

# Sustainable tourism issues in the San Antonio Mission Historic District



Excerpted from a 2015 article

in *Tourism and Hospitality*

*Research*. Original article

written by UTSA's Dr. Sedef

Doganer.

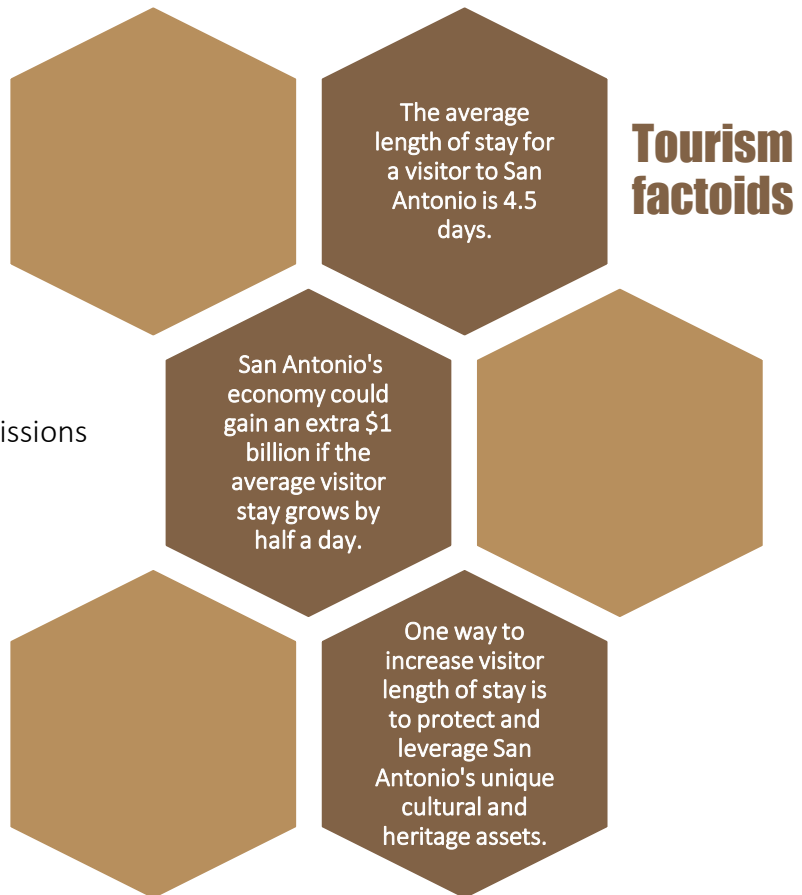
## About the CCS

**Our Mission:** The Center for Cultural Sustainability explores the continuity of the cultural systems of human existence and the common identities of heritage that bind people to places.

**Our Purpose:** The CCS provides academic research and services to benefit communities, completes large-scale research projects, provides research and educational opportunities for graduate students, and convenes leaders in the field for dialogue on global practices concerning sustainable development and construction.

## About this report

The audience for this document includes the stakeholders affected by UNESCO's recent designation of the San Antonio Missions as a World Heritage site.



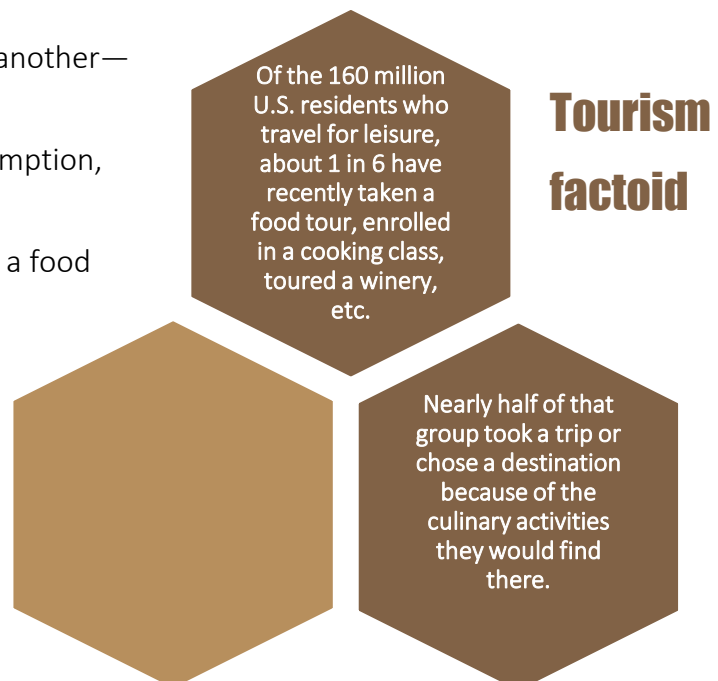
## What is sustainable tourism?

Since its beginning in the 1970s, the sustainable tourism movement has worked toward improving the tourism phenomenon in such a way as to contribute to the regional economy and local community without harming the environment, society and historical, natural and cultural entities. The idea of sustainable tourism is now a popular concept and refers to *allowing tourism growth* while at the same time preventing degradation of the environment, as this may have important consequences for future quality of life.

Sustainable tourism *fosters community pride* and includes *direct involvement of the local community*. It includes three categories.

1. **Culinary tourism:** Defined by author ML Long as “the intentional, exploratory

participation in the foodways of another— participation including the consumption, preparation, and presentation of a food item, cuisine, meal system, or eating style considered to belong to a culinary system not one’s own” (*Culinary Tourism:*



*Exploring the Other Through Food*). Examples include eating meals prepared with local ingredients or the purchase of local food products that are then taken home to give as gifts. The locally sourced produce ensures *tourist dollars are invested back into the community*, allowing other businesses to thrive.

2. **Cultural heritage tourism:** Cultural heritage tourism is “traveling to experience the places and activities that authentically represent the stories and people of the past and present” (National Trust for Historic Preservation, n.d.). It is an economic development tool designed to attract visitors to an area based on the unique aspects of the locality’s history, landscape and culture. This not only boosts regional and local pride but is also a good source of revenue for a community and creates jobs. Amid increasing globalization, cultural heritage tourism *focuses on what makes San Antonio unique*.

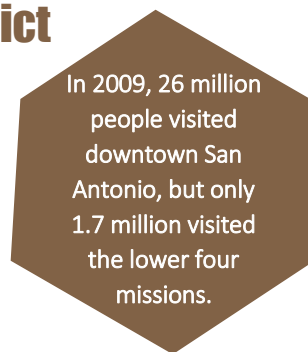
3. **Rural tourism:** Involves an escape from everyday urban and suburban life. It is typically characterized by a small-scale, well-managed, educational and frequently high-end market. Examples include spending a day at a working farm; going horseback riding, hunting, or fishing; walking/hiking, etc.

## Tourism in San Antonio

Numerous investment and policy initiatives have been implemented to support and enhance the visitor industry in San Antonio. These include: Witte South Texas Heritage Center, McNay Art Museum, HemisFair Park, River Improvements Project, San Antonio International Airport Expansion, Pearl Brewery Development and the new hotel, San Antonio Bike Programs, Convention Center Improvements and the planned New Expansion, Tobin Center for the Performing Arts, Confluence Park River South Coordinated Management Plan, Mission Reach Recreation Concessions Study, Downtown Transportation Plan, Alamo Plaza Study, Placemaking Campaign, New Children’s Museum, San Pedro Creek, and Big Tex project.

## The San Antonio Mission Historic District

The Mission Historic District, located along the San Antonio River in the south section of the city, includes the lower four missions (Listed from north to south: Concepcion, San Jose, San Juan Capistrano, and Espada), their *acequias* and fields. Local government has completed a multiyear project to restore and enhance 13 miles of the San Antonio River both north and south of downtown. The project also aims to reinforce the connection to the San Antonio Missions and encourage tourists to circulate along the river beyond the downtown area.



In 2009, 26 million people visited downtown San Antonio, but only 1.7 million visited the lower four missions.

**Tourism  
factoid**

# Characteristics of cultural heritage tourists

Today, San Antonio's tourism economy

depends mostly on leisure

travelers and convention

planners. However, a

different type of traveler—the cultural

heritage traveler—exists. And with the

cultural heritage visitor comes

opportunity for significant

economic impact.

