

## Good eats in Santa Fe

A rundown on restaurants in Santa Fe, N.M.

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SANTA FE, N.M. — While some may head to Santa Fe for the great shopping, the galleries and the scenery, we're all about the food.

With about 200 restaurants in this city of 70,000, the choice is huge. From the rustic and ubiquitous chile sauces and enchiladas to sophisticated French or New World fare, the exciting mix of restaurants in this more than 400-year-old city offers the food-obsessed the option of many days of exciting eating.

Here are some of the best restaurants we found within a short walk or cab ride from the historic Santa Fe Plaza in the center of town. (For more options, the Santa Fe Restaurant Association maintains an online dining guide at [www.santafrestaurantassociation.com](http://www.santafrestaurantassociation.com), where you can search among dozens of restaurants.)

**Cafe Pasqual's**, 121 Don Gaspar Ave., 505-983-9340, [www.pasquals.com](http://www.pasquals.com) Breakfast and lunch daily; dinner nightly 5:30-9:30 p.m. Sunday-Thursday and to 10 p.m. Friday-Saturday

Eating at this Santa Fe must-do is a colorful experience. Literally. The tiny dining room features wooden chairs painted a bright teal blue, a ceiling festooned with lacy paper decorations and walls sporting hand-painted Mexican tiles and a sweeping five-panel mural called "La Luna Se Fue a Una Fiesta" ("The Moon Was at a Fiesta"), by Mexican artist Leovi-gildo Martinez. No surprise, then, there's an upstairs art gallery next to the restaurant.

Chef Katharine Kagel opened this downtown restaurant in 1979. It has stayed open because of the delicious food made with local and mostly organic ingredients. The menu is firmly Southwestern; you'll find enchiladas, chili rellenos, burritos and huevos rancheros. But the menus offer a number of twists as well, from a smoked trout hash and omelets to braised lamb with mashed potatoes and Vietnamese-style squid salad.

Reservations are accepted only for dinner. Don't worry too much about the other times; tables turn quickly.

— **Epazote**, 416 Agua Fria St., 505-988-5991, [www.epazotesantafe.com](http://www.epazotesantafe.com) Dinner 5:30 to 10 p.m. Monday-Saturday

So what if the guitarist is wearing a lei and softly strumming Hawaiian tunes in the dining room? The mellow music matches the warm, relaxed vibe of this restaurant offering "inspired New World Cuisine." Chef Fernando Olea is renowned for his moles, thick, creamy sauces that offer intricately woven flavors and fragrances. He serves grilled halibut, for example, with a mole rosa made with beets, pine nuts, almonds, white chocolate and chipotle chilies. Duck breast is paired with mole poblano, while chicken takes a mole verde.

Beyond the various moles, consider the barbacoa de borrego, slow-cooked lamb and rice wrapped in a banana leaf with three increasingly fiery salsas on the side.

Located to the southwest of Santa Fe's central plaza, Epazote is across the street from El Santuario de Guadalupe, one of the oldest churches in the nation dedicated to the Virgin of Guadalupe. The restaurant is a former convent, its ancient thick walls now serving as the backdrop for bold artworks displayed as though in an art gallery (and that look is intentional, as a portion of the restaurant is now a real art gallery). Aided by strategically spaced spotlights, the color of the paintings and sculptures seem to literally glow as bright as the flavors in Olea's food.

— **Geronimo**, 724 Canyon Road, 505-982-1500, [www.geronimorestaurant.com](http://www.geronimorestaurant.com)

Dinner nightly 5:45-9:30 p.m.

Strolling by the windows of Santa Fe's top art galleries might seem reward enough for visiting Geronimo, on Canyon Road about a mile from the city center. But once there, you're blessed with a unique location, a beautiful 255-year-old adobe home with dining indoors and out under a covered porch, smart service honed over 18 years, and excellent food from executive chef Eric DiStefano (also of the famed Coyote Cafe) and Charles R. Thompson, the chef de cuisine.

While the menu's thrust is "global French Asian" with all the attendant mix of color, flavor and texture, there's still a sense of the rustic in a dish such as elk tenderloin accented with bacon and garlic mashed potatoes. It's nice that the restaurant gives proper due to poultry. Menu offerings include quail, chicken, duck and squab. A "sticky" duck salad pairs plush threads of meat with crispy shallot onion rings and a blood orange vinaigrette. The pan-roasted quail preens on a bed of brie and Parmesan cheese polenta.

Geronimo long has been a destination restaurant, yet the feeling is never self-important. You feel welcome and more than a bit pampered, which is why folks keep coming back.

— **Rosewood Inn of the Anasazi**, 113 Washington Ave., 505-988-3030, [www.innoftheanasazi.com](http://www.innoftheanasazi.com) Breakfast, lunch daily; dinner nightly 5:30-10 p.m.

Here's the place to go for an upscale interpretation of Santa Fe's cuisine. The small 58-room inn is just northwest of the historic plaza. The dining room is warm, with banquettes down each side and earth tones in the fabrics, wall murals and dark wood floors.

The setting makes for a quiet breakfast spot, where you'll find lighter dishes such as a house-made granola with yogurt and berries, or fresh berries and cream. We went for a more substantial dish called the Anasazi Benedict, a wonderful stack of corn chipotle pancakes topped with slices of chicken apple sausage and a tangy/spicy jalapeño hollandaise sauce — the perfect fuel for sightseeing.

We also were tempted by the blue corn and blueberry flapjacks with strawberry butter, the green chili breakfast burrito and the ranchero breakfast skillet of roasted potatoes, black beans, asadero cheese and red and green salsas, all nestled together with eggs of your choice. But, hey, there's only so much we could handle at 8 a.m.

— **The Shed**, 113 E. Palace Ave., 982-9030, [www.sfshed.com](http://www.sfshed.com) Lunch 11 a.m.-2:30 p.m., dinner 5:30-9 p.m. Monday-Saturday

Family owned and operated, this charming restaurant just northwest of the plaza is considered a Santa Fe institution. After spotting its hand-painted blue sign hanging above, you walk through a cute courtyard with a few tables and benches under trees, where waiting guests sip margaritas. Inside the restaurant, red beams are painted with floral designs, and mismatched artworks hang on the walls. Simple wooden tables and chairs and tile floors complete the rustic look.

Polly and Thornton Carswell opened The Shed in 1953 on Burro Alley. They moved the restaurant to its current location, called Prince Patio, in 1960. Now their son and his wife (Courtney and Linnea) and their children continue to run the restaurant.

The Shed is part of an adobe hacienda that dates to the 1600s, when the King of Spain gave this property to Capt. Diego Arias de Quiros in recognition of his service. In 1870, the patio acquired its present name when Gov. Bradford Prince bought the hacienda and established his family here, where they stayed until 1940.

Today the restaurant is filled with locals and tourists, usually scooping up the fresh guacamole with chips as a starter. The salsa that comes with it is sweet, not very spicy. Many order one of the combo plates, such as the enchilada and taco plate: one rolled, blue corn enchilada filled with cheddar cheese and onion and covered with red chili sauce. A blue-corn taco is filled with finely ground lean ground beef. Pinto beans on the side had a strong chili powder flavor, but the mild posole (made with hominy, lean pieces of pork, garlic, oregano and coarse red chili) helped mitigate the spice. Fresh lemon soufflé (Rachael Ray is said to love it) came out too quickly to have been cooked to order, with a brown dry top and ore like a pudding cake.

— **Tia Sophia's**, 210 W. San Francisco St., 505-983-9880

Breakfast 7-11 a.m. Monday-Saturday, lunch: 11 a.m.-2 p.m. Monday-Saturday

Tia Sophia's is the real deal.

This is where the locals chow down for breakfast and where the menu states clearly: "Not responsible for too HOT chile." And yes, you'll find plenty of chilies here, even at breakfast.

The storefront has two rooms, divided by the kitchen. Booths are aligned along both dimly lighted rooms, with a few bright tables by the front windows. The owners greet everyone warmly.

In Santa Fe, burritos are breakfast food as well as lunch and dinner food. Tia Sophia's burritos have been voted the best and featured in magazines and newspapers. The breakfast burrito offers a choice of bacon, sausage, bologna or ham, and potatoes, wrapped in a flour tortilla and topped with chili and cheese.

Not in the mood for burritos?

Try the Atrisco Plate: It offers two eggs how you like them, green chili stew in a bowl and a flour tortilla served with butter on the side. The thin stew comes in a bowl with a boiled potato half, large chunks of stewed pork, and real kick. Spooned over the eggs, it's eye-opening. Soothe your mouth with the tortilla, spread with butter and sprinkled with the cinnamon sugar that's on every table.