

## Texas / West

# Big Bend NP

DISTANCE: ...

ELEVATION GAIN: ...

ROUTE TYPE: ...

### **1. LOST MINE TRAIL**

Moderate Level Hike      4.6 miles in-and-out hike

Lost Mine is one of the most popular hiking trails in Big Bend National Park. The hike is uphill to the peak, returning downhill the way you came. I didn't find the trail to be too difficult. If you are a casual gym goer I think you'll be fine. You do gain an elevation of 1,000 feet, so it is more than a stroll in the forest. If you only have one day in the park, this is the hike I'd recommend.

After leaving the parking lot, we passed signs warning us about mountain lion and bears. I saw neither but I did see a deer and an even less menacing bunny. It was uphill from here, but there were benches to catch our breath regularly and enjoy a water break with a view.

At around halfway up there is series of switchbacks to gain elevation where terrain gets steeper. We thought we had reached the top (above photo), stopping to take pictures, sitting to bask in our glory and success. Then a group of scouts told us to keep going, embarrassed but grateful we kept going. The trail continues a short way past this point. It's relatively treeless and over the rock. It's an easy stroll from here and the views were incredible.

It took us about an hour and fifteen minutes to get to the top, and about 45 minutes to haul ass back down. The lightning that I thought was far in the distance was on top of us in seconds, and we were underwater for our entire descent. So, while apparently this can be done in 2 hours flat when the descent is done running in the rain, I'd allow about 3 hours or more to take your time and stop for snacks and a drink at the top.

Drenched but happy. We were the only ones left on the trail, how shocking. Seems we were the only ones who didn't get the storm memo. Did you know the desert has a monsoon season? On our way out of the park, already out of the mountains, we were blessed with a double rainbow. A promise from the heavens to have no more floods on our hikes in Big Bend? Fingers crossed.

### **2. SOUTH RIM TRAIL**

Strenuous Level Hike      12.7 Mile Loop Trail

The South Rim trail head is just steps from the Chisos Mountain Lodge parking lot and I think it's one of the best hikes Big Bend has to offer. If you're planning on doing the entire loop, prepare accordingly. It is nearly 13 miles and will probably take around 7 to 8 hours. It's recommended to bring a gallon of water per person. We took 2 liters each, plus a liter of Gatorade, plenty of salty snacks and sandwiches. There is a small shop there to stock up if you need.

Since it's a loop you can start with either the Pinnacles Trail or the Laguna Meadows Trail. We started with the Pinnacles. This was the toughest part since it's steep and full of switchbacks in the trees. It was very humid from an early morning rain shower. After a while, we broke through the trees to a view over the Chiso Basin. We could see the lodge in the distance.

The South Rim Trail is classified as strenuous. It takes a full day. Many choose to camp at one of the many designated campsites along this trail. There were a lot of steep switchbacks that alternated with easier walks that regularly gave me a chance to catch my breath. Throughout our entire hike, we were threatened by dark clouds and thunder but we seemed to just miss every storm.

Midway through the hike is the reward. You're blessed with a panoramic view of the south rim and over Mexico. We sat for a relaxing lunch to rest our bones and savor the vistas. We also watched three different thunderstorms pour down over Mexico. Pictures really can't do this justice. It was a breathtaking view.

We rested here for a while with a picnic lunch. Everything we brought onto to the trail with us, we took with us when we left. It's important to leave no trace or your time hiking in Big Bend National Park. Leave only foot prints, take only memories (and amazing photos).

We enjoyed the views for the rest of the walk back, taking in the flowers that were blooming thanks to the rainy season. The soil around the Laguna Meadows area is black and volcanic. There was so much to take in, including another panoramic view of the Chisos Basin (see below).

We were getting pretty beat by the end and the final mile was a struggle. It was a LONG day but I'd do it again in a heartbeat. It took us over 8 hours but we took multiple breaks to rest our feet and to enjoy views. I absolutely recommend this hike for those that have a few days in the park, or those looking to camp. But you do need to be in good physical shape to complete the entire loop.

### **3. WINDOW VIEW TRAIL**

Easy stroll      .3 Miles

This isn't even a hike, it's a stroll. This paved trail is .3 miles long and next to the Chisos Mountains Lodge, right before the South Rim trail head. You can see the famous Window in the distance and it frames a jaw-dropping sunset. Maybe if you just completed the South Rim you can grab an ice cream from the store and collapse your weary bones on a bench here to watch the most beautiful Big Bend National Park sunset, you earned it.

### **4. LOWER BURRO MESA POUR-OFF TRAIL**

Difficulty: Easy      Distance: 1 mile round trip

We did manage to squeeze in one desert hike to round out our Big Bend hiking adventure. This is an easy, 1 mile round trip hike. The short distance is the only reason I dared to walk into the desert on a scorching, August afternoon. We walked half a mile through gravel to a narrow canyon in the Burrow Mesa.

Water pour-off has carved a deep crevasse into the mesa, hollowing out a channel from 100 feet high. It was hot and I may or may not have complained the entire walk back to the car, but I still believe it was worth it. However, having done this I don't recommend anything longer in the desert in August.

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### **5. WINDOW TRAIL**

We had every intention of doing the Window Trail, but the South Rim left us far too sore to even consider it, so until next time Window Trail. This is a moderate hike. It's a 5.6 mile there and back hike to the famous window you view from a distance at the Window View Trail. I've heard it's similar to Lost Mine in difficulty. However, you are descending on the way there, leaving the steep climb for the return. Be sure to save water and energy for the return uphill hike.

### **6. THE PINNACLES**

The Pinnacles starts in the Chisos Basin, near the parking lot for the lodge and convenience store. This is a moderate hike that is just over 7 miles. The first 3.5 miles are completely uphill, via switchbacks climbing the walls of the Chisos Basin. We did this hike to begin our South Rim loop and it literally took our breath away, it was tiring! The views of the basin below make the huffing and puffing worth it. There is a compost toilet at the top and benches to rest before you head back down the way you came.

### **7. EMORY PEAK**

Emory Peak is a 10.5 mile in-and-out trail and the difficulty level is moderate. The Pinnacles trail forms a large part of those 10.5 miles. At the top of Pinnacles trail is another trail head to continue ascending towards the highest peak in the park, Emory Peak. There is a permanent bathroom here as well as bear boxes to lock up anything you don't want to lug to the top with you. This is one of the Big Bend hikes I'm dying to do, we decided to skip it for now in favor of completing the South Rim. I hear the views from the peak are the best in the park. At the very top there's a 25 foot scramble up a rock face to reach the best view.

### **8. LAGUNA MEADOW TRAIL**

The South Rim is a loop trail beginning the Chisos Basin. The trail head here splits in two, with the Pinnacles beginning if you go to the left and the Laguna Meadow Trail to the right. This is a 7.8 mile in-and-out trail of moderate difficulty. The incline is more moderate than the steep hike on the Pinnacles (in hindsight I wish we had chosen to start with this trail for the South Rim for this reason). The biodiversity is beautiful here and I remember being surprised by the black, volcanic soil.

### **9. SANTA ELENA CANYON**

The Santa Elena Canyon is a must do experience. Well, so I'm told. Due to heavy rains throughout the previous weeks, this hike was closed while we were visiting. It's a moderate 1.7-mile hike into the canyon and the views are said to be magnificent.

### **10. HOT SPRINGS HISTORIC TRAIL**

The Hot Springs Historic Trail was also closed when we were there due to flooding. This is a short 1-mile hike and is an easy one, making it a good option for families. There's no shade so in the hot summer months be careful with the sun. You can refresh yourself with a dip in the hot springs while overlooking the Rio Grande. Don't only hike to the Hot Springs but continue to the end of the trail to reach the most beautiful views.

### **11. MULE EARS**

I would have loved to do the Mule Ears Spring Trail, a popular hike in the desert. However, I'll save it for a cooler time of year. This is a moderate 3.8-mile hike in the desert starting on the Ross Maxwell Scenic Drive.

### **12. CHIMNEYS TRAIL**

The Chimneys Trail is moderate in difficulty and 4.8 miles round trip. It is another desert hike that I have my eyes on. These dike formations are leftover from this region's volcanic past. The difficulty level is due to the distance, which is something to be cautious of in the heat of the desert. You can continue another 1.5 miles northwest to Red Ass Spring if the weather and your energy level allows it.

### **13. DEVIL'S DEN**

Big Bend may be small but there are still parts of the park that are barely visited in favor of more popular destinations like the Chisos and Sam Maxwell Drive. The northern back country, where you can hike to Devil's Den, is one of these more isolated stretches of land. It's a moderate level, 5.6 mile round trip hike that starts 3.5 miles south of the Persimmon Gap Visitor Center.

Devil's Den is a limestone slot canyon, you can hike down into the canyon or along the southern edge. To get there follow the trail for 1.5 miles, then take a right onto a side trail. After half a mile take a left onto a wash and this will lead you into Devil's Den (this sounds ominous).