

September 16, 2025 Blog #73



The Only in America Tour—Part 11 Everything's Bigger

America has a sizeable reputation. Everything here is bigger than it is in European or Asian countries. Consider our houses, lawns, cars, trucks, and portion sizes.

A few years ago, a couple of interns from Germany worked at our church in Abingdon, Virginia. They stayed at a furnished house provided by the congregation. When these young women first arrived, a church member gave them a tour of the house and showed them how to operate the washing machine and dryer. But after their guide left, the Germans explored their new home on their own.

Like many Europeans, the interns were accustomed to using cone-shaped disposable coffee filters. So, when they found a package of standard cup-shaped American filters in a cupboard, they weren't sure what they were used for. Their best guess . . . American muffin cup liners!



"Tex Randall" is a 47-foot (14.3 meters) seven-ton (6,350.29 kilograms) cowboy statue in Canyon, Texas.



Even with their limited exposure to American culture, these Germans could readily imagine that we routinely baked and ate enormous blueberry muffins. Or perhaps the interns were simply treated to a meal at Perkin's on their way from the airport to their new home. One look in the restaurant's glass bakery cabinet could persuade anyone that "we go big, or we go home."

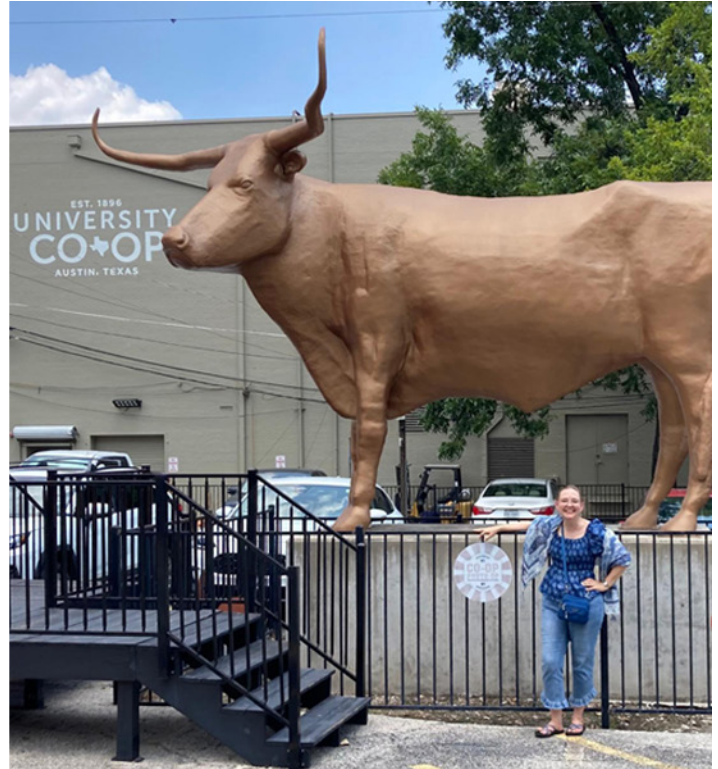
As my college friend Thea and I traveled through Texas and New Mexico last summer, we saw many examples of "the world's largest _____." Some I have written about in previous blogs: the giant eyeball in Dallas; Buc-ee's—the world's largest convenience store; the world's biggest pair of leather boots at Rocketbuster Boots; Texas's Round Rock Donuts features "donuts larger than your head."



Standing 30 feet (9.14 meters) tall, a giant statue called "The Traveling Man: His Stroll" celebrates Dallas's local railway history.



The Hyde Park Grill in Austin, Texas, boasts great food and a Giant Fork that stands 30 feet (9.14 meters) tall.



"The World's Largest Longhorn" in Austin, Texas, measures 12 feet (3.7 meters) high and 17 feet (5.2 meters) long with a nine-foot (2.7 meters) horn spread.

and the Big Texan Steak Ranch—home of the 72-ounce steak showdown. In the attached photos, I will introduce you to more oversized oddities.

Now, lest you think this obsession with largeness is limited to Texas, allow me to list a few other American anomalies and their state locations: the Largest Ball of Twine (Minnesota); the Largest Basket (Ohio); the Largest Bottle of Ketchup (Illinois); the Largest Box of Raisins (California); the Largest Filing Cabinet (Vermont); the Largest Ball of Rubber Bands (Florida); and the Largest Chest of Drawers (North Carolina). Perhaps one day I can visit them all.

Also in Austin, Texas, "Jacky the Jackalope" stands 18 feet (5.5 meters) tall and claims to be the largest jackalope in the world. The jackalope is a mythical creature of the Southwest, which combines the body of a jackrabbit with the antlers of an antelope.



So, why does our culture believe “bigger is better”? Part of our obsession with size, I think, dates back to our history as a frontier nation. For many generations, there was always “more room” westward for those who were willing to settle it. Folks felt free to spread out and enjoy the country’s vast spaces and resources.

So physical space is part of the equation, but so too is social and psychological space. As a new nation, America was relatively free from the rigid caste system of other countries. Upper mobility is possible. Immigrants come to our shores with the hope of freedom and a better life for their children. They believe that America is “the land of opportunity” where anyone can achieve “the American dream” if they just work hard enough.

In any event, largeness became a symbol in America of status and success, which advertisers were only too happy to promote.

Of late, there has been a cultural backlash against our affinity for bigger and better. The Tiny-House Movement has encouraged many Americans to embrace the freedom of having less. It promotes the notion that one can still “live large” with a smaller carbon footprint. Personally, I fantasize about living in a tiny house, but my bulging carry-on baggage alone could fill a small domicile to the rafters.

But I am not a historian or a sociologist or an influencer. I am a tacky American tourist. And when it comes to roadside statuary, I say, “The bigger the better!”

Have a delightful day! 



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