

August 2024

Hale of a Trip!

San Antonio Missions - National Historic Park



Even though we are native Texans, we'd never explored the Missions at San Antonio. Of course we'd been to The Alamo, but it was time to dig deeper. I am so glad we did!

Located just 10 minutes south of downtown San Antonio, the San Antonio Missions National Historic Park will take you back in time to a place where the Indigenous People of the region were served by Spanish Franciscan Missionaries. Not only do the sites make up a National Historic Park, the 4 missions plus the Alamo were designated as a World Heritage Site in 2015. Take the San Antonio RiverWalk Missions Trail via E-Bike for a welcome break

from the crowds and a chance to reconnect with nature while learning about the unique history where cultures collided and a new people were born.

San Antonio River Walk - Missions Reach



The Missions Reach section of the San Antonio RiverWalk is a beautiful stretch of preserved trails that wind along the banks of the San Antonio River. Not to be confused with the man-made commercial section of the famous San Antonio RiverWalk, this eight mile section of the river has been dedicated to the public for educational and recreational use. The entire trail is out and back about 20 miles, so renting an E Bike for the day is a perfect plan.

Plan ahead!

We visited San Antonio at the tail end of a brutal heat wave that blistered much of Texas with temperatures rising above 100 degrees for much of the summer. We had planned a Labor Day Weekend trip to watch a couple of Matt's former high school football players compete at the college level. The Missions Trail was definitely a bonus but we would recommend waiting until Fall or early Spring for the best weather conditions in the South. We visited The Alamo on a separate day because the experiences are quite different. Pack snacks and plenty of water as there are only vending services at some, not all of the sites. Stop in at the Historic Pearl area <https://atpearl.com> for morning coffee at Bakery Lorraine <https://bakerylorraine.com> and grab picnic supplies at the Pullman Market <https://atpearl.com/operator/pullman-market/>. Don't get too caught up in the fun at this lively outdoor venue. Make a dinner reservation and plan to end your day after your adventure.

E-Bike Rental

While there are several scooter rental companies around Downtown San Antonio and the RiverWalk area, we choose to rent E-Bikes using the BCycle app

<https://www.bcycle.com/app>

Download the app and set up your account ahead of time. You can rent by the hour or by the day. Daily rental requires that you dock the bikes once an hour, but that isn't an issue as there are bike docking stations at each Mission. Bikes are equipped with a lock if needed but we found there were plenty of bikes to go around.

Choose a starting point

You can start your adventure at The Alamo, but as of Summer of 2024, there is heavy construction in the area as they improve the Alamo Visitor's Center. We started at **Mission San Jose** <https://www.nps.gov/places/mission-san-jose.htm> since this is the most complete reconstructed site which also includes Park Headquarters. Take the time to watch the 20 minute video at this site to learn more about how the Indigenous culture melded with Spanish religion, language and agriculture. Ranger guided talks/tours begin at 10 and 11am.



Next stop was **Mission San Juan**

https://www.nps.gov/places/mission-san-juan.htm?utm_source=place&utm_medium=website&utm_campaign=experience_more&utm_content=large where we learned how Franciscan Missionaries taught the natives how to plant and irrigate crops using the acequia systems. The missions did provide protection from other warring tribes, but I couldn't help but realize that by teaching the nomadic tribes how to farm and raise cattle, it fully changed their way of life. They no longer followed the buffalo herds for survival. They went from sleeping under the stars to cramped quarters within the secure walls of the mission. Learn more about agriculture as you stroll along the Yanaguana Trail, the ¼ mile trail that loops along the San Antonio River. You'll see the irrigation ditches called acequias that still carry water up to the San Antonio Missions. You'll dock your bike near the park entrance, explore the Mission and walk the nature trail. Then grab a bike and head back toward the rear of the Mission near the trail entrance where you'll pick up the hike/bike Mission Trail.



The first Mission established in the province of Texas was San Francisco de la Tejas. Founded in 1690 in East Texas, the Mission was relocated to it's current location in 1731 and re-named San Francisco de la Espada. Listen to the audio from the World Heritage Site to learn more about **Mission Espada**

<https://www.worldheritagesa.com/Missions/Mission-Espada/Espada-Audio-Tour>



There is a small visitor center at Mission Espada with a Park Ranger and the ability to get your National Park Passport stamps! If your trip happens to be during the Texas summer months, we recommend explorers Uber to Mission Espada and begin your E Bike ride at this southernmost San Antonio Mission.

Work your way back up to end at **Mission Concepcion**

<https://www.nps.gov/places/mission-concepcion.htm> which is one of the oldest unrestored churches in the United States. Take time here to look for remnants of the original frescoes. All of the missions once were adorned with colorful hand painted exteriors and at Mission Concepcion, surviving frescoes can be viewed inside on the walls and ceilings. Symbols were painted reflecting both the Catholic religion as well as the beliefs of the Indigenous people.



All of the San Antonio Missions, excluding The Alamo, remain active Catholic Parishes. We visited on a Sunday and mingled with church goers just before mass began at Mission San Jose and at Mission Concepcion, we arrived just as a quinceanera was ending. It was magical to see the old culture melding with current traditions.

Resources:

The World Heritage Sites

<https://www.worldheritagesa.com/Portals/17/Files/Tours/VSA WorldHeritage Brochure 08 2022.pdf>

National Park Service <https://www.nps.gov/saan/index.htm>