Getting to Marfa is a journey, no matter where you’re coming from. The closest city, El Paso, is a three-hour drive away through the Texas high plains and desert—the region known as Big Bend country—and a ride so deserted that tumbleweeds may block the road. Then again, it’s that very remoteness that brought minimalist artist Donald Judd here in 1971, seeking peaceful creative respite after years spent in the hustle and bustle of New York City.

It was a move that would change the small town forever. Judd’s studio, and the subsequent foundation he built on the grounds of a former military camp—one that displays much of his work to this day—transformed Marfa into a cultural mecca for art aficionados from around the world, attracting everyone from Solange Knowles to BTS’s Kim Namjoon. In 2019, an estimated 49,000 people visited Marfa, a number almost 25 times its population of 2,000.
Those willing to make the trip won’t be disappointed, though: despite being a hub for minimalist and site-specific art, Marfa also somehow holds true to its cowboy and ranching roots. (The thing to do on a Saturday night is drinking Lone Stars at the local saloon, while the best food in town is still, arguably, a five-dollar burrito.) Below, find where to stay, eat, and do in this curious cultural corner of the country.

Where to Stay

![Hotel Saint George](image)

**Hotel Saint George**

Hotel Saint George was—and remains—the first luxury hotel in Marfa. The rooms, with their calming gray color schemes, are spacious and modern, while an impressive pool complex is the perfect way to cool down from the desert heat. Come nighttime, their bar becomes a lively gathering place perfect for a spicy margarita.

**El Cosmico**

Adventurers looking for attainable lodging can opt for El Cosmico, a bohemian-esque campground that offers a variety of housing options from yurts, to trailers, to even a micro-home called the “Cosmic Casita.” Their onsite food truck, Cloudy’s, serves up breakfast tacos to cheeseburgers, and they’ll often host concerts from indie musicians on their grounds.

**Cibolo Creek Ranch**

Just over 30 miles outside of Marfa—which is this part of the country, is decidedly not far—is Cibolo Creek Ranch, a sprawling five-star property set upon 30,000 acres where guests’ rooms are tucked away in a 19th-century adobe fort. Here, you can horseback ride through the remote Big Bend country, or hop on an ATV tour to see an abandoned ghost town and Indigenous rock art.
What to Do

**Ballroom Marfa**

Ballroom Marfa is a contemporary museum with a constantly rotating exhibition program: whenever you go, you’ll experience a different show from a different working artist, such as Roberto Carlos Lange and Kristi Sword’s “Kite Symphony,” which is running at the venue until May. They also commission site-specific works, such as *stone circle* (2018) by Haroon Mirza, inspired by prehistoric monuments like Stonehenge, and helped bring “Prada Marfa” and “Giant” to life—but more on those later.

**Chinati Foundation**

There is a definitive must-visit when in Marfa, and that is the Chinati Foundation, the minimalist art museum founded by Donald Judd that catapulted this tiny Texas town into the national spotlight. Wander through Donald Judd’s 100 untitled works made in mill aluminum, housed in old military camp buildings, or take in the neon lights of Dan Flavin’s site-specific installations. For art novices, book a guided tour—and most importantly, stay awhile.

**Judd Foundation**

Although much of Judd’s work resides at the Chinati Foundation, his in-town residence
allows you to go one step further in understanding the artist. View everything from his extensive collection of books—he famously read for hours each day—to his studio, or even his kitchen. Each room, perfectly preserved from the last time he visited in the 1990s, feels like Judd could walk in at any moment.

“Prada Marfa” by Elmgreen & Dragset

The Instagram reputation of “Prada Marfa” likely precedes it. (That’ll happen when Beyoncé uses you as a backdrop for one of her Instagram snaps.) Yet the site-specific art installation by Elmgreen & Dragset, supported by the Art Production Fund and Ballroom Marfa, is still very much worth a visit. It’s absurdist in nature: the “store” is on remote ranch land, the door doesn’t open, and the objects of desire (shoes and handbags from a 2005 Prada collection) are frozen inside forever, unable to be bought. Is it a commentary, monument, or a critique of capitalism? Well, that’s up to you.

“Giant” by John Cerney

In 1956, Elizabeth Taylor, Rock Hudson, and James Dean descended on Marfa to film the epic western Giant about a Texas ranch family during the rise of big oil. Nearly 60 years later, artist John Cerney erected massive plywood cut-outs of the Old Hollywood stars and plopped them on the side of Highway 90 near where the historically significant movie was filmed.

Where to Shop
**Raba Vintage**

When you come to Marfa, you will undoubtedly want to dress like a cowboy, even if you don’t have the wardrobe to make that sartorial dream a reality. So stop by Raba, a store that specializes in “high desert” vintage. Raba carries an eclectic mix—when this writer was there, she spotted everything from old-school suede jackets fringed jackets, quilted coats, a Chloé poncho, and even a matching set by Christian Dior—but they all fit a classic Western aesthetic.

**Garza Marfa**

Garza carries everything from furniture to ceramics, but their in-house designed textiles are the real stars of the shop. Come home with a colorful tablecloth, blanket, or bolster that’ll be a colorful statement piece in your home for years to come.

**Moonlight Gemstones**

Spiritual shoppers should look no further than Moonlight Gemstones, a rock shop that offers rare crystals and handmade silver agate jewelry. Ogle beautiful brimstones or turquoise rings, and don’t be surprised if you come home with a bag of rocks of your own.

**Marfa Brand**

Marfa Brand offers a wide array of artisanal bath products all meant to evoke the scent of the Wild West. Take the Ranch Road soap, which is made with cedarwood, patchouli, and clove.

**Where to Eat and Drink**
Cochineal

Cochineal put Marfa on the culinary map after its executive chef and co-owner, Alexandra Gates, was nominated for a prestigious James Beard Award. Gates takes cues from the cuisine of West Texas and Europe with her elevated seasonal menu, which includes everything from elk osso buco, to venison meatballs, to cast-iron trout.

Convenience West

When in Texas, indulging in some smoked meats is an absolute must. Saddle up at Convenience West, a former convenience-store turned barbecue restaurant, and order up some brisket, ribs, Frito pie sausage. (And some vegetable sides—so you can at least pretend you’re eating a balanced meal.)

The Sentinel

The breakfast tacos and turmeric lattes are enough of a reason to go to The Sentinel, a quaint coffee and lunch spot just off the main drag of Marfa town. But there’s also a tasteful assortment of artisan goods—think silver jewelry, woven baskets, colorful blankets, and earthy candles—as well as the ethical mission behind it all: the sales benefit two local independent newspapers, the Big Bend Sentinel and Presidio International.

Marfa Burrito

There’s no better—or bigger—burrito in town than at Marfa Burrito, run by local celebrity Ramona Tejada. (She’s got photos on the wall with Matthew McConaughey and Mark Ruffalo to prove it.) The simple yet hearty menu is handwritten on hot pink paper—think entries for “egg and chorizo” or just “carne.” Stop by for a breakfast burrito after a late night at…

Lost Horse Saloon

Anthony Bourdain filmed one of the final episodes of *Parts Unknown* at the Lost Horse Saloon, a cowboy bar and grill where the neon sign outside tells you exactly what to order: beer. Grab a Lone Star and maybe a burger before you saddle up to play pool all night long.

Marfa Spirit Co.

In a tin building a block or two off of Marfa’s main drag is Marfa Spirit Co., a distillery, tasting room, and restaurant specializing in signature cocktails made with their own “Chihuahuan Desert” brand liquor, from sotol to grapefruit liqueur. Go there for steak night on Fridays and get ready to knock back some cocktails.