

Tumacacori

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

National Historical Park
Arizona



Tumacacori's Franciscan church
© TOM VAUGHAN

Tumacacori sits at a cultural crossroads in the Santa Cruz River Valley. Here O'odham, Yaqui, and Apache people met and mingled with European Jesuit and Franciscan missionaries, settlers, and soldiers, sometimes in conflict and sometimes in cooperation. Follow the timeworn paths and discover stories that connect us to enduring relationships, vibrant cultures, and traditions of long ago.

The O'odham

Long before the arrival of European settlers, the Santa Cruz Valley was home to people who called themselves "O'odham." They gathered wild foods, hunted, and irrigated native crops, including corn, beans, squash, and cotton. Their homes were sturdy, dome-shaped structures made of bent saplings covered with brush and mud.

While each village had a leader, government was by consensus. During armed conflicts, a war chief took absolute command. Villages were politically self-contained, but neighboring settlements would sometimes unite against a common enemy. They also came together for games, song, dance, and religious observances. Rituals recreated the harmony of nature which was the core of their spiritual life.



O'odham basketry uses bundled bear grass woven in a continuous spiral with strips of white and green yucca leaves, red yucca root, and the black pod of the "devil's claw."

NPS / DOROTHY MICHELLE NOVAK



Padre on Horseback

Jesuit missionary Eusebio Francisco Kino traveled the *Pimeria Alta* for 24 years, establishing missions and supply routes, and mapping the area for New Spain. His willingness to understand the O'odham ways and his lack of dogmatism won their trust. He mixed practical help—introducing wheat, livestock, and fruit trees—with impressive pageantry and church ritual. Although never a resident priest at Tumacacori, he is forever linked with the missions of the *Pimeria Alta*.

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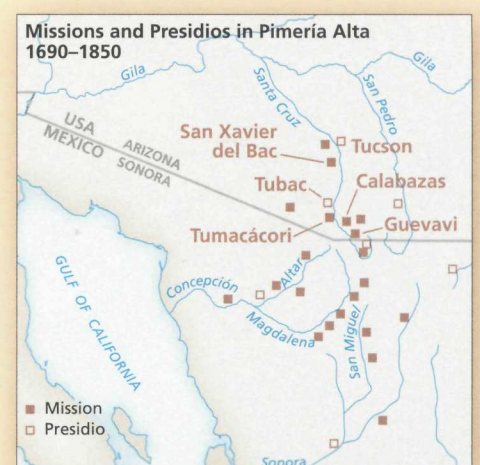
Frontier Missions

As Padre Kino and his party approached the O'odham settlement of Tumacacori in January 1691, they rode the wave of a century of expansion northward along New Spain's west coast. Padre Kino founded mission San Cayetano de Tumacacori on the east bank of the Santa Cruz River and next founded Mission San Gabriel at Guevavi, 15 miles upriver. After Guevavi was made *cabecera* (mission headquarters) in 1701, its resident priest traveled to serve Tumacacori and other *visitas* (visiting stations).

In 1751 some of the O'odham people in the Altar Valley to the southwest attacked Spanish settlements killing two priests and over 100 Spanish, Yaqui, and O'odham people. Following the revolt, a 50-man presidio (military post) was founded at Tubac, three miles north of Tumacacori. The mission community moved to its current location, possibly to benefit from protection offered by the presidio.

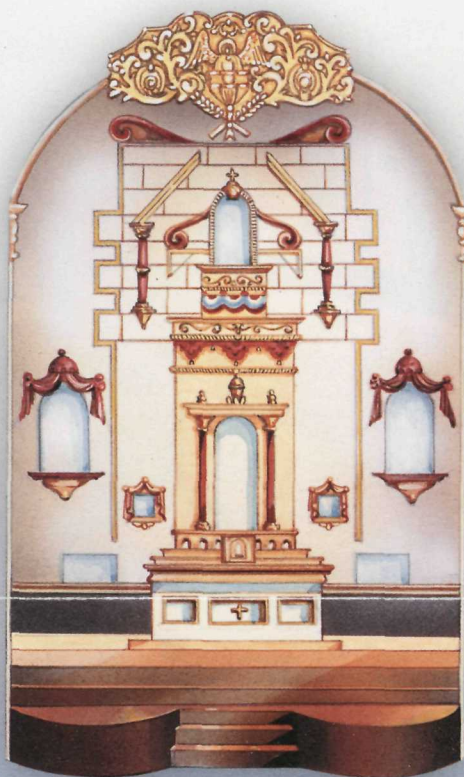
In 1767 King Charles III of Spain abruptly banished the Jesuits from all his realms. The Franciscans, who took over the missionary efforts in the *Pimeria Alta*, soon moved their *cabecera* from Guevavi to Tumacacori. The Franciscans inherited difficulties that had frustrated the Jesuits: restless neophytes, Apache raids, disease, encroaching settlers, and lack of government support. By 1787, Guevavi and the newly established mission of Calabazas were both abandoned.

Around 1800, Fray Narciso Gutiérrez began construction of a large church to replace Tumacacori's modest structure, but his mission's poverty and the Mexican wars for independence slowed progress on the building. When a decree by the new nation of Mexico forced all Spanish-born residents to leave the country in 1828, Tumacacori lost its last resident priest. The Indians and a few settlers hung on, but a series of Apache raids and a harsh winter drove the last residents from Tubac and Tumacacori in 1848.



Pimeria Alta, "place of the upper Pimas," was the name given by the Spanish to this land in what is now southern Arizona and northern Sonora, Mexico. The Spanish called the O'odham who lived along rivers "Pima."

Exploring Tumacacori

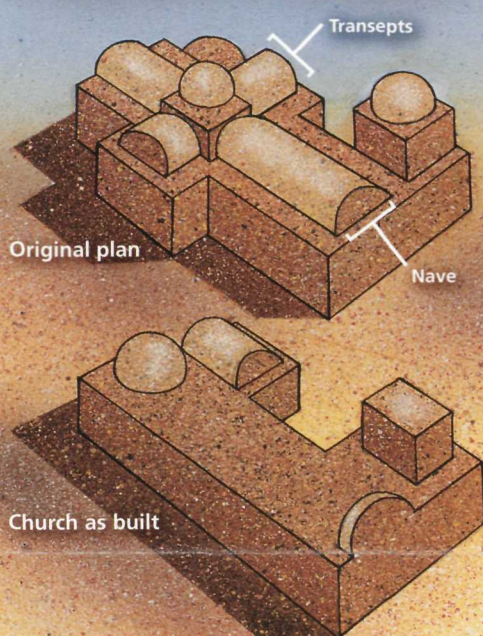


Building a New Church

Although it was never finished, the church in progress must have been a striking landmark with its colorful façade, bell tower, and white dome. The interior was even more colorful, especially the sanctuary and altar (left). As you entered the nave, the choir loft overhead would have sounded with voices

and instruments. Baptisms occurred in a domed room beneath the bell tower. Rich imagery of Catholicism—Mexican baroque statuary, symbolic paintings, depictions of the Stations of the Cross—adorned the walls and was designed to capture the imagination of mission residents.

A depiction of the ornate altar and sanctuary wall (left) before the mission was abandoned.



The original cross-shaped plan (above left) called for a barrel-vaulted nave and transepts, with domes covering the crossing and bell tower. Lack of funds forced the Franciscans to scale back twice, first eliminating the transepts, then

replacing the barrel vault over the nave with a flat roof (left). The bell tower dome was never built. Weathering, looting, and vandalism during a 60-year period of abandonment destroyed many of the original finishes.

ILLUSTRATIONS: NPS / DOROTHY MICHELE NOVICK

Corridor of Life

Villages and missions like Tumacacori were established along areas of the Santa Cruz River where water was found year-round. Fish, trees, and large mammals near the river provided food and materials for clothing and housing, sustaining the people who called this their home.

The Santa Cruz River meanders through the cottonwood and willow habitat.

NPS / CHIP LITTLEFIELD

The Santa Cruz River passes through Tumacacori. The rare cottonwood-willow riparian forest provides habitat for a rich community including endangered species, like the Gila topminnow and Yellow-billed cuckoo.

Visiting Tumacacori

The Tumacacori mission unit of the park lies 45 miles south of Tucson and 19 miles north of Nogales, at I-19, exit 29. The park is open daily 9 am to 5 pm, closed Thanksgiving and December 25.

For firearms, pet, and safety regulations check the park website.

Tumacacori The remains of the mission church and associated structures can be visited via a guided or self-guiding walking

tour, along with a reconstructed O'odham *ki* (house) and heritage orchard. The adobe visitor center, built in 1937, includes a museum, video, and courtyard garden.

Calabazas and Guevavi are accessible by guided tours only.

Santa Cruz River and Juan Bautista de Anza National Historic Trail can be accessed from inside the mission grounds and at two trailheads on the park boundary. Please note posted safety regulations.

Accessibility

We strive to make our facilities, services, and programs accessible to all. For information go to the visitor center, ask a ranger, call, or check our website.

More Information

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www.nps.gov/tuma

Tumacacori is one of over 400 parks in the National Park System. Learn more at www.nps.gov.

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