



48 HOURS IN

San Antonio

SLOW DOWN · STAY AWHILE

WELCOME

Welcome to San Antonio.

San Antonio is the oldest major city in Texas — founded by Spanish missionaries in 1718, three centuries before Austin became a tech hub and two centuries before Houston became a port. It is also, quietly, one of the best cities in the American South for solo travel: a walkable downtown anchored by the River Walk, a genuine culinary culture that goes beyond Tex-Mex, a collection of Spanish colonial missions that constitute a UNESCO World Heritage Site, and a local music scene that operates without particular interest in being discovered.

The San Antonio River Walk (Paseo del Río) is the city's gravitational center — 15 miles of river paths threading through downtown at a level below the street grid, lined with restaurants, bars, and hotels that have grown around the engineered waterway since the 1940s. The tourist section between the Convention Center and Museum Reach is polished and busy; the quieter Museum Reach north toward the Pearl district and the Mission Reach south toward the missions are genuinely beautiful urban waterways with local traffic.

San Antonio is a majority-Hispanic city — 64% of the population identifies as Hispanic or Latino — and this shapes everything about the food, the music, the architecture, and the texture of daily life in ways that make it distinct from every other major American city. The best meals here are not in tourist restaurants but in the neighborhoods of the South Side, in taquerias open since before dawn, and in the Pearl's chef-driven dining rooms that treat the local culinary heritage as serious source material.

DAY ONE

Day One

The Alamo · River Walk · Pearl District · Southtown

Day One covers the historic core and the most walkable parts of the city — from the Alamo through the downtown River Walk north to the Pearl, then south to Southtown for dinner.

MORNING · 8:00 AM - 1:00 PM

8:00 AM

The Alamo

Alamo Plaza, Downtown: the most visited site in Texas and the origin point of the Texas independence narrative — the 1836 battle where 189 Texan defenders held a Spanish mission against Mexican General Santa Anna's army for 13 days before being overrun. The mission church (built 1724) and the Long Barrack are open for free; the Alamo Museum (opened 2024) charges admission. Arrive before 9am to see the church without crowds. The surrounding Alamo Plaza is undergoing a major redevelopment to restore the historic grounds.

***Insider Tip** The Alamo's church is smaller than most visitors expect — the famous facade is only the front of a modest Spanish colonial mission, not a fortress. The power of the site is historical, not architectural. The new Alamo Museum next door provides the context that makes the site meaningful.*

10:00 AM

San Fernando Cathedral & Main Plaza

Two blocks west of the Alamo on Main Plaza: the oldest cathedral in continuous use in the United States, established 1731, rebuilt in its current form in 1868. The interior — restored and with a projection mapping program in the evenings — is genuinely beautiful. Main Plaza (Plaza de las Islas) in front of the cathedral was the original center of Spanish colonial San Antonio; the plaza still functions as the city's civic heart.

11:30 AM

La Villita Historic Arts Village

South Alamo Street: the oldest neighborhood in San Antonio — a cluster of 18th and 19th century buildings that survived urban renewal and now house galleries, craft studios, and restaurants. The scale and texture are unlike anything else downtown: low stone buildings around courtyards, Spanish colonial architecture, and independent shops with no national chains. Free to walk through.

12:30 PM

Lunch: The Original Donut Shop

Boulevard area near the Pearl: San Antonio's most beloved breakfast institution — a no-frills diner open since 1948 serving the best breakfast tacos in the city. Barbacoa, carne guisada, or egg and potato on a flour tortilla, with coffee from a never-ending pot. Under \$10. The line moves fast.

AFTERNOON · 1:30 PM - 7:00 PM

1:30 PM

River Walk: Museum Reach to Pearl

Walk the Museum Reach section of the River Walk north from downtown toward the Pearl district — the most beautiful stretch of the waterway, with public art installations, restored historic buildings, and dramatically less tourist foot traffic than the downtown loop. The walk from the Blue Star Arts Complex to the Pearl is about 1.5 miles along the river; allow an hour with stops.

***Insider Tip** The Museum Reach passes under 13 bridges, each with different mural art on the abutments — commissioned as part of the 2009 extension. The King William Street bridge has the best collection. The stretch between the Lexington Avenue pedestrian bridge and the Pearl is the quietest and most locally used section of the entire River Walk.*

3:00 PM

Pearl District

A former Pearl Brewery complex redeveloped into San Antonio's best mixed-use district: chef-driven restaurants, an H-E-B grocery, boutique shops, a weekend farmers market (Saturday and Sunday mornings), and the Culinary Institute of America's San Antonio campus. The architecture preserves the original brewery buildings — brick, high ceilings, industrial details — within a walkable block structure. The best two hours in San Antonio for food browsing, coffee, and people-watching.

5:30 PM

Blue Star Arts Complex & Southtown

South Alamo Street, Southtown: San Antonio's arts district south of downtown — galleries, studios, independent restaurants, and a creative community that has been building here since the 1990s. The Blue Star Arts Complex is a converted warehouse with galleries and First Friday openings. The surrounding streets of Southtown — King William Historic District to the east, South Alamo Street to the west — are lined with Victorian houses and independent businesses.

EVENING · 7:00 PM - LATE

7:00 PM

Dinner: Mixtli

2403 Nacogdoches Road: the most important restaurant in San Antonio — a 12-seat tasting counter serving a monthly-changing menu that explores the regional cuisines of Mexico with academic rigor and exceptional technique. Chef Diego Galicia and Rico Torres rotate through regions of Mexico with dishes unavailable anywhere else in the US. Dinner for one: \$95. Book well ahead at mixtli.com. The most singular dining experience in Texas.

10:00 PM

Night: Bars on St. Mary's Strip

St. Mary's Street, between downtown and Monte Vista: San Antonio's live music corridor — dive bars, Tejano venues, and indie music clubs within walking distance of each other. The venues are unpolished, affordable, and genuinely local. The mix on any given night might be conjunto, rock en español, indie country, or cumbia. Drink prices are 40% of Austin equivalents.

DAY TWO

Day Two

Mission Trail · San José · South Side Tacos · Market Square

Day Two leaves downtown to explore the UNESCO World Heritage missions along the San Antonio River south of the city, then returns through the South Side — the heart of San Antonio's Mexican-American culinary culture — before finishing at Market Square.

MORNING · 8:00 AM - 12:30 PM

8:00 AM

Mission Concepción

807 Mission Road: the best-preserved Spanish colonial church in North America — the 1755 facade still shows traces of the original polychrome geometric frescoes that once covered the entire exterior. The interior is unrestored and dim, with thick walls and an earthen floor. Part of the San Antonio Missions National Historical Park (free entry). Arrive early; Mass is still celebrated here.

9:30 AM

Mission San José

6701 San José Drive: the largest and most impressive of the five San Antonio missions — the 'Queen of the Missions,' built 1720–1782. The carved stone Rose Window (Ventana de Rosa) on the south sacristy wall is considered the finest example of Spanish colonial decorative carving in the United States. The granary, the soldiers' quarters, and the full perimeter wall are intact. Allow 90 minutes.

***Insider Tip** Mission San José hosts a Mariachi Mass every Sunday at noon — a full Catholic Mass with a mariachi ensemble playing traditional music throughout. The combination of the 18th-century mission interior, the music, and the multigenerational San Antonio families who have attended this Mass for decades is one of the most moving experiences available in Texas. Visitors are welcome.*

11:30 AM

Mission Espada & Mission San Juan

The two southernmost missions are smaller and less visited — Mission San Juan (1731) has a simple façade and a functioning acequias (irrigation canal) system that still waters the fields alongside the river. Mission Espada (1731) is the most remote and the most atmospheric — surrounded by working farmland with almost no other visitors on weekday mornings. Both are free.

AFTERNOON · 12:30 PM - 6:00 PM

12:30 PM

Lunch: South Side Taquerias

Drive north from the missions along Mission Road into the South Side — San Antonio's most authentic taqueria district. Taqueria Datapoint (multiple locations), Garcia's Mexican Food (1736 Pleasanton Road), or the taco trucks along Roosevelt Avenue: breakfast tacos served

all day, carne asada, carnitas, and barbacoa that has been slow-cooking since Saturday. Under \$10 for a full lunch.

2:30 PM

San Antonio Museum of Art

200 W Jones Avenue, near the Pearl: the finest art museum in San Antonio, housed in the restored Lone Star Brewery complex. The Latin American art collection is exceptional — the largest in any US art museum. The ancient art collection (Egyptian, Greek, Roman) is also significant. Allow two hours. Admission \$20; free Tuesdays 4–9pm.

4:30 PM

Market Square (El Mercado)

514 W Commerce Street: the largest Mexican market in the US — two historic market buildings packed with vendors selling Mexican crafts, clothing, ceramics, and food. Tourist-oriented but genuinely lively, with Mariachi bands performing in the plaza and Mi Tierra Café (open 24 hours since 1941) anchoring the north end. Buy a paleta (fruit ice pop) from a street vendor and walk the stalls.

EVENING · 6:30 PM - LATE

6:30 PM

Dinner: Cured

Pearl District, 306 Pearl Pkwy: a charcuterie-focused restaurant in the Pearl that sources from Texas farms and produces everything in-house — cured meats, pickles, ferments, and a charcuterie board that is the best introduction to Texas craft food culture. The bar program is excellent; the bourbon selection reflects Texas distilling. Dinner for one: \$45–60.

9:00 PM

Night: River Walk at Night

The River Walk at night — lantern-lit, quieter than the day, with the water reflecting the lights of the restaurants — is one of the most pleasant walks in any American city. Take the water taxi (Yanaguana Cruises, \$15) for the full loop, or walk the downtown section one final time. End at the Esquire Tavern (155 E Commerce St) — the longest bar in San Antonio, operating since 1933, with a terrace above the River Walk.

WHERE TO EAT

San Antonio's Table

TACOS & TEX-MEX

The Original Donut Shop · Pearl area · €

Best breakfast tacos in the city since 1948. Barbacoa, carne guisada, egg and potato. No frills, no wait if you arrive early.

Garcia's Mexican Food · South Side · €

Family-run South Side institution. Puffy tacos (the San Antonio original), carne guisada, tamales. 1736 Pleasanton Road.

Mi Tierra Café · Market Square · €

Open 24 hours since 1941. The bakery counter at the front has the best pan dulce in the city. A San Antonio institution.

Rosario's Mexican Cafe · Southtown · €€

The best full-service Tex-Mex restaurant in San Antonio — fish tacos, chile relleno, frozen margaritas. 910 S Alamo Street.

CHEF-DRIVEN & FINE DINING

Mixtli · NE San Antonio · €€€€

The most important restaurant in Texas. 12-seat counter, monthly rotating regional Mexican menu. Reserve weeks ahead. mixtli.com.

Cured · Pearl District · €€€

Texas charcuterie, farm sourcing, exceptional bourbon program. The best introduction to the Pearl's food culture. 306 Pearl Pkwy.

Biga on the Banks · River Walk · €€€

River Walk fine dining with a Texas-meets-European menu. The best River Walk restaurant that isn't a tourist trap. 203 S St. Mary's St.

COFFEE & CASUAL

Local Coffee · Multiple · €

San Antonio's best independent coffee roaster. Locations downtown, Pearl, and Southtown. The pour-over program is serious.

Burgerteca · Pearl District · €€

Weekend farmers market staple — smash burgers with Mexican-influenced toppings. Best Saturday lunch in the Pearl.

GETTING AROUND

Navigating San Antonio

MODE	COST	NOTES
Walking	Free	Downtown, River Walk, Pearl District, and Southtown are all walkable from each other. Mission Trail requires a car or tour.
Rental Car / Uber	Varies	Essential for the Mission Trail on Day Two. Uber is reliable throughout the city. Rent from San Antonio Airport (SAT).
VIA Bus	\$1.30/ride	San Antonio's bus system covers the city adequately. The #9 (Fredericksburg) and #20 (South Flores) serve the main itinerary areas.
River Walk Water Taxi	\$15	Yanaguana Cruises runs a 35-minute narrated loop of the downtown River Walk. Scenic and useful for orientation.
B-cycle Bikeshare	\$3/30min	Bikeshare stations throughout downtown and the Pearl. Useful for the Museum Reach River Walk segment.

PRACTICAL INFORMATION

Before You Go

TOPIC	DETAILS
Getting There	San Antonio International Airport (SAT) is 13 miles from downtown — 20–25 min by car. Uber to downtown: \$20–25. No direct rail.
Getting Around	Car essential for Day Two (Mission Trail). Downtown and Pearl are walkable. Uber reliable throughout.
Best Time	October–April: mild weather, ideal for outdoor walking. May–September: very hot (95°F+) and humid. Fiesta (April) brings major crowds.
Solo Dining	San Antonio is relaxed and bar-seating friendly. The Pearl's restaurant bars are especially good for solo meals with counter service.
Heat	Summer heat in San Antonio is significant — carry water at all times outdoors. The missions have minimal shade; visit before 10am in summer.
Useful Apps	Uber, B-cycle (bikeshare), Google Maps offline, mixtli.com (reservations), yanaguanacruises.com.

San Antonio awaits.

BEFORE YOU LEAVE: FINAL CHECKLIST

- ☐ Reserve Mixtli weeks in advance: mixtli.com
- ☐ Sunday Mariachi Mass at Mission San José: noon, free
- ☐ Pearl Farmers Market: Saturdays and Sundays 9am-1pm
- ☐ Download offline map for the Mission Trail
- ☐ Reserve Biga on the Banks for River Walk dinner
- ☐ Check Fiesta dates (April) — city-wide festival, hotel prices spike

Your interactive map is one scan away.

All locations from this guide, colour-coded by day, open on your phone.

goingsolo.life/maps/san-antonio

GoingSolo.Life

TRAVEL ALONE. LIVE FULLY.