



WRITING SAMPLE

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Santa Fe: A Remarkable Blend of Cultures

By Gretchen Heber

Santa Fe's storied status as a must-visit destination is well-deserved. At every turn, the town exudes charm, culture and history. There's so much to do, in fact, that choosing a place to start is a lesson in patience!

The core of the appeal of modern Santa Fe is its distinctive blend of heritages. The native people who populated the area for centuries built rich cultural traditions that were expanded upon by Spanish conquistadors, by Mexicans who won their independence from Spain and claimed the territory as their own and by other European settlers who migrated west from other parts of the continent, as the region joined the United States.

"Santa Fe is one of the oldest cities in the United States, providing 400 years of history," said Joanne Hudson, a spokeswoman for Tourism Santa Fe. "We offer visitors a unique regional sense of place, food and culture."

After picking up a rental car at the Albuquerque airport, visitors point their vehicle northeast and enjoy a one-hour drive through the scenic Land of Enchantment on their way to experience the rich traditions innate to Santa Fe.

Adobes Abound

Upon arriving in New Mexico's capital city, one of the first things visitors are struck by is the distinctive architecture. Most of the town's structures are crafted to adhere to the traditional style that represents a blend of techniques utilized by the Pueblo Indians and the Spanish settlers.

The clay-colored, low-slung buildings are made of adobe bricks, which consist of a mixture of sun-dried earth and straw. "It's striking that so many of the buildings use that earthy brown, adobe color that's characteristic of the clay in this region," said Hudson. "You don't see a lot of bright colors here."

For decades, this distinctive Santa Fe architecture has been a code-mandated design attribute, and it marks the town as special the minute it's glimpsed, contributing greatly to the city's over-the-top charm factor.

Historic Plaza

Located in the heart of downtown, the Sante Fe Plaza has been the geographical and cultural center of Santa Fe since the town's birth.

The old-style town square is criss-crossed by brick paths and punctuated by the requisite statues and obelisk. The plaza is a gathering place for locals and tourists alike who come together for community gatherings, concerts and more.

Visitors enjoy walking the perimeter of the Plaza, stopping into any of the many boutiques and shops or selecting wares from the numerous Native American vendors who line up along the north side of the Plaza outside the historic Palace of the Governors building to sell their beautiful jewelry and artwork.

An Artists' Colony with Global Appeal

In fact, it is the impressive concentration of art galleries that draws many visitors to Santa Fe. Drawn by the area's "beautiful scenery and the special light of Northern New Mexico," artists flocked to the Santa Fe around the time of New Mexico's statehood in the early 20th century, said Hudson.

Those artists begat more artists, and the area became known as an artist's haven. Today, three major hubs of galleries attract both casual and serious collectors of a wide range of art styles.

Downtown, around and near the plaza, numerous galleries beckon to tourists looking for a memory of Santa Fe to take home.

Near downtown is the winding, hilly, half-mile stretch of Canyon Road that's lined with galleries showcasing artists from Santa Fe, New Mexico and around the world. More than 100 artists' studios, galleries, jewelers, boutiques and restaurants make an afternoon spent on Canyon Road a most pleasurable one.

A few blocks southwest of the Plaza, The Railyard Arts District is a more recent addition to the Santa Fe arts scene, and hosts a collection of contemporary art galleries.

And visitors won't want miss Santa Fe's glass blowers. Tesuque Glass Works, for example, is a short, splendid drive outside of Santa Fe, where visitors see and interact with gaffers crafting spectacular and colorful vases, bowls and other decorative pieces. Visitors to Tesuque shouldn't miss a leisurely walk around the grounds, where numerous intriguing sculptural and kinetic works are on display.

Sustenance Not to Be Missed

The historical and cultural forces that shaped Santa Fe have had a considerable impact on the region's well-regarded cuisine, as well.

Native American, Spanish and Mexican influences combine with the area's legendary chili-pepper production to produce the distinctive essence of Santa Fe, characterized by flavor-packed sauces and featuring innovative applications of the "three sisters" — corn, beans and squash, the primary crops grown historically grown by Native American tribes.

And of course, New Mexico is famous for its renowned chile sauces. "When you're in Santa Fe, you'll want to have at least one meal where your first decision is red or green chile," said Hudson, referring to the beloved sauce choice that can divide families whose members fall on opposite sides of the red-green debate.

Santa Fe has numerous, category-creating, award-winning restaurants that attract gastronomes from around the world who wish to sample the region's delectable culinary gems.

Book that Flight

Winter-weary New Yorkers might find a welcome meteorological respite in Santa Fe almost year-around. The city gets 300 days of sunshine a year, though it can get chilly in winter.

While the city is just 16 miles from ski resort Ski Santa Fe, and a mere 70 miles from world-class skiing at Taos, Santa Fe itself doesn't get much snowfall, said Hudson. "You're not going to find grey, gloomy days. We have beautiful blue skies throughout the winter."

The average high temperature in the warmest month, July, is 86°F. Visitors to Santa Fe during warm spells can dive into any of the air-conditioned area museums for respite from the heat.

Anytime of the year, Santa Fe beguiles with its charming cultural, historical and artistic vibe that's truly unique to this small capital city of 70,000 residents.

"Santa Fe is a friendly, welcoming town where you can wander quaint, historic neighborhoods with art galleries and restaurants, surrounded by the special culture and creativity that Santa Fe offers," Hudson said.