



United States Celebrates World Heritage Inscription of San Antonio Missions

Media Contact:

Sara Gruber, Senior Brand Manager
San Antonio Convention & Visitors Bureau
(210) 207-6783
saragruber@visitsanantonio.com

San Antonio, Texas (October 17, 2015) - The United States celebrated the World Heritage Inscription of the San Antonio Missions, including the historic Alamo, with a monumental ceremony at Mission San Jose, “the queen of the missions.” Descendants of tribes who resided at the missions, along with church parishioners and visitors joined Secretary of the Interior Sally Jewell, the National Park Service and a delegation of elected officials to honor the story of these missions and their role in United States and World history. As the largest collection of Spanish colonial architecture in the U.S., these 18th century Spanish missions symbolize an era when the world was expanding, cultures were intertwining, and the global landscape was forever changed.

The designation was announced on July 5th at the annual UNESCO World Heritage committee meeting in Bonn, Germany. Joining an elite list with just 22 existing U.S. landmarks, San Antonio’s five missions are taking their place among other cultural institutions like the Statue of Liberty and Independence Hall as well as world wonders like the Great Wall of China the Gizeh Pyramid of Egypt. The Missions are the third designation in the country in the last 20 years and the first in Texas.

“The San Antonio Missions are universally admired for their representation of the unique, interwoven heritage of Spanish and indigenous cultures in the U.S., and warrant worldwide recognition,” said Secretary Jewell. “Today’s ceremony recognizes the many years of hard work and dedication put forth by individuals and organizations to achieve this designation, sharing an important chapter in the history of America with the world. Their efforts will help make San Antonio a top tourist destination.”

“San Antonio’s Spanish colonial missions were inscribed to this prestigious list because they are a living example of the interchange of cultures—bringing together indigenous, Spanish, Mexican, and other influences that form South Texas today,” noted Susan Snow, archeologist for San Antonio Missions National Historical Park who has been coordinating the community efforts to secure UNESCO World Heritage status since 2007. “The resulting cross-cultural exchange is the very essence of the great melting pot of the United States.”

Major Economic Impact

A UNESCO designation is a catalyst for socio-economic change, with increased visitation and tourist spending. According to the U.S. Travel Association, \$928 billion was generated by domestic and international travelers in 2014, placing tourism as one of our nation's largest economic generators and spurring an additional \$1.2 trillion in other industries.

For San Antonio, the impact will be even more significant, as tourism is one of the city's top five industries, providing one in eight jobs and more than \$12 billion annually. By 2025, the World Heritage Site economic impact on San Antonio and Bexar County is expected to generate an additional \$44 million - \$105 million in economic activity, with over 1,100 newly created jobs.

History of the Missions

Mission Concepción, Mission San José, Mission San Juan, Mission Espada and Mission San Antonio de Valero (The Alamo) were built in the early 1700s to convert Native Americans to Christianity and help settle this region under the flag of Spain.

Straddling either side of the spring-fed San Antonio River, the five Missions are uniquely close to one another, spanning just over seven miles. They proved critical to Texas' iconic history and heritage, shaping the San Antonio landscape with their acequias, farm fields, ranchlands, and compounds. Indigenous people and people from around the empire of New Spain were brought together to share technologies, art and cultures. The Missions continued to play an important role in early Mexican history and in the struggle for Texas independence. These contributions are still seen in the modern layout of the streets and neighborhoods of San Antonio.

The Missions survived for decades, creating a distinctive culture that blended native traditions with newly adopted Spanish ways. Communally, they have shaped the personality of San Antonio, now the nation's seventh-largest city, as a melting pot of Latino, Native American and Western cultures.

The Mission Experience Today

As protected historic sites, the Missions host millions of visitors each year. All except The Alamo are still active Catholic parishes, some with descendants of the original congregants.

Whether a visitor is interested in attending a mariachi mass, hiking from Mission to Mission or simply enjoying a self-guided tour, there are many ways to immerse oneself in the days and influences of colonial Spain.

- **Mission Reach River Walk:** The Missions are now linked by the newly expanded River Walk, a network of garden-bordered paths along the San Antonio River that connect much of the city's history with hotels, restaurants, theaters and more. Following a recent \$358 million renovation extending it from three to 15 miles, guests have the opportunity to hike or bike from Mission to Mission as well as kayak certain sections of the river.
- **A Tour 300 Years in the Making:** With their limestone facades and picturesque bell towers, the Missions bring to life a bygone era. All are open to the public free of charge. Tours allow visitors to walk the historic grounds and explore living quarters and churches, while hearing centuries-old stories from studied park rangers.

- **Museum & Award-Winning Film:** Mission San José, often referred to as the “Queen of the Missions,” provides an ideal starting point. Its museum exhibits artifacts that explain the diverse tasks found within the Spanish missions. An on-site theater shows the award-winning film *Gente de Razón*, which tells the story of the native people of 18th-century South Texas, their role in colonizing New Spain and the impact of the Spanish Missions.
- **Reliving the Story of the Alamo:** The famed Alamo offers its iconic shrine, Long Barracks Museum, audio tours, and numerous historic buildings. Living history demonstrations and battle reenactments also play vital roles in the educational offerings of the modern-day Alamo.

The San Antonio Convention & Visitors Bureau (SACVB) offers exclusive history-themed vacation packages with a diverse array of accommodations to meet visitors’ budgets. To learn more about these historic missions or to plan a San Antonio getaway, visitors can log on to visitsanantonio.com.

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