

A Weekend in Texas Pete Country: Winston-Salem, NC

With a name like Texas Pete®, you would think one of the world's most popular hot sauces would be from the Lone Star State instead of the Tar Heel State. Well, anyone in Winston-Salem knows better--especially if their last name is Garner (the creators of Texas Pete).

The long-time hot sauce of choice was actually created – and is still produced – in Winston-Salem, North Carolina. It's a zesty little history (and geography) lesson that's still on the tongues (and taste buds) of many locals--and thousands of other fans who swear by the many uses of this famed spicy condiment. It also makes the Winston-Salem area ideal for a spicy weekend in Texas Pete country.

3-Day Itinerary / Winston-Salem and Surrounding Area

Day 1

Visit Texas Pete's HQ, head to a local restaurant (every restaurant recommended uses Texas Pete), and stay in an historic inn

Day 2

Stop by the helpful Winston-Salem Visitor Center for lots of tourism information (and a tasty sample of a Moravian cookie), visit Old Salem and more, sample more Texas Pete-topped dishes at local restaurants, and stay in an historic B&B

Day 3

Enjoy a sumptuous B&B breakfast before exploring area wineries and even more dining options



With so much to see and do in the area, we recommend a 3-day itinerary starting on Friday or another weekday (Texas Pete HQ is closed on weekends). Enjoy all the area has to offer by mixing and matching events (and restaurants) to your particular interest. Be sure to check days and hours of operation for each venue.

Day One

It only seems appropriate to start the adventure at **Texas Pete's sprawling HQ and factory**, located just outside downtown Winston-Salem. There, visitors can learn a quick history lesson from the friendly receptionist: Thad Garner, plus his father, mother, and two of his brothers, actually started the business back in 1929. There are now five direct descendents of the founders working at Texas Pete, including a fourth generation.

The now-legendary story about the naming of the sauce goes something like this. Customers of the barbecue stand kept requesting a spicier sauce, so the Garners created a new recipe using red peppers and a still-secret blend of other ingredients (vinegar was and is another key ingredient).

In discussing a name for the unique new sauce, one of the brothers suggested the name, "Mexican Joe." But father Samuel felt the name should be more American, saying, "Maybe Texas...but, Texas what?" At that moment, Sam's eyes fell upon his son, Harold, who was nicknamed Pete...and the name Texas Pete was born.

Millions of gallons later, Texas Pete Hot Sauce remains a classic condiment for many foods throughout the southeast U.S. and the rest of the world. The Garners say folks in Winston-Salem love it on their eggs, chicken wings, pizza, potato salad, and practically everything else. Many restaurants in the area keep the ubiquitous small bottles on every table, right along with the salt and pepper--as well as using it in a variety of dishes on their menus.

Now called the TW Garner Food Company, this spicy Winston-Salem company has become much more than the long-time manufacturer of a single hot sauce. They began producing popular jams, jellies, and preserves for soldiers at Fort Bragg during World War II and many varieties are still made today. Then, in 1958, they became the first company to manufacture canned Chili Sauce (typically topping hamburgers and hot dogs).

In the 1970s, they expanded the line to include classic southern staples like Texas Pete Honey Mustard Sauce (a great addition to baked beans), Texas Pete Pepper Sauce (some hearty folks eat the peppers along with using the spicy liquid), and Texas Pete Seafood Cocktail Sauce (best with boiled shrimp). The 1980s saw the addition of Texas Pete Buffalo Style Chicken Wing Barbecue Sauce.

In 2004, TW Garner purchased Vermont's Green Mountain Gringo® and moved those operations to Winston-Salem. With the legacy of Texas Pete, this purchase was a natural. Green Mountain Gringo products include original salsas (mild to hot), flavored salsas (we love the Roasted Chile Pepper), and unique Tortilla Strips. All Green Mountain offerings feature fresh ingredients, with the classic yellow and white corn strips in the rectangular shape an ideal "carrier" for the varied salsas. The original Tortilla Strips became so popular that the company recently introduced Green Mountain Gringo Blue Tortilla Chips, which are made with organic stone-ground blue corn flour (while maintaining the original rectangular shape).

The company also continues to capitalize on the popularity of the Texas Pete brand. Earlier this year, they came out with two new sauces: Texas Pete Hotter Hot Sauce and Texas Pete Garlic Hot Sauce. Both have that vinegar-based tang for which the original Texas Pete is well-known, with the heat index tripled for the former and a nice hint of garlic for the latter.

Today, Reg Garner (Thad was his uncle) serves as president of the company that's become known for Texas Pete and much more. His sister, Ann Garner Riddle, is the firm's vice president. Hal Garner, son of another of the original founding brothers, serves as secretary, treasurer, and office manager, while Hal's son, Glenn, is the director of marketing. Frank Sherrill, son of a founding daughter, is the vice president of sales.

Their Winston-Salem headquarters doesn't host visitors for tours (the recipe for Texas Pete is still a secret), but the reception area does have an array of gifts and gear for sale. Many of the items feature the Texas Pete logo depicting a cowboy about to lasso something--like some serious flavor, perhaps?

The purchase possibilities include varied gift boxes, hats, tumblers, mugs, mouse pads, T-shirts, golf shirts, clocks, golf bags, and even a bright red "koozie" in the shape of a cowboy boot. Reg Garner or one of the other family members just might be passing through the lobby, offering visitors a brush with some zesty history far from the Lone Star State.

After visiting Texas Pete's HQ, it's easy to be hungry. To say that the rest of Winston-Salem is into Texas Pete products is a mild understatement. As mentioned, many restaurants feature the original sauce on their tables and locals aren't adverse to using it as a condiment for all three meals.

For some classic 'Q' as a late lunch or even just a snack, it's hard to beat **Hill's Lexington Barbecue**, which is within sniffing distance of Texas Pete HQ. Prepared in the Lexington, North Carolina, style (think vinegar), the Hill family has been serving up chopped barbecue sandwiches and more since 1951 (with Texas Pete on the counter and many of the company's employees lunchtime regulars).

South by Southwest is a delectable downtown option for the first night. The menu is Mexican and southwestern, but with a few southern accents. Their Grilled Fish Soft Tacos feature local fresh fish caught in the Atlantic less than 200 miles to the east. They also have an excellent premium tequila list and a range of creative "Cactus Cocktails" (try the Spider-Byte--trust us). If owner/chef Pat Burke is around, he's considered the local expert on all things chile pepper.

Spend the night just down the street at **The Brookstown Inn**, which is located in the same old cotton warehouse as the Visitor Center (see below). Highlights of this convenient 71-room hotel include spacious rooms, lots of exposed brick walls, friendly service, a wine and cheese reception each evening (featuring North Carolina wines), late-night cookies and milk, and a big make-your-own breakfast (bring your own Texas Pete to top their tasty sausage-and-egg biscuit).

Day Two

After breakfast at The Brownstone Inn, stroll around the corner of the building to the **Winston-Salem Visitor Center**. Once loaded down with brochures, maps, and information, be sure to ask about the **Art-O-Mat** machine downstairs--this unique machine (there are many throughout downtown) dispenses one-of-a-kind miniature pieces of art for just five bucks.

Kids and kids at heart will definitely want to hit the **Children's Museum of Winston-Salem**. This museum makes it fun to learn through a wide array of exhibits, activities, and special events.

It's an easy stroll from the Visitor Center or Children's Museum to **Old Salem Museums & Gardens**, which is much like it was back in the early-1800s when it was a thriving Moravian community. Highlights include: simply strolling the historic town and chatting with appropriately attired interpreters, four museums, and lots of shopping (though we didn't find any Texas Pete in the historically correct village). Be sure to sample the ginger-laced and paper-thin Moravian Cookies.

Up in the very modern downtown area, it's fun to stroll the thriving **Downtown Arts District**, with an eclectic collection of studios, galleries, and restaurants. If you shop 'til you drop, quench your thirst or snack attack by dropping into the huge new **Foothills Brewing** location on bustling Fourth Street (the nearby **Mellow Mushroom** is another local favorite for pizza).

Further afield for the afternoon, varied historical highlights include: **Reynolda Village** (once part of tobacco baron R.J. Reynolds' 1,067-acre estate--his house and gardens are nearby); **Historic Bethabara Park** (where the first North Carolina Moravians settled); and the **Winston Cup Museum** (which preserves early NASCAR history).

Back in downtown proper, check-in is at the **Henry F. Shaffner House Bed & Breakfast**. Built from 1907 to 1909, it was the home of Shaffner, a co-founder of Wachovia Loan and Trust Company. Hosts Michelle Watson and Chris Hughes welcome overnight guests with a tour of the sprawling house, wine and cheese reception (including NC wines), a choice of differently decorated rooms, and a hearty homemade breakfast (prepared by Chris).

For another delectable downtown meal, head back to the Downtown Arts District and dine at **Sweet Potatoes**. Co-owners Vivian Joiner and Stephanie Tyson crank out southern-inspired down-home (but uptown) cooking. The Mambo Chicken sandwich features a huge fried boneless chicken breast on a Kaiser roll--with a side of spicy Mambo Sauce that definitely has its share of Texas Pete (Vivian calls it a "sauce with attitude"). Chef Stephanie proudly uses Texas Pete in many other dishes and she only uses North Carolina sweet potatoes (including the mix for biscuits in her Hot Brown version of a Kentucky favorite).

Day Three

After a delectable breakfast at the **Henry F. Shaffner House**, it's time to head into the countryside to taste some wine (most wineries open at 10 or 11am).

Many people are learning of the high-quality wines now being produced in North Carolina. Winston-Salem is at the epicenter of this growth, in that it's part of the **Yadkin Valley** (currently, the state's only American viticulture area). Many area wines are featured on the wine lists of local restaurants, but winery visits also provide a great way to taste and buy wines (we found the local Viognier went very well with spicy food).

There are more than 20 from which to choose, but several worth a visit include: **Shelton Vineyards** (stunning vineyards and a tasty restaurant serving their wines and others); **RayLen Vineyards** and Winery (those in the know particularly enjoy their Viognier and the fruity Category 5 red blend); and **Childress Vineyards** (founded by Richard Childress of NASCAR fame, tasting, shopping, and dining are all offered here).

Those who make it out to RayLen should ask for directions to historic Mocksville and a restaurant called **Starr's**. Located right on quaint Main Street, Chef Starr has created somewhat of a Texas Pete shrine on her menu and plates. Highlights of the Starr's menu (with and without Texas Pete) include: Pickle's Fried Pickles; Fried Green Tomatoes (on a salad or in a sandwich); and Stuffed Fried Chicken (crammed with honeyed ham and pimento cheese). Suffice to say, both the chef and food are co-stars in this spicy restaurant. It's a great way to end a spicy Texas Pete weekend!

For more information:

Texas Pete

www.texaspete.com

Winston-Salem Visitor Center

www.visitwinstonsalem.com