Christmas in Santa Fe

This charming Southwestern town is a dreamy holiday getaway.

Photography by Gabriella Marks

Anyone who lives in Santa Fe, NM, will tell you that it's a magical place, and at no time is that more true than around Christmas. Farolitos (paper-bag lanterns) line the rooftops of nearly every building, casting a soft glow over the town, and almost everyone with a fireplace burn pinon wood, filling the air with a spicy, woodsy scent. The city has deep Native American, Mexican and Spanish roots, and during the holidays you can bet that whatever food you taste—tamales smothered in green chile sauce, cinnamon-dusted biscochitos (traditional Christmas cookies)—will be memorable. Here's where to eat and what to do on a Santa Fe holiday.
Doors all over town are dressed for the holidays with wreaths, ribbons and natras (hanging arrangements of dried chiles).
MUSEUM HILL
This spot on Camino Lejos is named for its concentration of public art spaces, including the Museum of Indian Arts & Culture, the Museum of International Folk Art and the Santa Fe Botanical Garden. Many venues celebrate the holidays with free workshops, open houses and parties. At the botanical garden make sure to stop by Glow, a nightly light show. museumhill.net; santafebotanicalgarden.org

SANTA FE FARMERS’ MARKET
Local growers set up stalls at the farmers’ market every Saturday throughout the winter, but between Thanksgiving and Christmas, vendors also sell homemade items, including yarn, wreaths, soap and baked goods. santafefarmersmarket.com

SANTA FE SCHOOL OF COOKING
New Mexico is the land of green chilies, and you’ll learn all about them at this culinary school. Look for special holiday classes starting in November that cover tamales, posole, chili sauce and other Christmas dinner essentials. santafeschoolofcooking.com
Las Posadas
The whole town turns out for this holiday event, held on the second Sunday of December, to watch actors playing Joseph and Mary search for a place where Mary can give birth. Join the throngs for a candlelit procession around the Plaza, then catch the grand finale at the Palace of the Governors, where musicians play Christmas carols and everyone gets a cup of hot cocoa.

Plaza Shopping
The area around the Plaza in Santa Fe’s downtown is home to dozens of first-rate boutiques. Topping the list is Shiprock, a loft-like gallery that sells blankets, rugs, jewelry and pottery from the Navajo and other Southwestern Native American tribes. Across the street is the Palace of the Governors, where American Indian artists from local pueblos sell authentic jewelry, pottery and artwork for unbelievably fair prices. shiprocksantafe.com, nmhistorymuseum.org

Meow Wolf: House of Eternal Return
Part art installation and part fun house, the House of Eternal Return is a Victorian mansion with a fictional backstory. The family who lived there disappeared after conducting an experiment that opened the house to other dimensions. Kids will go nuts for the zany rooms and secret passages, and adults can try to figure out just what happened. meowwolf.com
THE TEAHOUSE
This gift shop is home to more than 80 varieties of tea. Christmas Eve the street is lined with candle-lit hedges, and a live band plays carols. Before joining the crowds on the Paseo del Pueblo, warm up with a specialty tea at the cozy café on the trail. Also on the menu: soups, salads, and hearty comfort food. teahouseatteclo.com

C. Q. HIGGINS
This jewel box of a bakery shop is right off the Plaza and serves up a sweet and savory Southwest treat, such as chocolate dessert, mexican chocolate, and dishes made in the cafe. During the holidays, we enjoy the frosted bread, peppermint-flavored chocolate, and festive drinks, like eggnog and latte. cgchiggins.com

TIA SOPHIA'S
This no-frills spot has been a Santa Fe fixture since 1975, serving heaping plates of New Mexican fare for breakfast and brunch. With the addition of a new menu, each dish is a work of art, the look and taste of the food is both mouthwatering and satisfying. In addition, all items are made with the freshest, highest-quality ingredients. The chefs and staff are passionate about the food they serve, and the atmosphere is warm and inviting. via sophiastea.com

DR. FIELD GOODS KITCHEN
Three cheers about our visit here! The servers were laughing and happy. The food was totally delicious. The chef makes delicious food and he is a real chef. The ingredients are all fresh, from local farmers, and the meat comes from the restaurant's butcher shop. The kitchen is clean and the staff is friendly. Don't miss the Pizza de Gallo, which is fired in a wood-burning oven built by the chef. drfieldgoods.com

ELGISA
The food at Elgisa looks like a work of art, which makes sense considering chef John Rivera Sedlar's great menu. The restaurant offers a five-course degustation menu featuring ingredients that are sourced like lamb and watercress. Dehru a high-end take on tacos, stuffed with crispy beef and other unexpected fillings. elgisa.com

SANTACAFE
This Santa Fe restaurant is a hit with the locals and visitors alike. The menu offers a variety of dishes, including Southwestern and Asian. Come for Sunday brunch—the most popular dish is the Southwest Benedict. For dinner, the menu features classic Southwestern and Asian dishes. The atmosphere is cozy and inviting. Santacafe.com
Toast the Holidays!

Here's where to go for a festive cocktail.

SECRET LOUNGE
Santa Fe was the first American city to import tequila from Mexico, and the town takes its margaritas seriously. At this secret bar in Hacienda de los Santos, the drink is made with a smoked sage leaf. haciendadelossantos.com

GRUET WINERY
This well-known sparkling wine producer opened a tasting room in Santa Fe last year. Pull up a seat at the marble-topped bar for a flight from vintages for $10, or try a bubbly cocktail. gruetwinery.com

SANTA FE SPIRITS TASTING ROOM
You'll be full of holiday spirit after a trip to this bar, an outpost of New Mexico's largest distillery. Get a pre-dinner cocktail made with the signature white whiskey, or try the Apachito, a likker made from pine nuts and ponderosa pine sap. santafespirits.com

LA FONDA ON THE PLAZA
The most centrally located of Santa Fe's hotels (it's right on the Plaza downtown), La Fonda pays homage to the area's artists by featuring local artwork and hand-painted headboards in every room. After checking in, explore the lobby home to a lively bar and restaurant and more than a dozen small boutiques selling Southwestern crafts, home goods, clothing and jewelry. From $230 per night. lafondasantafe.com

LA POSADA DE SANTA FE
La Posada is a historic inn in the center of Santa Fe. Spread over more than 6 acres downtown, there are 80 adobe casitas, each with two or three guest rooms, and most have a shared patio or deck overlooking the gardens and terraced walkways. The main house was built in the 1930s by a wealthy merchant; if you're brave, stay in suite 100, which is supposedly haunted by the benevolent ghost of his wife. From $225 per night. laposadade santafe.com

ROSEWOOD INN OF THE ANASAZI
This luxurious boutique hotel feels especially festive during the holidays. The entrance is lined with twinkling lights, the lobby is home to a giant Christmas tree and local musicians play Christmas music in the lounge on Saturdays. Do yourself a favor and book a table here for a fancy Christmas dinner—you'll be served decadent versions of grinch, grilled shrimp and gingerbread. From $275 per night. rosewoodhotels.com