

ion TRAVEL

La Fonda On the Plaza is the only hotel directly on Santa Fe's famous plaza. It's an easy walk to the open-air Native American art market or the many stores and art galleries and the famous Loreto Chapel.

La Fonda on the Plaza

A look back in time combined with modern trends

BY SANDI DAVIS

Leave Oklahoma City, take an eight hour drive west and then north and you'll find Santa Fe, N.M., tucked into the Sangre de Christo Mountains.

This scenic city is especially worth a look during Christmastime, when luminaria candles line Artist Road and The Plaza.

The perfect place to stay, whatever the season, is La Fonda On the Plaza, a historic hotel full of rustic charm, great food and drinks and an art collection any museum would be proud to have.

The whole city, actually, is full of art, especially American Indian Tribal art.

Each day, tribal artists line up hoping to get a space on the side of the plaza reserved solely for them and their work.

Their pieces are spread on rugs covering the ground,

allowing collectors and tourists a chance to own their art, ranging from jewelry to exquisitely woven rugs in all price ranges.

The other three sides of the square are full of art galleries, all sorts of high end stores plus a beloved Woolworths where you can get a Frito Chili Pie made in the Frito bag, T-shirts, hats, sundries and so much more, ground zero for tourists and residents alike who need something in a hurry.

No matter how you find yourself in the plaza, make some time to visit La Fonda On the Plaza, walk the meandering hallways, stop in for a cup of coffee or a margarita and visit the many little shops inside the hotel.

The hotel's site goes back centuries. There are reports of an inn back in the 1600s, making its site the oldest hotel corner in America.

In 1821, Capt. William Becknell completed the first

successful trading trip between Missouri to Santa Fe, the traders found a comfortable inn – or Fonda – on the plaza when they arrived. It then became part of the Santa Fe Trail.

During this time it housed trappers, soldiers, gold seekers, gamblers and politicians, changing hands and names several times but always serving as a hotel.

The current La Fonda was built in 1922. In 1925 the building was acquired by the Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe Railroad, who leased it to hotelier Fred Harvey, who used the hotel as a celebrated Harvey House.

The hotel we see today combines distinctive Old West traditions with contemporary luxury and a convenient location.

La Fonda's influences use the work of famed architects John Gaw Meem and Southwest architect and designer Mary Elizabeth Jane Colter. It is a popular site for weddings, meetings and vacations.

The hotel has a AAA Four Diamond rating and is a member of Historic Hotels of America and the National Trust for Historic Preservation. In 2015 it was added to the Historic Santa Fe Foundation's Register of Properties Worthy of Preservation.

It stayed a Harvey House until 1968, when the hotel was bought by local businessman Sam Ballen and his wife Ethel.

In 2014, longtime family friend and current Chairman of the Board, Jennifer Kimball purchased the hotel with her brother Philip Wise and investment firm Cienda Partners.

In 2013 La Fonda On the Plaza finished its most significant room renovations since the 1920s. Detailed studies were made of the original building plans and the aesthetics of original designer Mary Elizabeth Jane Colter.

The new design keeps the feel of the original hotel while including fresh, modern touches.

With the exception of the Terrace luxury rooms and suites, all guest rooms got new lighting, floor coverings and handcrafted furnishing, new energy efficient casement windows, state-of-the-art temperature controls and sound insulation, updated plumbing, electrical and communication systems.

If you're staying in the hotel, look at the way your bedstead is painted, the hangings in your rooms, but especially the art on the walls. Each piece of art is original, not only in your room, but throughout the hotel.

La Fonda On the Plaza finished its three-tiered renovation in May with the updating of La Plazuela restaurant, the lobby and public spaces. In addition, two new handicap-accessible, family friendly restrooms were added on the first and second



La Plazuela Restaurant in La Fonda On the Plaza is a wonderful stop on any visit to Santa Fe. Its updated menu and custom Tequila brand combine make looking at the art surrounding the restaurant a wonderful way to relax. Also pay a visit to the bar which has been restored to its original horseshoe shape.



floors.

La Fonda's art collection features some of the finest examples of New Mexican style throughout the hotel's history. They are scattered throughout the hotel and the best way to see many of them is to book a free docent-led art tour through the concierge desk, Wednesdays through Sundays at 10:30 a.m.

If you miss the tour, grab an art guide at the front desk or buy "In Every Room: A Story of the Art," a book highlighting a few of the pieces and their stories.

If you have a few hours and like tequila, try to book a bartender to give you a tasting lesson of the unique tequila served in the hotel. The Herradura Brand is still made in Amatitan, Jalisco, Mexico, though it's owned by U.S. beverage maker Brown-Forman.

The bar serves several varieties of the tequila and will be happy to give you a tasting menu and let you decide what you'll be using in your drinks from then until you leave.

The hotel we see today combines distinctive Old West traditions with contemporary luxury and a convenient location.

To keep your stay and the hotel fresh in your memories, or to share it with people who will enjoy it as well, or to fill out your Christmas shopping list, buy a copy of the hotel's newest souvenir, the book, "La Fonda: Then and Now."

The book includes photographs of the hotel taken in the same places – interior and exterior — year after year, showing the changes, as well as images of the art hanging throughout La Fonda.

Each chapter features a different contributing writer – each with a unique attachment to the hotel – who write essays about their favorite things, including the art, architecture, weddings and more.

"La Fonda: Then and Now" is \$55 and is a coffee table-sized book.

To purchase the book, to make reservations or for more information, call (855) 516-1090 or check their website at www.lafondasantafe.com/. ■

Each bed headboard in the hotel is hand painted and are one-of-a-kind. The rooms at La Fonda on the Plaza also vary by the year they were added. A few rooms on the first floor go back to the days when the hotel was part of the Harvey House chain.