

VACATION

Visit New Mexico
Land of Enchantment

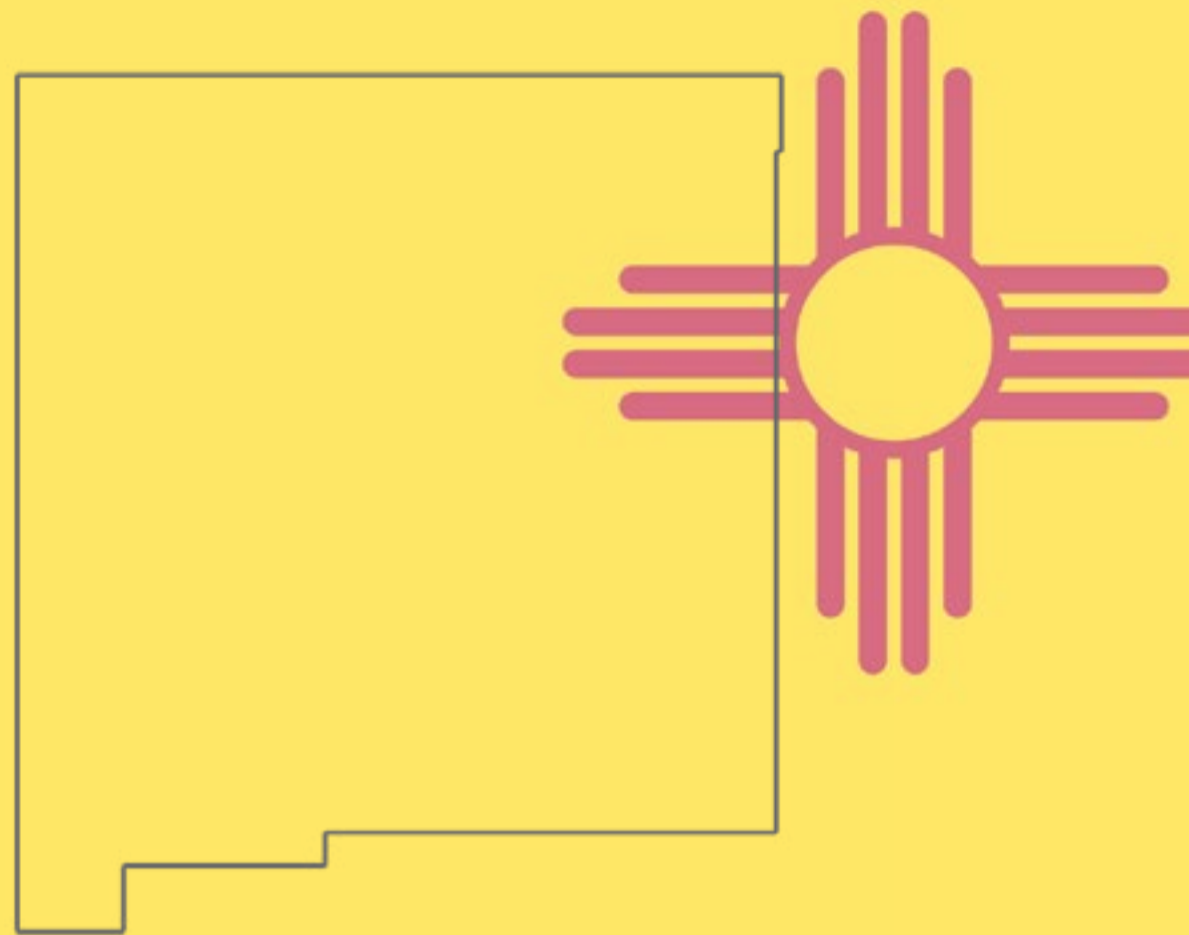
**Discover the
City Different**
in Santa Fe

Explore Route 66
in Albuquerque

**Have an Alien
Encounter**
in Roswell

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Wonder**
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The City Different: Santa Fe

Santa Fe, founded in 1607, is the capital of the state of New Mexico in the United States. With an elevation of 7000 feet, it is not only the United States' oldest state capital but its highest. Its population of about 70,000, doesn't make it the most populous capital, but that's part of its charm. [Santa Fe](#) is consistently rated one of the world's top travel destinations for its confluence of scenic beauty, long history (at least by US standards), cultural diversity, and extraordinary concentration of arts, music and fine dining.

History

Santa Fe was once the capital of Spain's, and then Mexico's, territories north of the Rio Grande, but its visible history extends far beyond the arrival of the Spanish; it is thought to have been the site of Puebloan villages that had already been long abandoned by the time the Spanish arrived in 1607. It became the state capital when the territory of New Mexico achieved statehood in 1912.

In the early 20th century, the area attracted a number of artists, such as Georgia O'Keeffe and Alfred Stieglitz. The region remains important on America's art scene. It is the third largest art market in America, behind New York City and Los Angeles, which is pretty impressive considering Santa Fe's population relative to NYC and LA. The arrival of



Igor Stravinsky and the founding of the Santa Fe Opera, one of the world's leading opera companies, had a similarly invigorating and enduring influence on the musical community. Many people go to Santa Fe for spiritual gatherings and to practice meditative arts at the many spas and resorts that are in and around Santa Fe.

Santa Fe is rooted in paradoxes. On the one hand, it is one of the United States' oldest cities (by some reckonings the oldest), and many residents can trace their roots and property holdings in town back to the 17th century. On the other hand, it has also been the target of a teeming influx of wealthy immigrants in the last 30 years or so that has spurred a great deal of new construction and created inflated prices for real estate -- and drastically elevated taxes on old family properties, many of which are owned by families that can't afford the taxes. The tension between new and old, rich and poor, etc are a persistent undercurrent in the community. These and other factors (not the least of which is a well-deserved reputation as a haven for flamboyant characters) contribute to Santa Fe's uniqueness.

Climate

Much of the city's attractiveness, from both scenic and cultural perspectives, arises from its setting in the foothills of the Sangre de Cristo Mountains. This location produces a mild continental climate with four distinct seasons. Winters are pleasant, with day-time highs usually in the 40s (Fahrenheit), often "feeling" warmer due to the sunny conditions. Snow varies wildly from year to year; some winters see almost no snow, while others will have several individual storms dropping a foot or more each. (The sun and high altitude mean that roads usually aren't clogged too badly,

even by the big storms, for more than a day or two, as the snow melts rapidly.) Spring, usually dry and moderate in temperature, is still probably the least pleasant time to visit from a weather perspective, because of strong winds. Early summer (June, early July) is



hot and dry, with highs around 90, but gives way around mid-July to a truly delightful climate as summer, monsoonal thunderstorms peel off the mountains and cool the afternoons down. Bring rainwear if visiting in July or August. The monsoons typically die out in early September leading to a fall with dry, sunny days and clear, crisp evenings; first frost is usually in October, with snow starting to stick in the mountains at about that time.

One caution: the elevation is high enough to challenge the lungs of the visitor freshly up from sea level. It's wise to spend your first day on relatively sedentary activities (museums, walking the downtown area) and move to more active things after you've had some time to acclimatize.

Get around

Santa Fe has a small but vibrant downtown that is not only walkable, but walked, often, by many people late into

the nights, particularly in summertime when the tourists flood in. Parking can be a problem during the summer, but look for parking lots (fee) near St. Francis Cathedral, the new Convention Center, and between Water and San Francisco Streets west of the Plaza. If in town for the Santa Fe Indian Market, plan on parking away from downtown and taking a shuttle, e.g. from De Vargas Mall. Limited, but improving, public transportation is available at other times via Santa Fe Trails, the city's bus service. The North Central Regional Transit District "Blue Buses" provides

free bus service Monday through Friday with routes that connect the counties and communities of Santa Fe, Taos, Los Alamos and Rio Arriba.

Once you get to Santa Fe, consider taking a tour of downtown. Several companies offer open-air tram tours, like [The Loretto Line Tours](#) (available in the parking lot of the Loretto Chapel). These tours last about 1.5 hours and give you a sense of the architecture, culture and history of the downtown area.

See

Like many towns initiated by the Spanish, Santa Fe has a central square that is a gathering place for all types. For hours of entertainment, pull up a bench and people watch; you'll rapidly gain an appreciation for how the "City Different" nickname applies. Especially nice in the summer evenings as the temperatures drop (although rain may drop as well) and the people come out.

Museums

Santa Fe has a variety of interesting museums, most in the downtown area and easily reached on foot. Museum Hill, south of downtown, is accessible via public transportation. The first four listed below are sub-units of the Museum of New Mexico, for which you can buy a shared pass for \$20 that allows access to all four museums and the Museum of Spanish Colonial Art within a four-day period. If you only have time for one, individual passes are available.

- [Palace of the Governors](#)
- [New Mexico Museum of Art](#)
- [Museum of International Folk Art](#)
- [SITE Santa Fe](#)
- [Museum of Spanish Colonial Art](#)
- [Georgia O'Keeffe Museum](#)
- [Wheelwright Museum of the American Indian](#)
- [Institute of American Indian Arts Museum](#)
- [Rancho de los Golondrinas](#)
- [Santa Fe Children's Museum](#)

Architecture

There are several photogenic churches in town, most of them open for visits during daylight hours when no church services are in progress.

- [St. Francis Cathedral](#)
- [Loretto Chapel](#)
- [San Miguel Mission](#)
- [Santuario de Guadalupe](#)
- [Scottish Rite Temple](#)

Fine art

If you have any interest at all in fine art, make sure you walk down [Canyon Road](#) (an easy stroll from downtown), which is full of unique, quirky and just plain fun art galleries. Other galleries are west and south of the Plaza in the downtown area itself.



Native Americana

One of the major contributors to Santa Fe's fame is the large number of American Indian pueblos (towns) nearby. Several are important centers for folk art; most permit visitors at dances and other tribal ceremonial events; and from a more contemporary perspective, several host casinos with gambling, night life, etc. Nearly all pueblos charge a fee for photography, video, sketching, etc., as an attempt to mitigate the impact of tourism on the private life of the inhabitants.

Dances and ceremonies take place throughout the year, but one not-to-be-missed special event is the Eight Northern Indian Pueblos Annual Arts and Crafts Show, held in mid-July at one of the pueblos, frequently Ohkay Owingeh. Many of the artisans use this event as a "tune-up" for the Santa Fe Indian Market the following month, so that both quality and quantity of the available work are quite high, yet the prices are often considerably better than for comparable (sometimes the exact same) work at the Indian Market.

Kicks on Route 66: Albuquerque

Although it is the largest city in the state, Albuquerque is often overshadowed as a tourist destination by Santa Fe, 60 mi (97 km) to the north. But [Albuquerque](#) has a number of great attractions in its own right, with pleasant scenery, colorful history, and a spectacular hot-air balloon fiesta in the fall.

History

Albuquerque was founded in 1706 as a small Spanish settlement on the banks of the Rio Grande and was named for the Duke of Alburquerque (hence Albuquerque's nickname, "The Duke City"). In the 1880s the railroad came to town, and almost overnight a new city grew up around the train tracks a couple of miles away from the original settlement. This "New Town" became the hub of commerce for the state, and the city grew exponentially (eventually the "New Town", which today is Downtown, and the original "Old Town" settlement were joined to become part of the same city).

In the 1920s the federal government officially recognized a series of highways that ran from Chicago to Los Angeles as [Route 66](#), and Albuquerque was one of the towns "The Mother Road" passed through. Starting in the



1950s, Albuquerque grew exponentially given federal investment in the local military bases and a massive influx of visitors and new residents, and for the most part it hasn't slowed down. Today, Albuquerque is still the hub of commerce and transportation in the

state. While Santa Fe is the state capital and the principal tourist destination of New Mexico, Albuquerque is the state's only truly urban area, with a city population of over 500,000 and a metropolitan population of nearly a million people. This is where you'll find the headquarters of the state's businesses, the University of New Mexico, and the Albuquerque International Sunport, the only major airport in the state.

Climate

Albuquerque is in the high desert and has a generally warm, dry climate. Spring is sunny and windy, although temperatures at night can be chilly. Summers are very hot (highs average 90-95°F/34°C, and temperatures near 100°F/38°C are not rare) and still mainly dry, but monsoonal conditions develop in July or August and produce furious short-lived thunderstorms. Have rainwear available in the summer, although you won't use it most days. Fall is delightful, with comfortable temperatures and a return to generally dry conditions. Winter can be blustery, with overnight lows below freezing, and on occasion some snow, but subzero temperatures are rare. One winter weather issue for the traveler; snow can be infrequent, but does occur, and local drivers don't deal with it well. If you happen to be in town for a snowstorm, expect road chaos far out of proportion to the amount of snow that falls.

People

Albuquerque is a casual town — expect shorts, a T-shirt, and sandals to be entirely acceptable almost everywhere. While Albuquerque does have a large non-native population, it is predominantly white, Hispanic, and American Indian. Albuquerque is also something of a self-deprecating

town; long-time natives here may often remark on how backward, dusty, and small it is, which is something that is frequently rebuked with a passion from many newcomers. However, the wonderful upside of this self-deprecation is that Albuquerque is generally a rather humble city, where people tend to be very friendly.

See

- [Albuquerque Biological Park](#)
- [Rio Grande Zoo](#)
- [Albuquerque Aquarium / Rio Grande Botanical Garden](#)
- [Anderson-Abruzzo Albuquerque International Balloon Museum](#)
- [Indian Pueblo Cultural Center](#)
- [National Hispanic Cultural Center](#)
- [National Museum of Nuclear Science and History](#)
- [Sandia Peak Tramway](#)
- [Unser Racing Museum](#)



Old Town

Located east of Rio Grande Boulevard in between Central Ave. and Mountain Rd. (west of downtown).

A nice sightseeing area, [Old Town](#) is where the city was founded in 1706 and is a place where centuries of history and modern life merge; 18th century architecture with narrow brick paths is blended with adobe architecture,

and there lots of little nooks and crannies, small restaurants, and specialty shops. Old Town has a central plaza with a gazebo which is bordered on the north by the San Felipe de Neri church, the oldest building in Albuquerque. In Christmas time, thousands of luminarias (paper bags filled with sand and illuminated from within by a lit candle) line the streets. Guided tours of Old Town are available from a private operator or from the Albuquerque Museum.

There are several museums located within easy walking distance of the Old Town plaza. Most of them are on Mountain Rd., just a few blocks northeast of the Plaza.

- [Albuquerque Museum of Art and History](#)
- [American International Rattlesnake Museum](#)
- [iExplora! Science Center and Children's Museum](#)
- [New Mexico Museum of Natural History and Science](#)
- [Turquoise Museum](#)

Do

- [Albuquerque Isotopes](#)
- [Cliff's Amusement Park](#)
- [New Mexico Lobos \(UNM sports\)](#)
- [Open Space Visitor Center](#)
- [Outpost Ice Arena](#)
- [Petroglyph National Monument](#)
- [Rio Grande Valley State Park](#)
- [Rio Grande Nature Center](#)
- [The Sandia Mountains](#)
- [Santa Ana Star Center](#)
- [Tingley Beach](#)

Albuquerque International Balloon Fiesta

At Balloon Fiesta Park, located north of Alameda Blvd., one mi (1.6 km) west of I-25 (take either Alameda Blvd or Tramway Blvd exit off I-25). \$6,

children ages 12 and under free (parking \$10 per car).

[The Fiesta](#) is the world's largest ballooning event, largest annual international event in North America, and one of the most photographed events in the world. A cultural landmark for Albuquerque (and indeed, all of New Mexico), this festival gives you a first-hand look at the world of ballooning. For nine days in October, you may walk out onto a large field where balloonists from around the world set up, inflate, launch, and possibly land their balloons. Mass ascensions of balloons with hundreds of different colors and shapes create an often stunning and magnificent sight. It's one of the most heavily attended festivals in the entire U.S.

Balloons fly best in cooler conditions, so many of the events take place early in the morning. Traffic is pretty bad around the festival; expect a long, long line of cars (you may want to seriously consider taking park-and-ride to beat the traffic). Get your hotel reservations far in advance, because everyone fills up around this time of year.

The event begins on the first Saturday of October and ends with a farewell mass ascension on the Sunday of the following weekend, with numerous

events in-between, such as concerts and balloon races.

Buy

Upon first glance, it might seem like your only place to shop are the miles and miles of strip malls that line the major arterials. While that's not entirely the case, everything is really spread out, with the exception of the concentrated Old Town-Downtown-Nob Hill area along Central Ave. So while you can find just about anything you're looking for, you will probably have to drive a ways to get it.

Here are some good places around town to shop:

Old Town

At Central & Rio Grande. If you're looking for all the "New Mexican" shops, this is probably the next best thing to Santa Fe. Granted, some of it is tacky souvenir stuff, but there are also plenty of quality gift shops with authentic Native American and Southwestern art. You can also find plenty of antiques, art galleries, jewelry, pottery, weavings, clothing stores, and other specialty shops.

Downtown

Particularly along Central and Gold Aves. (one block S of Central). While downtown has plenty of bars and restaurants, the shopping scene is a bit lacking. However, there are a few interesting places.

Nob Hill

Along Central from Girard to Carlisle. A trendy district known for its neon reminiscent of the Route 66 days, Nob Hill is easily one of the best places in the city to window shop. The Nob Hill Business Center, at Central & Carlisle, has some great little shops as well as the La Montanita Food Co-Op.