

Santa Fe bills itself as “The City Different,” but if the capital city of New Mexico ever decides to change its motto, a better one would be:
Sunsets to die for.
Sunrises to live for.

In fact, the sunsets are so spectacular that residents of my neighborhood routinely come out into the streets to watch them. There are no re-runs.

Santa Fe (population 62,000) is a cultural and environmental feast. At 7000 feet, the 33 square-mile city lies in a valley between two mountain ranges with a southerly view of two more. On a clear day—



which is most days—I can see another mountain about 60 miles away. The vista is so breath-taking, in fact, that for the first few days after we retired here in 2003 from central Pennsylvania to a development rich with walking trails, my dog would stop on our 3.5-mile morning walk and just stare into the distance. I could tell that she was awe struck.

The cultural feast arises out of the first and second wave of settlers—the Native Americans who were followed by the Spaniards. The Spanish get credit for founding Santa Fe (which is Spanish for “Holy Faith”) in the early 1600s and Santa Fe claims to be the oldest capital city in the United States. New Mexico, in fact, is officially a bilingual state and the local newspaper publishes a weekly section in Spanish.

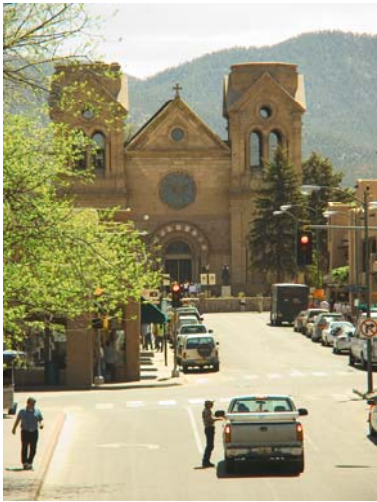
For those who want to continue their education and have fun at the same time, Santa Fe offers just the menu, from ongoing archeological digs to ancient Indian villages to more museums than you can visit in a week to a selection of restaurants that will please every palate and educate you at the same time about real southwestern food. Art galleries abound and the city is alive with a variety and diversity of art.

The ancient Plaza evokes the influence of the Spanish and offers tourists not just a lot of shopping but even more history. The historical place to visit on the Plaza is the Palace of the Governors, once the seat of government for the Spaniards and now a registered national historic landmark. This museum falls under the aegis of the Museum of New Mexico and so buying a four-day pass for \$15 gets you into the Palace and four other museums. Otherwise, you pay \$7 a person per visit.

Perhaps even more interesting than the Palace Museum are the Native American vendors who sell jewelry, pottery and artwork underneath the Palace’s Portal. All of the vendors are registered through

the Palace and may sell handmade goods only. The goods can be expensive (I've seen pottery for \$300), but they are authentic and unmatched in the many stores downtown. The Native vendors, by the way, don't take credit cards, but there is an ATM nearby.

And while you're downtown, check out the Georgia O'Keeffe museum, the Institute of American Indian Arts Museum and St. Francis Cathedral. Although it dates to 1610, the present cathedral was built in 1886 and its most heralded priest is Archbishop



Jean Baptiste Lamy, a Frenchman who is buried in the cathedral. Enroute to the cathedral just off the Old Santa Fe Trail, you'll pass the La Fonda Hotel and you should keep it in mind for lunch. The O'Keeffe and IAIA museums are separate from the Museum of New Mexico and do have modest admission fees.



After lunch, walk over to Canyon Road. This will be an all-afternoon trek as you walk up one side of the road and down the other, visiting the many galleries and shops. Of course, if you ate a big lunch, you will walk it off on this road, which includes several restaurants. (You can, by the way, drive to Canyon Road and park in a public lot near the top and then walk down toward town, but you still have to walk back up to get to your car. It is a hike.)

Santa Fe tends to be a pedestrian-friendly city, as long as the pedestrians are crossing in designated areas. The city claims it enforces its jaywalking law. And, unfortunately, New Mexico has a major DUI problem so be careful, especially at night.

There's so much to see and do in Santa Fe that you'll probably find yourself overstimulated very quickly. A visitor from Australia exclaimed to me: "You live in a movie set." She was referring to the scenery, not the cowboys. If you find yourself on sensory overload, you can get out of town, but that will merely whet your appetite for more. Several good day trips await the curious.

Because most of the museums are closed on Mondays, use Monday for a trip to Los Alamos and Bandelier National Monument, which was once the site of a Native American pueblo. What you can see by walking on a level surface allows you to get some notion of what life was like, but if you want a closer view you'll need to climb a little, so bring good walking/hiking shoes.

And don't forget your camera. The scenery on the way to Los Alamos will take your breath away and you'll find yourself taking

advantage of the occasional roadside pull-off to take photographs. At the Bradbury Science Museum in Los Alamos (which is opened on Mondays), you'll learn about the development of atomic power and what the Los Alamos National Laboratory has done since.

Another day trip of interest is a visit to Madrid, which is south of Santa Fe on Route 14. Until the 1950s, Madrid (pronounced MAD-rid, not ma-DRID) was a coal-mining town and it includes a so-so mining museum. But it's known today for its art shops and crafts stores. There are no sidewalks so residents and visitors alike walk in the street. Drive carefully.

In New Mexico, tourists have a choice of visiting 19 pueblos. The most famous are Acoma, which is west of Albuquerque and thus a long day trip, or Taos, which is about 90 minutes north of Santa Fe. You must pay an admission fee to enter a pueblo and an additional fee for each camera you take in. Within the pueblo you will encounter vendors selling jewelry, pottery and art—and you'll get a chance to take some spectacular photographs, although you must first ask individuals if you want to take a portrait. As with the Native American vendors at the Palace of the Governors, the vendors at any pueblo are selling authentic goods. Surprisingly, not all vendors take credit cards but they will take a personal check.

On your return from Taos, if you've left enough time, you can take a slight detour and visit Ghost Ranch at Abiquiu, where O'Keeffe did much of her painting. As you travel about the area, you will understand why O'Keeffe and other artists settled in New Mexico. They drew their inspiration from the land and you too will be inspired.

Back in Santa Fe for another day, you can use more of your four-day museum pass by visiting Museum Hill. There are four museums within walking distance of each other—Native American, international folk art, Spanish history and the Wheelwright, named after its benefactor and focusing on Navajo arts and crafts. You can drive there or take public transit, aptly named Santa Fe Trails.

Did I mention the sunsets and sunrises? The sunrises tend toward the pastels, although we've had some that match the fiery sunsets. The best place to view the sunsets is at the Santa Fe Community College, which is south of town on a slight ridge facing west toward an undeveloped area that provides unrestricted views. Parking is free—and so is the view.

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