



## High plains art

Lubbock — and Texas Tech University in particular — is gaining a reputation for its world-class public art

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# 'Survivor,' Yucatan-style

## Adventures include zip lines and cave-swimming



PHOTOS BY DEBORAH ABRAMS KAPLAN/SPECIAL TO THE EXPRESS-NEWS



**FROM TOP:** Mark Kaplan is caked in mud but is quite happy upon reaching Discovery Jungle Park.

A park visitor carefully crosses a suspended wood bridge, with some help from safety wires. The group swims in a cenote, a water-filled cave.

BY DEBORAH ABRAMS KAPLAN  
SPECIAL TO THE EXPRESS-NEWS

**J**UNGLE DISCOVERY PARK, Yucatan — After steering the manual-shift open-air buggy through 10 miles of bumpy jungle roads, we climbed 18 feet up a tottering rope ladder to reach a thin-planked bridge that we traversed between tree platforms. No television crew followed us around, but it didn't matter. We felt as if we were the cast of "Survivor."

Adventure travel in the Yucatan is growing, with zip-line and canopy tours advertised everywhere. Those wanting something different from the beach scene should check out Jungle Discovery Park, 10 miles outside Playa del Carmen.

Getting to the park from the tour company office is half the fun. When making a reservation, visitors choose to drive to the park on an ATV, buggy or "folk truck." We quickly ruled out the latter after looking at pictures on the Web site. It looks like a truck you'd take between Guatemalan towns. That is, it would be an adventure in Guatemala, stocked full of locals and their chickens, but a bit too tame for our "Survivor" experience.

Though everyone else chose ATVs, we opted for the buggy — a VW Beetle contraption with no shocks. "You're gonna get dirty," warned Da-

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For more information about traveling in the Yucatan

niel, our guide from Mexico City. With the top half of the buggy sawed off (i.e. no windows or windshield), he was right.

Mark hadn't used a stick shift since learning to drive 20 years ago, so we went last, following the cloud of dust trailing from the ATVs. Another guide took up the rear to be sure we didn't careen into the bushes.

As the driver, Mark got goggles, making him look like a freakish aviator. But after two minutes on the road, I began wishing I had them, too. My sunglasses were instantly caked with mud, and it was difficult to keep my eyes open with Mark aiming the buggy directly into every mud-filled

See **YUCATAN'S/3L**



The shallow canal in Sian Ka'an Biological Reserve connects two lagoons in the Mayan trade route between Tulum and Muyil and is bordered by mangrove and grasses.

## Sian Ka'an — where the crocodiles roam

BY DEBORAH ABRAMS KAPLAN  
SPECIAL TO THE EXPRESS-NEWS

**S**IAN KA'AN BIOLOGICAL RESERVE, Yucatan — I took it as an omen that the only ancient structure we would see today was a temple to ward off crocodiles. After all, this preserve has 23 known archaeological sites going back 2,300 years. Fortunately we were there before the breeding season began. We didn't have to worry about a crocodile eating us for lunch.

In Mayan, Sian Ka'an means "where the sky is born." As I stood atop the tour company's main building, the inspiration for this name was evident. Without turning my head, I could see the Caribbean Sea to the east, with white sandy beaches and turquoise blue water. Looking north was a narrow strip of tropical forest. And to the west was the Campeche lagoon, the first of three connected lagoons we'd boat through that day.

Sian Ka'an is a UNESCO World Heritage Site as well as its biosphere reserve label, meaning that a lot of regulations ensure the area's preservation. Only 2,000 landowners live in the 1.6 million acres of coastal reserve. Eco-friendly housing includes rain collecting systems and composting toilets.

Taking up one-third of Mexico's Caribbean coastline, the reserve includes tropical forests, sandy dunes, wetland lagoons and a grass/mangrove ecosystem. Sian Ka'an's reef is part of the second-largest coral reef in the world, behind Australia's Great Barrier Reef. At 1,000 kilometers (621 miles), the Mesoamerican Barrier Reef extends to Belize and Honduras.

We toured the reserve with Cesiak, a nonprofit agency that also offers low-impact lodging. Our Guadalupe guide, Ben, brought us through an abundant palm tree grove planted in the 1950s. Unfortunately much of the area's primary vegetation is gone, but the roots of these palms are so strong the trees don't blow away in hurricanes. While there was some damage to lagoon

See **SIAN/3L**



Crocodiles in Sian Ka'an rarely come out during the day and are found in the brackish lagoons.

## S.A. runner goes for the gold

The sights, sounds — and ferocious heat — made the Bangkok Marathon memorable.

*Editor's note: Thanks to reader Richard Teitz for sharing the story of his inspirational run in Thailand. But you don't have to run a marathon or travel to Southeast Asia to share your story in this section. If you have a travel-related adventure that you'd like to share with readers of the Express-News, drop us a line at [tbarnett@express-news.net](mailto:tbarnett@express-news.net). We'd love to hear from you.*

BY RICHARD TEITZ  
SPECIAL TO THE EXPRESS-NEWS

**I**m a runner, a very good runner, with a lot of fast marathons over the years, but even so the e-mail from Songram Kraisonthi, race director of the 2006 Standard Chartered Bank Bangkok Marathon, on Sept. 26, was a big surprise. Do you, he asked, want to race in the Bangkok Marathon two months from now as an invited elite runner? Songram went on to say

the sponsors were inviting the winners of the previous 18 Bangkok Marathons, plus five Americans to be chosen based on their records.

I sent Songram the information he asked for and waited. On Oct. 11 he e-mailed me and four other runners congratulations and outlined the conditions: We would pay airfare and he would cover other expenses, including hotel, meals, local transportation, race entry fees, expense money, etc.

I bought my ticket and let loved



ones know I wouldn't be around for Thanksgiving. I knew the marathon would be daunting. It has a reputation as one of the world's toughest because of the extreme heat (it was 95 de-

grees on race day), humidity and pollution. But if San Antonians aren't used to heat and humidity, who is?

As I told Songram, Bangkok would be my 145th marathon. My first was in 1979. My most recent was the Marathon of the Americas in San Antonio on Nov. 13. I am a certified running coach for Team in Training, the fundraising program for the Leukemia and Lymphoma Society ([www.teamintraining.org](http://www.teamintraining.org)).

How did I become a marathon run-

See **TRAVEL/6L**



Runners Jeff Horowitz (left) and Richard Teitz pose at the starting line of the Bangkok Marathon.

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