

# Emerging HORIZONS

Accessible Travel News

Winter 2009 Vol. 12 No. 1

Albuquerque: A Cultural Gem in Northern New Mexico

Big Bear Lake Boasts Year-Round Accessible Fun

Post-Cruise Fun in Jacksonville

Winter is Prime Time in Lake Havasu City



# Albuquerque: A Cultural Gem in Northern New Mexico

Andy B. Harrington

San Felipe de Neri in Old Town Albuquerque

Photos by Charles Pannell

**A**lbuquerque is one of those undiscovered cultural gems; a diamond in the rough so to speak. Frequently overshadowed by neighboring Santa Fe, this historic city is easily overlooked and often only treated as a pit stop along the way to somewhere else. Even I've passed through Albuquerque before — seven times in the past few years to be exact. Truth be told, it was only after a friend relocated to Albuquerque and subsequently raved about the cultural attractions, that I began to give the city more serious consideration.

So on my next trip, I did more than pass through. I stayed and explored the museums, galleries and historic attractions in the largest city in The Land of Enchantment. And I loved every minute of it. My hotel was just ten minutes from the airport, the weather was great, and prices were very affordable. And as far as access goes, even though not everything was 100% wheelchair-accessible, the locals did their best to make even the most historic attractions at least doable for many folks. And that kind of a can-do attitude gets tops marks in my book!

## Old Town

As a focal point of community life since 1706, Old Town is the best place to begin your Albuquerque visit. Even though it contains several historic buildings, the sidewalks are wide and level with curb-cuts at every corner. Street parking is limited, however there are plenty of accessible spaces in the

large parking lots at the south end of town. The whole area is filled with quaint shops and restaurants, most of which feature accessible entrances. It's a great place to immerse yourself in Southwestern culture.

Old Town is organized in the traditional Spanish way, with homes and businesses built around a centrally located church and plaza. San Felipe de Neri church was the first building erected, and it's located right across the street from Old Town Plaza. Take some time to enjoy both. Old Town features over 150 shops and galleries, housed in flat roofed adobe structures that boast the traditional pueblo-Spanish style architecture; and that in itself gives the area some real character.

If you'd like to do a little shopping, then stroll by the outdoor vendors on San Felipe Avenue, just across the street from the plaza. Here you'll find artists and craftsmen selling their wares — mostly jewelry and pottery. The quality is excellent, and the prices are very reasonable. It's definitely the place to go if you're in the market for turquoise jewelry.

Finally, if you'd like a walking tour of Old Town, then sign up for the History, Legends and Lore tour at Tours of Old Town (505-246-8687, [www.toursofoldtown.com](http://www.toursofoldtown.com)). These 75-minute tours begin at the ticket office, near the Visitor Information Center on Romero Street. They're held rain or shine, (except Thursdays), from 10 A.M. to 4 P.M.

This leisurely one-mile walk is an excellent option for wheelers and slow walkers, with a level route and several opportunities to sit and rest along the way. Additionally, the guides tailor the tours to the participants' pace. It's a great way to learn about the history of Albuquerque's first neighborhood, and at just \$10 per tour (\$9 for folks over 55), it won't break the bank either.

## Museum Hopping

With two must-see cultural attractions at the east end of town, you can easily spend several days exploring Old Town. The Albuquerque Museum of Art & History and the New Mexico Museum of Natural History are located right across the street from one another; so you can enjoy one museum in the morning, take a lunch break in Old Town, and then visit the other museum in the afternoon. It makes for a perfect museum hopping day.

The Albuquerque Museum of Art & History (505-243-7255, [www.cabq.gov/museum](http://www.cabq.gov/museum)) features art and artifacts that chronicle over 400 years of Southwestern history; plus it also boasts an impressive sculpture garden with more than 50 works of art. Access features include plenty of accessible parking, level access to the building and barrier-free access throughout the galleries and sculpture garden.

Don't miss *Jamestown, Quebec and Santa Fe: Three North American Beginnings*; a special exhibit which focuses on the story of European settlement in the new world. It runs through March 29, 2009. And for a real bargain, plan your visit for the first Wednesday of the month before 1 P.M., when there's no admission charge.

Across the street, the New Mexico Museum of Natural

History (505-841-2800, [www.nmnaturalhistory.org](http://www.nmnaturalhistory.org)) also offers excellent access, with accessible parking and barrier-free access throughout the building. This massive museum boasts eight permanent exhibit halls, a theater and a planetarium. Don't miss the exhibit about the personal computer revolution, which got its start in Albuquerque. It's fascinating and the old photos are a real hoot!

### Up, Up and Away

Ballooning is also an integral part of the local cultural, so it comes as no great surprise that there's an Albuquerque museum devoted entirely to the sport. Located next door to the Balloon Fiesta Park, the Abruzzo Albuquerque International Balloon Museum (505-768-6020, [www.cabq.gov/balloon](http://www.cabq.gov/balloon)) houses one of the finest collections of ballooning equipment and memorabilia in the world.

The museum features accessible parking, level access to the building and elevator access to all levels. It contains everything from weather balloons and hands-on exhibits, to airship models, videos, balloon art and oodles of balloon pins. And if you want to see what it's like to ride in a balloon, then check out the balloon simulator. It features roll-on access with a giant flight screen. You can control the gas to change your altitude as you soar along, and it really feels like you're flying. It's a fun option for folks who can't climb into a balloon gondola.

### Celebrate Diversity

Last but not least, save some time for a visit to the National Hispanic Cultural Center and the Indian Pueblo Cultural Center, for an in-depth look at these two distinctly different local cultures.

This Natural Hispanic Cultural Center (505-246-2261, [www.nhccnm.org](http://www.nhccnm.org)) houses a theater, a sculpture courtyard and a restaurant on its 16-acre campus; however the highlight of the complex is the art museum. With level access and barrier-free pathways throughout the exhibition space, the museum hosts a variety of visiting exhibits as well as exhibitions of selected pieces from their large permanent collection. *Meso Americanics*, a temporary exhibition of the work of Einar and Jamex de la Torre, runs through February 22, 2009. The artists work in blown glass and mixed media; and their attitude ranges from whimsical to irreverent. Nothing is sacred to these talented brothers.

It should be noted that although there is a level pathway to the museum, it's a long walk from the parking lot, so slow walkers should plan to bring a wheelchair.

Just as the National Hispanic Cultural Center focuses on the different aspects of Hispanic history and culture, the Indian Pueblo Cultural Center (505-843-7270, [www.indianpueblo.org](http://www.indianpueblo.org)) devotes their attention to the Pueblo Indians of the area. In fact, the center is considered the gateway to the 19 pueblos of New Mexico, as it provides visitors with a good primer on pueblo life, culture and history.

There is barrier-free access throughout the complex, with plenty of accessible parking in front. Inside, interpretive exhibits

chronicle the history of the Pueblo Indians and individual exhibits highlight the pottery, jewelry and other handcrafted pieces from each tribe. The museum also boasts the largest collection of authentic Indian jewelry in the Southwest.

Traditional dance demonstrations are held on Saturdays, and the Pueblo Harvest Cafe features cuisine reflective of the Pueblo Indian culture. And don't miss the 10,000 square-foot gift shop, which features a wide selection of handcrafted jewelry, pottery, rugs and more. The quality is excellent and the prices are very reasonable. It's *the* place to shop for that perfect cultural souvenir of your Albuquerque visit.

### If You Go

Albuquerque Convention & Visitors Bureau  
(800) 284-2282  
[www.itsatrip.org](http://www.itsatrip.org)

### Sky City Side Trip

Located 45 miles west of Albuquerque, the Acoma Pueblo (800-747-0181, [www.acomaskycity.org](http://www.acomaskycity.org)) is well worth a visit, if only for the scenery along the way. Nicknamed Sky City, this ancient village is perched on top of a 367-foot sandstone bluff, and is considered the oldest continually inhabited pueblo in the US. Today the adobe homes boast some modern trappings, such as curtains and screen doors; however the 10-14 families that still live there lack running water and electricity.

Private vehicles are not allowed on pueblo land, and unfortunately the shuttle bus lacks a lift. There is space in front to carry a folding wheelchair, but you need to be able to walk a few steps in order to take the tour.

The good news is, they have an excellent condensed tour for slow walkers. It lasts approximately 25 minutes and includes a private guide. This slower paced tour stops at the church, the plaza and at a few vendors. It's important to note that the ground may be bumpy and uneven in some places, but the guides do their best to avoid major obstacles. Still it's a good option for many folks, and a unique opportunity to visit an inhabited pueblo.

Kivas at Acoma Sky City

