

Albuquerque, New Mexico, U.S.

International Balloon Fiesta

By Tom Kirvan

HIGH-FLYING

ANNUAL ALBUQUERQUE BALLOON FIESTA COLORFULLY PAINTS THE SKIES EACH FALL

Every fall, a kaleidoscopic flotilla of some 550 hot-air balloons takes to the skies over Albuquerque as one of the great American spectacles and the largest balloon festival in the world – the Albuquerque Balloon Fiesta, scheduled this year for October 3-11 in New Mexico's biggest city.

In 2025 the event coincided with the dates of the Primerus Global Conference in nearby Santa Fe and it ranks as the “most photographed event on earth, and the largest annual international event held in the United States,” according to The Santa Fe Travel Insider.

“You can experience much of the Balloon Fiesta’s thrill early in the morning,” according to the magazine. “The Mass Ascension launches of 500-plus balloons are not to be missed, occurring at approximately 7 a.m. and lasting until about 9 a.m.”

The elongated and collective liftoff can attract upward of 100,000 spectators each day to the launch field where sky-gazers are provided an up-close look at takeoff procedures, while thousands more gather at landing sites all over the city to watch incoming balloons.

For veteran hot-air balloon pilots, the Balloon Fiesta is particularly attractive because of what has become known as the “Albuquerque Box,” a unique, early-morning wind pattern in the Rio Grande Valley that allows balloons to fly in a loop and land near their original launch site.

“When the Albuquerque Box conditions are ideal, a pilot can launch from Balloon Fiesta Park in the morning and ride the lower winds to travel south,” according to organizers of the 54th annual event. “If they activate their burner and ascend higher, they catch the upper winds blowing north, which carry them back toward their starting point. By adjusting their altitude, pilots can effectively fly in a ‘box’ shape and land where they took off.

“This phenomenon – popularized during the [Fiesta] – is most common on early October mornings when clear skies and low humidity create strong radiation cooling. It earned the region the title of ‘Hot-Air Balloon Capital of the World.’”

A NEW MEXICO CONNECTION FOR PRIMERUS MEMBERS

Primerus has a member law firm in New Mexico, **Hinkle Shanor LLP**, with locations in Albuquerque, Roswell, and Santa Fe. They specialize in environmental law, public utility, tort & commercial litigation, medical law, corporate law, and more.

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Each Saturday, Sunday, and Wednesday during the nine-day event begins with Dawn Patrol and a breathtaking Mass Ascension, when all balloons launch from Balloon Fiesta Park in two waves. In addition to Mass Ascension mornings, which begin at 7 o'clock, other days feature launches from the park and special shape rodeos, when a spectacular variety of specially shaped balloons ascend from the grassy field.

Evening events vary throughout the week, according to organizers, but many nights feature a Balloon Glow, when the hundreds of balloons on the field stay grounded and simultaneously light up the night sky.

With a population of nearly 570,000 residents, Albuquerque is a vibrant urban center that balances modernity with deep historical roots. Situated along Route 66, it is just 60 miles from the New Mexico capital of Santa Fe, the oldest capital city in the U.S.

New Mexico, often called the "Land of Enchantment," is a state of some 2.1 million people, making it one of the least densely populated states in the U.S. Despite its relatively small population, New Mexico is one of the most diverse states in geographical terms, featuring vast deserts, towering snow-capped mountains, sprawling plains, and dense forests.

The Sangre de Cristo Mountains, an extension of the Rockies, dominate the northern part of the state, while the southern regions are characterized by arid deserts and striking rock formations. The Rio Grande River runs through the heart of New Mexico, providing a lush contrast to the surrounding landscapes.

For those with wanderlust, the Albuquerque area offers an assortment of day trips, including to nearby Los Alamos, a site that played a pivotal role in the outcome of World War II with the development of the Manhattan Project, and to the beautiful high-altitude city of Taos, home to several world-class ski resorts.