

MORE THAN THE ALAMO



DRINK: PISCIA ON THE RIVER

PARTY: HOTEL VALENCIA YBAR

DRINKING: MEDUSA LOUNGE

Suddenly ^{hip} San Antonio

■ Texas' No. 1 vacation destination has long been beloved for its cultural and historical treasures and for family fun. Now, it's also a haven for those who want to party and be pampered.



SEEK THE PLEASURES: The San Bar Lounge is a favorite late-night gathering place for young San Antonio party girls and guys.

FACTS According to a recent Scripps Howard Texas Poll, 27 percent of Texans who vacation within the state this summer will visit San Antonio, more than twice the fraction recorded by any other destination.

FAVES As in years past, we'll stroll along the River Walk, drink at SeaWorld and San Plaza Pisco Texas, chase history at the Alamo, chow down on Tex-Mex cuisine at El Mercado — and maybe find time to sample a margarita.

FUN Twenty-first century San Antonio is high on the hip quotient, too, with an evolving sophisticated arts upscale lodgings, eclectic restaurants and vibrant nightlife steps from the River Walk in the heart of downtown.

NIGHTLIFE

New clubs tantalize, surprise

By HARRY SHATTUCK

SAN ANTONIO IS a vibrant night scene. From the classic San Bar & Lounge to the "Latin House" scene at San Bar & Lounge, there's something for everyone. A night drinks on a Friday, looking for a good time, I have never missed the opportunity to visit the city. For the most part, I have never missed the opportunity to visit the city. For the most part, I have never missed the opportunity to visit the city.

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WATERMARK HOTEL & SPA Located in the heart of downtown San Antonio, the Watermark Hotel & Spa is a 1000-room resort with a pool, spa, and fitness center.

PISCIA ON THE RIVER A new restaurant on the River Walk, Piscia offers a variety of dishes and a full bar.

HOTEL VALENCIA RIVERWALK A new hotel on the River Walk, Hotel Valencia offers a variety of amenities and a full bar.

CIVITAS AND ACENAR A new restaurant in the heart of downtown San Antonio, Civitas and Acenar offers a variety of dishes and a full bar.

THE ACCOMMODATIONS AND PUBLIC AREAS

Affair or not, it's remembered

Seven-layer beds
Instead of "Do Not Disturb," signs placed outside guest-room doors read, "Not Quiet Yet." And promotional literature points to the Valencia's recognition by the San Antonio Current as the city's "best hotel to have an affair in."
The bold and sunny Valencia is especially popular with travelers ages 25-45, but happily married seniors can also appreciate rooms and suites with "Seven-layer beds," a down-stuffed leather club chair and spacious marble baths. Guests can order in-room spa services, too.



HIGH STYLE: The Hotel Valencia Riverwalk's second-floor lobby lounge includes a handblown glass chandelier.

Mix of elements
Combining influences from the Mediterranean, Asia and South America, public areas are a feast for the senses, with Tuscan Renaissance architectural styling, a waterfall cascading from the second-floor lobby area to the ground level, Brazilian hardwood floors, walls made of crushed brick, deep rich colors and lots of mirrors.
Idle away the day or savor an after-dinner beverage in a third-floor courtyard where comfortable chairs face what designers describe as "a dramatic fountain backdrop by a dynamic line of fire."

High technology
With its only sister property situated in San Jose, Calif., it's hardly surprising that the finest Valencia is San Antonio's most high-tech lodging.
Deftmen with hand-held devices offer wireless check-in (within the system functions

properly), and high-speed wireless Internet service is available throughout public areas and in guest rooms.
Planning a trip
The Valencia is at 150 E. Houston St. Rates vary, but standard rooms with king beds start at \$124 per night for some summer dates. Courtyard rooms start at \$238. Janine suites typically sell for \$450.
A Girlfriends Getaway package has rates starting at \$169 per night, including tax. The package includes a gift bag and two cocktails at the hotel's Vbar.
Inquire about other packages. Value parking costs \$37 per night. Access www.hotelvalencia.com. Call 866-842-0000.

— HARRY SHATTUCK



AWARD-WINNER: The Watermark, above, and Vella at the Houstonian are the only Mobil four-star resort spas in Texas for 2005.

Fancy treatments
A spa concierge points the way to a dressing area and lounge, delivers a glass of lemon or cucumber water, then escorts you to one of 19 treatment rooms.
Once you've experienced an avocado lime-blossom scalp and body treatment, a massage clay wrap, a hot stone massage or restorative organic facial, you retire to a "quiet room" — one for men, another for women, still another for couples — where the only intrusion is soothing recorded music. Not ready for a nap? You'll find steam rooms, saunas and hydrotherapy tubs, too, along with a fitness center.

Fancy digs
Luxury and suites, many overlooking the River Walk, feature 12-foot ceilings. All have four-poster beds, sitting areas and marble baths with separate showers and Jacuzzi tubs. Four spa suites are designed for couples who wish private in-room treatments.
The décor in public areas includes an extensive collection of art. Among other features is a small rooftop pool and spa cafe.

Planning a visit
The Watermark is at 212 W. Crockett St. Published room rates run \$329-\$700, but summer discounts are available with king-bed rooms for \$199 on some dates. A spa package for two starts at \$376. Parking costs \$25 per night.
Access www.watermarkhotel.com. Call the hotel at 866-605-1212; call 210-396-5040 for spa reservations. Guests at La Mansion del Rio also have spa privileges. Rates at La Mansion begin at \$139 per person.

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FOLLOW THE TREND: The Hotel Valencia Riverwalk's Ybar was named "Best Place to Be Seen" for 2005 by San Antonio's Downtown Alliance. Night owls congregate at the large bar or in intimate sitting areas nearby.

WENDY POOLE FOR THE COURTESY