



# San Antonio

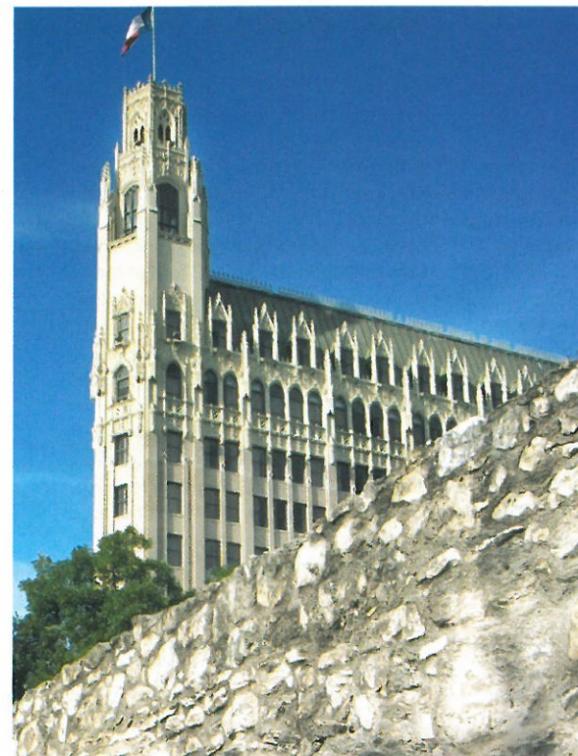
## SELF GUIDED TOUR

by Elizabeth Porterfield, City of San Antonio Office of Historic Preservation  
 photos provided by the City of San Antonio Office of Historic Preservation

**V**isiting San Antonio and looking for a way to explore downtown? From the iconic Alamo to the scenic Riverwalk, San Antonio boasts many significant structures, sites, and places that are well worth visiting or stopping to admire as you stroll the city streets. Take time to explore the history of our city with one of several self-guided tours.



Beginning in Alamo Plaza and working your way west, you can explore the history and architecture of many of San Antonio's historic treasures along the Commerce Street corridor through the Texas Star Trail Downtown Walking Tour. This self-guided walking tour by the San Antonio Conservation Society features over 75 historic downtown sites. The tour brochure with stops and map is available at the San Antonio Visitor Center at 317 Alamo Plaza. The 2.6 mile route through downtown can be started at any point along the way. Texas star medallions are located in the sidewalk in front of each building on the tour, and smaller sidewalk medallions connect the sites. Stops in Alamo Plaza include the Alamo, the Gothic Revival style Medical Arts Building (now the Emily Morgan Hotel), and the 1930s Post Office and Federal Courts Building. Don't miss the interior fresco murals depicting "San Antonio's Importance in Texas History."



The Texas Star Trail continues to the heart of the city at Main Plaza where the first Canary Island settlers established homes in the early 18th century. San Fernando Cathedral in the Plaza was originally founded as a parish church in the 1730s, and the Gothic Revival style façade was added in the mid 19th century. The oldest portions of the church are visible at the rear of the building. San Fernando Cathedral continues to serve the Catholic Archdiocese of San Antonio. Across the Plaza is the imposing Bexar County Courthouse constructed between 1891 and 1894 of Texas granite and sandstone.

Continuing west on the Texas Star Trail is Plaza de Armas, or Military Plaza, where Spanish military troops once drilled. Prior to civilian settlement, the Spanish military garrison, or Presidio de Bexar, was established in this location in 1722. The Spanish Governor's Palace on the western edge of the plaza was the residence and headquarters of the captain of the Presidio and is thought to have been completed ca. 1749. Designed around a central courtyard, the Spanish Colonial style structure was saved and largely reconstructed in the early 20th century. It now serves as a museum. At the center of Military Plaza is San Antonio's City Hall, completed in 1892.

Another stop on the Texas Star Trail is historic La Villita, established in the 18th century as a small residential village. The ca. 1800 Cos House is the oldest remaining structure, and many of the other 19th century buildings now serve as small shops. Further along the Texas Star Trail you'll also see historic churches, decorative bridges spanning the San Antonio River, and some of the remaining historic buildings of HemisFair Park.



**Previous Page:** Alameda Theater on Houston Street, Post Office and Court House on Alamo Plaza, Medical Arts Building (now the Emily Morgan Hotel); **This Page** Clockwise from Top Left: San Fernando Cathedral, Arneson River Theater, Spanish Governor's Palace.

Houston Street is another of San Antonio's historic downtown commercial corridors with many spectacular buildings from the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Don't miss the Houston Street Kiosks located at intervals along Houston Street between Alamo and Santa Rosa Streets. The eight former public telephone kiosks have been converted into sixteen interpretive panels highlighting the history of Houston Street's commercial past. Historic photographs and text capture the feeling of Houston Street during its heyday as the shopping and entertainment district of the city. Numerous department stores, theaters, and restaurants once lined the street. Sights to see include the 1930s Art Deco style Kress Building that has recently been restored and the imposing Central Trust Company Building, the tallest in the city at the time of construction in 1919. Don't miss taking in a show at the magnificent Majestic Theater, with its elaborate Spanish and Moorish style interior designed as a baroque courtyard. The elaborate façade of the former Texas Theater remains as a lasting tribute to Houston Street's entertainment district, and the 1949 Art Deco style Alameda Theater once served as a Mexican-American theater for Spanish film and live entertainment.

Stepping below street level, the San Antonio Riverwalk is one of the

most beloved features of the city. Spanning the San Antonio River through downtown, the historic Riverwalk was envisioned by architect Robert H. H. Hugman in 1929. Formal development of the Riverwalk began in 1939 based on Hugman's earlier plans, and it officially opened in 1941. Many of Hugman's designs for the scenic bridges, stairways, walkways, landscaping, and the Arneson River Theater were realized, although Hugman only served on the project for one year before being dismissed. In recognition of Hugman's significant role in the development of the Riverwalk, bronze plaques replicating the architectural seal used on his drawings have been installed at original Hugman-designed features. A Hugman Riverwalk Smartphone Tour is now available for a self-guided Riverwalk tour highlighting twelve of the most significant Hugman features. Download the QR code or print a copy of the tour narrative and map at [www.hugmantour.com](http://www.hugmantour.com) and navigate your way along the Riverwalk with historic photos and commentary by renowned San Antonio historian Lewis Fisher.

Enjoy your stay in San Antonio and take a self-guided tour to explore the rich history and architecture of our city.