

## Location and History of Jesuit Missions of South America



The priests of the Society of Jesus, more commonly known as Jesuits, who developed the series of missions in South America in what is now Argentina, Brazil, Bolivia, Uruguay and Paraguay had little notion that one day the ruins of their establishments, great or small, would be on the tourist circuit.

The first missions were founded in Brazil in 1609, but abandoned in the 1640s after repeated raids by bandits from Sao Paulo. The ruins of this and other missions in South America are popular tourist attractions due to the grand scale of some of the churches and the local carvings influenced by European art of the day.

### History and Culture of the Missions

In contrast to the prevailing policy of *encomienda*, in which local tribes were subject to manual labor for subsistence, the Jesuits implemented a system called a *reducción*, or *redução* in Portuguese. *Reducción* was developed as part of the mission to bring the Roman Catholic religion to the local populations. Under the *reducción* system, locals from the Guaraní tribe lived communally and brought their farming skills with them and the Jesuits, in turn, protected the tribes from “bad influences” and exploitation by the Europeans.

They learned basic education and tradecrafts such as carpentry, leather tanning, bookmaking and manuscript preparation. The more promising boys were given advanced, classical educations.

With the increase in production, these missions would create tribute for the Spanish crown as “payment” for allowing the territories to be under Jesuit control. Over the next 150 years, the missions grew into small cities, economically strong and centers of education and crafts for the Indian tribes. The Guaraní developed a distinct architectural style that became known as Guaraní baroque, echos of which can still be seen today in the magnificently worked churches and architecture in the missions.



Each settlement had their own individual style, but all shared the same organizational plan. Surrounding the village plaza with its cross and statue of the mission's patron saint, were the church, college, churchyard and houses for the Indian residents. Settlements also provided a house for widows, a hospital, many workshops for the creation of artistic items, and several warehouses.

### The Fall of Jesuit Settlements

As they grew, the mission cities drew the notice of Spain, Portugal, and Pope Clement XIV who feared that the Jesuits were becoming too powerful, too independent. In 1756, Spanish and Portuguese forces attacked the missions, killing many and leaving the settlements in ruin. The surviving natives fled,

and the Jesuits were expelled from South America, as they were from other portions of the globe. However, their spirit remains in the ruins of many missions: sixteen in Argentina, seven in Paraguay and seven in what is now Brazil.

- 1) Yaperú
- 2) La Cruz
- 3) Santo Tomé
- 4) San Francisco de Borja
- 5) San Nicolás
- 6) San Luis
- 7) San Lorenzo
- 8) San Miguel
- 9) San Juan
- 10) Santo Ángel
- 11) Apóstoles
- 12) Concepción
- 13) Santa María
- 14) San Javier
- 15) Mártires
- 16) San José
- 17) San Carlos
- 18) Candelarias
- 19) Santa Ana
- 20) Loreto
- 21) San Ignacio Mini
- 22) Corpus
- 23) Jesús
- 24) Trinidad
- 25) Itapúa
- 26) San Cosme
- 27) Santiago
- 28) Santa Rosa
- 29) Santa María de Fe
- 30) San Ignacio Guazú



**Reducciones jesuíticas**

### Paraguay

- **San Ignacio Guazú (1610)**
  - The first Jesuit settlement in Paraguay is located in the city of San Ignacio de las Misiones, 226 km from Asunción. The mission museum offers a detailed view of the missionary way of life.
- **Santos Cosme y Damián (1632)**
  - Located in the city of Santos Cosme y Damián, 342 Km from Asunción, this mission was an astronomical observatory with a school.
- **Santa María de Fé (1647)**
  - Located in Santa María, 240 Km from Asunción, near the Ciudad de San Ignacio, this mission is built on a large scale. It has a museum with details of the architecture and daily life.
- **Santiago (1651)**
  - This mission is one of the best historical mission sites still in use. The homes of the Indians bordered the central plaza where there are monuments and a