

Attracted to San Antonio



Discover the history, culture, cuisine, and entertainment of SA

by Robert Hu

What comes to mind when you think of San Antonio? Natural beauty. Majestic landmarks.

Rich history and culture. World-class art centers and museums. Lively music, entertainment, and festivities. Variety of delicious foods. Endless shopping outlets.

San Antonio—or SA, as locals call it—is the eighth largest city in the union, with a population of more than one million people. As the host city for the 98th AALL Annual Meeting and Convention, held July 16-20, 2005, SA promises a world of attractions, excitement, and opportunities for both Convention attendees and visitors.

Situated in the Hill Country of south central Texas, San Antonio offers a special charm unmatched by any other city in the Lone Star State. Indeed, SA captures the spirit of Texas with its history, nature, architecture, and culture. Numerous movies and TV productions have chosen to film in SA for its grace and beauty. According to the SA Convention and Visitors Bureau and other sources, the city has appeared in 43 feature films and 30 TV programs since 1923. The films include *The Alamo* (2003), *Spy Kids* (2000), *Miss Congeniality* (2000), *Too Good to Be True* (1998), *Selena* (1996), *Ace Ventura: When Nature Calls* (1995), *Cloak and Dagger* (1983), and *The Getaway* (1972).

Seeing is Believing

San Antonio, founded in 1718 by a Spanish missionary, is among the nation's most scenic cities. It is the No. 1 tourist choice in Texas, drawing nearly 20 million visitors annually from across the country. While historic and cultural attractions abound in the city, a number of sites stand out.

The Alamo (300 Alamo Plaza, admission free), the most famous Texas landmark, was originally a Spanish mission. In 1836, a group of 189 Texas revolutionaries faced off against 4,000 Mexican troops there for more than 13 days.



SACVVB Photo/Al Rendón

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The Spanish Governor's Palace (105 Plaza de Armas), built in the 1700s as a regional military headquarters for the Spanish troops, served as the seat of Texas' colonial government. Today the palace serves as a museum full of period furnishings and clothing.

The San Fernando Cathedral (115 Main Plaza) was constructed in 1731 by Canary Islanders. It is the nation's oldest surviving chapel and serves as the parish church of the Archbishop of San Antonio.

La Villita (418 Villita Street), founded by Mexican and European immigrants, is an historic village, featuring a variety of arts and crafts shops.

The King William Historic District (107 King William Street), a neighborhood

built by wealthy German settlers, boasts of Victorian and colonial-revival-style homes and mansions.

What is wonderful about these landmarks and sites is their concentration in the downtown area. In fact, many of these attractions are just a short walk from the Henry B. Gonzalez Convention Center, site of the AALL Conference.

Stroll along the Riverwalk

Many visitors come to SA to experience the magnificent *Paseo del Rio*, or **Riverwalk**. Called "an urban masterpiece" by some, the Riverwalk is a scenic strip about two miles long, which winds through downtown SA along the San Antonio River. Twenty feet below street level, the Riverwalk is nestled in a beautiful park setting with lush plants and trees.

Along the banks of the river are numerous restaurants, cafes, and bars, most of which are chic and trendy. Hotels, gift shops, and other businesses fill the Riverwalk as well. One side of the Riverwalk ends right at the convention center, so you can easily enjoy this urban wonder either during Conference breaks or on your way to the hotel. Just don't forget to bring your walking shoes.

For those who prefer sitting to walking, boat rides are a great option. Still others might enjoy sipping a margarita on the Riverwalk bank while watching the Texas sunset.

Tex-Mex Cuisine at its Best

San Antonio offers all types of cuisines, including American, European, and Asian. There are literally hundreds of restaurants and food establishments in every fare and price range imaginable. The Riverwalk alone boasts nearly 100 restaurants, cafes, and bars, with a wide range of tastes and flavors. The city is the center of one of America's greatest regional cuisines, Tex-Mex, and, as one local law librarian put it, offers the best food of this kind south or north of the U.S./Mexico border.

SA in Print

Insiders' Guide to San Antonio. 2nd ed. By Paris Permenter, John Bigley, Michele Krier and Luanna Crow. Guilford, CT: Insiders' Guide, 2004.

147 Fun Things to Do in San Antonio. By Karen Foulk. Sugar Land, TX: Into Fun, 2001.

SA Online

The Alamo
www.thealamo.org

Buckhorn Saloon and Museum
www.buckhornmuseum.com

Henry B. González Convention Center
www.sanantonio.gov/convfac

King William Historic District
www.saconservation.org/tours/sitevisits_kingwilliam.htm

McNay Art Museum
www.mcnayart.org

The Mission Trail
www.nps.gov/saan

Riverwalk
http://thesanantonioriverwalk.com
http://sanantonioriverwalk.com
www.riverwalk.com

San Antonio Convention and Visitors Bureau
www.sanantoniovisit.com

Sea World of San Antonio
www.seaworld.com/seaworld/tx/default.aspx

Six Flags Fiesta Texas
www.sixflags.com/parks/fiestatexas/index.asp

La Villita
http://lavillita.com

Witte Museum
www.wittemuseum.org



SACVB Photo/Al Rendón

For more on Tex-Mex, read Robb Walsh's recent book, *The Tex-Mex Cookbook: A History in Recipes and Photos* (New York: Broadway Books, 2004), and you will see why it's so popular. You can't leave San Antonio without trying the chicken-fried steak, an all-time Texas favorite. Finally, a piece of advice—beware of the food portion on your plate. Many items on a restaurant menu come “Texas size.”

Shopper's Paradise

Shoppers will love San Antonio since they will find so many venues from which to choose—small antique stores to mega-size modern malls, and anything in between. There are 16 malls in the city and two outlet malls around the area. The **El Mercado** (514 W. Commerce Street) near downtown offers the biggest Mexican marketplace outside of Mexico. For Convention goers, **Rivercenter Mall** next to the convention center welcomes visitors (and your dollars) with a wide range of shops and food establishments.

Want some cowboy boots, cowgirl hats, and Western buckles? The city offers plenty of choices. **Silver Spur** (210 Broadway), **El Vaquero** (110 Broadway), **Boot Hill** (inside the Rivercenter Mall), and **Paris Hatters** (119 Broadway) are located downtown. In addition, try the famous **Buckhorn Saloon and Museum** (318 E. Houston Street), a quirky establishment that has been around for 120 years. The place attracts visitors from around the world with a combination of a museum of Western culture and artifacts, a unique shop of Western wear and other merchandise, and a nicely decorated on-site café.

Entertaining the Whole Family

San Antonio is a city for all ages with exciting choices in culture, music, parks, and entertainment. Art or museum lovers will find an abundance of first-class museums and art centers in the city, many of which are located near the downtown area. You may enjoy the **San Antonio Museum of Art** (200 W. Jones Avenue), **McNay Art Museum** (6000 N. New Braunfels Avenue), **Texas Pioneer and Ranger Museum** (2805 Broadway), **Cowboy Museum** (209 Alamo Plaza), and **Southwest School of Arts & Crafts** (300 Augusta Avenue).

History and culture buffs may enjoy a wide array of quality cultural centers, such as the **Institute of Texan Cultures** (801 S. Bowie Street), **Mexican Cultural Institute** (600 HemisFair Park), and **Rockefeller Center for Latin American Art** (200 W. Jones Avenue).

Children will have fun visiting the **Witte Museum** (3801 Broadway) or **San Antonio Children's Museum** (305 E. Houston Street). The **San Antonio Zoo and Aquarium** (3903 N. St. Mary's Street) and **San Antonio Botanical Gardens** (555 Funston Place), along with several beautifully landscaped city parks, form the perfect playgrounds for youngsters. Furthermore, **Sea World San Antonio** and **Six Flags Fiesta Texas**, world-class amusement parks only a short drive from the city, could keep the whole family entertained for days.

Marveling at the Convention Center

Beauty and class do not usually come to mind when one envisions a convention center, but they do in San Antonio. The Henry B. Gonzalez Convention Center, perched above the Riverwalk, is one of the most attractive convention centers in the country. In January 2005 it was named the best convention center in the south by *Meetings South Magazine* for the second year in a row. It was also voted the Best Convention Center in the Industry, according to the SA Convention Visitors Bureau.

Modern, spacious (1.3 million square feet of space), airy, and high tech, the interior design of this fairly new facility features bright lighting, artful tapestry, tasteful carpeting, and creature comforts. Outside, the facility is nestled amid a beautiful landscape, decorated by wonderful rocks, waterfalls, and murals. Coming to and leaving from the center is easy by car or on foot. The facility is connected to the Rivercenter Mall, where restaurants, bars, gift shops, and other businesses bustle. The convention center is just a short walk away from major downtown hotels by way of the scenic Riverwalk, which can be a great way to relax the mind after a day's meeting.

What comes to mind when you think of San Antonio? History, culture, art, museums, food, entertainment, fun, and, of course, the convention center. Come to SA! You can enjoy the vistas the city has to offer while you strategize. ■

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