

Austin and San Antonio

Two of the biggest cities not only in Texas, but in the entire United States, and both are just 75 miles, or 121 kilometers, apart...about an hour and a half drive.

Both are also two of the fast-growing major cities in the country, and they are growing so fast that we could one day live to see them merge into each other to form a megacity.

San Antonio has the third largest metropolitan area in Texas and 24th in the country, while Austin has the fourth largest metropolitan area in Texas and 28th in the country. Austin is likely the fastest growing metro in the United States, though, and its population could catch up to San Antonio's soon.

Hopefully by the end of this here video, you'll know exactly which one you prefer. First, let's look at what they have in common.

Both are kind of in the middle of Texas. Both are a similar distance from the Gulf of Mexico.

Being as close as they are, both have very similar climates. They both have a humid subtropical climate, located on and near a transitional zone that borders a semi-arid climate to the west. Drive east out of both cities, it gets more lush and green. Drive west out of both cities, and it quickly gets more dry. Both have a similar amount of sunny days and get a similar amount of precipitation. Both have hot, long summers and mild winters, although northern fronts from the Canadian Arctic can, believe it or not, reach as far south as both cities, and snow and ice are a thing in both every three years or so.

Both are just east of Texas Hill Country, a geographic region of Texas made up of rugged hills consisting mostly of limestone or granite. Some of these hills are so dramatic they seem more like little mountains, to be fairly real with ya there.

Both cities often get thunderstorms and can get tornadoes every once in a while. Both are too far from the Gulf of Mexico to get hurricanes. That said, remnants of hurricanes can make their way that far inland.

Both have an ethnically diverse population. Both have a sizable population that can speak Spanish. (A- 22%, SA- 39%)

As in most major American cities, residents in both lean to the left politically. However, Austin is generally way more left-leaning, and is the most left-leaning city in all of Texas.

The median age in both is about the same (A- 33.7, SA- 33.8), and much younger than the national median age. The most popular religion in both is Roman Catholicism.

Both have horrible traffic. However, while driving in both cities is a nightmare, it's slightly worse in Austin. According to at least one study, Austin is the fourth worst city in the country for drivers and San Antonio is the seventh worst.¹

One reason for the horrible traffic is that both get LOTS of visitors compared to most other cities around the country. Don't believe me? Austin gets at least 25 million visitors a year. San Antonio often gets between 30 and 40 million visitors a year.

Both have one major airport. Both have a bike sharing system.

Both have nearly identical air quality.

Both have one top-level professional sports team. San Antonio is home to the Spurs, of the National Basketball Association. Austin is home to Major League Soccer's Austin FC.

Both cities made the U.S. News & World Report's "Best Places to Live" list. The list ranks Austin as the 13th best place to live in the country and San Antonio as the 83rd best.

President Lyndon Johnson has ties to both cities. First of all, he grew up right about here and spent much of his time in office there. Today it's the Lyndon B. Johnson National Historical Park, a short drive from both cities. LBJ also lived in Austin for a short time, and so did his wife, Lady Bird Johnson. And guess where the two got married? San Antonio! Yep, good guess there buddy. Now, I have to add that the LBJ Presidential Library and Museum IS in Austin.

But that's it for similarities. Now it's time to look at differences.

But before we look at differences, this video is sponsored by Morgan and Morgan, America's largest injury law firm. Have you ever been injured in a car accident or known someone who has? How did insurance handle it? Did you know that you can sue insurance companies that don't properly cover your medical expenses?

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<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2022-11-16/worst-us-cities-for-traffic-new-york-chicago-miami-top-list-for-drivers>

Thanks to Morgan and Morgan for sponsoring this video.

For the rest of this video, let's look at differences, you cool with that Jimbo?

First of all, the metropolitan area of San Antonio has about 300,000 more people. (A- 2.3 million, SA- 2.6 million)

San Antonio has a lower population density. San Antonio has a much larger Hispanic and Latino population. In fact, nearly 65% of San Antonio's residents identify as Hispanic. San Antonio is home to the largest Mexican market outside of Mexico. It's known simply as El Mercado, and it's a really cool place.

Things generally cost A LOT more in Austin. Yep, if you want to get a much cheaper cost of living, then San Antonio makes more sense. The main reason why Austin is so expensive is its ridiculously inflated housing market.

That said, San Antonio has a higher poverty rate. (A- 12.5%², SA- 17.6%³). Related to this, the median household income is higher in Austin. (A-\$75,752⁴, SA- \$53,420⁵) Also related to this, Austin has a higher percentage of residents who have a college degree. It also has more high school graduates. And yeah, the student to teacher ratio is lower there as well. (A-14:1, SA- 15:1) Dang, sorry San Antonio. It's not that you're so bad, it's that Austin is so good. According to Wallethub, it's the 10th most educated city in the country.⁶ San Antonio still ranks better in education compared to most American cities, ok?

Major industries in Austin include technology, financial services and defense. Major industries in San Antonio include healthcare, tourism, and also defense. San Antonio is known more for its huge military presence there. Not only does it have one of the biggest concentrations of military bases in the country, it's also home to the Department of Defense's largest hospital, the Brooke Army Medical Center.

Austin has a higher gross metropolitan product. Ok that just means Austin produces more valuable stuff.

San Antonio residents are more religious, overall.

San Antonio has been around longer. A lot longer. Let's get into some history, eh...

Native Americans lived in the area of modern-day Austin and San Antonio for thousands of years. At the time of European arrival, the Payaya people lived in what is now called San

² <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/austincitytexas/PST045221>

³ <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/sanantoniocitytexas/RHI125221>

⁴ <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/austincitytexas/PST045221>

⁵ <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/sanantoniocitytexas/RHI125221>

⁶ <https://wallethub.com/edu/e/most-and-least-educated-cities/6656>

Antonio, although they called it “Yanaguana.” Meanwhile, three tribes lived in the general area of what is now called Austin: the Tonkawa, Comanche, and Lipan. In 1536, a Spanish explorer named Alvar Nunez Cabeza de Vaca checked out central Texas and came across a river, which he named San Antonio, after St. Anthony of Padua. Over the next 200 years, the Spanish slowly sent more and more people up to the area to settle and start to build missions to attempt to convert the local Native Americans to Christianity.

In 1691, Spanish explorers and missionaries came across a Payaya camp near where modern-day San Antonio is, and that’s when they started calling the permanent settlement there “San Antonio,” in fact. They built a fort nearby which became strategically important for the Spanish. On May 1, 1718, the Spanish officially founded San Antonio as a mission. Technically there were five “San Antonios” in the area, but this one eventually became known as simply the Alamo. Jump ahead to 1731, and Spanish settlers from the Canary Islands built some homes near the Alamo and called the community San Fernando de Béxar. In the mid 1700s, the Apache and Comanche tribes often raided the Alamo, but it was somehow still standing by 1773, when the Spanish made it the provincial capital.

San Antonio had been around for 113 years when Mexico gained independence from Spain and became its own country. By this time, the settlement was in an area known as “Texas.” Because the area was sparsely populated and still susceptible to Comanche raids, the Mexican government began allowing Americans from the north to begin coming down to settle there. They let a guy named Stephen Austin start a colony as long as his crew were moral, hardworking, Catholic, and willing to learn Spanish and become citizens. Oh, and they also said they couldn’t bring slaves down there as slavery had been banned. Austin’s first American families he brought to colonize Texas, today known as the “Old Three Hundred,” did their best to follow those conditions. However, over time future settlers weren’t so excited about following those rules, and many Americans refused to convert to Catholicism and even snuck their slaves into Texas. By 1830, the population of Texas had swelled to around 30,000, with Americans outnumbering Mexicans there 6 to 1. By this time, the Mexican government was angry that so many Americans were breaking their rules, so they cut off American immigration. However, many Americans continued to illegally cross the border and settle in Texas anyway. Tensions sharply rose, and long story short, this all culminated with the Texas Revolution, in which the American colonists, joined by many Tejanos, or Mexican Texans, started an armed uprising and declared independence from Mexico. One of the most famous and important battles of this revolution occurred at the Alamo. Texans had retreated to the mission and withstood a 13-day siege, before Mexican troops led by Antonio López de Santa Anna broke in and killed almost everyone inside. The brutal nature of this attack led to many Texans signing up to fight, as well as many Tejanos joining the American side. “Remember the Alamo!” became their rallying cry.

Well, the Texans ultimately won and became an independent country, the Republic of Texas, in 1836. The next year, some Texans started a small village about 75 miles northeast of San Antonio and called it Waterloo. Three years later, the Texas government officially took over the village to make it the capital of Texas. They renamed it “Austin,” after the aforementioned

Stephen Austin, who by this time was considered the “Father of Texas.” Austin was officially incorporated on December 27, 1839.

Still, at that time San Antonio was easily the biggest and most important city in Texas. Plus, Austin was still under constant threat of being invaded by Mexico again. In fact, in 1842, Houston temporarily became the capital instead due to this constant threat.

On December 29, 1845, the United States annexed Texas, but voters still decided to keep Austin as its capital, despite San Antonio being the bigger city and more of a hub. During the Mexican-American War, San Antonio became an important military center for federal troops.

In 1861, when most Texans wanted to secede from the United States to join the Confederacy, most residents of both cities preferred to stay with the Union. After the war, the African American population in both cities grew at first, but after Jim Crow laws implemented racial segregation beginning in the 1870s, thousands fled to northern industrial cities.

Still, for the rest of the century, both cities steadily grew, attracting immigrants from all over the United States and world.

San Antonio was the largest city in Texas between 1900 and 1930. During that time, San Antonio’s population went from double that of Austin’s to more than four times that of Austin’s. After air conditioning became a thing is when the population of both cities really took off. After World War Two, Austin’s growth was mostly driven by it being an education and government hub, whereas San Antonio’s growth came from it being a military hub. Only in recent years has Austin’s population started to catch up with San Antonio’s.

Today, it’s known as the live music capital of the world, and it’s had this nickname ever since folks found that the city had more live music venues per capita than anywhere else. Indeed, plenty of musicians have flocked to the city in recent decades hoping to make it big with their art. Austin has also attracted a lot of tech companies in recent years.

Still, there’s no denying that San Antonio has the upper hand when it comes to historical heritage. You quickly see that by walking down the San Antonio River Walk, which is arguably the biggest tourist attraction in all of Texas. In fact, it’s even inspired river walks in other cities.

Ok San Antonio residents, I’m truly sorry about this, but I’m going to continue to list Austin’s advantages.

Austin is generally a safer city. San Antonio has both a higher violent crime rate and higher property crime rate.

Austin also has better water quality. Austin gets more of its electricity from renewable sources.

Austin has better public transit. In fact, San Antonio is the biggest American city without any urban rail transit.⁷ Austin is also more walkable and bikeable, overall.⁸⁹

As I mentioned earlier, Austin is the capital of Texas...it's where the Texas government meets and passes laws and stuff. At 360,000 square feet, the Texas Capitol building is the biggest state capitol in the country. But you already knew this, because everything is bigger in Texas, right?

Speaking of big, Austin is also home to the University of Texas, one of the biggest universities in the country.

San Antonio's most famous tourist attraction is arguably The Alamo Mission, which I brought up earlier as the site of the Battle of the Alamo during the Texas Revolution. It's the oldest building in Texas and is a UNESCO World Heritage site.

Austin also has the famous Congress Avenue Bridge, which is the home of the world's largest urban bat colony. In fact, that's why one of Austin's nicknames is "Bat City." Seriously. Google "Bat City" and nothing but Austin stuff will show up.

Ah but just outside of San Antonio is Bracken Cave, the summer home of the largest bat colony in the world, period man.

Austin is home to the only known surviving moonlight towers, or moontowers, in the world. (Party at the moon tower clip) What's a moonlight tower you ask? Great question. I had to look it up myself for this video. A moonlight tower is a tower meant to simulate the effect of a full moon. They're basically big street lights meant to light up an entire neighborhood, as opposed to just a street. While literally every other city on the planet has long since gotten rid of their moonlight towers, Austin has laws that state their moonlight towers should never be demolished. Keep Austin Weird, indeed.

But hey, San Antonio's weird, too. After all, it's home to the world's biggest cowboy boots. The sculpture is more than 35 feet (10.6 m) tall. Hey I told you everything was bigger in Texas.

Other notable attractions in Austin include Zilker Botanical Garden, the Bullock Texas State History Museum, Barton Springs Pool, and the LBJ Presidential Library. Other notable attractions in San Antonio include San Fernando Cathedral, Brackenridge Park, The Pearl Brewery District, and San Antonio Missions National Historical Park.

Austin is also home to the annual South by Southwest, a series of media festivals and conferences that take place there every March.

⁷ <https://deceleration.news/2022/08/25/making-rail-transit-central-in-san-antonio/>

⁸ https://www.walkscore.com/TX/San_Antonio

⁹ <https://www.walkscore.com/TX/Austin>

Austin gave us Whole Foods and Dell Computers. San Antonio gave us Fritos and, supposedly, chili. Wait, both chili and Fritos were invented in San Antonio? That's one of my favorite combos ever.

Ok, I'm getting hungry. Let's wrap this up.

I think it's best to end this video by looking at this stretch of Interstate 35 between the two cities. It's one of the busiest and congested stretches of interstate in the entire country, which is why passenger trains and buses connecting both cities are being planned, by the way¹⁰¹¹. If you're listening to this video stuck in traffic on that stretch of Interstate right now, know that there's a simple reason why you're stuck in that traffic. San Antonio and Austin both remain very desirable places to live, and there is no evidence that's gonna slow down any time soon. But as former San Antonio mayor Ivy Taylor once said, "It's no longer 'San Antonio vs. Austin,' but 'San Antonio AND Austin'."

Because they're two of the most exciting cities in the country, attracting so many new residents, they indeed may one day become one single metro area. They better get ready for it.

Thanks to my KP from the YouTube channel, Molecular Memory, for reading over this script to me. She's an Austin resident. Also a shout out to my colleague Doug Sandberg, who helped me with this video. He grew up in San Antonio. And my good friend Chris lives in the Austin metro. Chris, thanks for supporting my videos all these years. So what did I leave out? What did I get wrong? What did I get right? Anything? Did I get anything right? I sure hope so. Let me know down below. As always, I love hearing from folks actually from these two cities, and I love suggestions for future cities I should compare. Thanks for watching!

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