

San Antonio River Walk

Just north of San Antonio is a group of natural springs that feed into the San Antonio River, which today many know solely for the major tourist attraction, the River Walk. Thousands of guests each year come to stroll along the River Walk, dine in the restaurants that line the river banks or take a cruise in a river boat, but what most people don't know is that this river was not always a downtown attraction. The San Antonio River's importance reaches back in time and flows far beyond the city limits...all the way to the Guadalupe River 180 miles south of the city.

For over 11,000 years this river has been the life source for groups of Indian hunters and their families. The San Antonio River was one of the few sources of water in the region, so it drew groups of people from miles around to get water since before the Ice Age. During the period of Spanish exploration, the river was given the name "Yanaguana" or "refreshing waters."

It was not until 1691, on the Catholic feast day of St. Anthony, that the waterway was named the San Antonio River by a group of Spanish explorers and missionaries. Just as many before them, the group of missionaries and explorers relied heavily on the river for providing water and irrigation for their crops. Because this was the only river in the area that was spring fed and flowed year round, many Spanish missions were built along the banks of the river. One of the more famous missions, built in 1718 near the banks of the San Antonio River, was the Mission San Antonio de Valero, known by most people know it as the Alamo.

Throughout the following centuries the river sustained travelers and settlers, but it was also dangerous, especially in times of heavy rains.

In the 1900's, major floods rushed through downtown San Antonio, killing many people. By 1926, a plan was approved to help control flooding in the city, including a dam that would be completed within a year. This dam would allow local missions, residents, and businesses to safely rebuild and develop the downtown area. The dam and a well developed flood plan was created initially to solve practical problems, but the improvements would later become the cultural heart of the downtown area.

Farsighted citizen groups and architects encouraged the city to create an urban park environment like those of Venice, Italy, featuring restaurants, shopping, walking paths, boat tours, art, and leisure. Though people in the 1920's and 30's had great visions for the Riverwalk area's potential, it was not until the 1960's that city improvements and development would become a reality.

Today, San Antonio residents and guests can stroll down the winding sidewalks that line the Riverwalk, savor the aromas and taste of fine cuisine, and step to the rhythm of Latino music floating on the breeze from nearby restaurants and cantinas. The trees planted by the San Antonio Conservation Society decades ago provide shade for those who stroll along the river on warm summer days, and provide a picturesque awning for the annual holiday light display.

If San Antonio is on your list of travel destinations, take some time to stroll along the River Walk or take a ride on a River Cruise to learn about this unique area of down town San Antonio. The history of the San Antonio River reaches far back beyond the time of the River Walk, so after you finish strolling along its

shores, visit one of the local museums or historical missions to learn about the history of this vital river and the lives that it changed.

Source(s):

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