

# New Mexico



The Museum of Contemporary Native Arts in Santa Fe offers tours and a variety of event spaces for corporate groups.

Sometimes people just need to be educated about New Mexico, says independent meeting planner Melissa Rael of Melissa G. Rael & Associates in Albuquerque.

“Lots of people have this preconceived notion that we’re just desert out here,” she says. “But when they get here they see the mountains and everything they can do like white-water rafting and skiing, and things they can experience like the art, restaurants, wineries and different cultures. So when they get out here, they see that we have plenty to offer,” Rael says.

## Albuquerque

Albuquerque is the largest city in New Mexico and is certainly the transportation gateway for the state. The airport handles about 6 million passengers a year, is served by seven

# The Land of Enchantment Keeps Groups Coming Back

By Michael Bassett

major commercial carriers and offers direct service to 29 different cities in the U.S.

Because of its accessibility and size, it is the one destination in New Mexico capable of handling large citywide conventions. The city has more than 16,000 hotel rooms and the Albuquerque Convention Center, which is now undergoing a \$20 million facelift, has 167,000 sf of meeting space, including a 31,000-sf ballroom, a 2,350-seat auditorium, 27 meeting rooms and banquet space for up to 6,000 people. And it’s located right in the middle of downtown Albuquerque, so it’s easily accessible from several hotels within walking distance of the convention center.

The fact that Albuquerque has “multiple downtowns,” from Old Town to Nob Hill, also appeals to groups, says Dale Lockett, president and CEO of the Albuquerque Convention & Visitors Bureau. “We’re talking about little downtown clusters no more than five or 10 minutes from one another, which makes Albuquerque a very walkable city.”

And affordable, too, says Mark Holland, associate director of the Rocky Mountain Mineral Law Foundation, an organization that provides continuing education for professionals in mining, oil and gas, water and other related areas. The foun-



*“Planners looking for a place where they can find value come to Albuquerque.”*

**Dale Lockett**, President and CEO Albuquerque CVB



Albuquerque, known as the ballooning capital of the world, features the week-long International Balloon Fiesta every October.

dation holds an annual meeting every year, as well as smaller meetings throughout the western United States (as well as a couple outside the U.S.).

“Albuquerque is really a lovely city,” says Holland, “But what makes it really appealing is its incredibly reasonable prices.” Over the years, the city has appeared on a number of lists of the country’s most affordable destinations.

“We’re a value destination, so planners looking for a place where they can find value come to Albuquerque,” says Lockett. “It’s affordable, all the major airlines are represented here, and groups can get value without compromising the quality of the product.”

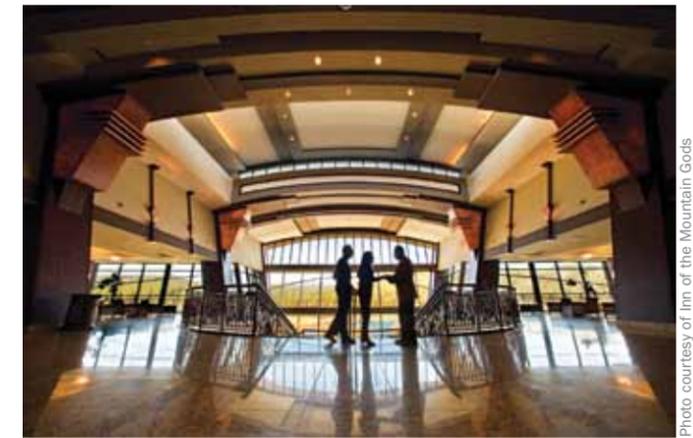
The city is also pouring money into its meeting/tourist infrastructure, says Lockett. “In the past few years we estimate we’ve spent or earmarked upwards of \$200 million to change the feel of the destination.”

For example, in addition to the convention center renovation, the Albuquerque Hilton has been reflagged as the Crowne Plaza Albuquerque and reopened last year after a \$14 million renovation, while both the Albuquerque Hyatt Regency and Albuquerque Marriott completed renovations.

While accessibility and infrastructure are important parts of Albuquerque’s appeal as a meeting destination, there are countless other reasons why meeting planners bring corporate groups to the city.

“It’s just a very unique destination,” says Lockett. “And that uniqueness is tied into the terrain, the look and the feel of the destination, plus the hundreds of years of culture diversity as it relates to cuisine and the arts. It’s just not your typical destination.”

Lockett says weather is also a major advantage for Albuquerque, as it is for the rest of New Mexico.



The scenic Inn of the Mountain Gods offers golf, gaming and the new Mountaintop venue Elks Lodge at Ski Apache.

“With 310 days of sunshine a year, you really can’t go wrong any time of the year,” he says. “Our winters aren’t too harsh, and summers are fairly mild.”

The number of activities available to groups is a major selling point as well. The self-described “ballooning capital of the world,” Albuquerque is home to many hot air balloon companies that provide rides for individuals and groups. For groups visiting the city in the fall, The International Balloon Fiesta takes place in Albuquerque for a week every October.

The city is also the site of the Anderson-Abruzzo Albuquerque International Balloon Museum, dedicated to the art, culture, science, history and sport of hot air ballooning. The museum is available for group rental and has been the location of many an opening reception, says Lockett.

Another popular attraction is the Indian Pueblo Cultural Center, “gateway to the 19 pueblos of New Mexico.” The museum has a permanent exhibit that leads visitors through the history and background of the state’s 19 pueblos, while featuring their original artwork and craftsmanship. The center is also available for meeting and event rental.

There are plenty of outdoor activities available within 30 minutes of the city, Lockett says, pointing out that groups — if inclined — could golf one day and ski the next, in locations just 30 minutes apart. For those looking for spectacular views, a trip on the Sandia Peak Aerial Tramway, located on the eastern edge of Albuquerque, takes visitors to an observation



Photo by Mark Kane@2011

This sculpture welcomes visitors to Santa Fe’s Museum of Indian Arts and Culture. The museum offers indoor and outdoor venues for meetings and receptions.

# New and Noteworthy

**Bishop's Lodge Ranch Resort and Spa** in Santa Fe is nestled around the base of the Sangre Resort & Spa and includes 15 adobe-style lodges housing 91 rooms and eight gated villas. The resort has instituted its "Equus Experience," which, according to Marketing and Sales Director Jeff Lashar, is "a teambuilding exercise perfect for corporate groups." The Equus Experience is designed to help inspire self-mastery, teambuilding and collaborative leadership in participants through their

interaction with horses in a controlled setting. Bishop's Lodge provides four conference rooms totaling 8,000 sf plus outdoor event space.

**The Hotel Andaluz** in Albuquerque now bills itself as "one of the greenest hotels in the country." The LEED Gold-certified hotel has reduced water usage by more than 45 percent, uses solar-heated water that is produced onsite, has a comprehensive recycling program, composts all banquet food waste and has preferred parking for low-emitting and fuel-efficient vehicles. The AAA Four Diamond, historic hotel has 107 oversized guest rooms and 6,000 sf of meeting space.

**The Eldorado Hotel & Spa** in Santa Fe just completed a renovation of its 219 guest rooms that included new furnishings and new bathroom product. In addition, the hotel last fall opened the Agave Lounge, which is situated next to the hotel's Old House restaurant. "It's a hip, sophisticated upscale lounge," says Doug Libby, director of sales and market at the Eldorado. "It's been well received, not only by our hotel guests, but by the locals as well." The hotel offers more than 23,000 sf of conference space.

At the **Hyatt Regency Tamaya Resort & Spa** on the Pueblo of Santa



Photo courtesy of Hyatt Regency Tamaya Resort

Ana between Santa Fe and Albuquerque, groups can engage in untethered hot air ballooning teambuilding adventures (above). While not quite up to Harry Potter's high-flying quiddich battles, participants still engage in a series of aerial competitions that include dropping scoring bags onto targets on the ground below. The Hyatt Tamaya, renowned for its Native American art and cultural programs, offers 350 pueblo-style guest rooms and nearly 74,000 sf of indoor/outdoor meeting space.

Planners who want to offer the big three of gaming (left), spa and golf can head to the **Hilton Santa Fe Golf Resort & Spa at Buffalo Thunder**, situated on 587 acres 15 miles south of Santa Fe. The classically Southwestern-themed resort offers 450 guest rooms and 66,000 sf of meeting space, plus an old Spanish chapel that can be used for events. — MB



Photo courtesy of Hilton Santa Fe Golf Resort & Spa at Buffalo Thunder

deck atop the 10,378-foot Sandia Peak, giving them a panoramic view of the Rio Grande Valley.

## Santa Fe

Santa Fe is a small city with an international reputation, says Mark Holland, which is one of the reasons he brought the Rocky Mountain Mineral Law Foundation's annual meeting to the city last July.

"It's an incredibly desirable location for a lot of people," says Holland. "People in Texas love to drive there, and people from elsewhere in the U.S. hear about the food, art and fantastic scenery, and they want to see it for themselves — or if they've already been there, they want to go back."

Santa Fe also has a certain cachet for international visitors, Holland says. "Few people would make it their primary destination if they're coming from another country, but our

meeting gives them an opportunity to visit and use it as a jumping off point to go elsewhere in the Southwest.

Last year's event had 1,056 attendees, which means the group used up quite a bit of Santa Fe's hotel inventory. It was also the first time Holland was able to book the LEED Gold-certified Santa Fe Convention Center.

The convention center opened in 2008 and contains 40,000 sf of meeting space, including an 18,000-sf ballroom, 11 breakout rooms and outdoor meeting areas. Entrances into the center from Marcy and Grant streets open into a lobby with fireplaces, custom-made furniture and a two-story ceiling.

"It's a gorgeous facility," says Holland. "And it was the first time we've ever been able to fit 1,000 people into a room, classroom style."

Jim Bradbury, executive director of the Santa Fe Convention & Visitors Bureau, agrees that the convention center is certainly a draw for groups looking at Santa Fe. "It's brand new, fits perfectly into the design of the city, and is within a two-block walking distance of 1,500 hotel rooms."

But what really draws visitors to the city, Bradbury says, is, "We're a cool, small city with a myriad of things for groups to do if they have leisure time or want spousal planned activities."

This wide range of activities includes the outdoor variety such as hiking, biking, skiing and golfing, says Bradbury, while the indoor variety includes great restaurants and wonderful cultural options, including excellent art galleries and museums.

Holland says he hired a local destination marketing company to put together some optional tours for his group, including a backstage tour of the Santa Fe Opera, a class at the Santa Fe School of Cooking, a trip to Bandolier National Monument (about an hour from Santa Fe), and a citywide treasure hunt for children and their parents.

The Mineral Law Foundation did have a hosted reception, but other than that, attendees were on their own. "There are so many good places to eat in Santa Fe that we didn't want to limit their choices," Holland says.

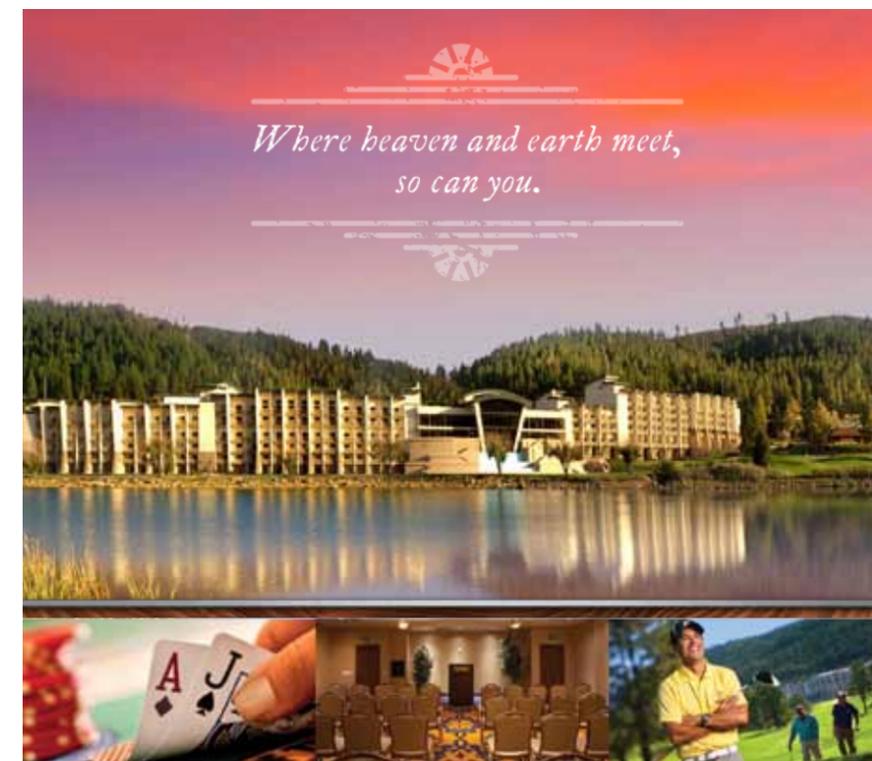
Another benefit to holding a meeting in Santa Fe is the walkability factor, which "is a major selling point," says Bradbury. Holland notes that "almost



*"We're a cool, small city with a myriad of things for groups to do if they have leisure time or want spousal planned activities."*

**Jim Bradbury**, Executive Director  
Santa Fe CVB

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Photo by Tina Larkin/courtesy of town of Taos

Rapturous over white-water rafting on the Rio Grande — the Taos area boasts the wild and scenic portions of the river.

where people can walk to breakfast, lunch, dinner, shopping and all those art galleries.”

As a small city, Santa Fe also has a small municipal airport, although it does offer direct service to Los Angeles and Dallas-Fort Worth. But most groups coming to Santa Fe usually come in via Albuquerque.

“We don’t think that’s a problem,” says Bradbury. “We actually use it as a selling point. Sure it takes 50 minutes to get from Albuquerque, but it’s a hell of a beautiful drive.”

While getting people to Santa Fe is “a little more difficult than having the meeting in a major city” the fact that so

Taos is known for two distinct kinds of activities, says Jeanne Kitzman, tourism and meetings coordinator for the town. The more passive of the two involves the cultural aspects of the area.

Drawn to the area by the culture of the Taos Pueblo and the area’s beautiful landscape, historically renowned artists, photographers and writers such as Georgia O’Keefe, Ansel Adams and D.H. Lawrence made the area famous as a mecca for the creative arts. Today Taos supports dozens of art galleries as well as three museums.

Taos is also the site of the Taos Pueblo, the only existing Native American community designated both as a World Heritage Site by UNESCO and a National Historic Landmark. The adobe structures have been continuously inhabited for more than 1,000 years and currently have 150 permanent residents.

There are also a number of activities for the more athletically inclined, says Kitzman, primarily white-water rafting. “The area has the wild and scenic part of the Rio Grande,” says Kitzman, “And it offers different kinds of rafting experiences that are appropriate for just about anybody.” Visitors

can also go hot air ballooning, hiking, biking, camping, fishing and skiing.

Taos has a small convention center — the Taos Civic Plaza & Convention Center — which is located in the heart of the Taos historic district. The center has four halls totaling approximately 23,000 sf of indoor and outdoor function space. According to Kitzman, the center is often used by smaller properties that lack sufficient meeting space of their own.

There are some larger properties appropriate for incentive groups, such as the El Monte Sagrado Resort & Spa, which has 84 rooms, suites and casitas, as well eight potential meeting and function rooms, including a 2,400-sf ballroom.

South of Albuquerque, in Mescalero, the Inn of the Mountain Gods Resort & Casino has 273 luxury rooms and suites, 40,000 sf of meeting space, a 38,000-sf casino, an indoor swimming pool and an 18-hole championship golf course.

In addition to the golf and casino, guests have a myriad of

recreational options, including hunting, skeet shooting, fishing, and skiing and snowboarding at the Ski Apache ski resort on the slopes of Sierra Blanca.

The Inn recently opened the Elks Lodge at Ski Apache, a two-story building 10,000 feet up on the mountain. “It’s a great place for a small corporate function” says Sales Director Charles Meeks, who points out that it is adjacent to a tubing run, “which can be a great add-on to an event.”

Well to the south, near the New Mexico/Texas border, Las Cruces is an up-and-coming meeting destination, says Rael, particularly with the opening of the new LEED-certified Las Cruces Convention Center in 2011.

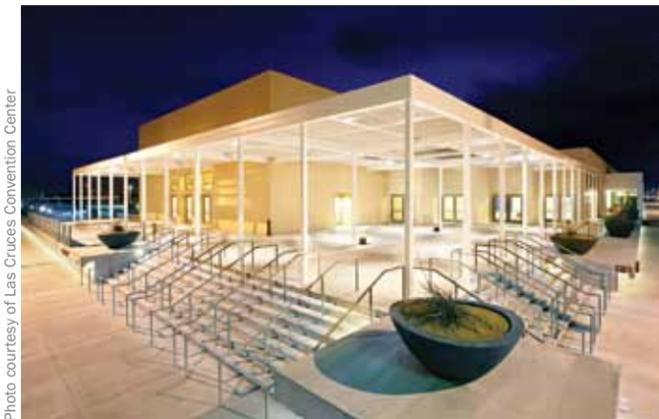


Photo courtesy of Las Cruces Convention Center

The 55,000-sf Las Cruces Convention Center opened last year.



*“The area...offers different kinds of rafting experiences that are appropriate for just about anybody.”*

**Jeanne Kitzman**, Meetings Coordinator  
Town of Taos, NM

The 55,000-sf facility has 30,000 sf of meeting space and features a 14,500-sf exhibition hall, an 8,950-sf ballroom, as well as six breakout rooms totaling another 3,000 sf of meeting space. In addition, the center has 5,000 sf of outdoor space and 8,500 sf of prefunction space.

The area gets lots of sunshine — more than 350 days a year — so there are plenty of recreational activities for groups, including golf, camping, hiking and horseback riding.

The town gets a lot of business from Texas — it’s close to El Paso — says Rael, although the lack of a nearby airport could be problematic. “Sometimes the issue is getting groups from out of state to visit parts of New Mexico,” she says. “But once they’re here, they always want to come back.”

The desire to return is a common theme among planners and attendees alike who experience this uncommonly beautiful and culturally rich state, which more than lives up to its nickname, The Land of Enchantment. **C&IT**

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**Melissa Rael**, Independent Planner  
Melissa G. Rael & Associates, Albuquerque, NM

many of Holland’s attendees come from the Southwest U.S. means that many drive in.

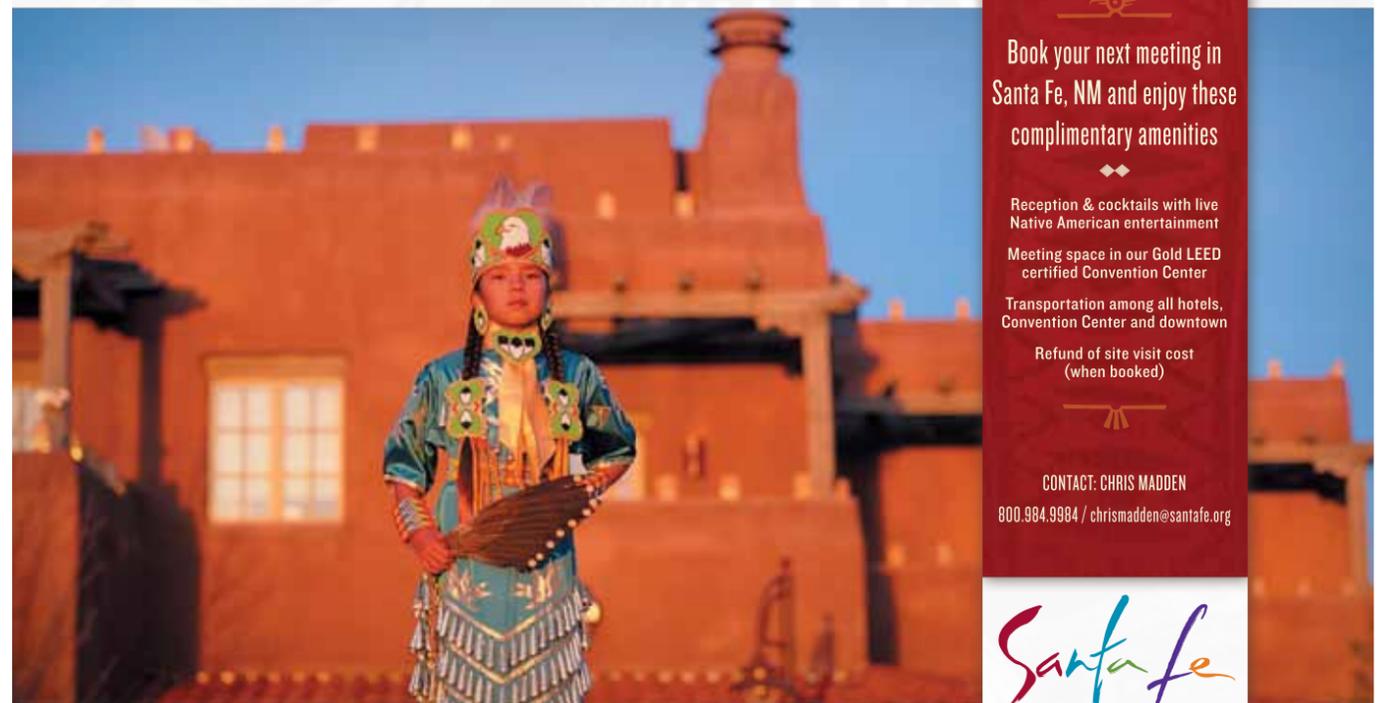
And while transportation issues may be more difficult than normal when it comes to holding an event in Santa Fe, it hasn’t dissuaded Holland from coming back: He’s negotiating right now to bring the Mineral Law Foundation’s annual meeting back to the city in 2017.

### North and South

Taos is located north of Santa Fe, about 85 miles south of the New Mexico/Colorado border.

It’s a “beautiful” town, says independent planner Melissa Rael of Melissa G. Rael & Associates. “You’ve got the pueblos, the scenic drives, lots of art galleries and some great restaurants. There aren’t any malls or big, boxy chain restaurants, just a lot of mom and pop places, and I think people really like that.”

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