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Explore Albuquerque like a local. (Photo: Mark Hollingsworth)

Albuquerque

Insider's Guide To Albuquerque, New Mexico

By Davina Van Buren

For decades, Albuquerque played second fiddle to the more artsy Santa Fe as a tourist destination. But in the past five years, the Duke City has come into its own. Thanks to a vibrant nightlife, booming brewery scene, and authentic culinary options, the city has become a gastronomic dream destination. Add that to Albuquerque's deeply-instilled Southwestern culture, and you have a place like no other.

So if you're planning a trip to Albuquerque, here's all you need to know to make the most of your stay.

What to See

Anderson-Abruzzo Albuquerque International Balloon Museum

The Balloon Museum (Photo: Mark Hollingsworth)

Albuquerque is perhaps most famous for its annual International Hot Air Balloon Fiesta. And this bright, colorful museum celebrates that, taking you through the history of the sport. Aside from exhibits that take you through the science and recreational aspects of the sport, the museum also features the Tim Anderson 4-D Theater, an immersive experience that engages audiences in visual, aural, and physical sensations of hot air ballooning.

Historic Old Town

Stroll through Albuquerque's Old Town to get a feel for the past. (Photo: Mark Hollingsworth)

Albuquerque was founded in 1706 by Spanish settlers, and built in traditional Spanish style—a central courtyard surrounded by private homes, a church, government buildings, and shops. It's much the same today. You can shop, eat, take a haunted ghost tour, purchase authentic Native American goods from local vendors or simply stroll through the plaza and let the sights, sounds, and smells delight your senses.

Los Poblanos Historic Inn & Organic Farm

Enjoy the splendid Los Poblanos Historic Inn & Organic Farm. (Photo: Mark Hollingsworth)

A stunning entrance lined by rows of massive cottonwood trees greets visitors to this working organic farm. A small market sells products made with the farm's 25 acres of lavender (Insider's tip: don't miss the lavender marshmallows). The on-site restaurant serves veggies from the garden and honey from the farm's beehives.

Where to Eat

El Pinto

When in Albuquerque you have to visit the “Salsa Kings.” (Photo: Mark Hollingsworth)

Twin brothers Jim and John Thomas are known as the “salsa kings” (their products are even sold in Whole Foods stores) and have served everyone from Snoop Dogg to Katy Perry at their legendary restaurant, which was started by their parents in 1962. You can’t visit Albuquerque without eating here.

Golden Crown Panaderia

Try the state cookie at this delightful bakery. (Photo: Mark Hollingsworth)

At this father-and-son-owned bakery, pizzas, empanadas, and sandwiches are all made by hand and incorporate items, such as herbs, grown literally steps away using hydroponic gardening techniques. This is also the place to try New Mexico's state cookie, the biscochito. The dainty butter cookies are typically flavored with cinnamon and anise, but Golden Crown offers blue corn, chocolate and cappuccino varieties as well.

What to Do

Take a Balloon Ride

As we've said, this is what Albuquerque is famous for. Visit during the annual International Balloon Fiesta—the largest gathering of hot

air balloons in the world—to see hundreds of balloons in every imaginable design. Or, better yet, take flight yourself. Rainbow Ryders—which is the official hot air balloon ride operator of the Fiesta—offers daily, hour-long balloon flights.

Soar Above a Mountain Ridge

Take a spin on the Sandia Peak Tramway, the longest aerial tram in the United States spanning 2.7 miles. Bring a jacket—the temperature at the top is significantly more chilly than the takeoff spot, and weather conditions can change quickly.

Break Bad

Fans of the hit TV show *Breaking Bad* fans will find several fun activities like a show-themed trolley tour and sampling “blue ice” at The Candy Lady.

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