

LA PROVENCE, 206 E. Locust, off 1700 block of McCullough (225-0722). This is a relative newcomer to the roster of French restaurants in San Antonio but it has grown in quality. It's quieter than La Louisiane, both in decor and decibels, and more adventurous in its menu. The beef (surely not of Texas origin) is as good as you'll find anywhere; in tournedos Rossini it comes with a full and flavorful bearnaise. Veal in cream with sliced fresh mushrooms is a triumph. The French bread is crisp, the butter fresh, and the waiters manage excellent crepes Suzette without too much fuss. It's serious without being pretentious—something of a rarity among restaurants of this kind. Bar. Dinner Tue thru Sat 5:30–11. Reservations advised. Expensive. All credit cards.

LITTLE RHEIN, 231 S. Alamo (225-2111). If you're determined to dine on the river and you care about food, this cozy steakhouse may be your only choice. The menu features a small but select group of steaks (center cuts, at a premium price, run to \$14.00 or so), and a few non-steak items such as double-cut pork chops, shrimp, and a surprisingly good "northern white fish" (halibut?) broiled simply with butter. Service ranges from old hands like Buster to fairly gauche youngsters, and is more efficient indoors than on the patio. Nice touches like individual loaves of bread and real cream—in a pitcher. Bar. Dinner every day 5–10:30 (Fri & Sat till 11). Expensive. All cards.

MARIO'S, 325 S. Pecos (223-9602). Save yourself a trip to the border; this place has it all: full mariachi bands (with brass—which may be more noise than you like), big late-night crowds, mock-Aztec decor, and one of the few local menus that goes beyond the standard combination Mexican dinner. *Tri-pitas* (calf intestines, cleaned and charcoal-broiled) are a specialty. Plates are garnished with fresh, chunky guacamole, bright *pico de gallo* (tomato and peppers), and crisp romaine lettuce. There is a bakery, too, for the wonderful Mexican *pan dulce* (sweet breads)—not, perhaps, as good as the one at the more popular Mi Tierra across the expressway but in every other way this is the best Mexican food available in downtown San Antonio. (The owner is a political activist and shows it by offering no gringo dishes or American beers in this establishment.) Bar. Open every day, 24 hours. Inexpensive to moderate. No credit cards.

PAESANO'S, 1715 McCullough (226-9541). This is probably the city's best Italian restaurant—and, to hear its partisans tell it, the best Italian restaurant west of Torino. The food is northern, not Neapolitan, and the emphasis is definitely not on pasta but rather on fish, veal, and the excellent steak *pizzaola*. Shrimp Paesano, in a delicate and creamy lemon sauce, is available both as an appetizer or a main dish. The place is crowded and alive with the noise of happy eaters. No reservations are taken, so it's wise to come early (or late). Owner Joe Gosniac is always on hand and will probably claim a relative or two in whatever city you're from. Beer and wine. Dinner Tue thru Sat 5:30–11:30. Upper moderate. MC, V.

RED CARPET, 107 E. Martin, near National Bank of Commerce (222-8581). This quiet, unstylish place is a "sleeper" among San Antonio restaurants. It was once a private club and still has the air of a 1940s hotel. But the kitchen turns out some very satisfying dishes at reasonable prices and the service is just formal enough to make you feel you're "dining" rather than eating. Steaks are well-handled; trout *belle meuniere*, with crabmeat and mushrooms, was as good as any seafood we've had in this city. The house salad, with hearts of palm, mushrooms, and a mustard-based dressing, is well above average; and crepes Suzette and other flaming specialties are prepared at the table on request. Bar. Dinner Mon thru Sat 6:30–10. Upper moderate. A 15% gratuity is added. All credit cards.

VIET NAM, 3244 Broadway (822-7461). The latest wave of immigration to the American West is well-established in San Antonio and this is the best of its restaurants. Crab is the mainstay and it comes in many forms, from the tissue-thin spring rolls (served on a bed of lettuce and mint) to rich crab soup or a noodly melange called crabmeat Supreme. The menu, even in English, sometimes needs a gloss; "green pepper steak" is actually chunks of beef with stir-fried peppers; chicken flavored with lemon grass is a favorite. The two small rooms have been prettied up in a way that is neither pretty nor particularly oriental, but the servers are charming and very helpful. Beer & wine. Open every day 11–11. Moderate. MC, V.

A Selective Guide

To Some

Fine Restaurants in San Antonio



Prepared especially for conferees of

THE WESTERN HISTORY ASSOCIATION

October 14–17

WAAM/THE ART MUSEUM ASSOCIATION

October 25–29



San Antonio has many good restaurants for a city of its size. Here are some that may be of special interest—either for the kind and quality of food they offer, or because they are located fairly near the center of town. Many good restaurants are left out because they are *far* out; no restaurants are included merely because they are centrally located, fancy, or well-known tourist attractions.

Buen provecho!

ARTHUR'S, 4001 Broadway (826-3200). This attractive place is fairly *haute*—both as regards cuisine and price. It has, however, one of the most festive bars in the city, with first-rate entertainment from 5 p.m. (generally cool jazz), an atmosphere that is vaguely redolent of Singapore, and a selection of very satisfying hot appetizers in case you'd rather not undertake the two-foot-wide menus inside. If you do, it's worthwhile getting the help of one of the two genial host-managers, the brothers Tabatabai. There is an encyclopedic list of California wines. Bar. 5–2 a.m. Dinner 6–11 (midnight on Saturday). Expensive. All credit cards.

THE BAYOUS RIVERSIDE, 517 N. Presa (223-6403). Owner John Cace's daddy has a place in Marshall, Texas, and the flavor here is definitely from the East Texas–Louisiana border. That means oysters (try *a la Bayous*, with garlic and romano cheese), good catfish, froglegs, and a wonderful pot of marinated crab claws served as an appetizer. The original San Antonio location, on the North Side, done in weathered wood and oyster sacks, is more comfortable than the downtown location; on the other hand, you can dine on the Riverwalk if the weather is fine, or stick to the roomy oyster bar just above street level. Bar. Dinner Mon thru Thur 5–10:30, Fri and Sat till 11. Oyster bar open till midnight. Moderate. All credit cards.

THE BEAN POT, 110 Austin Highway (826-7511). If it's barbecue you crave, you'll be startled at the near lack of good places in San Antonio. This one, located just off Broadway in Alamo Heights, has the recommendation of 23 years' experience. You serve yourself, cafeteria-style (including a condiment bar with beans and three kinds of pickles), then straddle a plain chair at a plain table.

The sauce at least lacks the sweetness that spoils so many of the popular chain restaurants, and the brisket, ribs, and ham are generally juicy and well-smoked. (There's sausage and chicken, too.) Beer. Mon thru Sat 11–9. Inexpensive. No checks or credit cards.

CHEZ ARDID, 7701 Broadway, in Alamo Heights (824-6567). Chef Guillermo Ardid and his family run this small, tastefully decorated *restaurant gastronomique* with attention to the most minute detail. He is frequently out front, proudly displaying a seafood quiche, a specially good purchase of fish or vegetables, a splendid rack of lamb. Soups (the cream of celery is an example) are light and appetizing; salads are made with Boston lettuce and other greens. Both complement the meal rather than rendering it superfluous. Service is unobtrusive and efficient, the wine list ample without being extravagant. Bar. Dinner Tue thru Sat 7–10. (Only one party is booked per table, so you are never rushed.) Reservations are a must. Expensive. AE, MC, V.

CRUMPETS, 5800 Broadway, in Cambridge Place (821-5454). Sophistication without pretentiousness (something we should all strive for) has been achieved here. Likely as not, owner Anneliese Hutt will be wearing designer jeans; you will feel comfortable in Gucci or golf clothes. The kitchen, however, is a match for the finest in town: the delights it produces are simple—garlic soup, leaf lettuce salads dressed in a perfect vinaigrette, crisp French bread, and light and subtle sauces on the entrees (chiefly beef filets, chicken, and fresh fish). The bakery produces sumptuous pastries, including a light and slightly dry ricotta cheesecake. Bar. Dinner Mon thru Sat 5:30–10:30. Upper moderate. AE, MC, V.

THE FIG TREE, 515 Villita (224-1976). If your wallet is full and you have a deep appreciation of the kind of elegance that must have polaxed the prospectors at Denver's Brown Palace a century ago, this may be for you. Nothing quite lives up to the magnificence of the table settings. The short menu—about a dozen entrees, priced at \$26.50 each—includes a fine rack of lamb, beef tenderloin topped with fresh oysters, and rainbow trout wrapped in smoked salmon. Appetizers can be passed over but there's a fine salad of Kentucky limestone lettuce and excellent coffee brewed at tableside. Service is very personal, pauses between courses deliberately long and punctuated, in the Escoffier manner, with consommé and a perfectly tasteless *sorbet*. The wine list is no match for all this either. But it is an eye-ful. Bar. Dinner 7 days 6–10:30. Reservations required. All credit cards.

FOUR SEASONS PLAZA NACIONAL HOTEL, 555 S. ALAMO (229-1000). The *Anaqua Room* is the most memorable of San Antonio's hotel dining rooms, beautifully furnished (with petit-point chairs, and Peruvian framed mirrors on one wall), subtly lighted, and offering a view of the lighted patio outside. There are some fine and unusual appetizers (like leek pate in vinaigrette) and entrees are sensibly offered in a variety of ways (fish may be poached, sautéed, or grilled) with sauces on the side. Service is of the quiet and deferential kind. Outside, on the patio itself, is the *Restoration Bar & Grille*, a cozy place made in one of the restored adobe houses that were on this site before the hotel was built. Prime steak by the ounce (weighed, but not cooked, at the table), and one or two other specialties like flamed shrimp are the excellent staple items here. Bar. *Anaqua Room* open for dinner 5:30–11 daily. *Restoration* 6–11 Mon thru Sat. Expensive. All credit cards.

HU-NAN RIVER GARDEN, 506 River Walk (222-0808). Chop suey, they tell us, was invented in the Old West by a Chinese cook who had to rustle a quick meal out of leftovers. That academic headnote will serve, perhaps, to justify inclusion of a quite good oriental restaurant right on the San Antonio River. Chop suey, of course, trails the list, which ranges competently from whole steamed fish with a sauce of ginger and chiles to a vegetarian dish of broccoli sautéed in a rich brown oyster sauce. The hot, spicy dishes of Hunan and Szechuan provinces are well-represented, but if you like them really hot, you'll have to insist. You may also have to

insist if you like your bourbon straight or simple; there's a whole menagerie of cute and exotic drinks with hollow pineapples and paper parasols. Open every day 11–11. Moderate. AE, MC, V.

P.S. Right next door is a wonderful Italian ice-cream parlor named *Justin's*. The home-made ices and ice-creams include an incredibly flavorful hazelnut and you can get espresso, capucino and freshly-made Sicilian *cannoli*, a pastry-horn filled with a chilled mixture of ricotta cheese, pistachio and minced fruits. Much better than fortune cookies.

KANGAROO COURT, 516 River Walk (224-6821). If what you really want is a snack and an opportunity to watch the river and its denizens, this English-style pub may serve your turn. The simpler oyster and shrimp dishes are fine; there is a wide selection of imported beers and ales, and the cheesecake has some renown. Servers tend to be young and cheerful, even if they lack some of the graces. Bar. Open every day 11:30–11:30. Moderate. All credit cards.

LA FIESTA, 1222 Austin Highway (824-8393). We wouldn't want you not to know about the city's outstanding Mexican natural foods restaurant. Mexican natural foods? Well, the vegetables are organically grown, the rice is brown, and no lard or preservatives are used. If you think you'd miss orange grease in your enchiladas, skip it. In fact the food is first rate by any standards; the tostadas are quick, crisp, and hot; the sauces savory and satisfying without too much bite. Beer. Dinner Tue thru Sun 11:30–9 or 10. Inexpensive. MC, V.

LA LOUISIANE, 2632 Broadway (225-7984). A couple of generations of South Texans have learned their table manners here. It's the grande dame of haute cuisine in San Antonio and while she's showing some signs of wear, she can still kick up her heels. The rich, dark seafood gumbo makes a good opener. Snapper almondine in a very light batter is always a success and sweetbreads Madeira are done just right. Nothing much has changed here in at least fifteen of the old girl's forty years in this location—including the hanging pots of plastic flowers. The service is uniformed, smooth, and just this side of indifferent. Bar. Dinner Tue thru Sat 6–10:30. Expensive. All credit cards.