

Affordable Serenity Santa Fe and its environs offer variety in experiences, climate, culture — and value

Santa Fe was the darling of the travel press a few years back. The city was almost too “in” for its own good. With every fawning, gaga travel essay came the creeping inevitability that it would become passé. And there was a worry in the little town itself that it would be trampled to death. For every pink howling coyote statue bought up by sunburned tourists trekking down its small streets, the fear was it was going to implode. Now, past its tourist heyday, the city is worth a real look especially since overcrowding made it impossible to take in its unique atmosphere.

People who already love Santa Fe, Taos and their environs know what they like: the powdery snow of winter that makes skiing near effortless, the glorious experience of al fresco opera at the breathtaking Santa Fe Opera in August, or shopping at either Indian Market or Spanish Market. Others—quite a few still do—go for the art, as Santa Fe is the 3rd largest art market in the world in and around Canyon Road.

But for the rest—the uninitiated—it’s a great time as well as a great place to visit. With less crowds you can savor Santa Fe’s small town feel. But in these days of smaller travel budgets, why Santa Fe? Isn’t it expensive? Surprisingly, you don’t have to spend a fortune. Accommodations run from 5-star spa hotels to motels right out of the Route 66 era. And deals abound these days so a stay at a top tier hotel is likely to be a lot less than it was a few years ago.

Dining out there are elegant spots like Geronimo on Canyon Rd., but you can also eat at a takeaway burrito stand and get a decent breakfast for under \$10 right on the Plaza. Canyon Road and the Plaza are free to foot traffic and the galleries and museums are free when they conveniently stay open late on Friday. Other things Santa Fe has to offer: lots of dry air (free, last we checked), four seasons (ditto) and warm hospitality (ditto ditto). Its breathtaking scenery costs nothing and is a refreshing break from Florida. Instead of palm trees and humidity you’ll get row after row of smoky blue mountain ranges and, albeit thin, crisp air.

While Santa Fe and Taos have four true seasons, all of them are what I’d call soft—meaning none are extreme. Summer is when the crowds descend the most, but my favorite times are fall and Christmas. So, first step: decide on a season. Summer for the festivals, rafting, hiking, shopping, opera and full out experience. Fall for the beautiful display of colors in the terrain and more festivals. Winter for the beautiful Christmas display the entire town puts on replete with farolito lined streets. Spring, see: fall and summer.

You can get to Santa Fe in three and a half hours if you fly Southwest Airlines—one of the best run, most efficient airlines on a list it occupies with few others. Got to their web site (www.southwest.com) and look for their web-only fares. Last I checked it was \$89 each way before taxes and fees. The next step is where to stay and this is a tough one. If you stay in what would be called downtown Santa Fe that would mean near the Plaza. Being a small compound of a city, everything in Santa Fe is near the Plaza, from museums to shops to galleries to restaurants.

But, if you want to get out and explore and visit say, Georgia O’Keeffe’s Ghost Ranch, or do some hiking or maybe some tramping at the Tesuque Flea Market, you’ll need a car. As one who likes a little bit of everything I decided on a hotel where I would be within walking distance to the Plaza and be able to park my rental car without paying a fortune. La Posada de Santa Fe Resort & Spa was the place and it was a chance to visit a property I had stayed at in its former self. Now owned by Rock Resorts, it received a major renovation a few years back.

You pull up a quiet tree-lined street to an opening in a chocolaty brown adobe wall. Friendly men in cowboy hats valet your car, if you wish, and help you with your luggage. It’s worth noting nothing in Santa Fe is big, loud or flashy. Buildings are intentionally low-rise and signage is to a minimum. La Posada is no different. You enter into the lobby and are surrounded by warm earthtone shades everywhere. It’s quiet—so quiet that you can hear the fire crackling in the fireplace a room away.

What I also like is that the 157 rooms are in a walled in compound that recalls its earlier life as an adobe art colony. Located just two blocks from the Plaza, it has RockResorts Spa and the AAA Four Diamond Award-winning Fuego restaurant, a fitness center, outdoor pool and whirlpool. Travel + Leisure have rated it one of the top hotels in the country. And most recently, readers of *Condé Nast Traveler* rated La Posada among the Top 50 Ski Hotels.

Unusual still is that the property occupies six landscaped acres. You can choose from a variety of rooms from adobe-style guestrooms



Santa Fe means adobe architecture almost everywhere such as Canyon Rd.

and suites, many with kiva fireplaces and shady patios. Throughout, original works of art from some of Santa Fe’s galleries are on display. Seeing as you’ll have to deal with a bit of jet lag and the adjustment to being 7,000 feet above sea level, the Spa and pool are ways to help you get acclimated and are great to come “home to” after a long day sightseeing.

La Posada’s Fuego restaurant is in a lovely, intimate room with a fireplace they light up on chilly fall evenings. During the day, you can enjoy the Garden Patio. For a nightcap or lighter fare, there’s the Staab House, known as “Santa Fe’s Most Romantic Bar.” As part of its uniqueness (of which is has a lot) La Posada was not only a former artist’s colony, but also someone’s home.

In 1882, a prosperous merchant named Abraham Staab built his three-story brick mansion, in the French Second Empire-style, on property that now belongs to La Posada. Abraham and his wife, Julia, entertained Santa Fe society in the grand residence decorated with the finest European materials. Legend has it that Mrs. Staab loved her home so much that she has never left it. In recent years, her alleged spirit has been the subject of many ghost tours, an episode of *Unsolved Mysteries*, and *Weird Travels*. The Staab House stands today in the form of a bar, where guests of La Posada enjoy cocktails and light Southwestern fare. Some have even reported meeting the grand lady.

When you are ready to venture out and leave the “village” of La Posada, you need only go two blocks south to reach the Plaza. This charming, quaint little spot is idyllic for shopping, sightseeing, dining. You’ll be back again and again, peeling away its many layers as you explore its narrow side streets.

A good itinerary: one day museums and galleries, another day shopping. Saturdays, be sure to head out early to see the many vendors selling handmade jewelry. They’re all Native Americans who will share with you what various totems or Southwestern symbols mean while others will share with you what they like to create and why. They price fairly and their stories are so wonderful. One of my favorite places is the Plaza Café which serves basic stick to the ribs food in a diner-like setting. Yes, a diner if the desert southwest. Just that sentence alone says volumes about the charming quirkiness of Santa Fe.

Don’t miss the Georgia O’Keeffe Museum and the Palace of the Governors that are near neighbors just off the Plaza. There’s also the charming San Miguel Mission (the oldest church in the U.S.) and of course, the more stately St. Francis Cathedral. The Loteto Chapel houses the famous “miraculous” staircase as well.

If you’re up for hitting the road, there are many options. Head north (especially in the fall) and there’s the funky ski bum town of Taos. You can have a long day out first by taking the curvy High Road. as its known, then visit and white-knuckle the vertigo-inducing Gorge Bridge, visit the Taos Pueblo (the oldest continuously occupied building in the U.S.), and then have a margarita and dinner at Doc Martin’s in the center of town (the term *town* may be an exaggeration—Taos has about 4,000 residents).

A Bit of History

Two centuries before Columbus set sail, the residents of ancient pueblos grew crops here. The Spanish then colonized Santa Fe and many villages over a period of 250 years, before New Mexico finally became a U.S. territory in 1846. In the 19th century, the adobe city experienced significant growth as residents from Europe and the eastern U.S. migrated to the Southwest. Palace Avenue, once an acequia that brought water into the city, overflowed with the lifesource of the region and supported the new populace of what would become today’s Santa Fe.

I strongly recommend doing a little reading before arriving in Santa Fe. The history here is complex and fascinating—a melding of Native American, Spanish (from Spain), and gringo. Each is distinct in its own right, but now coexist and commingle to offer the southwestern experience.

Hitting the Road

The hotel and city are within an hour’s drive of Bandelier National Monument, where magnificent ancient cliff dwellings full of kivas and petroglyphs remain. In addition, guests may visit the nearby Santuario de Chimayo, which is said to contain healing powers in its soil. On the Turquoise Trail, south of Santa Fe, guests can travel through the turn-of-the-century mining towns of Madrid, Cerrillos, and Golden—important sources of turquoise for ancient Indian jewelry.



The lobby area of La Posada welcomes with a roaring fire



La Posada has a heated pool for relaxing after a long day of sightseeing

“Elsewhere the sky is the roof of the world;
but here the earth was the floor of the sky.”

-written by author Willa Cather after one of her visits to Santa Fe

Free for the Enjoying

▼ The Rio Grande Gorge Bridge is a cantilever truss bridge across the Rio Grande Gorge 10 miles northwest of Taos. At 650 feet above the Rio Grande, it is the fifth highest bridge in the U.S.

The Rio Grande flows out of the snowcapped Rocky Mountains in Colorado and journeys 1,900 miles to the Gulf of Mexico. It passes through 800-foot chasms of the Rio Grande Gorge, a wild and remote area of northern New Mexico. The canyon provides a wide variety of recreational opportunities, luring fishermen, hikers, artists, and whitewater boating enthusiasts.

A spectacular vista of the Upper Gorge is from the High Bridge Overlook. In 1966 the American Institute of Steel Construction awarded the bridge “Most Beautiful Steel Bridge” in the “Long Span” category. The bridge has appeared in several films, including *Natural Born Killers*, *Twins*, *She’s Having a Baby* and *Wild Hogs*. Your legs will go wobbly, but walk across the bridge and enjoy the view.

▼ The High Road to Taos—a three-hour ride through cottonwoods, past river rapids, around sanctuaries and small churches and offering lots of forest and curves in the road. Great in fall.

▼ The leaves on the aspens and cottonwoods in the fall

▼ Spanish Market: July 25-26, 2009.
www.spanishmarket.org

▼ Indian Market: August 22-23, 2009.
www.swaia.org

▼ The Santa Fe Farmer’s Market, 1607 Paseo De Peralta, Santa Fe. Open Saturdays year-round. Winter hours: 9 a.m.-1 p.m. (Summer: 7 a.m. to noon). Also open Tuesdays, May–November 7 a.m.-noon and Thursdays, July–September, 3-6 p.m. Great place to mingle with the natives, learn about local foods, sample goodies galore and buy gifts to bring home.

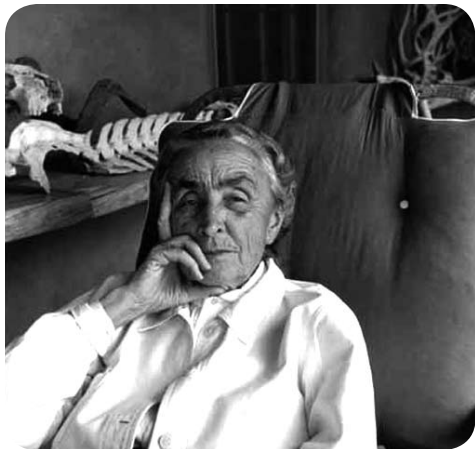
▼ The Tesuque Flea Market: This is fun and is free but you’ll find such good deals you’ll be lugging loads back home with you. Located in a natural setting with beautiful mountain scenery in every direction, the Market is owned and operated by the Pueblo of Tesuque. It has local, regional, and national vendors including those from countries as far away as Japan, India, Peru, and South Africa. During peak season, there are over 500 vendors and it can take almost three hours to view the entire market.

Follow St. Francis Drive through Santa Fe, which will turn into Hwy. 84/285. Continue and follow Hwy. 84/285 north for approx 5.5 miles. The Flea Market will be located on the left side next to the Santa Fe Opera. Open Friday, Saturday and Sunday: 8 a.m.-4 p.m.

Attractions

1 The Georgia O’Keeffe Museum

217 Johnson Street, Santa Fe
www.okeeffemuseum.org
Admission: \$8; under 18, free.
Free on Fridays 5-8 p.m.



Georgia O’Keeffe, the woman herself, looking very relaxed in her adopted home

If you had to list a top ten list of things to see in Santa Fe, no doubt the Georgia O’Keeffe Museum would be in the top five. When it opened in 1997 the lines were so long it made it near impossible to get in. People stood nonetheless, for hours to get into the smallish modern space that house several spare rooms of O’Keeffe’s work from her early years to the last images she did in her adopted home.

The museum explains her early career decisions and her relationship with Alfred Stieglitz and how that association both helped and hurt her career.

Best thing about the Museum is that you can see New Mexico in her work and, if you head out on the road, you will no doubt see sites O’Keeffe saw as well.

The Museum’s permanent collection of O’Keeffe’s work is the largest of any museum in the world. With more than 3,000 works in the collection and 1,149 paintings, drawings, and sculptures by O’Keeffe, the Museum’s holdings represent the largest repository of her work



The Gorge has breathtaking, if not vertigo-inducing, views

available to the public in a single institution. Subjects range from the artist’s iconic flowers and desert skulls to nudes, landscapes, cityscapes, still lifes, and abstractions, dating from 1901 to 1984.

This small museum will delight in how it shows O’Keeffe emerging as a person who painted somewhat hesitatingly and without a genre to call her own until she came to the desert southwest.

Current Exhibitions:

■ *Modernists in New Mexico*. Works from a Private Collector. To May 10, 2009.

In 1916, the painter Robert Henri left New York for the first of three visits to Santa Fe in search of new artistic inspiration. He did so amid the aftermath of the sensational Armory Show in New York, when many of his compatriots were responding inventively to the aesthetic challenge posed by the European avant-garde.

Henri encouraged two close friends and colleagues—George Bellows and John Sloan—to follow his lead. Before long, many American Modernists trekked to New Mexico as well, including Marsden Hartley, John Marin, Stuart Davis, Georgia O’Keeffe, and Edward Hopper. Some visited only once or stayed for just a short time while others (notably O’Keeffe and Sloan) became long-time residents; for all these American Modernists, though, visiting and picturing New Mexico became an artistic rite of passage of sorts.

This exhibition provides an excellent selection of American Modernist visions of New Mexico during the first half of the twentieth-century.



Cow skulls like these are desert southwest icons and they’re quintessential Santa Fe

■ O’Keeffiana: Art and Art Materials.

May 22–September 13, 2009.

In creating her extraordinary body of pictures, Georgia O’Keeffe developed an intimate knowledge of the artistic materials, objects, and places that informed her work on a daily basis. “O’Keeffiana: Art and Art Materials” will explore O’Keeffe’s material world through a rich selection of her works in various media—watercolor, charcoal, graphite, and oil—along with a sampling of the objects and artistic materials that she used and lived with.

2 The Palace of the Governors

Originally constructed in the early 17th century as Spain’s seat of government for what is today the American Southwest, the Palace of the Governors chronicles the history of Santa Fe, as well as New Mexico and the region. This adobe structure, now the state’s history museum, was designated a Registered National Historic Landmark in 1960 and an American Treasure in 1999.

Admission is \$9. Exhibits, collections and archives at the Palace of the Governors reflect the Spanish colonial (1540-1821), Mexican (1821-1846), U.S. Territorial (1846-1912) and statehood (1912-present) periods of History. The collection consists of more than 15,000 catalogued objects.

Current Exhibition:

■ *Through the Lens*. Runs through Oct 25, 2009.

Since the 1850s many of the most recognized names in photography have focused their lenses in and on Santa Fe. Through their creative efforts they have documented a particular place and its visual history. They helped create that “place” and the mystique of Santa Fe. Photography has long been significant in the construction of notions of space and place, landscape and identity, and especially in Santa Fe, however malleable visual meaning may be, has helped define the geographical imagination.

Through the Lens: Creating Santa Fe, examines the history of Santa Fe through the visual record created by internationally respected photographers.

Accommodations

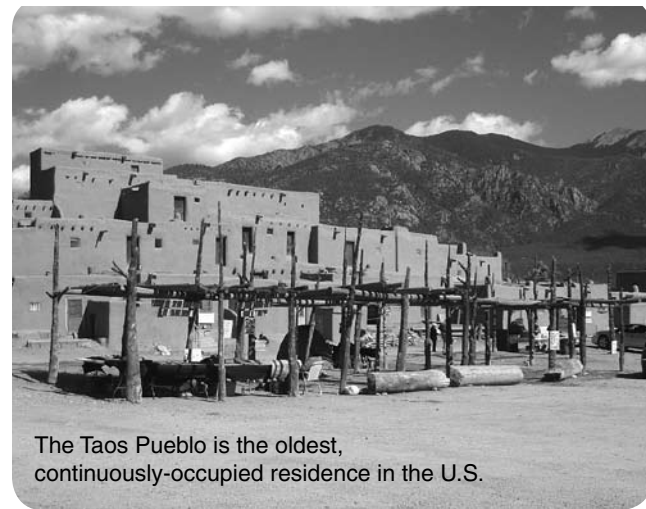
La Posada de Santa Fe Resort & Spa

330 East Palace Ave., Santa Fe
505-986-0000
www.laposada.rockresorts.com

Located just two blocks from the city’s historic Plaza—157 newly refurbished downtown Santa Fe hotel accommodations—characteristic of the early adobe art colony that still remains from La Posada’s origin.

Amenities: Full RockResorts Spa with treatments featuring organic ingredients and some indigenous to the American Southwest, a fitness center, outdoor heated swimming pool and whirlpool. Dining: La Posada’s Fuego, either inside the restaurant or on its Garden Patio. For a nightcap or lighter fare, there’s the Staab House. Fuego serves cuisine with a traditional French flair. The Staab House has bistro fare, a variety of cocktails, and live music on the weekends.

Rate and specials: Santa Fe Romance Package includes: Two nights accommodations in a Southwestern appointed room Three-course dinner for two at Fuego Couples spa treatments in RockResorts Spa Unlimited use of the Spa steam and fitness rooms. Valid to December 2009. La Posada’s Ultimate Best Buy is a 21-day advance purchase promotion at huge savings. The offer is both nonrefundable and non-changeable. Go online for full details. Expires April 30, 2009. Rooms range from \$211 to \$500 per night.



The Taos Pueblo is the oldest, continuously-occupied residence in the U.S.

Dining Out

- Café Pasqual’s, 121 Don Gaspar, Santa Fe. Great food, heart breakfasts. The communal table gives you the opportunity to meet locals and people from all over sharing travel stories.
- The Plaza Café, 54 Lincoln Ave., Santa Fe. Santa Fe’s oldest restaurant, has been serving authentic traditional dishes since 1918. Located on the Plaza.
- Doc Martin’s, 125 Paseo del Pueblo Norte, Taos. Located in the heart of Taos’ historic district. Doc’s is a true Taos tradition that specializes in organic foods with a splash of the southwest while incorporating local chilis, fish and meats.
- El Farol, 808 Canyon Rd., Santa Fe. A restaurant that’s as comfortable as your favorite pair of blue jeans. Flamenco, blues, Latin folk, Cuban, Salsa, Meringue—you name it. Locals and visitor fit right in and usually end up dancing together before the night is over.

Story: Louise Bruderle