

Good times flow on San Antonio's River Walk

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While some folks might be content to while away the San Antonio nights by sampling the margaritas at every restaurant and bar along the River Walk, there is actually a lot more to do in this "deep in the heart of Texas" city.

But after you've made the requisite trip to the Alamo (it's required of all tourists. Just go. They like their guns here.), the River Walk is where everyone heads. And why not?

Every night, it's a big party along the 2.5 mile stretch of the San Antonio River that cuts through the heart of the city. The rest of downtown rolls up the sidewalk at dark, but that's when the river heats up.

Your boat is the cliché thing to do, but your always upbeat guide actually has some useful Texas trivia, and there are interesting people to meet on the boat—like the funeral directors from California. Get those guys out of their black suits and they know how to have fun. Really.

The price is right (\$5.95 adults, \$1 for children), but be prepared to tip your captain, and, of course, there's the \$11 no obligation photo that you'll get coaxed into buying.

The day after Thanksgiving the river takes on an even more festive appeal with the annual "Lighting of the River Walk" or Los Posadas.

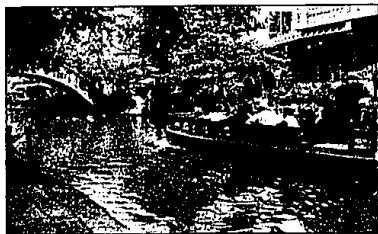
And whatever kind of food you're craving, there's a River Walk restaurant for you. Lime is a key ingredient in everything from the pasta primavera sauce at Michelino's to the magnificent escarpet at the Little Rhein Steakhouse, a most pleasant place with twinkling lights, subtle elegance, and the best margarita on-the-rocks.

Though not on the river, the Buckhorn Saloon and Museum is an easy stop for lunch, as long as you're not bothered by hundreds of stuffed animals — by taxidermy, not GUND — staring down at you. Expect a side of gravy with nearly anything you order. It's like ketchup.

FOR CHILDREN

If you've got kids in tow, the Children's Museum is a must-see. With three floors to explore, it's easily an all-day adventure, and a great escape for one of those rare rainy days. The museum combines local history, great hands-on displays, doses of educational material, and most of all, fun.

There's a miniature trolley



Cruises along the River Walk are a San Antonio mainstay.

and boat, and a pint-size Alamo (I think that's required, too), and make-believe rooms that will make a child rooted in concrete thinking develop an imagination to make believe he's a dentist, grocer, banker, construction worker or underwater diver. The fish aquarium cleverly has a mirror on the opposite wall so kids can don masks and fins and pretend to swim with the fishes.

And as this is a very diverse town, all educational material is written in both English and Spanish. Another place that kids love to explore is the San Antonio Zoo, located in Brackenridge Park. The Park, too, seems to be undergoing a renaissance, as a huge funding project for the parks is underway. Be sure to take the little

ones on the Brackenridge Eagle, a miniature train that circumvents 3.5 miles of park.

GARDENS AND DINOSAURS

Just a mile away is the San Antonio Botanical Garden where "Dinosaurs: Tex. Giants in Our Backyard" is on display until Dec. 1. The gardens are lush and gorgeous, and the dinosaur models are intermingled with the many displays.

If you want a real Texas-size view of San Antonio, you'll have to head up the Tower of Americas, which is the third tallest free-standing structure. Built for the 1968 World's Fair, it offers sweeping views of the city and surroundings. To go on the cheap, pay for parking, have the

elevator take you to the lounge and buy a drink or dessert. You'll get \$5 back in parking.

If you get a chance to see the inside of the Majestic Theatre, it's well worth a visit. It was designed by John Eberson, the same architect who designed Detroit's State Theatre, but the similarity ends there. While the State shows inklings of its former beauty, the Majestic has maintained its glory.

Eberson constructed the inside to look like a warm San Antonio night, complete with moving clouds and stars in the midnight blue sky. The Majestic is home to the San Antonio Symphony and various traveling Broadway shows, including the recent *Seussical*, featuring Cathy Nibby.

And no trip to San Antonio can be complete without a trip to Market Square, the local Mexican market known as El Mercado. It's filled with local crafts, food and music.

And other than the mariachi bands playing *La Bamba*, the music of choice in many local restaurants is Motown, so it's definitely a city of good taste. And since tourism is the city's second biggest industry (biomedicine is first), there are plenty of other folks who think there's plenty of good times to be had in the heart of the Lone Star State.



The San Antonio Children's Museum has lots to foster little imaginations.

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