



Pool at the Eldorado Hotel and Spa in Santa Fe.

SOUTHWEST FLAVOR

ALBUQUERQUE, SANTA FE AND TAOS OFFER A SENSE OF PLACE

By Carolyn Koenig

"Red or green?"

When dining out in New Mexico, you're apt to be asked the state's quintessential—and official—question. It refers, of course, to chile, a staple in New Mexico's fabled cuisine, from enchiladas to a bowl of.

From a meeting planner's perspective, however, it also indicates the idea of options available and a personal choice.

That is what's so remarkable about Albuquerque, Santa Fe and Taos, a trio of

northern New Mexico cities that share a fascinating cultural history, unique architecture and a plentitude of sunshine. Mountains surround them, brilliant blue skies frame them. They're colored with dramatic sunsets, and splashed with light that has enticed generations of artists to paint them. Arts and culture abound, as does outdoor recreation. But each has its own flavor, its own set of ingredients that make one as different from the other as, well, red and green. Choose one to fit your group's purpose

and style, and you'll give them a sense of place to experience on-site and to take home as an unforgettable memory.

ALBUQUERQUE ▼

Of the three, Albuquerque is the "big city" and commercial hub, with a population of 505,000. Its history dates back more than 300 years, to 1706, and the city continues to embrace its Native American and Hispanic heritages through museums like the Indian

GETTING THERE

- **Albuquerque International Sunport** (cabq.gov/airport) offers 203 daily flights. Taxis, rental cars, charter bus and limo service and two shuttle services into town are available. Two shuttles are available to Santa Fe, about an hour from the airport.

Pueblo Cultural Center and the National Hispanic Cultural Center. These influences are also still found in historic Old Town—anchored by the twin-spired San Felipe de Neri church, the first Spanish-built building—in the old plaza, along narrow, picturesque streets and in the adobe buildings and colonial houses that now harbor numerous galleries, artist studios and shops that speak of a more current history.

Running through the heart of Albuquerque is another mix of eras—Route 66 (Central Avenue), an 18-mile stretch of the historic Chicago-to-L.A. highway that now features hip boutiques, cafes and restaurants as part of the trendy Nob Hill shopping district in addition to funky road-trip kitsch.

In fact, downtown has become decidedly vibrant. Now in year eight of a 10-year, \$350-million-plus redevelopment program, it sizzles with more urban living spaces, restaurants and clubs. “Downtown continues to evolve,” says Larry Atchison, senior director of sales for the **Albuquerque Convention & Visitors Bureau** (itsatrip.org).

So does the art scene, with a plethora of galleries and museums, encompassing everything from contemporary and ethnic art to sculpture,



fine art prints and classic works by international artists. They're fun to browse, but serious

collectors head here as well.

Outdoor recreation possibilities are limitless. The Rio Grande is nearby, offering challenging water sports. Plus, the eastern edge of the city is bordered by the Sandia Mountains, which are only 20–25 minutes from downtown and offer excellent hiking and mountain biking opportunities for groups that want to explore the region and enjoy the area's low-humidity, sunny days (which may be one reason Albuquerque was named America's 3rd Fittest City by *Men's Fitness* magazine). If your attendees have a sense of adventure, there's hot-air ballooning nearly every day of the year. And if you've got golfers, numerous high-quality courses beckon with affordable greens fees.

Speaking of affordability, Albuquerque is ranked by AAA as the second most-affordable city in the U.S. and is a popular destination for meeting professionals who want a big bang for fewer bucks. The hotel inventory tops 16,000 guest rooms and ranges in style and price; plus, many of the properties are undergoing renovation, or have updated and upgraded, in the



Previous page, Folklorico dances associated with Mariachi music, performed at the Mariachi Spectacular held annually in Albuquerque in spring. Above, International Balloon Fiesta in Albuquerque; left, rafting in Santa Fe.

past few years. So it's not surprising that Albuquerque draws associations like the American Association of Bovine Practitioners, corporate groups and educational groups, especially due to its proximity to the University of New Mexico.

"Albuquerque offers outstanding value for meetings," Atchison says. Plus, he says, "We have four very mild seasons and are excellent for meetings any time of year."

MAJOR MEETING VENUES

Hand in hand with the city's reputation for accommodating meetings of all sizes is the **Albuquerque Convention Center** (albuquerquecc.com),

with more than 600,000 sq. ft. of flexible space. Up to 9,000 attendees can be hosted in this newly renovated center, which features 167,562 sq. ft. of exhibit space, a 2,350-seat auditorium, a 31,000-square-foot ballroom and 30 meeting rooms. (Using 500 hotel rooms on peak helps to qualify you for free meeting space at the center, Atchison says.)

Another option is the newly renovated **University of New Mexico Student Union** (unmsub.com), which can accommodate up to 1,000 and encompasses a grand ballroom in addition to 20 meeting rooms. Or, for really large groups, there's **Expo New Mexico** (exponm.com), a 236-acre fairgrounds facility that can accommodate 12,000 people for indoor events and 20,000 for outdoor events.

UNIQUE VENUES AND ATTRACTIONS

Albuquerque is a city of festivals, from the most famous, the **International Balloon Fiesta** (balloonfiesta.com) in October—the largest of its type in the world—to the **Gathering of Nations Native American Pow Wow** (gatheringofnations.com) in April. Celebrating other cultural influences are the **Festival Flamenco Internacional de Albuquerque** (festival.nationalinstituteofflamenco.org) and the **Mariachi Spectacular Showcase** (itsatrip.org).

For a sense of the balloon hullabaloo, there's the **Anderson-Abruzzo Albuquerque International Balloon Museum** (balloonmuseum.com), north of town at Balloon Fiesta Park. The museum—and tribute to the sport—features 9,850 sq. ft. of function space and offers catering for up

to 500 guests indoors and 1,000 outdoors.

For a breathtaking view of the city, head for the **Sandia Peak Tramway** (sandiapeak.com), the world's longest passenger aerial tramway. Hikers can lace up their boots and tackle several challenging trails from here, including one from the base to the summit. The views at sunset are spectacular.

In downtown, the historic **KiMo Theatre** (cabq.gov/kimo) along Route 66 provides a dazzling venue for events with its extravagant Pueblo-Deco style decor. Think awards ceremony or keynote speaker.

Another option is the \$22.5-million **Roy E. Disney Center for Performing Arts** at the National Hispanic Cultural Center (nhccnm.org), which has several theaters and auditoriums. Or consider the **Albuquerque Museum of Art & History** (cabq.gov/museum), where you can buy out the entire facility or one of the individual spaces (the sculpture garden, which can host up to 350, is a popular choice). The museum recently added an 8,000-square-foot gallery plus a large multifunction event space and an outdoor amphitheater.

SANTA FE ▼

An enchanting city—as befits its designation as state capital—Santa Fe grew to a population of 62,203 from a small Spanish military outpost established in 1610. That's the year the Palace of the Governors, and the San Miguel Chapel, were built, although artifacts that date back to a Native American settlement in the 11th century have been discovered (actually, the items

NEWS

ALBUQUERQUE

- **Andaluz**—the former La Posada de Albuquerque Hotel—opens in fall 2008 after a \$30-million renovation. Located downtown, it is within walking distance of the convention center.
- The expanded **Isleta Pueblo Casino and Resort Hotel and Convention Center** opens this month with more than 200 guest rooms and 30,000 sq. ft. of meeting and function space.
- **Hyatt Regency Albuquerque** has recently completed a multimillion-dollar guest room renovation that gives it a more contemporary look and features enhancements like upgraded electronics, new carpeting and new lighting.
- The **Doubletree Hotel**, which is connected to the convention center, has finished a renovation that incorporated its SweetDreams bedding.
- Albuquerque's Uptown neighborhood is also enjoying a spate of renovations, with the completion this fall of a \$20-million renovation of the **Sheraton Uptown** that includes all 17,000 sq. ft. of meeting space and upgrades to its rooms and suites, and guest room renovations at the **Albuquerque Marriott Hotel**.
- Opening shortly is the **Indian Pueblo Cultural Center's** new \$2-million expansion that encompasses a new grand entrance and a new building featuring authentic Pueblo artwork. Its Pueblo Harvest Cafe will have seating for 300, including an expanded private dining area.

SANTA FE

- **La Posada de Santa Fe Resort & Spa, A RockResort** recently completed a \$6.2-million renovation that enhanced all 157 guest rooms, public spaces, the spa and more.
- **Inn and Spa at Loretto** is finishing up a \$7.5-million redesign, which enhanced the exterior facade to restore its authentic Taos pueblo look as well as guest room and meeting space refreshments.
- **Encantado**, the newest Auberge resort, opens this August. The property will feature 65 casitas, a 10,000-square-foot spa and nearly 5,000 sq. ft. of meeting and event space.



Above, bar at Albuquerque's Nativo Lodge; middle, deluxe room at the Inn of the Anasazi, A Rosewood Hotel, Santa Fe; below, New Mexico Museum of Art in Santa Fe. Opposite: KiMo Theatre in Albuquerque.



surfaced during the excavation of the city's new Civic Center). The city is not only the oldest state capital in the U.S., it's also the highest, at 7,000 feet above sea level.

Santa Fe resembles Albuquerque and many Spanish cities with a central, leafy plaza that serves as the heart of downtown. Its architecture ranges from Spanish Territorial or Pueblo style to some more contemporary looks—although many of these newer buildings are stucco-ed over to better reflect the history and sense of place.

"We particularly like Santa Fe because it is an easy flight to Albuquerque, and then a short scenic drive to Santa Fe," says Cozette Langenkamp, manager of meetings and sponsorship development for the State Bar of Texas.

The City Different, as Santa Fe is sometimes called, is renowned for its art—and its performing arts. **Canyon Road** (canyonroadarts.com) encompasses more than 100 galleries, representing all types of visual arts, and **Museum Hill** (museumhill.org), easily reached by public transit, ties together the **Museum of Spanish Colonial Art**, the **Museum of Indian Arts & Culture**, the **Museum of International Folk Art** and the **Wheelwright Museum of the American Indian**. This small but very arts-minded city also has an opera, a symphony and several choral groups.

Artists have flocked here for the spectacular views and light, but visitors also count as attractions the 300 days of sunshine a year and—often a surprise to some—a

DON'T MISS

ALBUQUERQUE

- Historic Old Town
- Anderson-Abruzzo Albuquerque International Balloon Museum
- Indian Pueblo Cultural Center
- National Hispanic Cultural Center
- Nob Hill along Historic Route 66
- Sandia Peak Aerial Tramway

SANTA FE

- The Plaza
- Palace of the Governors
- Museum Hill
- Georgia O'Keeffe Museum
- Canyon Road
- New Mexico Museum of Art

TAOS

- Taos Plaza
- Taos Pueblo



four-season climate that produces snow in winter, to the delight of skiers.

"We particularly like Santa Fe because it is an easy flight to Albuquerque, and then a short scenic drive to Santa Fe," says Cozette Langenkamp, manager of meetings and sponsorship development for the State Bar of Texas. "The mountains are beautiful, the weather is crisp, and there is often snow on the ground

in April—something we don't see much of throughout most of Texas. A real treat."

She especially likes **La Posada de Santa Fe** (laposada.rockresorts.com), where she has held continuing-education seminars for several years. "The setting is perfect, with lovely rooms spread out over six acres." In fact, her group may now outgrow La Posada, as enrollment has sizably increased—for which she also

GROUP DINING

ALBUQUERQUE

The Artichoke Cafe

Blend of French, Italian and Southwest cuisine
artichokecafe.com

El Pinto Authentic Mexican Restaurant

New Mexican cuisine
elpinto.com

Sandiego's Mexican Grill

(Base of Sandia Peak Tram)
Coastal Mexican fare and traditional New Mexican
sandiapeak.com

High Finance Restaurant & Tavern

(Sandia Peak)
Prime rib/steaks
sandiapeak.com

SANTA FE

Geronimo

Global eclectic
geronimorestaurant.com

The Anasazi Restaurant

(Inn of the Anasazi)
Creative Southwestern, Native American
innoftheanasazi.com

The Pink Adobe

Steak, seafood, salads
thepinkadobe.com

TAOS

Joseph's Table

(Hotel La Fonda de Taos)
Santa Fe cuisine, steaks, seafood
josephstable.com

Lambert's of Taos Restaurant and Bar

Contemporary American cuisine
lambertsoftaos.com



Patio at La Posada de Santa Fe.

gives credit to Santa Fe as a destination. "We love Santa Fe," she says.

As a meetings locale, the city has many attractions beyond the climate. "We're an urban oasis in the high desert. We give planners an opportunity to meet in a small, walkable city, with 1,500 hotel rooms within walking distance of the convention center," says W. Keith Toler, executive director of the **Santa Fe Convention & Visitors Bureau** (santafe.org). "That's what people enjoy most. During their free time they can visit shops and 250 galleries and a little over 250 restaurants."

CONFERENCE AND MEETING VENUES

The much-awaited **Santa Fe Center** (santafe.org/Civic_Center) opens in late September, after a \$50-million remodel that significantly expands its size to 72,500 sq. ft. (in comparison to the old 10,000-square-foot Sweeney convention center). The building is LEED-certified with a silver rating and infused with natural light; it also features a rainwater collection system to provide irrigation, recycling in every room and a rooftop garden that aids heat absorption.

Another option opening in September is the **Hilton Santa Fe Resort & Spa at Buffalo Thunder** (hilton.com), 15 miles north of Santa Fe Plaza. The hotel, with 390 rooms and 66,000 sq. ft., is the largest property in the Santa Fe market and beautifully situated on Pueblo Pojoaque. According to Richard A. Ross, director of sales and marketing, groups that have already committed to this new property—which also features a new nine-hole Hale Irwin golf course and a 16,000-square-foot spa—are Farmers Insurance and the National Association of Homebuilders.





Above, The Old House wine cellar at the Eldorado Hotel and Spa; left, spa treatment room at the Hyatt Regency Tamaya. Opposite: Lobby at Sunrise Springs, Santa Fe.

UNIQUE VENUES AND ATTRACTIONS

In a city imbued with art, galleries and museums make wonderful off-site venues for receptions and dinners. The **Gerald Peters Gallery** (gpgallery.com) can accommodate dinners for up to 250; the **Georgia O'Keeffe Museum** (okeeffemuseum.org) has a world-famous collection

of her paintings and can also host receptions for groups up to 200.

The city of Santa Fe offers a GPS geocaching challenge to visitors that allows them to discover historic and cultural sights in downtown. It's powered by **Santa Fe Mountain Adventures** (santafemountainadventures.com), a local travel company that can also get your groups out of the meeting rooms and into the nearby mountains and recreational areas for team building and other activities such as white-water rafting on the Rio Grande, fly-fishing, hiking and mountain biking. Clients of the outfitter include Microsoft, T-Mobile, Target and other top-flight corporations.

TAOS ▼

While Taos and Santa Fe are similar in elevation (7,000 feet as opposed to Albuquerque's 5,300), they're distinctly different entities, primarily due to size and ambience. A "town" more than a city (population 4,700), Taos is close to **Taos Pueblo** (taospueblo.com), the iconic adobe "apartmentlike" structure that is now a National Historic Landmark and a UNESCO World Heritage Site. In continuous use as a residence for more than 1,000 years, its presence contributes greatly to the almost spiritual vibe found here.

Artists have been drawn to this magical location due to its beauty

In Taos, there's a surprisingly vibrant dining and nightlife scene—aided no doubt by the fact that a few Hollywood celebrities have discovered the area.



and light since the late 1890s, and the village today is a mix of New Mexican cultures, from pueblo days to the present. More than 50 galleries are within walking distance of the plaza, and there's a surprisingly vibrant dining and nightlife scene—aided no doubt by the fact that a few Hollywood celebrities have discovered the area.

CONFERENCE AND MEETING SPACE

The hub for meetings is the **Taos Civic Plaza & Convention Center** (taosconvention.com), which offers venues for exhibits and meetings—even concerts. There's a total of 23,655 sq. ft., including the Rio Grande Hall, which can host up to 500 people banquet-style.

ATTRACTIONS AND AMENITIES

A unique attraction is the **Earthship Community** (earthship.org), just west of city limits. These ahead-of-their-time, passive solar homes and the community's focus on sustainable living have provided inspiration for countless visitors, as the homes are constructed of natural and organic materials. There's a visitor center, guided tours and lectures on biotecture (by arrangement).

If you've got skiers, five alpine resorts are within an hour's drive of Taos, plus numerous well-maintained Nordic trails. Outdoor enthusiasts will also enjoy biking (the best way to get around town, by the way), fishing and the PGA-endorsed **Angel Fire Resort**

(angelfireresort.com). You can balloon nearby—as you can nearly anywhere in New Mexico. 🏔️

For more on Albuquerque, Santa Fe and Taos, visit smartmeetings.com

