

Santa Fe

By Tom Kirvan

SANTA FE SPORTS THE NICKNAME AS THE 'CITY DIFFERENT' FOR A HOST OF NATURAL AND CULTURAL REASONS

Founded in 1610, Santa Fe ranks as the oldest capital in the United States. It also carries the distinction of being the highest state capital, with an altitude of 7,198 feet, topping second place Cheyenne, Wyoming by more than 1,100 feet. As such, visitors are encouraged "to catch your breath and replenish your body with plenty of water to help you acclimate to our 7,200-foot elevation," according to Tourism Santa Fe.

Nestled in the foothills of the Sangre de Cristo Mountains, Santa Fe boasts a population of nearly 90,000 residents and is nicknamed "City Different," alluding its special combination of history, art, culture, and natural beauty. It is revered for its well-preserved Spanish colonial architecture, thriving arts scene, and distinctive Pueblo-style adobe buildings. Santa Fe also is a cultural haven, home to numerous art galleries, museums, and the renowned Santa Fe Opera.

The Santa Fe community also is a hotbed for outdoor enthusiasts, as opportunities abound for such activities as hiking, biking, rafting, fishing, and horseback riding.

With a rich heritage blending Spanish, Mexican, and Native American influences, Santa Fe is home to the Georgia O'Keeffe Museum, which honors the work of the acclaimed American painter and sculptor whose career spanned seven decades before her death in 1986 at age 98.

Widely regarded as one of the nation's great art cities, Santa Fe was the first U.S. city inducted into the UNESCO Creative Cities Networks, thanks to its more than 250 art galleries, multiple museums, and three annual art events – the Santa Fe International Folk Art Market, the Traditional Spanish Colonial Market, and the Indian Market.

Of special note, the cityscape features adobe-style Pueblo Revival and Territorial Revival architecture, much of it preserved and protected by historical designations.

Of historical significance, Santa Fe is less than an hour drive from Los Alamos, the planning site for the Manhattan Project during World War II. The Los Alamos National Laboratory is still operating as a major research complex in the fields of national security, space exploration, and renewable energy.

Other must-see destinations in the Santa Fe area include:

- **Bandelier National Monument:** An hour from Santa Fe, the Bandelier National Monument includes more than 33,000 acres of ruggedly beautiful canyon and mesa country. Petroglyphs, cliff dwellings, and standing masonry walls are in abundance throughout the park, paying tribute to the days of a once thriving culture.
- **Palace of the Governors:** Located on the north side of the Santa Fe Plaza and dating back to 1610, the Palace of the Governors is the oldest public building in continuous use in the continental United States and serves as the anchor for the New Mexico History Museum.
- **Loretto Chapel:** Also known as the Chapel of Our Lady of Light, Loretto Chapel is a Gothic Revival-style chapel that features a "miraculous staircase," a helix-shaped, unsupported wooden staircase, built by an unknown carpenter in 1878 without utilizing a central pole or nails. It has 33 steps, reflecting the age of Jesus at the time of his crucifixion.
- **New Mexico State Capitol:** Known as the Roundhouse, New Mexico State Capitol is the only round capitol building in the country. From a bird's-eye view, the 232,000-square-foot structure resembles the Zia sun symbol, which is emblazoned on the New Mexico state flag.
- **Cathedral Basilica of Saint Francis of Assisi:** Constructed in 1886, Cathedral Basilica of Saint Francis of Assisi is perhaps the most historic and recognizable building in Santa Fe. Its Gothic architecture serves in stark contrast to the adobe buildings in the surrounding area.