

Ghosts of the wild frontier

Does Davy Crockett still remember the Alamo? If ghostly activity in his final, Texan resting place is anything to go by, the answer is yes. By **Paul Slade**

"SAN ANTONIO is an awesome place to look for ghosts," enthuses Martin Leal, who conducts nightly ghost tours of the third-largest city in Texas. "There's a lot of interest from ghost hunters. I can go out on a Saturday night and meet all these other people out looking for ghosts. I haven't found another place like this in the United States."

Part of the reason for this is no doubt due to the fact that nearly 2,000 men died at the Alamo, when the Mexican army took the San Antonio fortress from a small band of Texan freedom fighters in the siege of 1836. The bodies of the Alamo's defenders, which included those of Wild West legends Jim Bowie and Davy Crockett, were unceremoniously burned. However the remains of the fortress can still be seen in the middle of San Antonio's downtown area, flanked by two historic hotels, the Menger and the Emily Morgan.

Today, these three buildings form a convenient focus for visitors seeking evidence of spectral activity in what is said to be one of the most haunted cities in America.

At the Menger, both guests and staff regularly report seeing ghosts throughout the older section of the hotel, and the bar, lobby and guest rooms have all, apparently, seen their share of inexplicable events.

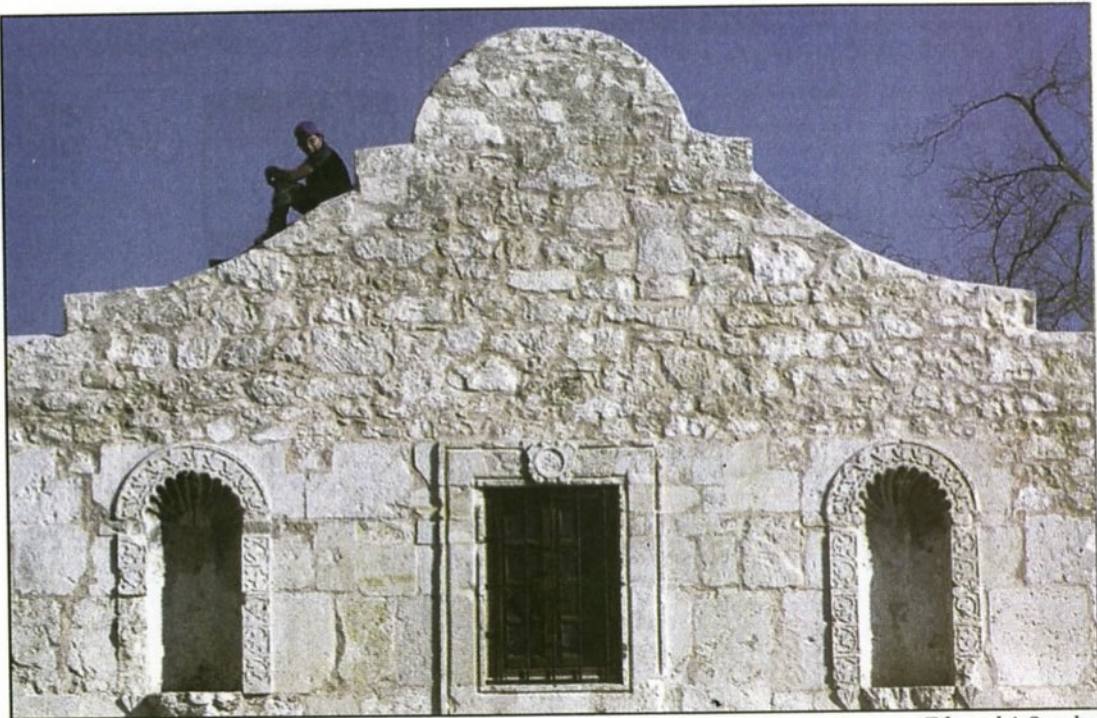
The ghost that is most often glimpsed at the Menger is that of Sallie White. She was a



chambermaid who worked at the hotel over a hundred years ago. In 1876, her common-law husband believed that she was being unfaithful to him and responded by shooting her dead.

With no one else to look after her, the Menger's owners paid for her to be buried. Ever since, there have been regular sightings of a ghostly chambermaid carrying an armful of towels down the hotel's fourth-floor corridor. Apparently she is always dressed the same and, when challenged, simply walks on by.

The hotel's assistant manager, Ernesto Malacara, has spoken to several guests who claim to have encountered Sallie. He says: "It is our belief that this woman's spirit was so moved by the hotel's gesture in burying her remains that she keeps coming back. All kinds of people have seen her; but they tend to give the same description; a woman wearing an old, dark-coloured uniform - something that has not been worn here for many, many years."



The fortress of the Alamo is now the haunt of ghost hunters

Edward A Ornelas

There are similar stories at the Emily Morgan. The hotel is named after the mulatto prostitute who is said to have delayed Mexico's General Santa Anna at the crucial Battle of San Jacinto, six weeks after the Alamo siege. The building once housed both a hospital and a morgue, a history commemorated by the pain-racked gargoyles that still guard its walls. The hotel is so convinced of its ghostly guests that it offers generous discounts to those hardy souls prepared to book rooms on the top floors, where the hospital's sick and dying patients were once housed.

Those who join Leal's tour are shown these and other

spooky locations, and are regaled with the tales that accompany them. The tour ends with an opportunity to examine the tools of the ghost hunter's trade, including temperature guns. These fire a beam of light that measures the temperature of any area you point it at. The theory is that ghosts draw heat from the atmosphere around them, creating localised "cold spots" and thereby betraying their presence.

Cold spots such as these have been reported at Brentano's bookstore in the town's Rivercenter Mall - which stands on the site where corpses from the Alamo siege were burnt. Intriguingly, these

are most commonly detected in the "romance" section. But browsers at Brentano's can rest assured that there's no need for bravery where San Antonio's ghosts are concerned, as they are all said to share a charitable attitude towards the living.

Indeed it is even said that the schoolchildren killed in a train wreck at the city's "ghost tracks" will even push your car off the railway line if you should find yourself stranded there. The Menger's ghosts, too, exhibit a courteous attitude and expect the hotel's staff to treat them with similar respect. "These are all benevolent ghosts," says Malacara, "and

we ask our people to react to them in a kind way."

If you really want to boost your chances of busting a ghost, however, you should make your way to the Alamo. Spectres are apparently sighted so frequently that they must sometimes outnumber tourists.

Until 14 December, Trailfinders (www.trailfinders.com; 020-7937 5400) has flights on American Airlines from Gatwick via Dallas or Heathrow via Chicago to San Antonio for £304 return. Martin Leal's ghost tours (00 1 210 227 3286) run daily and cost \$10 (£7). For further information, contact Texas Tourism on 020-7978 5233