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TRAVEL



A River Walk runs through it

San Antonio's quiet paved paths provide a link to city's attractions

LIZ FLEMING
SPECIAL TO THE STAR

It all started one June night in 1691, when Domingo Teran de los Rios, first Governor of the new Province of Texas, was camping with his missionary friend, Father Damian Massanet, at a rancheria of Payaya Indians.

As they cooled their heels in a river called Yanaguana, Damian had an idea. Why not celebrate mass and rename the river "San Antonio" for Saint Anthony?

The name stuck and, more than 300 years later, the river lies at the heart of the modern city of San Antonio, Texas.

Strung along its banks is the city's most appealing feature, the River Walk.

It's free, open 365 days a year, and larger than New York's Central Park and San Francisco's Golden Gate Park.

Its broad, well-paved paths lie far from road traffic, one storey below street level. As you stroll, pedal or sail along on one of the many river taxis (at just \$5 per

ride, they offer cheap, fun transportation) ortour boats that glide lazily around the circuit, diners look down from the balconies of hotels, bars and restaurants above.

Nothing moves very quickly, so there's time to wave or even call out to see what the daily special is on the menu.

The River Walk is a pathway to San Antonio's best attractions.

Lined with cafés, bistros and bars, the broad paths lie far from road traffic, one storey below street level.

SAN ANTONIO continued on T4

DREAMSTIME



A jagged coastline with steep cliffs makes for stunning views on the network of paths along Guernsey's south coast.

Picturesque Guernsey worth the visit

Island known for its cows also boasts a rich history and spectacular scenery

ADAM MAYERS
TORONTO STAR

GUERNSEY, ENGLAND—This British island off the coast of France has the feel of an overgrown flower garden, a riot of colour and a natural beauty that demands your attention, and a sense that around the next corner is something even more scenic to see.

Just 11 kilometres long and 8 kilometre-wide, Guernsey is the second largest of the Channel Islands after Jersey. A rich history traced back to William the Conqueror lends it a quaint mix of French and English culture, and a jagged coastline with steep cliffs makes for spectacular views from the network of paths along the south coast.

On the island's windier west side, you'll find wide, crescent-shaped beaches with a mix of sand and pebbles.

The island was once known for its dairy, produce and flowers. You can still get rich, velvety, local ice creams and the

butter on your bread is so yellow it looks like a bar of gold. In many front yards, cut flowers sit in buckets, yours for the taking, with payment made under the honour system into the payment box.

Aided by generous tax laws, Guernsey is now a banking centre. There is no tax for corporations and a flat 20-per-cent rate for individuals.

Nor is there sales tax, which means plenty of good shopping, including many jewelry and antique shops in St. Peter Port.

GUERNSEY continued on T4

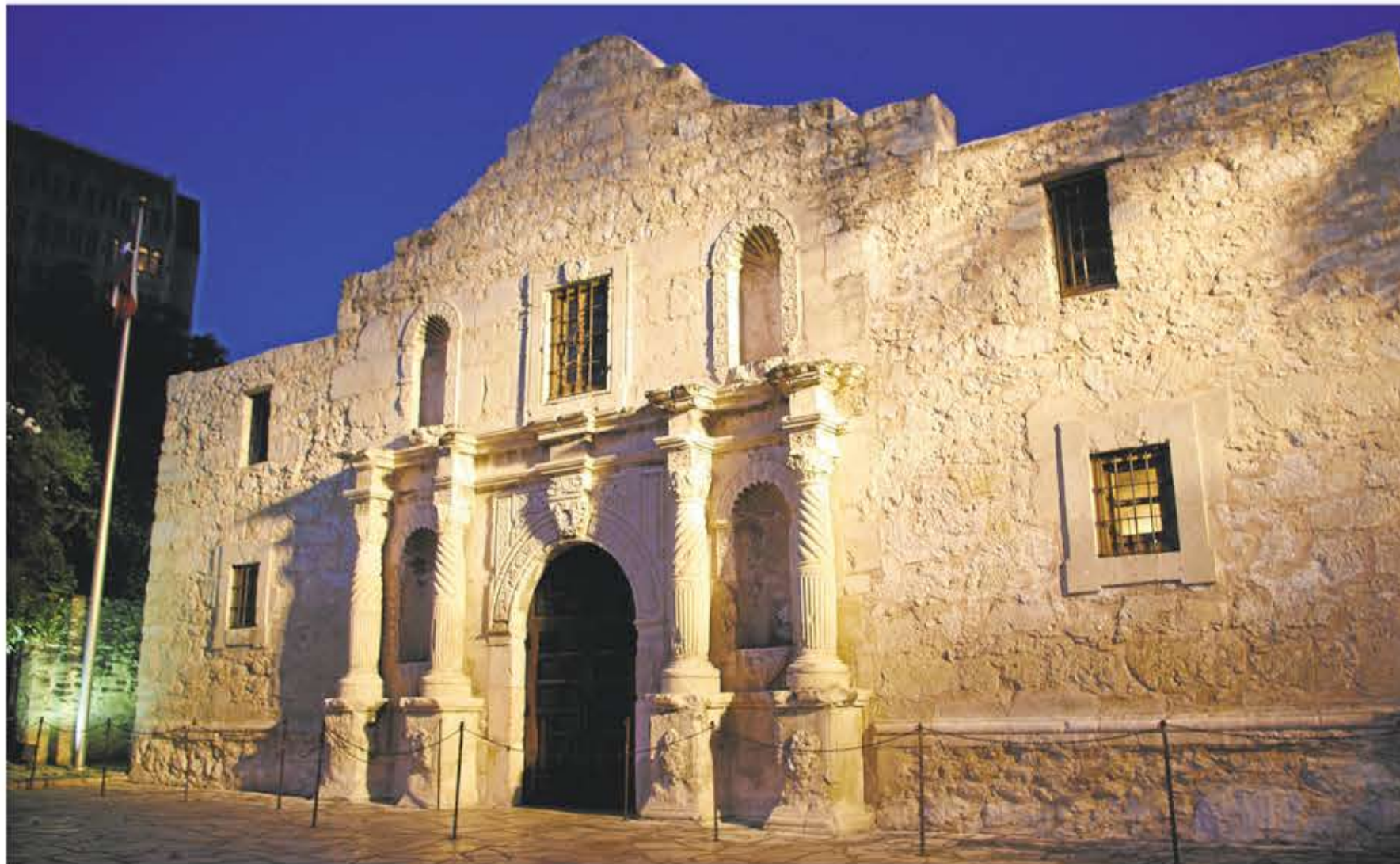
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The scene of a 13-day siege and bloody battle featuring a hardy, ragtag band of Texan rebels, the Alamo remains a beloved symbol of American defiance.

DREAMSTIME

Don't forget to stroll by the Alamo

SAN ANTONIO from TI

In addition to all the restaurants, bistros, cafes, clubs and bars vying for your attention, there's the Museum Reach area, home to outdoor art installations on the river banks, the San Antonio Museum of Art, the Southwest School of Art, the 125-year-old Pearl Brewery complex, now an eclectic mix of restaurants, an outdoor amphitheatre, a Saturday farmers market, funky shops and the Culinary Institute of America.

Take the south fork of the river and explore the King William Historic District all the way to the Blue Star arts complex's grouping of off-beat shops and galleries.

Downtown, the River Walk leads to the Alamo.

Remember the Alamo? Of course

JUST THE FACTS

SLEEPING San Antonio offers a range of hotels that overlook the River Walk, but the funkier by far is the Hotel Havana, (havanasanantonio.com) built in 1914 and loaded with quirky charm.

DINING The upscale Luke San Antonio has authentic Tex-Mex. LukeSanAntonio.com. Mi Tierra Café y Panaderia is a 24-hour

restaurant that feels like a permanent Mexican party. mitierracafe.com. For something fabulously healthy and different, try the Fruteria, where well-known chef Johnny Hernandez puts a new spin on traditional Mexican dishes. thefruteria.com.

WEBSURFING thesanantonio-riverwalk.com

you do, and so do the nearly 2.5 million tourists who visit the iconic site each year for guided walking tours and photo ops.

The scene of a 13-day siege and bloody battle featuring a hardy, ragtag band of Texan rebels headed by James Bowie and Davy Crockett,

the Alamo remains a beloved symbol of American defiance.

It would be tempting for an attraction as well-established as the River Walk to rest on its tourism laurels, but this year will see an ambitious rejuvenation of the popular pathway — a change as eco-friendly as it

is exciting. An extension slated for completion this spring and focused on restoring much of the San Antonio River's original undulating shape.

It will offer walkers and cyclists not only an improved route to San Antonio's four other 18th-century missions but also a fresh, new rural walking experience.

The river's natural flow was changed more than 50 years ago, when flooding prompted city officials to straighten it to facilitate drainage. The change stemmed the floods but, according to Steven Schauer of the San Antonio River Authority, was an eco-mistake. "Nature," says Schauer, "bends rivers for a reason. Those natural curves create the pools, riffles and runs that wildlife need for their natural habitat."

As part of the extension project, called the Mission Reach, the San Antonio River's original shape has been restored, native vegetation has been reintroduced and more than 20,000 young trees have been planted along the paved pathway. The birds and fish are thrilled, as are the tourists who can now easily access Mission San Juan, Mission Espada, Mission San Jose and Mission Concepcion on foot or by bike. Rentals are available along the Mission Reach and pathways extend to each of the missions.

With its rich smorgasbord of art, history and Tex-Mex culture, as well as America's largest public park area, San Antonio is a city with something for every taste. And best of all? A River Walk runs through it. *Liz Fleming is a freelance writer based in St. Catharines.*



ADAM MAYERS/TORONTO STAR

St. Peter Port's shopping area is quaint, with cobbled, winding streets.

German occupation during WWII is still etched in the island's fabric

GUERNSEY from TI

Even if it's only window shopping, it's a treat to meander down the narrow, winding cobble streets as bunnings flutter above you in the wind.

For Canadians, Guernsey's most famous son is Gen. Issac Brock, who died at the Battle of Queenston Heights during the War of 1812. A plaque thanks him for "Saving Canada for the Empire." But for many visitors, the draw is Guernsey's most famous guest, the author of *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* and *Les Misérables*, Victor Hugo.

Hugo was a vocal critic of Napoleon III and spent 15 years in exile in Guernsey from 1856. He wrote *Les Misérables* at Hauteville House (victorhugo.gg) in St. Peter Port, now a museum managed by the City of Paris. It is an hour well spent. Hauteville is a testament to Hugo's intellectual energy and fascination with "the beautiful and the grotesque," as our guide put it. He arrived with his family and mis-

tress, bought Hauteville and scoured the island for oddities to furnish it. The three floors are decorated with a medieval flare and enormous sense of humor. He wrote *Les Misérables* while standing at a writing table on the third floor, facing the French coast.

Guernsey's other must-see museums are the German Underground Hospital and Occupation Museum. The islands were the only British soil captured by the Nazis, and the legacy of World War II and occupation between 1940 and 1945 are etched into the island's fabric. A recent bestseller, *The Guernsey Literary and Potato Peel Pie Society*, told that story.

Most children and some islanders were evacuated after the fall of Dunkirk in June 1940, and the islands fell without a shot. The conquerors commandeered local homes and that included Varclin Farm in St. Martin's Parish, the former home of our hostess Sheila Daff. The Daffs' housekeeper buried the family silver in the garden, where it lived safely for the duration. An officer left behind a carved wooden plaque, done as a distraction perhaps, in late 1944, when the island was surrounded by the Allies. He carved a swastika and the words 'Weihnachten' (Christmas) and '4 compagnie' and left it on the mantle when the garrison surrendered in May 1945.

Along the coast, round defensive forts called Martello Towers that were built to watch for Napoleon's invasion, are disfigured by tons of concrete that turned them into snub, squat bunkers. Russian and Polish slave labourers spent four years carving the Underground Hospital (Les Eperons, La Vassalerie) out of solid rock in the middle of the island. The hospital was used

JUST THE FACTS

ARRIVING The island is well served by reasonably priced 45-minute flights from London Gatwick on either Aurigny or Air Flybe.

DINING We enjoyed steamed mussels, frites and a beer for about \$23 at Dix Neuf Bistro. At Christies, the three-course early dinner menu was just \$17. Esquire magazine rates the Cobo Fish Bar as one of the five best traditional fish and chip spots in the U.K.

SLEEPING The island offers everything from B&Bs and boutique hotels to five-star lodging. Check options at visitguernsey.com.

after D-Day for wounded German troops and doubled as an ammunition dump.

The attraction of this massive facility is the emptiness. Long, damp corridors echo with your footsteps, as chilling as the moisture running down the walls to gutters in the floor. Warnings in German (Smoking forbidden!) mark the walls.

In St. Peter Port, visit Castle Cornet, which has stood guard over the harbour since the 13th century. On a hot day take the 20-minute ferry ride to Herm for a pub lunch, a hike and a swim.

Getting around by car is a challenge because the streets are narrow, the lanes have high walls and road signs only occasional. Taxis are reasonable and the local buses offer a way to sightsee at island pace. Walking or renting a bike also are options.

Adam Mayers is the Star's personal finance editor.

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DREAMSTIME

The beaches of the Dominican Republic make for a popular winter getaway for Canadians.