

Santa Fe has long welcomed LGBTs



Santa Fe, New Mexico has long been one of the country's most gay-friendly destinations. With more than 400 years under its belt, the city, about an hour outside of Albuquerque, is the oldest state capital and the U.S.'s third oldest European-settled town, behind St. Augustine and Jamestown. From its early days as a trading post, it developed a tolerance for outsiders from different religions and ethnicities. That tradition of tolerance very much extends to the LGBT community. Santa Fe elected its first openly gay mayor, Javier Gonzales, three years ago. He was joined by two out lesbians on the city council, effectively making a third of the city's elected representatives gay.

Santa Fe still looks much like the Old West. During the City Beautiful movement in the late 1800s and early 1900s, Santa Fe decided that it would be the "City Different," and maintain the look that made it distinctive from Anytown, USA. The city jealously protects its adobe architecture from modern influences. And you won't see any modern high-rises. No building is allowed to be taller than the town's cathedral.

If you look around downtown, you will see a mixture of traditional Victorians as well as adobe.

New Mexico didn't become a state until 1914. Early efforts to elevate it from a territory to statehood were rebuffed in part because of the look of its adobe buildings, which were constructed from a mixture of mud and straw. Santa Fe got the message and built more traditional wooden structures and changed the names of some of its Spanish streets to very American-sounding names, including Washington and Jefferson.

Now, instead of trying to blend in with the rest of the U.S., Santa Fe very much celebrates and capitalizes on its Old West rough-and-tumble past, welcoming thousands of tourists every year. Summer is the most popular time for tourism. Because of its 7,000-foot elevation, the city's temperature rarely gets much above 90 and it cools down quickly when then the sun goes down. Albuquerque is about 2,000 feet lower in elevation and gets seven to 10 degrees warmer in the summer.

The fall and spring are also popular times to visit Santa Fe, when the weather is cool and it is less crowded. The town is also popular in the winter with skiers. The closest ski resort is about 45 minutes away.

Santa Fe Pride 2017 will be held this year in mid-September. The parade starts at 7 p.m. Friday, September 15, and the Pride festival is Saturday, September 16.

The Spanish-Mexican influence in the city is evident at every turn in the downtown area.

In keeping with the Spanish tradition, a plaza is in the center of town, along with a gazebo surrounded by local government buildings. America's oldest church, San Miguel Mission, looks very much like a smaller version of San Francisco's Mission Dolores. It was built in 1610, more than 150 years before Mission Dolores. Like San Francisco, Santa Fe's patron saint is Saint Francis of Assisi. But instead of being named for a saint, the town took the name that means Holy Faith.

Santa Fe's main cathedral, Cathedral Basilica of Saint Francis of Assisi, was dedicated in 1887 but its towers were never fully completed because of a lack of funds. Another of Santa Fe's most tourist-popular churches opened nine years before the Basilica. The Loretto Chapel features a "miraculous staircase" that was built by a mysterious carpenter who connected the upper balcony of the church with the main floor. A construction error didn't leave enough room for a traditional staircase. The resulting "miraculous" circular staircase is as beautiful as it is durable. But to keep it for many more years, only newly married couples are allowed on it now, when they pose for photos.

Native American heritage

Santa Fe celebrates its large Native American population. Much of the land between Albuquerque and Santa Fe is owned by Indian tribes. Many of the Native Americans in the area are Catholic and celebrate their traditional culture along with Catholic religious traditions.

Santa Fe has long attracted artists who undoubtedly are drawn to the city's natural beauty and colorful sunsets. A number of artists collaborated in creating one of Santa Fe's newest and, already, one of its most popular attractions. Meow Woof (<https://meowwolf.com/>) was created in an artist space occupied by an abandoned bowling alley. The building's name is emblazoned on a giant bowling pin sign in front of the parking lot. A giant spider and what looks like a 1950s menacing sci-fi space alien stand watch over the parking lot.



The interior of San Miguel Mission, America's oldest church, built in 1610. Photo: Ed Walsh

The space's main attraction is The House of Eternal Return, which opened a year ago as its first permanent installation. It is a replica of a Victorian home from Mendocino whose fictional family mysteriously disappeared. Clues are left throughout the house about what may have happened to the residents. You can read their mail, look at their computer programs, and read their written diaries to figure out what happened. After entering the living room, visitors who make their way to the kitchen can open the refrigerator door, and walk through a "wormhole" into a parallel universe filled with rooms that resemble sets from 1960s sci-fi TV shows. You can walk from a room with laser beams that you can play like a musical instrument to another room that looks like a black and white cartoon to other rooms that appear at first glance to be a normal family home. Local artists convinced Game of Thrones creator George R.R. Martin to help buy and rehab the building and they created New Mexico's most unique attraction.

The world-famous Santa Fe Opera (<https://www.santafeopera.org/>) kicks off its 61st season June 30 with performances until August 26. The big buzz this year is the opera's world premiere of "The (R)evolution of Steve Jobs." The opera company promises the show will "illuminate a side of Steve Jobs that we have never seen before." The opera noted that the late genius behind Apple "helped connect us all while building a firewall around his own emotions. At the heart of this world premiere is the story of a man who circles back to the formative events in his life while learning to acknowledge his own mortality."

With appreciation for art comes appreciation for well-crafted drinks. Santa Fe celebrates its favorite beverage, the margarita, in style with a 31-stop Margarita Trail. For \$3, you can buy a Margarita Passport that entitles you a \$1 discount at stops along the trail. Get your passport stamped (maximum of two stamps per day). You will get a free T-shirt for five stamps, "The Great Margarita Book" for 20, and if you complete all the stops on the trail, you get a Margarita Bartender Kit.

If the Margarita Trail isn't enough to satisfy you, check out the Chocolate Trail. The seven-stop trek includes shops that will let you sample chocolates made with ingredients native to New Mexico including chile, pinon nuts, and lavender.

Accommodations

One of New Mexico's finest resorts is a little less than an hour outside of Santa Fe. The Hyatt Regency Tamaya Resort and Spa (<https://tamaya.regency.hyatt.com>) is very popular for destination weddings and regularly hosts same-sex couples. Even if you are not planning on getting hitched in New Mexico, there is plenty to do on the property, with its three restaurants; three pools, including an adults-only pool; bicycle trails, and free bike rentals.

The property has three separate wedding venues. Summer weekends are the busiest time for weddings, but you can get some good deals if you opt for an off-season, Friday evening, or sunrise wedding. The property is truly a destination wedding location that you may never want to leave. It can accommodate weddings from just a handful of people to hundreds. The hotel is about 30 minutes from Albuquerque, so it makes a good home base for exploring Santa Fe or Albuquerque. The hotel makes getting to Santa Fe easy – it offers a free shuttle to a train that goes directly to the city.

If you prefer to stay in downtown Santa Fe, La Fonda (<https://www.lafondasantafe.com>) is the city's oldest and largest hotel and also regularly hosts destination weddings. Its rooftop patio makes a good backdrop for an outdoor wedding, with a perfect view of the cathedral across the street. The hotel has a large pool in the courtyard, a rarity for a downtown hotel.

The gay-owned bed and breakfast, the Turquoise Bear B&B (<https://www.turquoisebear.com/>), has 10 rooms, and is situated in a quiet section of the city, about a 15-minute walk from downtown. The main part of the hotel is in a historic 19th century building.

For more information, visit Santa Fe's official tourism website at <https://santafe.org/>.