

# Natives, explorers, settlers, and now tourists

► **ALBUQUERQUE**  
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surprisingly delightful.

New Mexico is often forgotten territory for traveling Americans. The few who do visit this corner of the country usually cruise through Albuquerque on their way to Taos and Santa Fe, the state's best-known tourist spots. But in recent years, this historic, culturally diverse capital of 800,000, the state's largest city, has come into its own with a compelling contemporary art scene, inventive eateries, and new hotels. What makes it most appealing, however, is its eclectic mix of rich history and youthful new beginnings.

Albuquerque has attracted newcomers for centuries, from early Pueblo Indians to explorers in the 1500s and the Spanish colonists who founded the city in 1706. Its allure included dependably clear and sunny weather and a striking landscape. The craggy Sandia Mountains rise to the east and turn a warm watermelon hue every evening; the Rio Grande cuts straight through town, creating a shady migratory stopover that attracts 300 species of birds; and open desert stretches to the western horizon.

"New Mexico is the fifth largest state with 2 million people," says Matt Jones, a friend and artist who has lived here. "There's a lot of room to expand your mind and there aren't many people up in your business. Albuquerque is probably the least pretentious place I've ever been." The live-and-let-live culture and inexpensive living attract students, artists, young professionals, and retirees.

One way to explore the city is to travel down Central Avenue, the old Route 66, which slices from east to west. I started in Old Town, where the 1793 church of San Felipe de Neri presides over an old plaza, surrounded by adobe buildings dating to the city's original settlement. Kitschy souvenir shops have moved into many of them, like The Chile Casa, which sells dozens of hot sauces with names like Butt Pucker XX and Colon Blow. Nearby, Native Americans sell handmade jewelry in the shade of centuries-old porticos, and oddball attractions such as the Rattlesnake Museum, with more than a dozen live rattlers, entice passing tourists.

To the east, downtown is home to old theaters, new art galleries, and some of Albuquerque's few tall buildings, first built during the city's railroad heyday. On a Friday night, low riders cruised back and forth as scantily clad partiers vied to get into venues such as Burt's Tiki Lounge.

A handful of yoga studios and gourmet eateries have sprouted among gritty diners and muffler repair shops in EDO, an up-and-coming neighborhood east of downtown. The area's new Hotel Parq Central, where I stayed, is a 1920s hospital turned boutique hotel with a rooftop bar that was bursting with well-heeled locals on a Friday night in January.

A few blocks away, the hour-long wait at Farina, a polished new Italian pizzeria with exposed brick walls, was worth it. I dined on a perfectly crisp white pizza with truffle oil and artichokes, dunked my crusts into Gorgonzola-crème fraîche dipping sauce, and washed it all down with a locally brewed Marble pilsner.

The mix of eateries offers a window into the diverse character of the city. The next morning, a mile east on Central Avenue, I found the Frontier Restaurant, an institution for decades. Its pioneer-themed facade looks like it could be made of Lincoln logs, and if a couple I had met in Farina hadn't recommended it, I never would have tried it.

Inside, workers in paper hats manned a food assembly line, whipping up meals like huevos rancheros with homemade tortillas in mere minutes. The chili was good, but the people-watching was even better: Women in suits, college students, hipsters, even street people downed steaming plates of breakfast food, while old men idly drank coffee and talked politics.

Also on Central Avenue, I found my favorite neighborhood: Nob Hill, a throwback to 1950s Americana with a trove of vintage Route 66 signs. In recent years, eclectic shops have moved into old storefronts and repurposed the neon signs, giving the area a youthful buzz. In a matter of blocks, there's a tattoo parlor, a folk-art gallery displaying the work of local artists, a vintage costume shop, a jeweler selling local silversmiths' wares, and a new frozen yogurt cafe, a sure sign a neighborhood has arrived.

As evening fell over the Sandias, I perused the local paintings, ceramics, and sculptures in the Mariposa Gallery, manned by hip clerks with weird bangs and funky eyeglasses. When I asked one employee who had long hair, giant earrings, and tattoos what brought him here, he said he had left Chicago to get away from the attitude of big cities. "If you come here looking for a paycheck, you'll be disappointed," he said. "If you come here looking for something new, this place can take you on an amazing journey."

Before leaving Albuquerque, I drove through a sea of earth-ored

homes and adobe strip malls to the western outskirts. From a nondescript trailhead behind a gas station, I walked out into the scrub desert. Just as I started to doubt the merits of traipsing around in the desert at high noon, I spotted the reason Petroglyph National Monument was established here. Right in front of me, ancient white carvings dotted the black boulders.

More than 20,000 figures, symbols, and handprints freckle this 17-mile volcanic escarpment, reminders of those who roamed here up to 700 years ago. The images hold great spiritual significance for local Native Americans, though no one is certain of their precise meanings. Only in Albuquerque, I thought, would a place of such power and mystery hide in plain view.

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PHOTOS BY KATE SIBER FOR THE BOSTON GLOBE

A sample of the revival of Albuquerque's east downtown, or EDO, is Farina Pizzeria & Wine Bar.

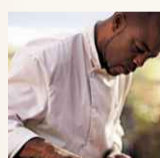
*"It tastes like you put some love in it."*

Collin Stone - Nova Scotian chef



Halifax Seaport Farmers' Market

## Collin's Nova Scotia



As a chef, I have an incredible relationship with our farmers. They grow a wide variety of world-class ingredients and deliver them to us fresh, twice a week. Things you wouldn't expect, like special varieties of squash, beans, blueberries and turnips from the Annapolis Valley. Plus, we use Nova Scotian free-range chicken, pork and beef. And when seafood arrives from Yarmouth and the Northumberland Strait, I know it was caught that morning. That means the freshest, best tasting ingredients make it to your plate every time. Every customer gets something special to remember.



## Collin's wine list

Nova Scotia's cuisine is about more than eating great food. It's about an incredible experience. Like what you'll find at our award-winning wineries. **Blomidon Estate Winery:** Try their L'Acadie Blanc and Baco Noir. **Gaspereau Vineyards:** Their wines are as beautiful as the view overlooking the gorgeous Gaspereau Valley. **Grand-Pré Wines:** After you sample their wines, be sure to check out the cobblestone courtyards, gardens and art gallery. **Just Vineyards:** You'll find this family-owned vineyard on the picturesque Northumberland Strait.

## Culinary must-do list

- Halifax Seaport Farmers' Market for local produce
- Glenora Inn & Distillery in Mabou for single-malt whisky tasting and dinner
- Smoked Atlantic Salmon from J. Willie Krauch & Sons, Tangier
- Deep sea fishing and lobster lunch, Lunenburg

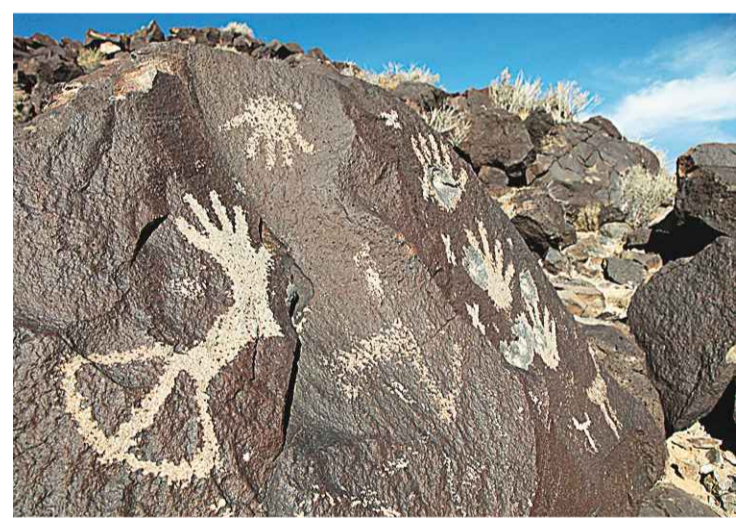
So when are you coming?

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Near the city outskirts, Petroglyph National Monument protects thousands of petroglyphs left hundreds of years ago.

## If you go . . .

### What to do

#### Albuquerque Museum of Art & History

2000 Mountain Road NW  
505-243-7255

[cabq.gov/museum](http://cabq.gov/museum)

Exhibits on New Mexican history, culture, and art, \$4.

#### Petroglyph National Monument

Visitors center at end of Western Trail  
505-899-0205; [nps.gov/petr](http://nps.gov/petr)  
Park has more than 20,000 petroglyphs, reachable by short trails.

#### Sandia Peak Ski & Tramway

Tramway Road

505-856-7325

[www.sandiapeak.com](http://www.sandiapeak.com)

Ascends over 10,000 feet with views of the city and the desert. \$20.

### Where to stay

#### Hotel Andaluz

125 Second St. NW

877-987-9090

[www.hotelandaluz.com](http://www.hotelandaluz.com)

Built by Conrad Hilton in the 1930s, this 107-room hotel was recently renovated with Mediterranean-inspired decor. Rooms \$139-\$299.

#### Hotel Parq Central

806 Central Ave. SE

888-796-7277

[hotelparqcentral.com](http://hotelparqcentral.com)

This chic boutique hotel with 74 rooms and a roof-top bar opened last year. Rooms \$130-\$350, including breakfast.

### Where to eat

#### Church Street Cafe

2111 Church St. NW

505-247-8522

[www.churchstreetcafe.com](http://www.churchstreetcafe.com)

An adobe cafe in Old Town with classic New Mexican food and plenty of green chile, \$7-\$15.

#### Farina Pizzeria & Wine Bar

510 Central Ave. SE

505-243-0130

[www.farinapizzeria.com](http://www.farinapizzeria.com)

Inventive thin-crust pizzas, local beers, Italian wines, \$9-\$15.