To market, to market
A Mexican mountain town offers a plethora of colors, textures and flavors.

The Navigator
Think travelers are worried about the sequester? Bring it on!

Travel News
The TSA clears some once-banned items for reboarding.

What's the Deal?
We scope out the week's best travel bargains for you.

CHAT
We answer reader questions Monday at 2 p.m. at live.washingtonpost.com.

ESCAPES
Wine journey
On this tour, you can follow the progress of the grape as it turns into the drink of the gods.

Step up right
A round of boot-scootin’ boogie nights in the dance halls of Texas

Carlsbad? Killer, dude!
Getting soaked — and stoked — riding the SoCal waves

On my ninth day in Texas, I burned my most important dancing lesson. It was a warm afternoon in January in my hotel in Gruene, Texas — a nearly empty dance venue on a wooden floor with wide-open idols — to watch a Redhawks game. I sat at the bar across from a TV and eventually began dancing to an off-duty cop. When he found out that I was driving across the state, he began a conversation. He asked me how I had been bored. Toward the end of the game, he politely took my hand. He led me past the biker on stage and turned the back of the building, to a small, deserted dance floor. He began a quiet stage. Before I knew it, he was leading me and placing my right hand on his shoulder. And then, we were two-stepping.

The movements weren’t familiar. After all, in the preceding days I’d found myself on countless dance floors, dancing with strangers to live music, taking lessons and remembering to let my partner lead. I just didn’t expect — on my way off from visiting dance halls — to find my skills tested in a smoky saloon during a playoff game. I shuffled around the gritty floor for a couple of jukebox songs before we returned to the bar for the fourth quarter.

After the game, I said goodbye and headed to my hotel, uncertain exactly how I would protect myself with the knife, but with a deeper understanding of the people of Texas. I realized that when it comes to the act of facing a partner and stepping in unison — which Texans do so well — the venue, the music and the atmosphere are all secondary. In this state, people just dance.

The writer is a Washington Post special correspondent.

Special to The Washington Post
Carlsbad, Calif., has some miles of pristine coastline, great weather — and monster waves.

At first sight, Carlsbad, Calif., with its miles of pristine coastline, great weather — and monster waves. It doesn’t get much more SoCal than this. The weather is about 75 degrees, the water temperatures about 70. If you want to learn to surf, this is the place.

This was an end-of-summer vacation with my wife and two teenagers. A four-day surf camp promised good weather, physical activity and maybe even a shot at a wilderness hut and a few days of camping. My wife and I decided to tough it out and camp closer to the beach.

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Texas dance halls have the right moves.

The charm of these dance halls is that they’re never more than a hour south of Austin, home of the historic Gruene (pronounced “green”) Armadillo Palace — decidedly more honky-tonk than dance hall (the term “dance hall” is where you go and dance with someone else’s wife).”

Dance halls...