



Meet Alex La Pierre

Nearly three years ago, we introduced readers to Alex La Pierre, founder of the tour operator, Borderlandia, whose work highlights the rich cross-border culture of Southern Arizona and Mexico. Today, Alex continues to expand his vision, now shining a spotlight on one of the most remarkable journeys in North American history: the Juan Bautista de Anza National Historic Trail, which is celebrating its 250th anniversary in 2026. Keep reading to learn more about how Alex is commemorating the anniversary or click on the link below for the latest media updates from Visit Tucson.

What's New



A re-creation of the Anza expedition.

On the morning that I spoke with Alex, much has changed, yet his passion for the borderlands burns brighter than ever. He and his wife Rocio's company, Borderlandia, has blossomed from a local tour operator into a vital storyteller of Southern Arizona and Mexico's intertwined cultures – garnering national attention, including two mentions in *The New York Times*. On a personal front, Alex and Rocio have grown not only their business but their family, and they now have a 1.5-year-old son.

In 2026, they're illuminating one of North America's great journeys: the 1775-76 expedition led by Juan Bautista de Anza, celebrating its 250th anniversary. To commemorate the milestone, Alex is telling the trail's nuanced stories – of migration, resilience, and identity – that resonate far beyond the 1,200-mile trail that extends from Sonora, Mexico to what is now San Francisco, California. The trail follows the footsteps of Anza's group, passing through the homelands of more than 70 Tribal communities, connecting Indigenous, Spanish, and Mexican histories.

"Imagine being in their shoes. This would be like us, nowadays, going to colonize Mars," said Alex. "But the motivations of the people that joined the expedition are the same motivations of people who immigrate to the U.S. today. They were going to be given land grants. They were given full outfits – outfits with mules, cattle... For a lot of these poverty-stricken people in northwestern Mexico, this was really a step up in their social scale, in their ability to provide for themselves..."

Now, through Borderlandia, Alex has begun a monthly tour – the 2-mile Anza Trail Guided Hike – which starts at the Tubac Presidio State Historic Park and heads south along the cottonwood-lined Santa Cruz River, just a small portion of the much longer trail. Along the way, Alex highlights the expedition’s often overlooked importance.

“If there was no Anza expedition, there would probably be no Tucson,” Alex said. “San Francisco was the destination – the promise of a new beginning at the edge of the continent. But the true story is in the journey itself, through lands rich with culture, history, and resilience.”



In addition to the new guided hike, Alex is collaborating with the Hermosillo, Mexico architect Luis Valle Cordero, who is biking the entire trail, to create a storytelling project that brings the journey to life (you can track his progress on [his Instagram page](#)). Together, they are weaving historical diaries, Indigenous perspectives, and modern narratives into a documentary that Alex is producing (you can watch the trailer [here](#)) and a book he’s co-authoring alongside Luis.

"At least a third of the expedition had indigenous bloodlines. Another third had African bloodlines, and the other third had European bloodlines," Alex said. "It is perhaps one of the most diverse expeditions in American history."

The rich multicultural heritage reflects the complex history of the borderlands that Alex and Rocio have sought to bring to life through their tours. By offering journeys through Tucson, Southern Arizona, and Mexico, they aim to deepen public understanding, "ensuring that the 99 percent good news of our neighbors in Mexico is shared," Alex said.

Their tours range from traversing neighborhoods like Barrio Viejo on the ever-popular Tucson Origins Tour, to multi-day excursions into Mexico like the Alamos Tour, and the

new overseas Basque Borderlands Tour, exploring the region from which the early settlers of Sonora and Arizona, including Anza, hailed from.

With Alex as the guide, "food and history are at the forefront of each of our tours. Food is such a good story, a good entrée into a new culture," Alex said. "And my background is history so that's definitely present in each of our tours."



Alex's love affair with the borderlands and Southern Arizona began some 15 years ago after a "life-changing University of Arizona ethnographic field school" in the northern Mexican state of Sonora, which abuts southern Arizona.

A former National Park Service ranger, Alex moved to Tubac, 45 minutes south of Tucson, to help ensure the preservation and interpretation of Tumacácori, Arizona's oldest mission, founded in 1691 by the Jesuit priest Eusebio Francisco Kino, better known as Father Kino.

During his early days, he recalls feeling intoxicated by the Sonoran Desert's landscapes and culture. He was drawn to a sign at Organ Pipe National Monument that references a Saudia Arabian prince's quote during his first visit to the Sonoran Desert.

"He said, 'this isn't a desert, this is a garden.' I really think that's so true. We have so many trees here – mesquite, palo verde, – that put this notion of a barren desert to rest," Alex said. "There are these deep river valleys that are almost like stitches between the border – San Pedro, the Santa Cruz – they're almost like fingers of Old Sonora that extend into the United States. You see shrines along the different roadways; the I-19 is the only freeway in the United States that has kilometers; our mountains have jaguars; we are home to the only parrot species in the United States; and the only wild chile botanical preserve is right here – the chiltepin pepper."

In 2016, Alex's passion for the preservation of the area's history and culture caught the eye of Demion Clinco, CEO of the Tucson Historic Preservation Foundation, who was seeking to apply for National Historic Landmark status of the downtown Tucson neighborhood Barrio Viejo.

Demion recruited Alex to scour the neighborhood, recording the architectural and genealogical details of what Alex refers to as "one of the largest and best-preserved examples of Sonoran adobe row houses," a style of architecture that is unique to the Arizona, Mexico borderlands.

Over the years, as Alex has grown in his knowledge of Tucson, he's also grown in his fondness of it – and today he calls the city the "gateway to Mexico."

"People's minds change when they connect with the borderlands," Alex said. "They see the beauty, the history, and the humanity that's often overlooked."

Want to learn more about Alex? [Here's](#) the original Meet our Makers newsletter we wrote about him nearly three years ago.



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