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Just six hours from the Mile High City, this international art destination feels a world away. A few ideas to inspire your next three-day-weekend romantic getaway.

By

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The picturesque Santa Fe Plaza (originally a fort) has served as the center of life in the city for more than 400 years and is often filled with tents for the festival du jour.

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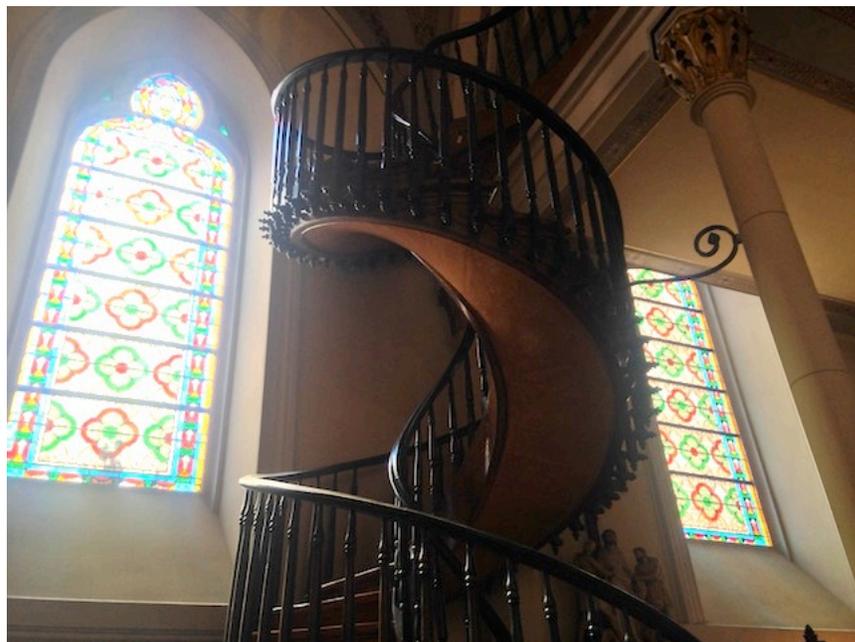
Our First-Timer's Guide series' second foray outside Colorful Colorado's borders takes us to the Land of Enchantment—specifically, the artist's enclave of Santa Fe, New Mexico. At about six hours away, it's a bit of a haul, but it's a straight shot on I-25 and you'll want the trunk space for the painting you'll inevitably find for over your mantle. Not into the gallery scene? Don't worry, the history-filled state capital (both the highest and oldest in the country, home to just 82,000 or so residents) holds plenty of other draws in its low-slung adobe buildings, which stretch out across the high desert landscape from the heart of downtown, the Santa Fe Plaza. Here's your guide to exploring the City Different.

The Odometer ^[4]: 390 miles, one way



Native American vendors sell their wares nearly every day at the [Palace of the Governors](#) [5].

Shop: Whether you're in the market for a \$20 Mexican woven blanket to use at the park or a \$2,000 tabletop sculpture for your entryway, you'll find what you're looking for in Santa Fe's plethora of shops, galleries, and seemingly never-ending lineup of outdoor markets and festivals. The best way to experience this easily overwhelming scene is to simply go with your gut as you stroll the narrow, twisting streets—if something catches your eye, pop in. If a too-high price tag catches your eye 30 seconds later, pop out (but don't be afraid to linger in a gallery that's out of your price range if you're enjoying the art on display; that's encouraged). Bargain-hunters will want to check out the Native American wares—lovely copper and turquoise jewelry abounds—spread out on blankets along the Palace of the Governors at the north end of the plaza as part of the regulated Native American Vendors Program.



Some aspects of the Loretto Chapel's staircase's [design and construction](#) [6] remain a mystery today.

Tour: Thirteen major museums call Santa Fe home, and there are plenty of other historic structures worth a closer look in this 405-year-old city. Start with the [Georgia O'Keeffe Museum](#) [7] to see paintings from the mother of American modernism in the very landscape that inspired some of her most famous works. Also be sure to walk through the beautiful, colorful [Cathedral Basilica of St. Francis of Assisi](#) [8] and the nearby [Loretto Chapel](#) [9] (it's well-worth the \$3 entry fee to view the miraculous staircase, built in the late 1800s, in person).



From Sun Mountain's summit, you can gaze out over Santa Fe and beyond.

Get Outside: Given Santa Fe's location in the Sangre de Cristo foothills, there's no shortage of hiking options nearby. For a quick jaunt with a big payoff, we like Sun Mountain, which affords 360-degree views from its summit. Take the Old Santa Fe Trail south out of town, and you'll find the [trailhead](#) [10] on your left a little more than 10 minutes from the plaza (if you hit East Zia Road, you've gone too far). The rustic path gains about 700 feet over a mile—meaning the views won't be the only thing taking your breath away.



The (unexpected) standout of La Boca's vegetarian lunch tapas platter was the crave-worthy spinach Catalan.

Eat: Grub options are nearly endless—some 250 eateries, at last count—in this tourist haven. For a quick (and inexpensive) morning meal, grab a handheld breakfast burrito from the [Burrito Co.](#) ^[11] (order it Christmas-style to try both the red and green chile). The [Tune-Up Cafe](#) ^[12]'s pupusas—of *Diners, Drive-Ins and Dives* fame—are worth venturing off the plaza for. For dinner, tapas are a must; [La Boca](#) ^[13] is a locals' favorite, and [El Farol](#) ^[14] on Canyon Road offers live entertainment nightly, including flamenco performances on Saturdays.



After you're done perusing the weekly, year-round farmers' market in the Railyard Arts District, grab a cold one at Second Street Brewery.

Sip: Locals love [Second Street Brewery](#) ^[15] in the hip Railyard Arts District, which skews more contemporary than the rest of town. (Plan your visit to coincide with the Saturday farmers' market next door, which is held year-round.) For a New Mexico craft brew on the plaza, head up to [Draft Station](#) ^[16]'s rooftop patio, where you can—and should—also order a delicious pizza with green chile subbed in for the sauce. Speaking of rooftops: Be sure to take in the sunset and a cocktail at La Fonda on the Plaza's 5th-story [Bell Tower Bar](#) ^[17] (open seasonally). As the night goes on, the [Cowgirl](#) ^[18]'s frozen margaritas just might give you the courage you need to get up and dance to whichever eclectic live act is playing.



The sprawling, historic, upscale La Fonda on the Plaza is worth the splurge.

Stay: If you can swing it, rent a room in a walkable location near the plaza; there are plenty of charming B&Bs and hotels to choose from, many with inviting Southwestern decor and romantic kiva fireplaces. [La Fonda on the Plaza](#) ^[19] is a high-end classic, while the newer [Drury Plaza Hotel](#) ^[20] boasts a rooftop pool and bar. A more budget-friendly but still very comfortable option is the [Santa Fe Sage Inn](#) ^[21], next to the Railyard Arts District; a free shuttle makes the mile trip to the plaza regularly.



Canyon Road draws visitors from around the globe for a reason and is a must-visit, even if you're not looking to buy.

If You Do One Thing: Spend an afternoon wandering up and down mile-long Canyon Road, the most densely concentrated area of art galleries in the world. Look for artists at work in on-site studios within some of the 80-some galleries and enjoy the variety of mediums—paintings, installations, leatherwork, jewelry, and more—and art styles represented.

(Check out more First-Timer's Guides from [5280](#) ^[22])

Tags:

- [santa fe](#) ^[23], [New Mexico](#) ^[24], [Palace of the Governors](#) ^[25], [Canyon Road](#) ^[26], [Loretto Chapel](#) ^[27], [Georgia O'Keeffe Museum](#) ^[28], [Cathedral Basilica of St. Francis of Assisi](#) ^[29], [Railyard Arts District](#) ^[30], [Sun Mountain](#) ^[31], [La Boca](#) ^[32], [El Farol](#) ^[33], [The Tune-Up Cafe](#) ^[34], [first-timer's guide](#) ^[35], [second street brewery](#) ^[36], [Draft Station](#) ^[37], [The Cowgirl](#) ^[38], [Santa Fe Sage Inn](#) ^[39], [Drury Plaza Hotel](#) ^[40], [La Fonda on the Plaza](#) ^[41]

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