



Your Guide to the Five

MISSIONS

on the San Antonio River



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Five Missions on the San Antonio River

A chain of five missions established along the San Antonio River in the 18th century became the largest concentration of Catholic missions in North America. Built primarily to expand Spanish New World influence northward from Mexico, the missions also served to introduce native inhabitants into Spanish society. Four of the missions (San José, San Juan, Concepción, and Espada) were originally founded in East Texas. As the East Texas missions succumbed to drought, malaria, and French incursions, however, they were relocated to San Antonio. The missions flourished during the middle of the 18th century, but later declined due to inadequate military support, disease, and increased hostilities with Apaches and Comanches.

The four southernmost Spanish colonial missions—Concepción, San José, San Juan and Espada—are included in the San Antonio Missions National Historical Park, which officially opened in 1983. Land for the park was donated by the city, county, state, Catholic Church and San Antonio Conservation Society. The missions are walled compounds encompassing a church and buildings where the priests and local Native Americans lived and worked.

For more information on the missions, or to find out about tours, visit www.nps.gov/saan/

sources:
www.lsjunction.com
www.visitsanantonio.com



The Alamo

The Alamo (Mission San Antonio de Valero) was founded in 1718 as the first mission in San Antonio, serving as a way station between east Texas and Mexico. In 1836, decades after the mission had closed, the Alamo became an inspiration and a motivation for liberty during the Texas Revolution. It was well over 100 years old when it became the focal point for the Battle of the Alamo, fought March 6, 1836. The Alamo will always be remembered and associated with that battle.

For 13 days in 1836, close to 200 Texas defenders held the Alamo from over one thousand of General Santa Anna's troops from Mexico. The most famous of the defenders, William Travis, Jim Bowie, and Davy Crockett, died fighting overwhelming odds for freedom.

San Francisco de la Espada

Mission San Francisco de la Espada, like its sister missions San Jose, San Juan, and Concepción, had its beginnings in East Texas. Originally named San Francisco de los Tejas, Espada was renamed and relocated to San Antonio in 1731. It is the southernmost of the chain of missions located on the San Antonio River. Mission Espada features a very attractive chapel, along with an unusual door and stone entrance archway.



Concepción

One of the most attractive of the San Antonio missions, the church at Concepción looks essentially as it did more than 200 years ago when it stood at the center of local religious activity. The mission was well known for its religious celebrations. Not visible today are the colorful geometric designs that originally covered the exterior surface of the mission. Inside, however, are original paintings of religious symbols and architectural designs.



San Juan Capistrano

First established in East Texas, Mission San Juan Capistrano made its permanent home on the banks of the San Antonio River in 1731. Within a short time, the mission became a regional supplier of agricultural and other products including iron, wood, cloth, and leather goods produced by the Native Americans in its workshops. A few miles southeast of the mission was Rancho de Pataguilla, which in 1762 reported 3,500 sheep and nearly as many cattle.



San José

Soon after the building of the Alamo, a second mission was founded in 1720 about five miles downstream. Named San José, this new mission was established by Fray Antonio Margil de Jesús, who had previously left a failed mission in East Texas. A model among the Texas missions, San José gained a reputation as a major social and cultural center. Among the San Antonio missions, it also provided the strongest garrison against raids from native tribes.



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