

The Ultimate Guide to Santa Fe, New Mexico

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The Ultimate Guide to Santa Fe, New Mexico

SUZANNE KOCH, JULY 1, 2019

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If you ask me, New Mexico is a completely underrated destination with hidden gems in every corner. It's home to some of the best food I've eaten, the largest hot air balloon festival in the world, a solid four seasons sans any real weather danger, a laid back vibe and friendly faces. It also boasts tons of Native American history and art, with a major concentration in **Santa Fe**. I recently had the chance to visit and experience everything the art-centric town has to offer.

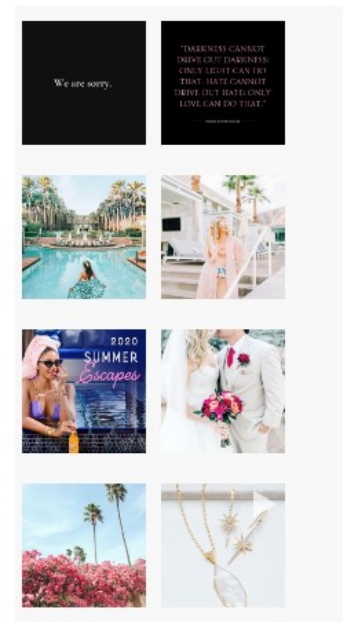
The city of Santa Fe itself isn't huge in size by any means but it still packs a spicy punch when it comes to things to do. Check out our picks for the can't-miss stops the next time you find yourself in the Land of Enchantment.



Hotel Santa Fe

Stay

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— AZ Insider: Emergency Relief Fund for AZ Artists Provides

If you want to stay within walking distance to downtown (the main shopping and art hub), there are many options available. I checked into **Hotel Santa Fe** for a few nights, which is the only Native American-owned hotel in downtown Santa Fe and about a 15-minute walk to the plaza. The charming property opened March 1991 and is located in the Railyard District. Owned by the Picuris tribe, the hotel houses a multi-million dollar collection of Native American art and is a deep dive into the world of the Picuris people.

For those looking to stay further out, **Hilton Santa Fe Buffalo Thunder** is located 15 minutes north of downtown. A handful of restaurants, multiple pools, a 61,000-square-foot Vegas-style casino, Wo'P'in Spa, award-winning 27-hole Towa Golf Course, tons of meeting space and a large Native American Art Collection are all spread throughout the property. Rooms maintain the sense of place with a warm Pueblo-style design. Pop culture enthusiasts may even recognize the hotel from Season 19 of *The Bachelor* (Chris Soules' season).

More Stays

For properties within steps of the plaza, great options include **La Fonda on the Plaza**, **Inn of the Anasazi**, **The Inn of the Five Graces**, **Hotel St. Francis** and the **Inn & Spa at Loretto**.



Photo: TOURISM Santa Fe



Santa Fe School of Cooking (Photo: TOURISM Santa Fe)

Eat

When in New Mexico, your plate should be covered in chile, especially for breakfast. You're guaranteed a great meal when you can't even tell what's hiding under the beautiful mess of red and green. For this, head to **La Plazuela**, La Fonda on the Plaza's main restaurant. The stunning, naturally lit space is surrounded by colorful stained glass and accented by wrought iron fixtures, a beamed ceiling, central fountain and twinkling trees. In short, it's magical. Order the huevos rancheros or New Mexico burrito for something savory or the blue-corn piñon pancakes for something sweeter.

For upscale dining, **Sazon** is an absolute must visit. Located just off the plaza, the outlet serves traditional Mexican cuisine in an intimate setting. Walls are lined with large pieces of stare-worthy art, mostly Frida Kahlo showcased in different settings donning shiny pistols and what not. Led by Mexico City-native Chef Fernando Olea (you'll likely see him roaming the dining room from under his cowboy hat), the small yet thoughtful menu is highlighted by Mexico's most interesting dish: mole.

I highly suggest going all out and experiencing the tasting menu, a roundup of the best Sazon has to offer. The tortilla-stuffed duck with sweet potatoes and mole was the exclamation point on a great meal. But it was the first course that changed my life. Ginger avocado jalapeño ice cream with beet sauce—yup, you start with the sweets. While it sounds like the kitchen sink of desserts, it was the fanciest, tastiest, most beautiful kitchen sink if that. Next up, Sopa de Amore, a perfectly named dish made of cream of poblano with blue lump crab and topped with

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amaretto foam and cinnamon chocolate dusting. Can we get a moment of silence to take that in?

More Eats

Other dining standouts include **Draft Station**, a rooftop pizzeria and bar overlooking the plaza that serves funky pies, brews and chile-infused sangrias; **Cottonwood Kitchen**, the casual restaurant at the shiny new Tesuque Casino; **Tomasitas**; and **Museum Hill Cafe**.



Native American Vendors (Photo: TOURISM Santa Fe)



Santa Fe Indian Market (Photo: TOURISM Santa Fe)

Explore

With a focus on food, a night at the **Santa Fe School of Cooking** is a no-brainer. Not only is it a great place to learn to cook New Mexican cuisine, it boasts a small market. Find cookbooks, dinnerware and local condiments and spices so you can bring the southwest home. Classes range from demos to hands-on and incorporate all the traditional faves like salsas, chiles, tacos, tamales and more. The demo kitchen makes it easy to follow along and there's more than enough food to go around at the end.

Are you tired of food yet? Work it off by taking a tour of **Bandelier National Monument** with **Great Southwest Adventures**. Once home to the Pueblo people, this one-and-a-half mile hike takes you through cave and cliff dwellings. Catch sight of ruins, petroglyphs and expansive views of the region.

Day Trip

For a day trip out of town to discover even more of Northern New Mexico, plan ahead to visit **Taos** during a **Feast Day**, a celebration of the Patron Saints that takes place multiple times of year on the Pueblos. Plenty of eating with friends and families plus traditional dancing highlight these religious days. While the dancing is open to the public to watch, no cameras or phones are allowed since Feast Days are extremely sacred. Get a taste of a common feast day at **Tiwa Kitchen Restaurant and Bakery**, serving Pueblo and New Mexican cuisine. The **Taos Pueblo**, like many other Pueblos, is home to Native American communities who still live in true adobe buildings without electricity. The villages look much like you would expect them to and are a sight to see on their own.

On your way to Taos, stop at Chimayo, a Spanish village 40 minutes north of downtown. The town is home to the famous **El Santuario de Chimayo**. The Roman Catholic church is a National Historic Landmark and a popular pilgrimage destination. It's also known to be where you can find "holy dirt" that is thought to possess healing powers. On your way back into town be sure to stop at **Vivac Winery**. Meaning "high-altitude refuge," the winery is known for its tasty reds. Most importantly they make their own chocolates in-house so what's not to love?



Shiprock Santa Fe

Shopping

With so much history, culture and proud locals, it's easy to see why Santa Fe is a hub for art. You can find all mediums here, from paintings and sculptures to pottery, jewelry and more. Stroll **Canyon Road** to find more than 75 galleries, studios and designers. Plus, there's plenty of iconic, vibrant doors along the way. Back near the plaza, **Shiprock Santa Fe** offers the most beautiful Navajo rugs and blankets woven in bright, warm hues. For unique items to add to your space, **The Torres Gallery** is the exclusive home to Robert Rivera's work. Find southwestern gourd art in an array of mediums, from ornaments and lamps to masks, wall art and figurines.

For the most authentic jewelry, shop dozens of **Native American Vendors'** goods under the portal at the **Palace of the Governors** just off the central plaza. Artists here must be members of New Mexico tribes and pueblos and follow regulations to ensure authenticity. Not only can you shop easy knowing it's all the real deal, but it's also some of the best selections around. And you can easily chat with the artists to find out more about each piece. I learned the pearly white aspect of the earrings I bought was from a conch shell.



Museum of Indian Arts & Culture

Art + History

To really dive deep into the history of New Mexico, multiple museums and cultural centers are brimming with stories. The **Museum of Indian Arts & Culture** gives visitors a look into the Southwest people from pre-history to modern day through a slew of contemporary art.

Get a feel for what a traditional Pueblo village is like by visiting the **Poeh Cultural Center** which resembles just that. The center is tribally owned and operated by the Pueblo of Pojoaque and aims to preserve the people's history and ancestry. It's currently teamed up with the Smithsonian Institute to bring 100 Tewa Pueblo pots back to their roots. The pottery will be showcased in a newly designed room at the cultural center and will debut this fall.

Over at the **SAR Indian Arts Research Center** check out more than 12,000 items displayed in two vaults. While many of the pieces are being used for research, you can tour the collections for yourself. For a more modern take on Native arts, the **JAIA Museum of Contemporary Native Art** is home to the largest collection of contemporary Native art in the world. The exhibits are easy to browse and will quickly shift your thinking of "typical" Native art into a new direction.



Events

Looking to plan a trip? Notable upcoming art events include the **International Folk Art Market**, July 12-14, featuring more than 150 folk artists from around the world; **Objects of Art Santa Fe**, taking place August 8-11, showcasing historic and contemporary works handmade in a range of media; and the **Antique American Indian Art Show Santa Fe**, August 13-16 and the largest show of its kind in the world. It features nearly 70 American Indian art experts and thousands of pieces from an array of indigenous cultures throughout North America. Finally August 17-18, experience the 98th annual **Santa Fe Indian Market**. The event is great for anyone who appreciates or is curious about Native American arts.

For more information, visit: santafe.org

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