



A giant, 70-foot-long mural in Mi Tierra Café's back dining room features the faces of everyone from Cesar Chavez to Selena to a baker who loyally worked in the restaurant for several years.

# ¡Viva San Antonio!

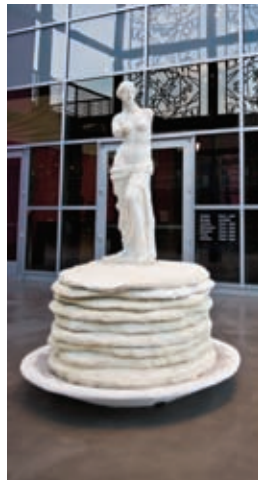
Don't just visit the River Walk and The Alamo. Dig a little deeper, and you'll find a multicultural experience

like no other, with art, music, and great tacos. By **Tanner C. Latham**, photography **Art Meripol**



This is not just a Southern story. This is an American story. If ever there was a pot where cultures melt, it is San Antonio. Spanglish phrases—“See you mañana”—fly around on street corners. The blended languages of English and Spanish symbolize a city celebrating its diversity.

The Latino presence is not just a flourish. Save that word for scarves or pocket squares. The influence is ever-present, draping the community like a free-flowing dress. The culture thrives healthiest in its art, food, religion, and spirituality, and we offer authentic experiences from each. We'll take you to an entry point and then guide you deeper. *Bienvenidos a los San Antonio.*



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP, LEFT: *Que Purdy* by artist Franco Mondini-Ruiz at Museo Alameda. Authentic food at Taco Taco Café. “Queen of the Missions,” Mission San José. Fruit cups spiced with chili powder at Los Valles Fruits and Foods. Mi Tierra is open 24 hours a day. Marvel at the works inside San Ángel Folk Art. A changing exhibit at Museo Alameda, *Conjunto*, focused on the Latino music with roots in German polka.



### Entry Point: Museo Alameda

“So many immigrants have not fully left Mexico behind,” says Henry R. Muñoz III, founding chairman of the Museo Alameda. The first Smithsonian-affiliated museum outside of Washington, D.C., the Alameda tells these stories—of the Latin experience in the United States—with rotating artistic, historic, and cultural exhibits. A giant sound and light installation called *Luminaria* dominates the entrance. After dusk, the show wheels through an original score and electric pinks, greens, and blues hourly. Spend time in the galleries, and then peruse the gift shop full of creative and nontraditional museum-y takeaways. 101 South Santa Rosa Street; [www.thealameda.org](http://www.thealameda.org) or (210) 299-4300.

### Dig a Little Deeper: San Ángel Folk Art

San Ángel Folk Art displays a visual feast of fascinating pieces from artists all over the world. “People have to walk around the shop three times to get it all,” says associate Paul Bonin-Rodriguez. “They just go around and around and around.” San Ángel carries works by self-taught artists of all backgrounds, but because so many hail from Mexico or this part of South Texas, their works have an inherent Latin essence and wrestle with themes of religion and politics. Our favorite find: The santos, wood-carved saints, by San Antonio native Alfredo Rodriguez. 110 Blue Star Place; [www.sanangelfolkart.com](http://www.sanangelfolkart.com) or (210) 226-6688.

### Entry Point: Mi Tierra Café

A festive vibe dominates Mi Tierra—red, white, and green paper decorations, tiny lights, and blankets all swag from the ceiling. Mariachi players sway among the tables. Its location on Market Square guarantees surges of tourists, but locals still pack in too. Because Mi Tierra opened in 1941, it’s had practice perfecting Enchiladas Verdes de Pollo (a green tomatillo sauce and chicken). 218 Produce Row; [www.mitierracafe.com](http://www.mitierracafe.com) or (210) 225-1262.

### Dig a Little Deeper: Taco Taco Café and Los Valles Fruits and Foods

Taco Taco Café is totally insider. San Antonio natives cram into this tiny breakfast taco joint daily for the *chilaquiles* (eggs with tortilla strips, peppers, spices, tomatoes, and cheese). 145 East Hildebrand Avenue; (210) 822-9533. With the spices still on your tongue, cool off with a fruit cup dusted with chili powder from Los Valles Fruits and Foods. Unusually refreshing. 3915 Nogalitos Street; (210) 927-9595.

### Entry Point: Mission San José

The San Antonio missions (example: The Alamo was founded as the Mission San Antonio de Valero in 1718) don’t just exist as relics. Many are still active Catholic parishes, vital lynchpins in the community. One of the most unique ways to experience this is by attending a noon mariachi Mass on Sundays at the Mission San José Catholic Church. The guitar and trumpet players and singers perform the songs in Spanish, while the priest conducts the Mass in English. The parish welcomes anyone from any denomination. 6701 San José Drive. Church: [www.sanjosemissionchurch.org](http://www.sanjosemissionchurch.org) or (210) 922-0543. National park site: [www.nps.gov/saan](http://www.nps.gov/saan) or (210) 932-1001.

### Dig a Little Deeper: Papa Jim’s Botanica

Folk healing remains an integral part of the Latino culture, and botanicas are traditionally community hubs and retail outlets for alternative herbal medicines. At first pass, Papa Jim’s Botanica appears to be a pharmacy for the superstitious, selling coyote teeth to prevent legal troubles or floor cleaners designed to remove jinxes. You can even find spell books and a “mojo bag” meant to bring the possessor good luck. But you’ll also discover amulets from multiple religions: Roman Catholic crucifixes sit beside American Indian dreamcatchers, Stars of David beside voodoo dolls. 5630 South Flores Street; [www.papajimsbotanica.com](http://www.papajimsbotanica.com) or (210) 922-6665.

### This Month

Three magic words: **Fiesta San Antonio**. For 10 days in April, the city kicks into celebration mode. Fiesta has grown from an 1891 commemoration for those who died at The Alamo and in the Battle of San Jacinto to more than 100 multicultural events throughout the city. Highlights include the Texas Cavaliers River Parade (April 21), A Night in Old San Antonio (April 22-25), and the Fiesta Flambeau Parade (April 26). [www.fiesta-sa.org](http://www.fiesta-sa.org) or 1-877-723-4378.

### Where To Stay

If you’ve never been to San Antonio, book a room down on the River Walk. Here are our picks.

- **Drury Plaza Hotel:** [www.druryhotels.com](http://www.druryhotels.com) or (210) 270-7799. Rates: start at \$160.
- **Hotel Contessa:** [www.thehotelcontessa.com](http://www.thehotelcontessa.com) or 1-866-435-0900. Rates: start at \$199. ●