

Welcome to MY San Antonio

By Pat Shutterly

When I think about returning to San Antonio as a visitor, after growing up there in the 1950s and 60s, and then living and working there in the 70s through the 90s, it brings a wave of nostalgia for **MY** San Antonio. Which certainly includes all the “required” touristy things – the Alamo, in downtown; one of the largest and best in the world zoos; the San Jose Mission: “Queen of Missions.” But **MY** San Antonio focuses on lesser-known places, which I want to commend to any considering attending the IATC Summer 2018 Convention. Here are a few, that are easy for you to get to.

A CULTURAL MELTING POT

San Antonio and Texas as a whole are known for their Spanish and Mexican heritage. But people from many cultures came there in search of: safety from the political and religious persecutions of Europe, a classless society where persons could be who and what they wished, a better life with more economic opportunity, and particularly, for land in the vast, open spaces of Texas in the 1800s.

For example, in the 1840’s and again after the Civil War, there was huge migration of Germans, who settled in the hill country around San Antonio and in the city itself. The result was flourishing farms, ranches, and supporting towns like New Braunfels and Fredericksburg north and west of the city, and a group of people who ended up leading many of the city’s financial, mercantile and other businesses. Such as the Menger Hotel, where our convention is sited. By the 1880s and 90s, the more successful ones had established the King William neighborhood, where I grew up only a short distance from downtown among its once-stately mansions. By my childhood they had fallen (some almost literally) on hard times. Fortunately, the neighborhood was rediscovered in the late 1960s, and restoration/reuse/renewal has made the area a lovely place for a quiet, self-guided walking tour.

<https://www.frommers.com/destinations/san-antonio/attractions/king-william-historic-district>
http://villafinale.org/King_William_District.html

Time your stroll to allow for one of the best breakfasts to be had anywhere: At the Guenther

House, on the grounds of the Pioneer Flour Mills. Don’t miss it! Or have some REAL Tex-Mex lunch or dinner at nearby Rosarios.

<https://www.guentherhouse.com/>

Besides Germans, there were ... Czechs, Lebanese, Polish, English, Irish, Scots, French, Belgians, Greeks, Italians, Chinese, Japanese I know I’m leaving some group out, but you get the point. And if you want the detail – perhaps to find out about your own forebears -- go to the Institute of Texas Cultures, in the Hemisfair Park area, just a few blocks from our convention hotel.

<http://www.texancultures.com/assets/1/15/2016%20Exhibit%20Floor%20guide-final2.pdf>

QUIET AMONGST THE HUSTLE-BUSTLE

The Spanish Governors “Palace,” really just a one-story large home, is literally in the center of San Antonio, nestled by City Hall. But it is figuratively several centuries away, and at any moment you can almost hear the rustle of skirts and mantillas as a young seniorita tries to slip away from her duena. I used to slip away for lunch in the patio when work stress overwhelmed me.

https://www.nps.gov/nr/travel/american_latino_heritage/spanish_governors_palace.html

Similarly, La Villita, where the original Canary Islander colonists settled when brought to San Antonio in the 1700s, is now home to painters, sculptors, other artists and galleries. I was fascinated as a child to watch a man spin molten glass into lacy animals. The Arneson River Theater is a unique performance venue, with stage on one side of the San Antonio River and seats on the other.

<https://www.thesanantonioriverwalk.com/directory/la-villita-historic-arts-village1>

And don’t overlook San Fernando Cathedral, on Main Plaza. It’s the oldest standing church in Texas – founded by the Canary Island settlers – with construction starting in 1738, and is one of the oldest cathedrals in the United States. Alamo defender Jim Bowie married his Spanish sweetheart there; and a few years later, during the Alamo siege, Mexican General Santa Ana used the church as a lookout and hoisted the “no mercy” red flag there for the Texans to see.

<https://www.mysanantonio.com/150years/article/20-things-to-know-about-San-Fernando-Cathedral-6465172.php#photo-7427713>