

Really steamed

A once-swanky hotel and spa in Hot Lake Springs, Ore., is being restored to its early 20th-century glory
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a Slice of Pai

Thai village is like a little piece of heaven

PAI, Thailand — We settled into Villa de Pai, a lackadaisical cluster of straw-thatched roof bungalows with outdoor bathrooms, the night after a major flood and were welcomed to our bungalow with mud up to our mid-calves. The mud was not a deterrent, though, as the villa soon became a picturesque community of backpackers strumming guitars, smoking hand-rolled cigarettes, sharing travel stories and watching the river pass by from hammocks.

Pai means “go” in Thai, which is ironic because no one seems to go anywhere once they get here. From its stunning natural setting to its cultural diversity, Pai is northwest Thailand’s rejuvenating riverside retreat. What began as a market and trading village for the Shan people, whose

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To follow Lisa Ashley Warshaw’s ongoing odyssey through Southeast Asia, find resources to plan your trip to Pai or to see Karla Held’s slide show and photo essay on the Voodoo Festival of Benin.

tribes originated in neighboring Myanmar, has since undergone a dramatic face-lift. In the past 20 years Pai has gone from a hidden hippie hideout in the hills to a well-rounded resort catering to a variety of travelers. Guest accommodations range from upscale riverside cottages to straw-thatched backpacker huts. Yet, amid the growth, it has managed to maintain its warm and friendly charm.

The nearly four-hour drive from Chiang Mai to Pai offers breathtaking views of densely forested mountains and plenty of knuckle-whitening moments. What was initially part of a Japanese military railroad project, the two-lane highway now curves and winds its way up through the hills. Buses struggle to climb the steep upgrades with gears cranking and pis-

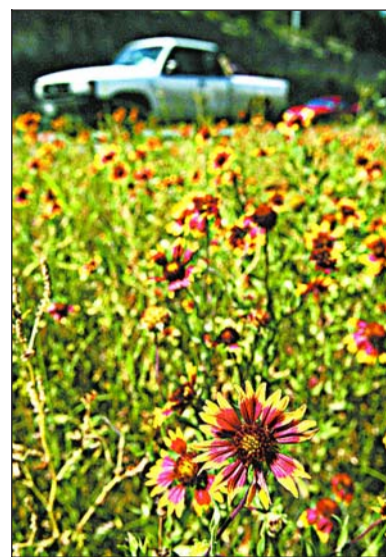
See PAI/3L

Pai, in northwest Thailand, offers serene views and outdoor adventure.

Renting a motorbike is a good way to explore the hill villages surrounding Pai.



STORY BY LISA ASHLEY WARSHAW ♦ PHOTOS BY KARLA HELD



WILLIAM LUTHER/STAFF

Indian blanket blooms along U.S. 281 in northern Bexar County.

Seein’ when the seein’ is good

Plan to catch the best of a bumper year for wildflower viewing.

By JENNIFER ROOLF LASTER
EXPRESS-NEWS STAFF WRITER

Traveling in Texas is never prettier than in the spring, when the bluebonnets are lush, the Indian paintbrushes are thick and everything from daisies to spiderworts has carpeted the hills of the Lone Star State in a vision worthy of Seurat, or perhaps Pollock.

Budding botanists may be in for a particularly bright year in 2007, according to the Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center. The combination of a wet winter and a sunny spring is just what Texas’ finest roadside attractions like most. “So far, it looks pretty good,” says Mark Simmons, an ecologist at the wildflower center. “The way things are going . . . these kind of conditions really accelerate the flowering time.”

But, as Dana Price, a botanist with the Wildlife Diversity Program with Texas Parks & Wildlife, points out, “They’re plants, and they do what they want.”

Still, regional experts are cautiously optimistic that, thanks to above-average rainfall this winter, 2007 could shape up to be one of the brightest wildflower years in recent memory.

“Having had some rain and then some sun, those are usually pretty good growing conditions,” Price says. “It’s kind of intuitive. Plants respond to two things: water and light or heat.”

And Texans respond to wildflowers. How to do the seein’ when the seein’ is good?

Taking to the road

Finding a few scattered wildflowers is easy; finding that field chock-full of blue and yellow and pink can be left up to serendipity — or you can plan.

“It’s hard to tell (the best area),”

See WILDFLOWERS/3L



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Find out just what varieties of flora you’re seeing out there.

Solitude, surprises in the high desert

Marathon offers endless space, an artsy feel and nature tourism.

By KELLY FENSTERMAKER
SPECIAL TO THE EXPRESS-NEWS

MARATHON — Drive around the back roads of Marathon and you can’t miss it. Domes and vaulted roofs painted outrageous hues of orange, purple and pink rise above neighborhood trees and houses. What appears to be a Mediterranean village gone psychedelic is actually Eve’s Garden Bed and Breakfast and Ecology Resource Center. This fantasy retreat is the creation of Kate Thayer and Clyde Curry, a manifestation of their dream to grow orga-

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There’s lots to see in the Gateway to the Big Bend

nic food and create housing both beautiful and environmentally sound.

Within the grounds of Eve’s Garden, winding paths lead to lush gardens and unexpected fishponds. Intimate nooks and crannies secluded in curved walls invite guests to curl up with a cup of tea and a book. Beyond the gardens, mountains and space — endless space — meet the edge of town.

“This place is a sanctuary of beauty and serenity,” remarked Priscilla Wiggins, a part-time resident of Marathon whose paintings are featured in the inn.

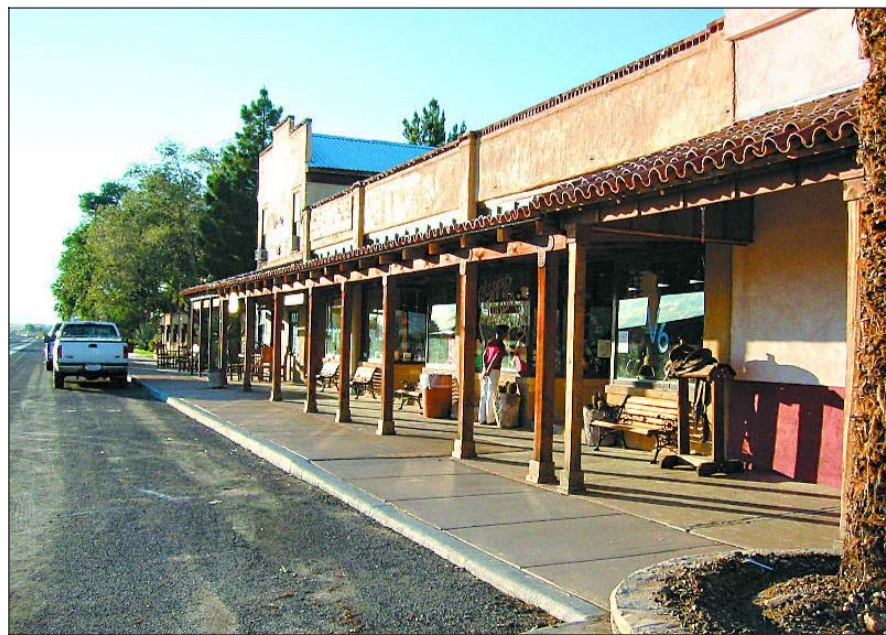
Curry and Thayer are a perfect balance of talents and the responsibilities they share at Eve’s Garden. Tall and lanky with reddish hair and startling

blue eyes, Curry is an accomplished builder. He constructed the domed buildings with papercrete, an innovative material made of shredded recycled paper, recycled Styrofoam and Portland cement. It is lightweight, easy to work with and has outstanding insulation properties.

Building papercrete bricks and adding guest rooms is an ongoing, dawn-to-dusk process for Curry, and he can usually be found in overalls spattered with paint and concrete. He also built a straw bale house on the other side of town.

Thayer is lithe and slender, with long brown hair shot with gold. She is responsible for the gardens, interior décor and the delicious breakfasts served to guests. Much of her time is spent at work in a 4,000-square-foot greenhouse

See MARATHON/4L



COURTESY DANNY SELF

The boardwalk on U.S. 90 in Marathon offers shopping and dining.