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Albuquerque's Eastside is paradise for nature lovers. (Photo: Mark Hollingsworth)

Albuquerque

Explore Albuquerque's Vibrant Neighborhoods

By Davina Van Buren

Albuquerque is among the most diverse cities in the United States, and its cultural, dining and nightlife options wholeheartedly reflect this fact. Nestled within the town's borders are close to 20 unique neighborhoods, each offering a slightly different vibe and range of activities. You'd need months (or years) to explore them all, but there are some standouts. So take a spin through these communities for a good overview of the Duke City's offerings.

Barelas/South Valley

Get a dose of history, good eats and wildlife in Barelas. (Photo: Mark Hollingsworth)

Barelas is one of Albuquerque's oldest neighborhoods, and maintains the closest ties to the city's Spanish roots (the city is named for Duke Francisco of Albuquerque, Spain). You'll see—and hear—a strong Latino presence here. You'll also find some of the city's most authentic Mexican restaurants, like the colossal tamale plates, hand-rolled enchiladas, and stuffed sopapillas at El Modelo. There's usually a line out the door and it's takeout only, but you might get lucky and snag one of the coveted picnic tables on the side of the building.

Learn more about the area's fascinating Hispanic culture. (Photo: Mark Hollingsworth)

The Natural Hispanic Cultural Center is the crown crown jewel of Barelas. Boasting an art museum, several performance venues, a genealogy center, two restaurants, and more, visitors can immerse themselves in Hispanic art and culture. Check the events schedule for everything from bilingual preschool story times to traditional and

contemporary musical, dance, and theater performances.

Also in the South Valley is the ABQ BioPark, which has a zoo, botanic gardens and an aquarium. Kids will love the BUGarium and dragonfly sanctuary pond, while zen types will find nirvana amongst the waterfall, pagoda sculptures, lantern and koi pond in the Sasebo Japanese Garden.

Nob Hill

Perhaps the city's quirkiest neighborhood is Nob Hill. (Photo: Mark Hollingsworth)

Nob Hill is one of Albuquerque's most happening neighborhoods. Located just east of the University of New Mexico along Central Avenue (also known as Route 66), the street is still lined with vintage neon signs and nods to its historic status, even though the

neighborhood celebrated its 100th anniversary in 2016. You'll find hipsters, college kids and young professionals inside its eclectic shops and cafes.

Nob Hill is also home to an abundance of art galleries and studios. Mariposa Gallery is one of the oldest and most acclaimed contemporary art galleries in Albuquerque—the perfect place to browse for paintings, sculptures or ceramic. And you may not realize just how much you love turquoise jewelry until you see the exquisite selection of handmade pieces at Gertrude Zachary. When you've worked up an appetite shopping, pop a squat at local haunt Zinc Wine Bar & Bistro's Cellar Bar. The downstairs space is a bit more casual than the dining room and has live music three nights a week. Nosh on small plates like steamed mussels in chorizo broth and turkey ryeben spring rolls while you rock the night away.

Eastside

Nature lovers flock to Eastside because of its easy access to outdoor and recreational activities. It's just 20 minutes from downtown Albuquerque, but the neighborhood's views of the Sandia Mountains, plus thousands of acres of hiking and mountain biking trails, make it an easy respite from the hustle and bustle of the city. Not in the mood for working up a sweat? Hop on the Sandia Peak Aerial Tram—the longest aerial tram in the United States—for dramatic views of deep canyons and jagged mountain peaks without breaking a sweat. The observation deck at 10,378 feet has panoramic views of the Rio Grande Valley (the eponymous

river flows north to south through Albuquerque). Bring a jacket, as the altitude makes the weather significantly chillier—and windier—at the top.

Also in the area: the [National Museum of Nuclear Science & History](#), which history and military buffs will find a fascinating (albeit slightly somber) visit. For something more active and upbeat, hit the [Hinkle Family Fun Center](#), where the whole gang can goof off playing bumper cars, laser tag, paintball, miniature golf and more.

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