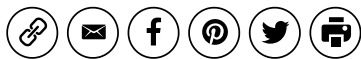


# The 8 Best Things to Do in Santa Fe

*In addition to its well-known art venues and only-found-here cuisine, Santa Fe has several new attractions that make a visit more compelling than ever.*



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A stop at the Museum of Contemporary Native Arts is a must on any Santa Fe art tour. Courtesy of Tourism Santa Fe

Santa Fe's nickname is "The City Different," which may seem a little odd or exaggerated—how different can a city be? But once you're there, it makes sense immediately. It's so unlike any other city in the United States, you may often have to remind yourself you haven't actually left the country. And we mean that in the best way

possible: Different (delicious) cuisine, a variety of languages, and non-Anglo-centric cultures mash together here to create something utterly one of a kind.

Aside from this, Santa Fe is simply a beautiful city. Ancient adobe architecture allows the mountain desert backdrop to shine, while the city's impressive art scene adds flourishes in all the right ways.

And recently, the city has seen some exciting openings. From new hotels like [Bishop's Lodge, an Auberge Resort](#), to a new train experience at the [Sky Railway](#), to a new location of beloved restaurant [Opuntia Café](#), Santa Fe has more to offer visitors than ever. Which is why you should plan your trip to New Mexico's vibrant capital city now. Read on for **eight of the best things to do in Santa Fe**.



Meow Wolf's House of Eternal Return has been wowing visitors since 2016. Photo by Kate Russell

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## 1. See amazing art

Santa Fe's diverse art scene is one of its defining characteristics. You might initially think of its turquoise jewelry, western paintings, and bronze sculptures, all of which it still does very well, but it also has an impressive contemporary art scene that rivals larger cities like New York and Los Angeles (really).

Don't believe us? Make a beeline for [Meow Wolf's House of Eternal Return](#), which is inside an old bowling alley. Art production collective Meow Wolf was started in Santa Fe and they can easily argue they started the immersive art craze when they opened House of Eternal Return in 2016. And with outposts in Denver and Las Vegas, they've certainly made a name for themselves. Intensely interactive, boundary pushing, mind bending, and yes, beautiful, the massive, ever-changing installation is almost impossible not to impress.

For modern Native American art, a stop at the [IAIA Museum of Contemporary Native Arts](#)—the country's only museum for exhibiting and collecting the progressive work of contemporary Native artists—is a must.

[Site Santa Fe](#), which has no permanent collection but instead only hosts rotating exhibits of modern art, is also worth a visit at its architecturally striking Railyard home.

The small but mighty [Georgia O'Keeffe Museum](#) is also a must-see, especially if you can't make a pilgrimage to her house in Abiquiú, about an hour's drive away.

And finally, the gallery scene in Santa Fe is legendary, with more than 250 of them around [downtown](#) (Shiprock, Keep Contemporary, and Good Folk are a few favorites) and along the famous [Canyon Road](#), where you can easily spend an entire afternoon strolling the tree-lined street dotted with classic adobe homes turned galleries.

## 2. Decide which chile you prefer: red, green, or Christmas

New Mexico is one of the few states in the U.S. to truly have a cuisine worthy of its own classification—when someone says New Mexican food, it actually means something. Usually, it has something to do with Mexican influences and New Mexican-grown chiles, namely Hatch chiles, which can be green or red depending on how ripe they are. These form the base for red or green chile sauce, which you'll find on dishes all over the city.

Start with the New Mexico invention of a breakfast burrito filled with eggs, beans, and sometimes fried potatoes, and you'll usually be asked if you want them smothered in chile sauce (answer: yes) and which kind (red, green, or Christmas, which is half and half). If you ask a group of locals where to get the best one, you'll get a flurry of competing answers, but you can't go wrong at the iconic [Tia Sophia's](#) or the more modern [Dolina Bakery & Cafe](#) (which also has a delicious Eastern European menu and stellar baking program).



At lunch or dinner, head over to longtime local downtown favorite [the Shed](#) for a slew of traditional New Mexican dishes, from burritos to enchiladas to tamales to posole, all served with fiery red or green chile. [Café Pasqual's](#) has been serving Mexican and New Mexican fare since 1979 and [Sazon](#) dishes out classic Mexican food with a focus on mole cooked by Mexico City native chef Fernando Olea.

If you need a chile break, head to [Paper Dosa](#), one of the most authentic South Indian restaurants in the country.

Inside the newly opened Spa at the Inn of the Five Graces Photos by David Marlow

### 3. Indulge in restorative wellness

Santa Fe has long attracted people seeking a sanctuary to renew and refresh their mind, body, and spirit, with many believing the city has its own healing powers thanks to the area's high, dry climate, natural hot springs, sun-filled days, and endlessly starry nights.

[Ten Thousand Waves Spa](#) is known for its Japanese-style hot spring soaking tubs, but getting a reservation can be tough if you don't book far ahead. And while many of the city's luxury resorts have equally luxurious

spas, there are a few new wellness offerings in particular to explore this season.

The long-standing [Inn of the Five Graces](#), an eclectic and luxurious Relais & Châteaux family-owned hotel, recently debuted its first-ever spa. Like the rest of the hotel, its design features textiles and furnishings imported by the owners from places like India, Afghanistan, and Morocco, as well as extremely detailed tile mosaics in the bathroom and treatment rooms. If you can manage to stop gawking at the gorgeous design, you'll find the capable hands of a masseuse will soon lull you into an intensely relaxed state. An expansive outdoor area with a pool, hot tub, and outdoor shower is due to launch next spring.

The newly opened [Bishop's Lodge, an Auberge Resort](#), will also be launching a new spa in 2022. In the meantime, it has a temporary spa area in one of the residences where guests can experience locally influenced treatments like an authentic New Mexican sound bath by healing sound facilitator Rick Bastine, who uses crystal meditation bowls, Tibetan singing bowls, and instruments like a didgeridoo and ocean harp to create sounds and vibrations that allow for a relaxing and healing environment.

#### 4. Ride the rails

The last thing [Game of Thrones](#) author and Santa Fe resident George R.R. Martin put his name (and money) behind was Meow Wolf. So when he took it upon himself to join with other locals to reimagine the defunct 18-mile rail spur between Santa Fe and Lamy, the result was no ordinary train ride. Called the [Sky Railway](#), two fantastically painted trains make their way between the two cities while riders enjoy entertainers, music, dinner parties, cocktails, and more along the ride. Launching this holiday season with at least four different experiences, including Pablo's Magical Holiday, Sunset Serenade, Murder on the Lamy Line, and the Exodus Experience, which features a Santa Fe theatrical experience company, Sky Railway is sure to keep riders entertained beyond the scenic mountains they'll see.

#### 5. Explore the Railyard and farmers' market

The Sky Railway's Santa Fe depot is in the [Railyard](#), just a few minutes from downtown. The active train station (it's where the commuter train to/from Albuquerque stops) has become a creative, shopping, and dining hub in recent years, and it's been the home of the [Santa Fe Farmers' Market](#) since the 1990s. Visit vendors selling locally grown produce (chiles included, in season), spices like epazote (Mexican oregano) and ground chiles, prepared foods like raspberry rhubarb pies, chile and cheese flatbread, green and red chile mustard, and brightly colored chile ristras (dried chile strings and wreaths). On Saturdays you can also catch the adjacent [Railyard Artisan Market](#) as well as the [El Museo Mercado](#) vintage and flea market across the tracks.

Newly opened or coming soon to the Railyard are [Wayward Sons Distillery](#), [Bosque Brewing Co.](#) from Albuquerque, [Built Design](#) home store, [Altar Spirits](#), [Nuckolls Brewing Co.](#), and [Chomp Food Hall](#).

And right in the middle of the pandemic last fall, beloved café and plant shop [Opuntia Café](#) moved to a massive location overlooking the Railyard. The light-filled spot is owned by Todd Spitzer and Jeanna Gienke—he looks after the eclectic tea and coffee list, while she’s the resident plant whisperer. The oasis-like space is filled with gorgeous greenery and natural woods, with plenty of quiet nooks. And while breakfast and lunch bring many patrons eager to dig into dishes like huevos rancheros, a ramen bowl, and cornflake-encrusted French toast, the café recently announced it is launching dinner and cocktails three nights a week.

In addition to its drinking chocolates, Kakawa also sells truffles and bars to take home as souvenirs. Courtesy of Kakawa Chocolate House

## 6. Sip chocolate elixirs

As temperatures drop, a rich cup of hot chocolate begins to sound very appealing. But at [Kakawa Chocolate House](#)—which has two locations in Santa Fe—you won’t find overly sweet and milky concoctions. Instead, their drinking chocolates are based on recipes from historic sources using carefully sourced chocolate from Latin America and Africa. And if you ask for a tasting, you’ll get a dose of palatable cacao education that

delves into drinking chocolate's Mayan and Aztec origins, through its European versions, to a recipe by Thomas Jefferson, and culminating in several of their own recipes. The shop also makes a variety of truffles and ice cream.

## 7. Shop small businesses

Santa Fe is filled with independently owned boutiques—you'll be hard pressed to find the Gap anywhere near downtown. Wander around the city's main square, the Plaza, and discover shops selling plenty of vintage and new turquoise jewelry, Southwestern textiles and apparel, western cowboy-style gear, and modern housewares. A few shops worth poking your head into include [Keshi](#), [Overland Sheepskin Co.](#), [Hecho a Mano](#), [Malouf on the Plaza](#), [Collected Works Bookstore](#), [Seret and Sons](#), [Santa Fe Dry Goods](#), [WearAbouts](#), and [Double Take](#), New Mexico's largest consignment shop.

Winter is prime time for experiencing Santa Fe's outdoor offerings. Courtesy of Tourism Santa Fe

## 8. Go for a hike or hit the slopes

Santa Fe is surrounded by the Sangre de Cristo mountain range, high desert, and the Santa Fe National Forest, which make for excellent hiking and skiing locations. For hiking, try the 3.9-mile-long Picacho Peak Trail, which ascends one of the highest hills that rises above the city, or the longer Nambe Lake Trail, which is about a 30-minute drive from downtown. In winter, head to the [Ski Santa Fe](#) resort and get ready for some serious powder.

>> **Next:** [An Off-the-Beaten Path Itinerary for a 3-Day Road Trip in New Mexico](#)

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