YOUR MUSEUM MINI GUIDE

Discover the place where the walls tell stories!

Did you know that the Regional Museum of Sonora used to be a prison in the Porfirio Díaz era? This iconic venue not only preserves the cultural wealth of the region, but is also a adventuresome place for the whole family.

Explore its neoclassical courtyards, admire exhibitions ranging from archaeology to contemporary art, and marvel at the Ernesto López Yescas Library, where Sonora's documentary heritage is preserved. Lose yourself in the history brought to life within these walls!



Administrative building: The penitentiary's "mansion"

This building contrasted with the harshness of prison life: it resembled a stately mansion, with exposed brickwork, palatial staircases, windows and balconies without railings, spacious, bright rooms, and high-quality woodwork. This space, designed to be used by the authorities, reflected the hierarchy and privileged lifestyle within the prison complex.

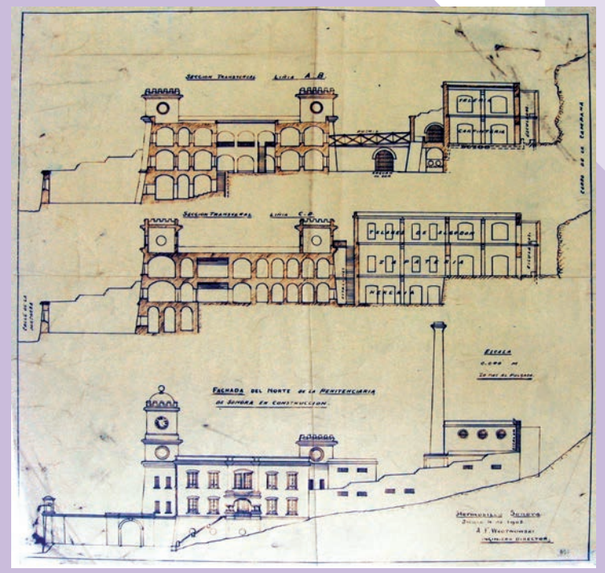


Growing collection: Sonora's living memory

The museum houses more than 1,900 cultural assets—from archaeological pieces to ethnographic objects—which are currently being cataloged and registered in the Single Registry of Cultural Assets.



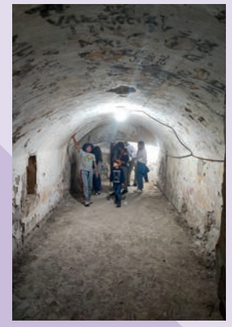
Each item, which has been rigorously documented, ensures that the memory of the Northwest will endure for future generations.





Inauguration and symbolism: The prison that became a museum

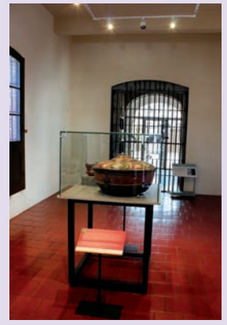
The Sonora State Penitentiary was officially inaugurated on September 15, 1908. Its design, consisting of two main sections, conveyed a clear message: order, control, and the modernizing ambition of the Porfirio Díaz era. Today, these neoclassical walls—which once symbolized repression—are home to culture, education, and the living memory of Sonora.



Central courtyard and basements: Remnants of a transformed past

The so-called "basements", where punishment cells used to be located, were accessed from the large central courtyard, now full of light and life. These spaces, once used for intimidation and repression, now remind us of the importance of justice and human rights.

It is a place that invites us to reflect on the past while celebrating its transformation into a space emanating culture and hope.



Treasures of the Northwest: The collection that tells our story

The museum houses one of the most important ethnographic and archaeological collections in northwestern Mexico, enriched by acquisitions, donations from the public, and findings by researchers from the National Institute of Anthropology and History (INAH). Each piece—from ancient ceramics to indigenous textiles—tells a story about the cultural richness of this fascinating region.

Temporary galleries: Windows into cultural diversity

The museum features four temporary galleries that rotate exhibitions on:

Regional archaeology
Recent discoveries in Sonora and the Northwest.

Social history
Photographs and documents concerning social movements and everyday life.

Contemporary art
Works by artists from Sonora and across Mexico

Ethnography
Culture and traditions of indigenous peoples (Yaquis, Mayos, Seris, Pimas, Tohono O'odham, Guarijíos, Cucapás, and Kikapúes).



Workshops for children: Learn by playing!

The museum offers fun workshops where children can explore the history and culture of Sonora through creative activities:

Cultural rituals
Comca'ac (Seri) face painting, Yaqui Pharisee masks, etc.

Sonoran legends
Storytelling and arts and crafts based on regional myths.

Popular art
Painting, weaving, and pottery inspired by Yaqui and Mayo traditions.





Petroglyphs in geometric patterns: Sacred geometry

Outside the museum, there is a petroglyph with fretwork (repetitive geometric designs) that reflects the worldview of the ancestral peoples of Sonora.

Patterns
Straight lines, zigzags, and staggered motifs symbolic of natural elements (lightning, water, hills) or ritual paths.

Technique
Percussion tool engraving on volcanic stone, with millimetric precision. The rock was struck directly with a "percussion tool" (harder stone, flint, or silica), which etched designs into the surface. Metals were not used.



The museum by the numbers: A cultural colossus

From when it was opened until 2011, the Regional Museum of Sonora housed over 600 m² of permanent exhibition space distributed across eighteen themed galleries, five temporary exhibition spaces, and a gallery about the site itself. It reached the point of receiving over 30,000 visitors a year, thereby becoming the most prominent museum in the state!



DID YOU KNOW...?

When this prison was built, many Yaquis from nearby neighborhoods worked on it and were appreciated as excellent workers. Sadly, they also became victims of deportation. Before being sent away, many were locked up here and forced to build the very walls that confined them.

FROM PRISON TO CULTURE: THE LIFE OF A MONUMENT

LATE 19TH CENTURY
Planning during the Porfirio Díaz era



1908
Prison inauguration





MOST OF THE 20TH CENTURY
It operates as a prison

THE 1970s
Cultural landmark



1985
Reborn as a museum

21ST CENTURY
A vibrant cultural hub





CULTURAL LEGACY

The restoration process, which respected its historical and architectural values, was completed on September 12, 1985, when it was inaugurated as the main center for researching, protecting, and promoting the cultural heritage of Sonora.

Today it is a symbol of identity and a place for encounters with history.

A MUSEUM FOR THE PEOPLE OF SONORA

Several generations of Sonorans have discovered and valued their cultural heritage in this iconic building, which has become a source of regional pride uniting families, tourists, and researchers. This transformation, which perfectly combines history and functionality, is one of INAH's most complex architectural intervention projects in northwest Mexico.

As a public space, it is a vibrant symbol of the capital and a constant venue for family gatherings, civic festivities, and photo shoots. It has preserved Sonora's heritage through educational projects, temporary and traveling exhibitions and, thanks to its Ernesto López Yescas Library, it protects and disseminates the region's documentary and bibliographic heritage.



Address
Jesús García Final s/n,
C. California 35, La Matanza,
Hermosillo, Sonora

Opening hours
Wednesday to Sunday
from 10:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.
Free admission

Services
Guided tours: Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday (various times).

Contact
museo.son@inah.gob.mx
Tel. 662 217 2714.

@Antropología e Historia en Sonora
@CISonora

Texts: Sonora INAH Center.
Photographs: Sonora INAH Center archive.

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Cultura
Secretaría de Cultura
INAH

A NEW PURPOSE: REBORN AS A MUSEUM

Governor Samuel Ocaña García took a crucial step in March 1982 when he handed the building, which had been neglected for years, over to the National Institute of Anthropology and History (INAH) for restoration and rehabilitation. The goal was to transform this space, steeped in history, into the headquarters of the Sonora INAH Center and the Regional Museum of Sonora, thereby revitalizing it for a cultural and educational purpose.

MUSEO REGIONAL DE SONORA INAH

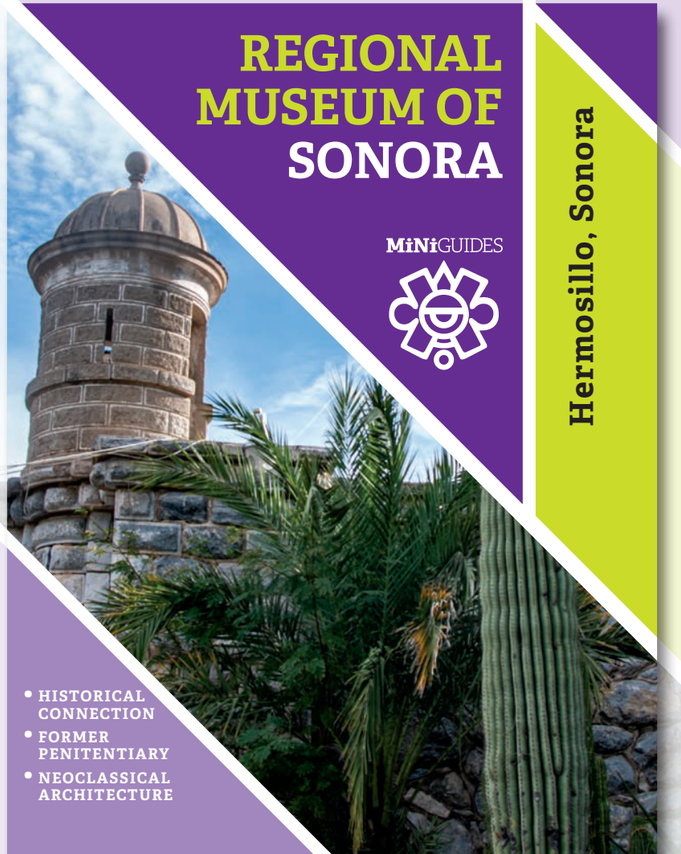


THE PENITENTIARY: SYMBOL OF AN ERA

This magnificent building served as a state penitentiary even before its official inauguration in September 1908. It served as a prison for seven decades and became a feared symbol of social and political life in Sonora. It was closed in 1979 after numerous adaptations when the new Sonora State Prevention and Social Rehabilitation Center went into operation, thereby closing a crucial chapter in the region's prison history.

REGIONAL MUSEUM OF SONORA

MiNiGUIDES



- HISTORICAL CONNECTION
- FORMER PENITENTIARY
- NEOCLASSICAL ARCHITECTURE

Hermosillo, Sonora

THE FORMER PENITENTIARY OF SONORA: A SYMBOL OF CHANGE

At the end of the 19th century, the Sonora government commissioned military engineer Arthur Francis Wrotnowski to undertake a visionary project: a prison that would reflect the positivist ideal of the Porfirio Díaz era by transforming pure punishment into a system with humanitarian and rehabilitative aims.

Thus came into existence the Former Penitentiary of Sonora, which, although originally part of a national system of social and political repression, was re-attired in an aura of modernity and compassion. Its neoclassical architecture with quarry-stone walls, radial courtyards, and ventilated cells sought to create an atmosphere of order and "regeneration" for inmates. It took its place alongside other iconic prisons of the era, such as Lecumberri in Mexico City.