

*A piece written for a targeted audience*

Fiestas de Santa Fe are a traditional, weekend-long celebration held every year in Santa Fe, NM, normally during the first week of September. Fiestas, for short, literally translates to “parties,” and they infect the entire city for that weekend. Almost everywhere you go, you can shout, “*¡Que viva la fiesta!*”—which means “Long live the party”—and get “*¡Que viva!*” in response.

The festivities are designed to celebrate the reclamation of Santa Fe in 1692. Don Diego de Vargas led the *Conquistadors* in an initially bloodless reclamation of the territory for Spain and, believing his prayers for a peaceful reentry had been answered by *La Conquistadora*, held a feast in her honor. *La Conquistadora*, a statue of the Virgin Mary brought to New Mexico by the *Conquistadors*, is the oldest statue of the Virgin Mary in the United States and is highly revered in Santa Fe. The feast de Vargas held in her honor has continued over the past 500 years, growing along the way.

Every year, men and women compete to be part of the Fiesta Court and represent important figures in this celebration, including de Vargas, the friars who travelled with the *Conquistadors*, and *La Reina de Fiesta de Santa Fe*, the fiesta queen. Throughout the weekend, they can be seen at different events, such as the Fiesta Day parade.

But the real fun begins the Thursday preceding fiestas. On Thursday, they burn Zozobra. Zozobra, or Old Man Gloom, started out in 1924 as a foot-tall statue in a local artist’s backyard. He and his family would write down their worries from the last year, stuff them into the puppet, and then burn him to get rid of all of the worries in their lives before fiestas.

Today, the puppet stands at 50-feet tall. Shredded legal documents are donated and dozens of children volunteer to run through the puppet’s body and stuff him full of the city’s glooms. Then, he’s strung up in Fort Marcy Park near downtown Santa Fe and burned at the stake. A lot comes before that: kids between 12- and 16-years-old dress up in white sheets and mourn him as Glooms; Zozobra moans and groans over his coming demise; a fire dancer performs, threatening him with her batons. But finally, when darkness has fully set, the fire dancer lights his feet and he goes up in smoke. When the flames reach his head, fireworks go off.

It’s an incredibly pagan tradition for a city with such historically Catholic ideals, but it’s one of the most well-attended events of the weekend. The other events are largely for kids, like the Pet Parade, and held early in the day. For the rest of Friday, Saturday, and Sunday, the Plaza—the center of Santa Fe’s downtown—is crawling with food carts and people hurrying to get it while it’s hot. Fiestas is never complete without an ear of roasted corn from the Corn Cart, or a Navajo Taco, a delicious meal consisting of fry bread, pinto beans, ground beef, lettuce, tomato, onion, and New Mexico’s signature ingredient—red or green chile.