to keep me for a spell.



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IN THE KNOW

The way to Buffalo Gap

■ Buffalo Gap is 13 miles south of Abilene on Farm Road 89. The historic village is open 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday-Saturday; admission is \$2-\$5, free for children 5 and younger.

Info: www.buffalogap.com or (325) 572-3365.

■ Harvest Home Bed & Breakfast is an unhosted cabin with one queen bed, a bathroom, fireplace and kitchenette; \$95-\$110; (325) 572-4381.

■ Perini Ranch Steakhouse serves roasted prime rib, rib-eyes, ribs, fried catfish, green-chile hominy, cowboy potatoes and the chef's great-grandmother's strawberry shortcake made from sugar biscuits, with heavy cream on the side.

Appetizers are priced at \$6-\$14; entrees, \$6-\$23; desserts, \$2.50-\$3.50. Open 5 to 10 p.m. Wednesday-Thursday and 11:30 a.m.-10 p.m. Friday-Sunday. Reservations: (325) 572-3339.

June Naylor, (817) 390-7818
jnaylor@star-telegram.com