



Exploring New Mexico

Description

lâ??ve had the chance to explore several areas of New Mexico which lâ??ll detail in this page. New Mexico is a state full of historic sites dating back many hundreds of years, as well as natural wonders encompassing mountain and desert regions. This page currently focuses on northern New Mexico, but in the coming years lâ??ll have a chance to travel further south and will continue adding to this page or create additional pages to cover everything we discover.

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Santa Fe

Santa Fe is probably the most unique and beautiful architecturally of all the state capitals, as well as being the oldest and highest in elevation. The combination of Native American and Spanish history here makes it a fun and relaxing place to enjoy. I've been to Santa Fe several times with my family and it never disappoints.

Loretto Chapel







Loretto Chapel is one of the most famous sites in Santa Fe, particularly because of the "Miraculous Staircase". The chapel dates back to the 1870s, and the staircase to the choir loft was built some time in the late 1870s or early 1880s.

The staircase contains no external supports and even the type of wood used in its construction is a matter of debate, since the wood isn't found in the area of New Mexico. I have read that the staircase's structural "spring" shape is the key to its integrity.

Mission San Miguel



Mission San Miguel dates back to the founding of the city in the early 1600s. The current structure is many hundreds of years old but it is not the "original" mission structure. I didn't have a chance

to go inside the mission church, unfortunately on my visit.

Saint Francis Cathedral







Unlike the mission and Loretto Chapel which are primarily museums, Saint Francis Cathedral is still an active church. but one that was built between the 1860s and 1880s and is replete with impressive,

historic artwork. In the courtyard are a series of statues depicting the scenes of the Signs of the Cross.

Capitol Building



While I have not been inside the capitol building, the structure is a unique, round edifice that fits in perfectly in Santa Fe's mixture of Native American and Spanish architecture. I'm not sure if the structure is based on the *kiva* (which I'll discuss later), but that does come to mind.

Camel Rock

Your life will not be complete without a stop at Camel Rock. It's right off the highway between Santa Fe and Albuquerque so you have no excuses. I stopped here on my own and took my family here as well. One big bucket list item checked off.



Hotels

Hotel Santa Fe: 5 Stars

We booked this hotel at the last minute when we had to quickly change our plans to arrive home ahead of a snowstorm. We were pretty impressed by this beautiful hotel and when we return to Santa Fe I believe we will try to stay here. The hotel is an attractive adobe structure with art throughout.

Restaurants

Cowgirl BBQ: 4 Stars





This was a fun place with good food ranging from BBQ to great New Mexico green chili dishes. I went for the green chili of course.

Taos

Taos is a beautiful town in northern New Mexico and the home of Taos Pueblo and the Taos ski resort.

Taos Pueblo





Taos Pueblo is reputed to be the oldest continuously inhabited structure in the world. The adobe pueblo has been reconstructed and added onto many times so the structure you see is not necessarily 800 years old, but the site dates back that far.

This is a very interesting place to visit although be careful to respect the living space of the Pueblo Indians and stay only in the designated areas (if you accidentally walk too far toward the homes they'll let you know).

There are gift shops here as well. If you like Native American art, Taos has a good variety. Other places with NA shops include Santa Fe, and well, almost all of New Mexico.

Bandelier National Monument

Bandelier is one of the country's oldest national monuments and is comprised of numerous dwellings that were built by the Pueblo Indians. The exact age of the ruins vary in age from around 900-400 years old. Some have been partially reconstructed and are accessible by ladders,









The monument isn't huge but it does have a lot to see between the cliffside ruins, the trails and the visitor center. We spent a couple hours here and the kids enjoyed exploring the site.

Kasha-Katuwe Tent Rocks National Monument

Tent Rocks is just south of Bandelier as the bird flies (about 10 miles) but is about 70 miles by road. The rock formations were formed from the same type of volcanic rock as that which the Puebloans carved to make the cliffside edifices of Bandelier.







The conical rock formations are fascinating to behold as they are nearly perfect in shape (as far as natural processes go). The tent rocks are the result of wind and erosion over time on the soft volcanic pumice.

There is a short 1 mile loop trail that provides views of the majority of the tent rocks and a longer slot canyon trail that travels deeper into the monument.

Valles Caldera National Monument



Valles Caldera is one of the newest national monuments and protects an area of wilderness directly above an extinct supervolcano. There was no visitor center yet at our time of visitation in 2017, but plans were in place to build one and to develop trails and access into the monument.

Manhattan Project Historic Site, Los Alamos

Next time I'm in Los Alamos (you will drive through it several times while traveling to Bandelier NM, etc, we'll make a point of coming to this place of 20th century history.

I have always considered the development of the atomic bomb (and atomic fission for energy) and the moon landing to be the two greatest achievements in not only American history but world history, These two events required the intellect and ingenuity of many, many of the world's greatest minds all working around the clock and, in the case of the Manhattan project, in secret.

New Mexico Highway 4 and the Soda Dam

For a scenic route between Albuquerque and Los Alamos, take New Mexico State Highway 4 through the Jemez River canyon and past the Soda Dam.







The Soda Dam is a travertine formation on the Jemez Springs. Hot springs can be found here (we didn't have time to seek them out).

Albuquerque

Albuquerque is the largest city in New Mexico and the home to many museums and outdoor sites as well.

Sandia Mountains

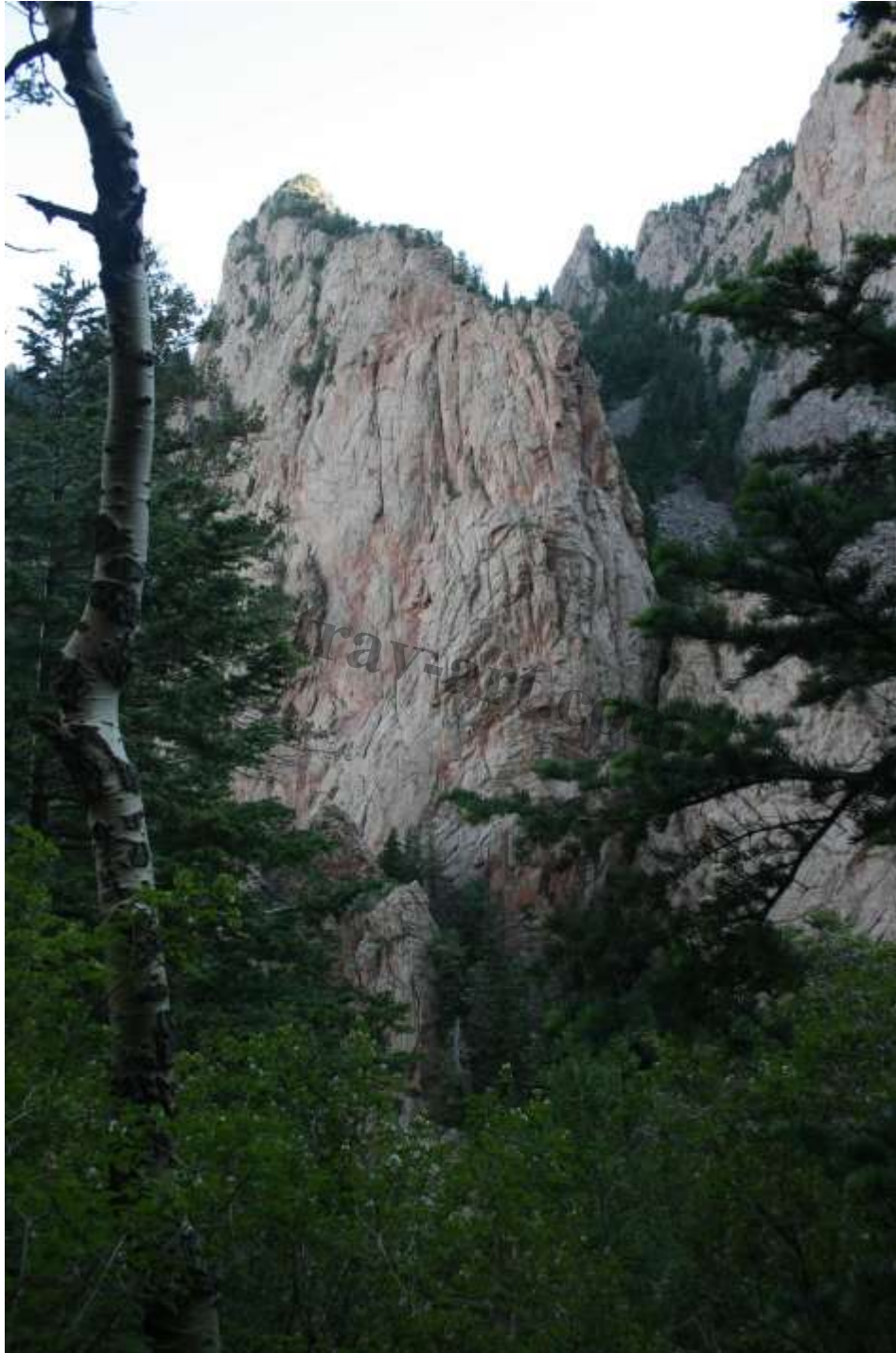
The Sandia Mountains loom over the city of Albuquerque and provide an easy outdoor destination for visitors to the city. At the top of Sandia crest are trails, cafes, and a visitor center. You can either hike here, take the tram, or both.

La Luz Trail

To hike to the top of the Sandia mountains you can take the La Luz trail which begins on the outskirts of Albuquerque at the base of the Sandias.



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It's about 7 miles to the summit. I hiked it in 2016 with my older brother and it took a couple hours. We decided to take the tram back down, but while this might SEEM to be a faster option, it actually requires hiking 2 miles across the summit to the tram station, and then another 2 miles traversing the hot base area back to the parking area.

I ended up hitching a ride back to the parking lot after we straggled back in the 100F+ heat at the base after spending hours on the trail. I would recommend just hiking back down the same trail (which is partially shaded by trees and the mountains).

Museum of Nuclear Science and History

For a really interesting and educational museum visit try going to the nuclear museum.







The museum walks you through all aspects of radioactivity, harnessing nuclear power, nuclear weapons and more. Outside are a number of aircraft, missiles, and artillery from past decades of the Cold War.

Petroglyph National Monument

Right outside Albuquerque on the west side is Petroglyph National Monument. Youâ??ll see two conical peaks of extinct volcanoes here and the trails pass alongside these small mountains.



I hiked it with my brother in the snow as you can see from the photos. We weren't able to see the petroglyphs due to the conditions. I'll have to come back here.

Albuquerque Zoo

Our family of animal lovers enjoy trips to the zoo so we paid a visit to the Albuquerque Zoo. While this is not the biggest zoo and doesn't have quite the unique exhibits of more famous zoos it was obvious

the staff really care about the animals.

We went at Easter time and the staff gave the animals Easter treats.





Hotel

Isleta Hotel and Casino: 4 Stars



Isleta Hotel and Casino is south of Albuquerque. It's a nice hotel with a unique pool that enters a Native American conical structure. While it is a casino this is a pretty reserved and conservative place so don't expect Las Vegas or even the resorts of Phoenix, which tend to be more geared to pleasure seekers.

Honestly, considering the location far from many other areas of Albuquerque, Santa Fe, etc I'm not sure we'd choose this hotel again. But it is nice and comfortable.

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