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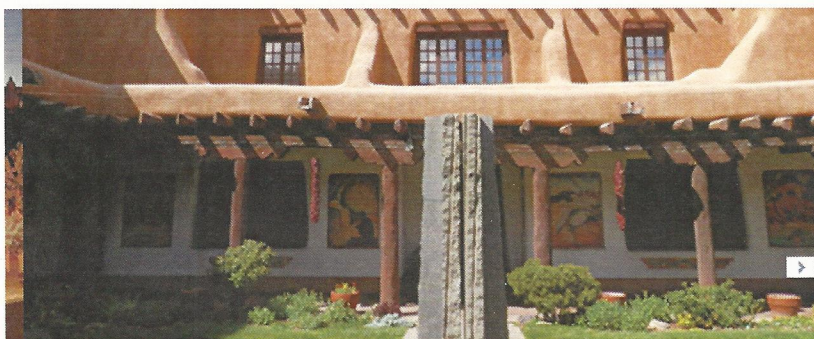
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## NORTH AMERICA »

### Santa Fe: A Breath of Fresh Air

Jeff Heilman finds countless ways to incorporate a little local flavor into your next meeting.



New Mexico Museum of Art

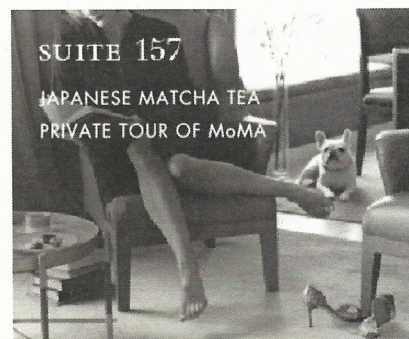
In New Mexico, the way of life is generally "*Carpe Mañana*"—Santa Fe lawyer George Adelo's copyrighted adaptation of the state's unofficial "Land of *Mañana*" moniker. When meeting in Santa Fe, the U.S.'s oldest capital city (and, at 7,000 feet, its highest), acclimatizing to the altitude can take several days (tip: hydrate, hydrate, hydrate), but adjusting to the city's leisurely tempo takes no time at all. After marinating for four centuries, the civic pace here—slow-cooked, like Santa Fe's signature green- and red-chili dishes—seduces the senses.

Founded in 1610 by Spanish colonialists, this sun-kissed desert citadel, set in the foothills of the 12,000-foot Sangre de Cristo Mountains, is a cultural gateway where architecture, art and antiquity converge for a singularly transporting experience.

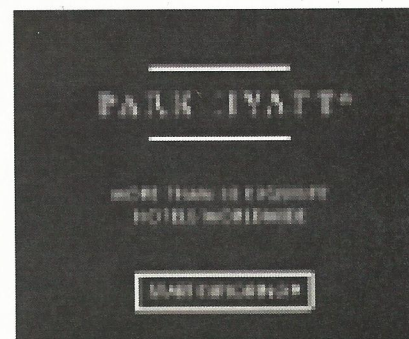
Virtually brand name-free, downtown Santa Fe's compact of earth-colored Pueblo and Territorial adobe buildings—their front portals ubiquitously hung with *ristras* (strings of red chili peppers)—breaks the conventional urban mold entirely. Home to 15 major museums and more than 250 fine-art galleries, tri-cultural (Native American, Hispanic and Anglo) Santa Fe is the nation's third-largest art market, behind New York and Los Angeles. First roamed by nomadic Paleo-Indians 10,000 years ago, the vast surrounding terrain—volcanic, tectonic, cinematic—appears extraterrestrial in its multihued Southwestern splendor by day; at night, under infinite galaxies above, the region runs with ghost riders and other phantasmagoria. Whatever your meeting agenda, Santa Fe is truly the "City Different."

With over 20,000 square feet of flexible space and 219 guest rooms, including suites, the Eldorado Hotel & Spa is the city's largest conference property. Also offering Native American-inspired treatments at Nidah ("your life") Spa, along with zesty fare at the hotel's Old House Restaurant and Agave Lounge, the Eldorado is host to many of Santa Fe's citywide conventions.

"Our proximity to the Santa Fe Community Convention Center, just a block and a half away, makes the Eldorado ideal for larger conferences," boasted General Manager Norbert Relecker. Last summer, the art-filled hotel converted 6,000 square feet of lobby space into the Eldorado Gallery, featuring works from local galleries for sale and hosting art-themed events.



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from the 1887 Cathedral Basilica of St. Francis of Assisi, the landmark La Fonda on the Plaza, opened in 1929, features 179 newly renovated rooms, including 14 on its privately accessed rooftop terrace.

La Fonda is right by Santa Fe Plaza, originally the walled *presidio*, or fort, where Santa Fe began. Flanked by cultural treasures—such as the New Mexico Museum of Art and the Museum of Contemporary Native Arts—the tree-shaded square also features the circa-1610 Palace of the Governors, home to the New Mexico History Museum, where, each day, Native American artisans sell handcrafted artwork and jewelry under an official vendors program.

With other cultural draws—including the Georgia O’Keeffe Museum, Lensic Performing Arts Center and the quartet of institutions on Museum Hill—Santa Fe is an international art mecca.

In the early 1900s, drawn by Santa Fe’s clean air (routinely top-rated by the American Lung Association) and its spiritual allure, artists began “colonizing” rural Canyon Road. Today, this mile-long stretch of stylish shops, restaurants (Geronimo and the Compound are winners) and nearly 100 galleries—some available for events—is Santa Fe’s signature street.

Connecting visitors and groups to the scene is fifth-generation Santa Fean and former gallery owner Bobby Beals. “With deep ties to the local art community, we facilitate a variety of art-themed events and interactions at area hotels and resorts,” said Beals of his firm, Beals & Co. “From live art demonstrations to gourmet art dinners with acclaimed local chefs, planners can incorporate a professional artist in their innovative meeting plans.”

The culinary arts also shine in Santa Fe, where the green-chili cheeseburger is gold, and foodie fests—ranging from the Wine & Chili Fiesta in September to the Ski n’ Brew in January—dominate the city’s 40-plus fiestas and celebrations each year. Groups can learn from local pros at Santa Fe School of Cooking and the new Santa Fe Culinary Academy, or sample the Farmers’ Market in the emerging Railyard District.

Santa Fe’s prodigious restaurant collection includes a local favorite, the Shed, housed in a 1692 adobe hacienda; Maria’s New Mexican Kitchen, a haven for tequila lovers; and Chef Charles Dale’s event-capable Parisian-style Bouche Bistro.

With international credentials from such places as Le Cirque in New York, Dale’s first Santa Fe venture was Terra, at the historic former Rancho Encantado resort (a property now flying the Four Seasons flag). Set on 57 acres that offer rapturous views of the Rio Grande River Valley and distant Jemez Mountains—close to the fabled Santa Fe Opera (open June through August, with sensational pre-show tailgating)—the resort offers 65 luxurious casita guest rooms and suites, an outdoor pool and a luxurious spa. Executive Chef Andrew Cooper is now inventively overseeing Terra, which is ready-made for magical weddings, meetings and other gatherings.

The area also boasts a myriad of inspiring outdoor escapes, such as whitewater rafting, exploring the ancient cliff dwellings at Bandelier National Monument and visiting one of the eight northern pueblos—any one of which is an activity guaranteed to elevate your meeting event to the next level. Led by Chief Adventure Officer Owen Perillo, local operator Santa Fe Mountain Adventures offers diverse group programs and destination services throughout the region.

Limo and shuttle services to and from all Santa Fe hotels are available for those landing at Albuquerque International Sunport—about an hour away—which now has daily direct service via JetBlue from New York City. Meanwhile, travelers from Dallas, Phoenix, Denver and Los Angeles can board daily direct flights into Santa Fe Municipal Airport.

With so many possibilities, you’ll certainly have your work cut out for you when deciding where to book your next meeting in Santa Fe, but the rewards are nearly as endless. Go today, relax *mañana*—it’s Santa Fe time.



Better than the real thing



Tags: Santa Fe, New Mexico | Eldorado Hotel & Spa | Four Seasons Santa Fe | meetings and events | Premier Traveler

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Author: Jeff Heilman

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