

CITY GUIDE

# San Antonio

A FIESTA OF FOOD AND ANTIQUITY AWAITS VISITORS TO THE SOUTHERN TEXAS CITY OF SAN ANTONIO. ONE OF JUST TWO AMERICAN CREATIVE CITIES OF GASTRONOMY, AND HOME TO THE STATE’S ONLY UNESCO WORLD HERITAGE SITE, THIS CITY IS THE EMBODIMENT OF CULTURAL FUSION

Words by CATHERINE MARSHALL

THE ICONS

**The Alamo**  
It’s impossible to condense the story of this 300-year-old Spanish mission to the singular conflict for which it’s known: the 1836 Battle of the Alamo, in which Texan soldiers failed to repel a Mexican advance. The event defined a quest for territorial expansion, begun centuries earlier, when Spanish explorers mapped the Texan coastline. Today, the Alamo is a portal to the state’s origin story, and anchor to the four other missions comprising the San Antonio Missions National Historical Park, Texas’ only UNESCO World Heritage Site.

**The Saga**  
The city’s cultural abundance manifests upon the façade of the San Fernando Cathedral in this spectacular video art projection (Tuesdays to Sundays, 9pm and 9.30pm). All San Antonians are represented here: First Nations inhabitants, Spanish colonists, Latin American and African-Caribbean arrivals and latter-day migrants from the globe’s furthest corners.

**River Walk**  
The city’s lifeblood, the San Antonio River, flows sedately through the metropolis before spilling out into tree-lined plains on its journey to the Gulf of Mexico. The 24-kilometre Paseo del Rio (River Walk) passes a profusion of shops, galleries, restaurants and bars; and the city’s public art ethos flourishes at the River Walk Public Art Garden and San Pedro Creek, where artworks decorate the levees and animate the verdure.

**Getting Around**  
This is a city of cars – and self-propelled transportation. Hire a car or take a taxi, Uber or Lyft from the airport for the 13-minute drive into town. Once there, you can explore many of the attractions and trails on foot or bike (San Antonio BCycle docks are located throughout the city; download the app and route map before you go). The VIA Metropolitan Transit bus also connects major attractions, but in a pinch it’s more efficient to catch a taxi.





DAY TRIPPER

German migrants brought wine to Texas Hill Country, an hour’s drive north. Strike out to Fredericksburg to taste the fruits of some of the country’s oldest vines.

MUST DO

Somewhere down that lazy river

There’s always a brightly coloured barge floating down the San Antonio River – most impressively during the annual Fiesta (18-28 April 2024), when the waterway is clogged with floats and festivity. Jump onto one of GO RIO’s electric vessels for a narrated cruise, or buy a shuttle ticket and hop on and off at the city’s major attractions. If you prefer to do the paddling yourself, hire a kayak or paddleboard and go with the (sometimes rapid) flow.

On a mission

Hop on a bike with Mission Adventure Tours and cruise the trail that meanders for around 17km from the Alamo to the four other missions located along the river (trip durations vary). The trail winds through a habitat rich in birdlife, mesquite and pecan trees, and stone-hewn acequias (irrigation systems) built by Spanish settlers.

ART & CULTURE

Contemporary art electrifies the outdoors, but older treasures can be found at the McNay Art Museum, home to a profusion of works dating back to medieval times. The city’s cultural synthesis is evoked in the collections of Latino and Chicano prints and Native American and New Mexican folk art. At the Witte Museum, the Robert J. & Helen C. Kleberg South Texas Heritage Center explores San Antonio’s evolution from colonial settlement to multicultural metropolis.

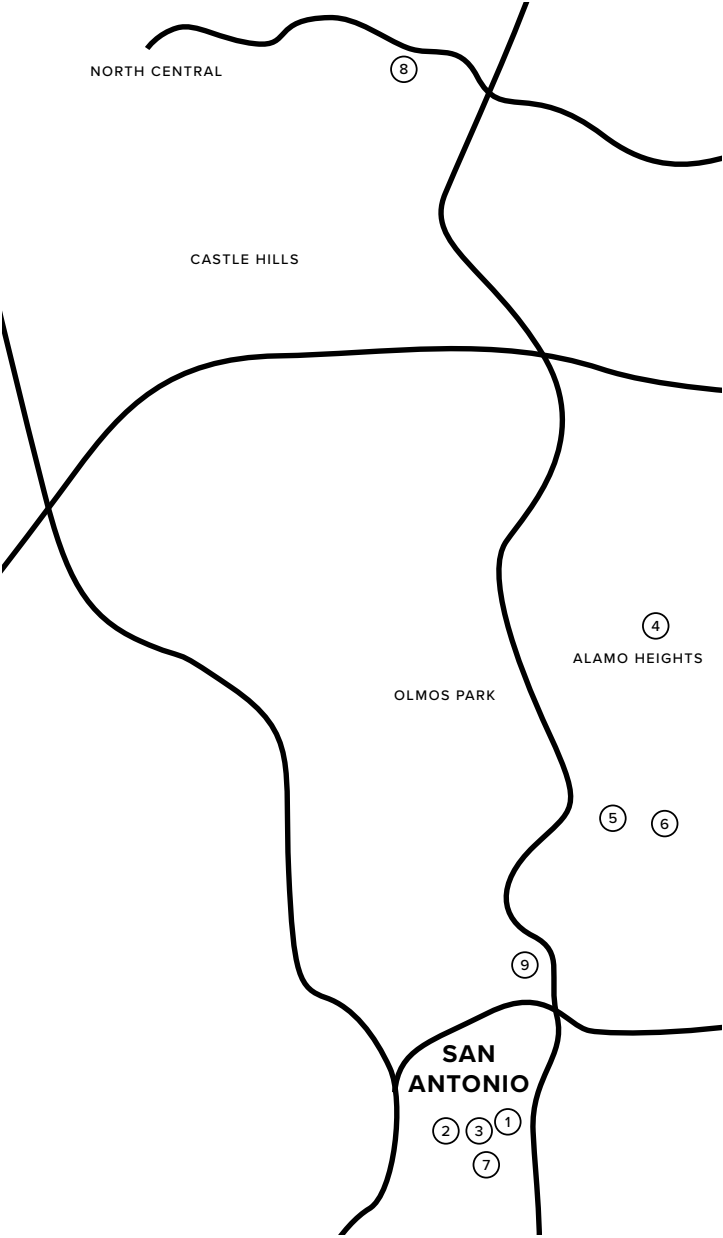
NATURAL BEAUTY

The Texas Native Trail at San Antonio Botanical Garden guides visitors through the state’s defining topographies: the hardwood forests of East Texas, the limestone-nourished foliage of Texas Hill Country and the succulent-filled expanses of the South Texas Plains. Birders take note: more than 200 species have been identified here.

LEGEND

- 1 The Alamo
- 2 San Fernando Cathedral
- 3 Paseo de Rio (San Antonio River Walk)
- 4 McNay Art Museum
- 5 Witte Museum
- 6 San Antonio Botanic Gardens
- 7 Rosario’s ComidaMex
- 8 Two Bros BBQ Market
- 9 Hotel Emma / Pearl Brewery

**OPENER** Historic Spanish mission and fortress compound, The Alamo, was founded in the 18th century by Roman Catholic missionaries.







**ABOVE** A festival of colour on the San Antonio River.

**RIGHT, TOP** Colourful outdoor murals can be found throughout San Antonio.

**RIGHT, BOTTOM** Lunch at Hill Country Herb Garden, San Antonio.



**OPPOSITE** The Pearl Brewery has a rich history dating back to 1883.



**WINE AND DINE**  
Gourmands will lose themselves in a culinary scene forged by cultural diversity. An American Culinary Institute campus is located here, and the city recently hosted the second annual Tasting Texas Wine + Food Festival in partnership with the James Beard Foundation.

**Rosario’s ComidaMex & Bar**  
Lisa Wong’s baby has turned 30, but the Mexican flavours she dishes up are as fresh as they were when she served her first enchilada. The menu at this San Antonio institution spills over with “Mexican comfort food” – chicken lime broth with queso fresco, ceviche served with house-made tostadas, meatballs braised in fire-roasted tomato and chipotle sauce. Signature margaritas are the obvious accompaniment.

**Two Bros BBQ Market**  
Expect a feast of smoky meats, spicy pickin’s and cheesy fixin’s at this lauded BBQ joint run by Iron Chef Gauntlet contestant Jason Dady and his brother, Jake. Order the luscious baby back

ribs, slow-cooked over Texas oak and hardwood charcoal in the custom-made smoke pit. Add the stuffed jalapenos (pickin’s) and mac and cheese (fixin’s) for a down-home lunch or early dinner. The eatery is one of four restaurants in the family’s culinary stable.

**STAY HERE**  
**The Hotel Emma**  
Steam punk and Spanish colonial revivalist aesthetics converge in this urbane hotel housed in the 19th century Pearl Brewery, centrepiece of the riverside shopping and dining precinct, The Pearl. For a cupola-domed sleep, book the seventh-floor garret suite. In-room pantries and an onsite eatery and tavern keep the munchies at bay; but the hotel’s culinary concierge underscores its epicurean location: a twice-weekly farmers’ market is held here, and stellar restaurants – Best Quality Daughter, Botika, Boiler House – are just next door.

