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MOUNTAIN WEST & DESERT ESCAPES

Greetings from SANTA FE

48 hours, solo, at your own pace

POCKET EDITION · 2027

48-HOUR GUIDE · SAFETY GUIDE · PLANNING CALENDAR

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Welcome to Santa Fe

Santa Fe is one of the easiest small cities in the West to explore alone. It is the oldest state capital in the country, set at about 7,200 feet in the Sangre de Cristo foothills, with adobe streets, world-class museums, a gallery district on Canyon Road, and a cuisine built on red and green chile.

Traveling solo here works because almost everything is close to the Plaza and made for lingering: a bench in the shade, a gallery that welcomes browsers, a counter seat at a chile kitchen. The pace is slow, the light is extraordinary, and nobody hurries a person who is looking at a painting or a sunset.

HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

Read through once before you go. Day One covers the Plaza, the Palace of the Governors, the Cathedral Basilica, the Loretto Chapel, and Canyon Road at sunset. Day Two visits Museum Hill and the Railyard, and ends with dinner and the night sky. Section 03 is the new-for-2027 feature on the Plaza and the Palace. The altitude is real, so drink water, go easy on the first day, and plan outdoor time for mornings and evenings.

ESSENTIAL QUICK FACTS

CURRENCY
US dollar (cards accepted nearly everywhere)

TRANSIT
Santa Fe Trails buses · about $1 a ride

TIME ZONE
Mountain (UTC−7; UTC−6 in summer)

EMERGENCY
911 · non-emergency 505-428-3710

TIPPING
18–20% in restaurants

ALTITUDE
About 7,200 feet — drink water, go slowly

01 DAY ONE

The Plaza · Palace of the Governors · Canyon Road

The first day stays in the historic center: a morning on the Plaza, two landmark churches, a New Mexican lunch, and the galleries of Canyon Road as the light turns gold.

MORNING · 8:30 AM – 1:00 PM

8:30 AM

Breakfast — Tia Sophia's

A downtown New Mexican diner with breakfast burritos, huevos rancheros, and the question every table gets asked: red, green, or Christmas (both).

Order Christmas if you cannot decide, and ask for the sauce on the side to test the heat.

10:00 AM

The Plaza and the Palace of the Governors

The Plaza has been the heart of the city since the early 1600s. On its north side the Palace of the Governors, the oldest continuously used public building in the country, now holds the New Mexico History Museum.

Native artisans sell jewelry under the portal outside the Palace; buy directly from the maker.

11:30 AM

Cathedral Basilica of St. Francis of Assisi

A Romanesque Revival cathedral of golden stone from the 1800s, a short walk from the Plaza, with a small chapel holding the oldest Madonna statue in the United States.

Go inside quietly; services may close parts of the church.

AFTERNOON · 1:00 PM – 5:30 PM

1:00 PM

Lunch — The Shed

A beloved lunch spot in a 1692 adobe hacienda, serving red chile enchiladas and blue-corn dishes since 1953.

Lines form at midday. Go at opening, or sit at a bar or counter spot for one.

2:30 PM

Loretto Chapel

A small Gothic chapel known for its "Miraculous Staircase," a spiral stair with two full turns and no visible central support.

There is an admission fee, and hours vary; check before you go.

4:00 PM

Canyon Road

A half-mile lane of adobe buildings holding more than a hundred galleries, studios, and sculpture gardens. Walk it uphill slowly and wander into any open door.

Many galleries close by 5 PM, so start early. Winter evenings add farolitos and lights.

EVENING · 6:00 PM – 10:00 PM

6:30 PM

Sunset at the Railyard or the Plaza

Golden light on the adobe walls is Santa Fe's best free show. Watch from a bench on the Plaza or from the Railyard Park.

Carry a layer; the temperature drops fast after sunset even in summer.

7:30 PM

Dinner — Cafe Pasqual's

A long-running downtown restaurant with an inventive New Mexican menu, a famous breakfast, and a lively community table.

Ask for the community table when dining alone; it is the best seat in the house.

02 DAY TWO

Museum Hill · The Railyard · Evening Under the Stars

The second day moves a little farther out, to the museums on Museum Hill and the art, markets, and nightlife of the Railyard.

MORNING · 8:30 AM – 1:00 PM

8:30 AM

Georgia O'Keeffe Museum

The largest collection of the painter's work in the world, set in a former adobe church building a few blocks from the Plaza, with her desert landscapes, bones, and flowers.

Visit early on a weekday for a quiet gallery. Check the schedule for timed entry.

10:30 AM

Museum Hill

A cluster of four museums about 10 minutes from downtown: the Museum of International Folk Art, the Museum of Indian Arts and Culture, the Wheelwright Museum, and the Museum of Spanish Colonial Art.

If you can see only one, choose the Museum of International Folk Art, with more than 100,000 objects from around the world.

1:00 PM

Lunch — La Choza

A friendly local favorite in the Railyard area, run by the family behind The Shed, with classic carne adovada and green chile stew.

The patio is pleasant on a mild day.

AFTERNOON · 2:30 PM – 6:00 PM

2:30 PM

Santa Fe Railyard District

A converted rail yard with galleries, shops, a park, and a farmers market on Saturday mornings. Walk the Railyard Park and the Rail Trail.

If it is Saturday, go to the farmers market first and eat your way through it.

4:00 PM

Meow Wolf — House of Eternal Return

An immersive art installation in a former bowling alley, with a mysterious house full of hidden rooms, passages, and tunnels. Odd, fun, and easy to explore alone.

Buy tickets ahead and expect to spend two hours or more.

EVENING · 6:30 PM – LATE

6:30 PM

Dinner — Plaza Cafe

A classic downtown diner on the Plaza since 1905, with a famous green chile stew and a long counter.

Counter seats are perfect for one.

8:30 PM

Stargazing Near the City

Santa Fe's dry air and altitude give vivid night skies. Head a few miles out of town, or join a guided stargazing tour.

Dress warmly; high-desert nights are cold.

03 THE PLAZA

The Plaza and the Palace

DID YOU KNOW?

Did you know Santa Fe is the oldest state capital in the United States?

Spanish colonists founded the settlement around 1610, and the Palace of the Governors on the Plaza was built that same decade. It is considered the oldest continuously used public building in the country, and it has been home to Spanish, Mexican, and American governments over four centuries.

A SHORT HISTORY

The Palace has served as a seat of government under Spain, Mexico, and the United States, with an interruption in 1680 when the Pueblo Revolt drove the Spanish out for twelve years. The building was later restored and now anchors the New Mexico History Museum.

HOW TO SEE IT

Walk the Plaza at an easy pace and then enter the Palace through the museum. Native American artisans sell directly under the portal, and the Plaza itself is free to enjoy. Evenings are lovely, with lights and street musicians in warm weather.

BEST TIME TO GO

Mornings are quiet, and early evening has the best light. During the summer festivals, including the Indian Market in August, the Plaza fills with visitors, so book rooms early.

04 WHERE TO EAT

Red chile, green chile, Christmas

Santa Fe eats are built on chile. Most of the places below have counters, bar seats, or patios that suit a solo diner.

BREAKFAST & LUNCH

Tia Sophia's
DOWNTOWN · $8–14

A New Mexican diner with breakfast burritos and a loyal local crowd.

The Shed
DOWNTOWN · $14–24

Red chile enchiladas in a 1692 hacienda, popular since 1953.

La Choza
RAILYARD · $12–20

Carne adovada, green chile stew, and a sunny patio.

Plaza Cafe
THE PLAZA · $10–20

A classic downtown diner since 1905, with a famous green chile stew.

DINNER & LATE NIGHT

Cafe Pasqual's
DOWNTOWN · $20–40

Creative New Mexican cooking and a lively community table.

Tomasita's
RAILYARD · $12–22

Family-run New Mexican food in a big, easygoing dining room.

Cowgirl BBQ
GUADALUPE · $14–26

Barbecue and live music in a casual downtown spot.

The Compound
CANYON ROAD · $40–70

A special-occasion dinner in a historic adobe on Canyon Road.

05 GETTING AROUND

Navigating Santa Fe

Santa Fe is small and the historic center is very walkable. A few shuttles, buses, and a short drive reach everything else.

Walking	Free	The Plaza, the Cathedral, Loretto Chapel, and the O'Keeffe Museum are all within about ten minutes.
Santa Fe Trails bus	about $1	City buses cover downtown, Museum Hill, and the Railyard. Check schedules.
Airport (SAF)	Limited flights	Most visitors fly into Albuquerque (ABQ), about 65 miles away by car or shuttle.
Rail Runner	by trip	A commuter train links Albuquerque and Santa Fe, with limited weekend service.
Rideshare & taxis	by trip	Useful for evenings and Museum Hill.
Rental car	varies	Helpful for day trips to Bandelier, Taos, or the High Road to Taos.

At 7,200 feet the sun is strong and the air is dry. Use sunscreen, carry water, and take it easy on the first day.

06 BACKUP PLANS

Santa Fe on a rainy afternoon

Monsoon storms in summer and snow in winter are short. These are good places to wait them out.

DOWNTOWN

New Mexico History Museum

Inside the Palace of the Governors, with exhibits on four centuries of local history.

MUSEUM HILL

Museum of International Folk Art

A huge collection of folk art, toys, and textiles from around the world.

DOWNTOWN

Georgia O'Keeffe Museum

The painter's desert landscapes, bones, and flowers.

RAILYARD

SITE Santa Fe

A contemporary art space with changing exhibitions.

DOWNTOWN

Collected Works Bookstore

A neighborhood bookshop and cafe, good for an hour with a book.

OUTSIDE TOWN

Ten Thousand Waves

A Japanese-style spa in the foothills, with private and communal soaking tubs; reserve ahead.

07 NEIGHBORHOODS

Know your neighborhoods

HEART OF THE CITY
The Plaza
The Palace of the Governors, the shops, and the artisan portal.

GALLERIES
Canyon Road
A half-mile of adobe galleries, studios, and sculpture gardens.

ART & MARKETS
The Railyard
The farmers market, the park, galleries, and Meow Wolf.

MUSEUMS
Museum Hill
Four museums and a quiet hillside setting.

DINING & NIGHTLIFE
Guadalupe
Restaurants, bars, and shops near the Railyard.

HISTORIC LANES
Barrio de Analco
One of the oldest neighborhoods in the country, with San Miguel Chapel nearby.

08 GOOD TO KNOW

What nobody tells you

- Plan around the altitude. Drink water, limit alcohol the first day, and take it slowly.
- Chile is a question here: red, green, or Christmas. Ask for the sauce on the side to test the heat.
- Many galleries close by 5 PM, so see Canyon Road in the afternoon and return for the evening glow.
- Buy Native jewelry and pottery directly from the artisans under the Palace portal.
- Tip 18–20% in restaurants.
- Mornings are bright and dry; storms in July and August are short and usually in the afternoon.

WHEN TO GO

Mar–May	Mild	Cool mornings, bright spring days, and fewer crowds.
Jun–Aug	Peak season	Warm days and cool nights, the Opera, and the Indian Market in August.
Sep–Nov	Best overall	Golden aspens, the Fiestas, and the burning of Zozobra in early September.
Dec–Feb	Winter	Cold, with snow, farolitos, and nearby skiing.

09 SOLO TRAVELER SAFETY

Is Santa Fe safe?

Very safe for travelers. The Plaza, Canyon Road, and the Railyard are busy and well-lit. The main risks are altitude, sun, and dry air, so hydrate and rest. Use common sense at night in less-lit areas outside the center.

NEIGHBORHOOD SAFETY AT A GLANCE

The Plaza	●●●●●
Canyon Road	●●●●●
Railyard District	●●●●○
Museum Hill	●●●●●
Guadalupe Street	●●●●○
Residential areas at night	●●●○○
Outside the central core at night	●●●○○

COMMON SCAMS

Be wary of unlicensed vendors selling jewelry as "authentic Native-made"; buy from the portal artisans or established galleries. Never leave belongings visible in a parked car at trailheads.

HEALTH & MEDICAL

Christus St. Vincent Regional Medical Center is the main hospital. Altitude can cause headaches and fatigue, so drink water, rest, and avoid heavy drinking on the first day. Carry travel insurance.

SOLO TRAVELERS

Share your plan with someone back home and keep your phone charged. Hiking solo is rewarding, but stay on marked trails and tell someone where you are going.

EMERGENCY CONTACTS

Police, fire, medical	911
Santa Fe non-emergency	505-428-3710
Poison Control	1-800-222-1222
Nearest ER	Christus St. Vincent · 455 St. Michael's Dr.

10 PLANNING CALENDAR

Santa Fe, month by month

Exact dates shift each year, so confirm before booking.

JUN–AUG SANTA FE OPERA

- The open-air opera season runs through the summer in the hills outside town.

JUL SPANISH MARKET

- Traditional Spanish Colonial art fills the Plaza in late July.

AUG INDIAN MARKET

- Santa Fe Indian Market is a weekend of Native art, held on the Plaza in August.

SEP FIESTAS

- The Fiestas de Santa Fe include the burning of Zozobra, the giant puppet that burns away the year's gloom.

OCT ASPENS

- Fall color in the Sangre de Cristo Mountains and a stream of balloons nearby.

DEC FAROLITOS

- Candles in paper bags light Canyon Road and the Plaza on Christmas Eve.

SAF

Every Stop, Mapped

Scan the code to open the free interactive Santa Fe map — every stop in this guide, filterable by day, food, and transport.

goingsolo.life/maps/santa-fe

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