

WHY YOU SHOULD VISIT MARFA IN 2017

The tiny West Texas town is making more of a splash than ever

By Geoffrey Montes – March 9, 2017

Prada Marfa
2005

One of Ballroom Marfa's first installations, has become an unofficial emblem of the city—and a selfie-magnet
Photo by James Evans



Despite being located deep in the unforgiving West Texas desert, some 200 miles from the nearest major airport (in El Paso), the tiny city of Marfa has cemented its status as a bona fide arts hub. It all started when Donald Judd created a home there in the 1970s and began to establish permanent spaces to display his work. While for many years visitors to Marfa were primarily limited to die-hard Judd fans and more clued-in art enthusiasts willing to make the trek, the town has lately evolved beyond its art-world roots and expanded its appeals for both visitors and a growing community of part-time residents. The past year has seen the arrival of another chic hotel and a stylish addition to Marfa's surprisingly impressive restaurant scene. And in addition to the well-known permanent art spaces, there are a number of not-to-be-missed new galleries and exhibitions. Below are ten great reasons to book your trip to Marfa now.

What to See

On March 10, the local non-profit arts organization Ballroom Marfa opens its latest exhibition, "Strange Attractor," in its converted 1930s ballroom gallery space. The show, curated by Brooklyn-based talent Gryphon Rue, comprises a variety of multidisciplinary works, including new pieces from Phillipa Horan and Lucky Dragons—not to mention a previously unseen Alexander Calder mobile and photographs of atmospheric sprites by Thomas Ashcraft. Ballroom Marfa is also behind the iconic Prada Marfa installation that is permanently located about 25 miles north of Marfa on the side of Route 90.

Marfa's latest gallery, Pure Joy, was launched in February by artist Meghan Gerety in a revamped fuel-storage shed. The inaugural show, through April 30, features new paintings and silicone sculptures by New York-

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Robert Irwin
latest work at the
Chinati Foundation
Photo: Chinati Foundation

A colorful Jeff Elrod painting
enlivens the industrial-chic
lobby of Hotel Saint George,
with the Marfa Book Co. in the
background.
Photo by Casey Dunn



based Shelter Serra (Richard Serra's nephew) that contemplate the decaying American dream. The tiny space also holds a stellar collection of out-of-print books and adjoins a courtyard where performances and events are held.

Of course, no trip to Marfa is complete without a visit to the sprawling Chinati Foundation, a 340-acre former military base turned art space that was created in 1986 to house works by Donald Judd, John Chamberlain, and Dan Flavin. (Works by more than a dozen artists are now included.) Opened last year, Robert Irwin's only freestanding installation, a 10,000-square-foot minimalist structure, is found in the compound's former hospital. Chinati also curates exhibitions outside its grounds. The Ice Plant, a downtown industrial facility, currently houses two five-part stainless-steel works by Judd that are on view until August 2017.

If it's a clear night, the Marfa Lights Viewing Area, found nine miles east of town on Highway 90, is where unexplained illuminations have manifested in the surrounding mountains since the 19th century.

Where to Stay

Opened in 2016, the minimalist-chic Hotel Saint George is named after the historic 1880s lodge that once occupied the same parcel. Designed by the Houston architecture firm Carlos Jimenez Studio, the 55-key hotel boasts a reception area filled with striking artworks by Jeff Elrod, Christopher Wool, and Mark Flood, and custom-made furniture like a handsome mahogany-and-steel reception desk crafted by local design studio Silla. The lobby is home to the Marfa Book Co., which is a hip independent bookstore offering a unique selection of books and retail goods. It also hosts exhibitions and performances.

For more adventurous types, El Cosmico is an 21-acre constellation of safari tents, teepees, and gussied-up Airstream trailers. Operated by esteemed hotelier Liz Lambert (who now runs six properties and a coffee shop), the compound also includes rotating art exhibitions, live musical performances, and wood-fired hot tubs.

For a city of fewer than 2,000 people, Marfa offers a surprisingly varied array of cu-

Galerie



The buzzy Capri restaurant was designed by Sean Daly.
Photo by Nicole Franzen

linery experiences. Perhaps most unique is Marfa Maid (or the “Little Dairy on the Prairie”), a goat-cheese farm two miles outside of town. Founded by Malinda Beeman and Allan McClane, the 15-acre homestead offers guided tours and artisanal cheese-making classes year-round (advance bookings are recommended).

Even if you’re not staying at the Hotel Saint George, pay a visit to its stylish restaurant, LaVenture. Here in this ultra-modern space (complete with exposed brick walls and bold abstract artworks), Texas chef Allison Jenkins serves Italian- and French-inspired dishes with an emphasis on locally sourced ingredients and fresh seafood.

For upscale dining, there’s Capri, which

is overseen by local philanthropist (and Ballroom Marfa co-founder) Virginia Lebermann with her husband, chef Rocky Barnette—who spent eight years at the acclaimed Inn at Little Washington. The inventive menu draws from the region’s culinary traditions (think prickly pear wine and marigold vinaigrette), while the luxe decor was conjured by Hollywood-based creative director Sean Daly.

Locals also laud Cochineal, the intimate 30-seat eatery that opened in 2008. Founded by Tom Rapp, formerly head chef of the Manhattan restaurant Etats-Unis, Cochineal boasts elegantly crafted dishes of American fare that incorporates vegetables and herbs from the property’s backyard garden.