

Las Cruces, New Mexico

(El Pueblo del Jardin de Las Cruces :: City of the Garden of the Crosses)

Las Cruces, also known as "*The City of the Garden of the Crosses*", is the county seat of **Doña Ana County**, New Mexico, United States. As of the 2016 the estimated population was estimated at 103,000+, making it the second largest city in the state, after Albuquerque. Las Cruces is the largest city in both Doña Ana County and southern New Mexico. The Las Cruces metropolitan area had an estimated population of 220,000 in 2016. It is the principal city of a metropolitan statistical area which encompasses all of Doña Ana County and is part of the larger El Paso–Las Cruces combined statistical area. Las Cruces is the economic and geographic center of the **Mesilla Valley**, the agricultural region on the floodplain of the Rio Grande which extends from **Hatch** to the west side of **El Paso, Texas**. Las Cruces is the home of **New Mexico State University** (NMSU), New Mexico's only land-grant university. The city's major employer is the federal government on nearby **White Sands Test Facility** and **White Sands Missile Range**. The **Organ Mountains** (right ►), 10 miles to the east, are dominant in the city's landscape, along with the **Doña Ana Mountains**, **Robledo Mountains**, and **Picacho Peak**.



History ... The area where Las Cruces rose was previously inhabited by the Manso people, with the Mescalero Apache living nearby. The area was later colonized by the Spanish beginning in 1598, when Juan de Oñate claimed all territory north of the Rio Grande for New Spain and later became the first governor of the Spanish territory of New Mexico. The area remained under New Spain's control until September 28, 1821, when the first Mexican Empire claimed ownership. The area was also claimed by the **Republic of Texas** during this time until the end of the Mexican–American War in 1846–48. The **Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo** in 1848 established the United States as owner of this new territory (right, shaded dark ►), and Las Cruces was founded in 1849 when the US Army laid out the town plans.



Town of **Mesilla** became the leading settlement of the area, with more than 2,000 residents in 1860, more than twice of Las Cruces. When the **Atchison, Topeka, and Santa Fe Railway** reached the area, the landowners of Mesilla refused to sell it the rights-of-way, and instead residents of Las Cruces donated the rights-of-way and land for a depot in Las Cruces. The first train reached Las Cruces in 1881. The population grew to 2,300 in the 1880s; the City of Las Cruces was incorporated in 1907. Growth of Las Cruces has been attributed to the university, government jobs, and recently retirees. New Mexico State University was founded in 1888, and it has grown as Las Cruces has grown. White Sands Missile Range was established in 1944 and White Sands Test Facility in 1963 ... both which add measurably to the Mesilla Valley economy.

The exact origin of the city's name is unknown. It is told that it was named after three crosses on a hillside marking the graves of bandits, echoing an old tale of the valley of "*Los Hermanos*". In Spanish *Las Cruces* means "*the crosses*." (Some have claimed an alternative meaning of "the crossroads", but this is grammatically implausible, as *cruce*, the singular form of "crossroad", is masculine and the phrase would be *Los Cruces*.)

Geography ... The approximate elevation of Las Cruces is 3,908 feet (1,191 m) above sea level.

According to the United States Census Bureau, the city has a total area of 76.6 square miles of which 76.5 square miles is land and 0.2 square miles, or 0.18%, is water.

Las Cruces is the center of the **Organ Caldera**; the **Doña Ana Mountains** to the north and the **Organ Mountains** to the east are its margins. Its major eruption was 32 Mya (million years ago).

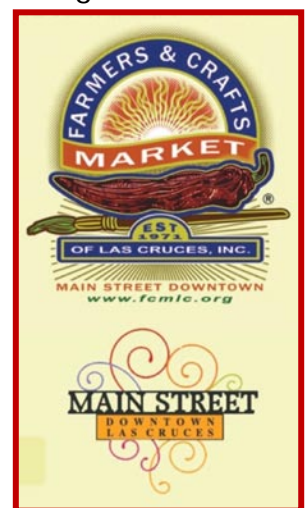
Doña Ana County lies within the **Chihuahuan Desert** ecosystem and the vegetation surrounding the city are typical of this setting; including creosote bush, soap tree yucca, tarbush, broom dalea, and various desert grasses such as tobosa and black grama.

The Rio Grande bisects the **Mesilla Valley** and passes west of Las Cruces proper, supplying irrigation water for the intensive agriculture surrounding the city. However, the Rio Grande fills its banks only when water is released from upstream dams, which is infrequent due to continuing drought.



Layout ... Unlike many cities its size, Las Cruces lacks a true central business district. This is because in the 1960s a large urban renewal project tore down a large part of the original downtown. Most Las Crucesians would agree that the modern "heart" of the city, where most stores and restaurants are located, is the rapidly developing eastside area. Las Cruces' shopping mall and a vast variety of retail stores and restaurants are located in this area.

However, the historic downtown of the city is the area around **Main Street**, a six-block stretch of which was closed off in 1973 to form the "Downtown Mall", a closed-to-traffic shopping area. The downtown mall has an extensive **Farmers Market** each Wednesday and Saturday morning, where a variety of foods and cultural items can be purchased from numerous small stands that are set up by local farmers, artists, and craftspeople. It also contains museums, businesses, restaurants, churches, art galleries, and theaters, which add a great deal to the changing character of Las Cruces' historic downtown.





In August 2005, a master plan was adopted, the centerpiece of which was the restoration of narrow lanes of two-way traffic on this model portion of Main Street (◀ left). Main Street was reopened to vehicular traffic in 2012. In 2016, **Plaza de Las Cruces**, a



centerpiece of Main Street (right ▶), was dedicated to the public. Serving a variety of functions, it will offer a forum for a variety of venues.

Climate ... Las Cruces has an arid climate. Winters alternate between cool and windy weather with warm, sunny periods in between; light frosts occur many nights. Spring months are warm and may be windy, sometimes causing periods of blowing dust and short-lived dust storms. Summer is generally hot, with some periods of over 100 °F, while the latter half of the summer seeing increased humidity and frequent afternoon thunderstorms. Autumns quickly cool into warm to mild weather. Most winter moisture is in the form of rain, though some light snow falls most winters, usually enough to accumulate and stay on the ground for a few hours.

Since records began in 1892, Las Cruces has experienced a weather pattern of moderate extremes. Below is a table of monthly average weather patterns from 1981-2010 (with extremes since 1892).

Month	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Year
Record high °F	78	86	90	96	104	110	109	105	103	95	87	78	110
Average high °F	58.6	63.5	70.1	77.8	86.8	94.8	94.9	92.2	87.7	78.6	67.3	57.8	77.51
Average low °F	29.1	32.7	38.2	44.9	53.7	62.4	68.0	66.8	59.9	47.4	35.7	29.1	47.33
Record low °F	-10	-5	8	20	27	35	42	44	30	20	-4	1	-10
Average precipitation inches	0.51	0.41	0.22	0.29	0.40	0.66	1.53	2.22	1.33	0.94	0.46	0.77	9.74
Average rainy days (≥ 0.01 in)	3.6	2.8	2.2	1.9	2.4	3.6	8.3	9.4	5.9	4.8	3.1	3.7	51.7

Data Source: NOAA

Census ...

Census	Pop.	%±
1910	3,836	—
1920	3,989	4.0%
1930	5,811	45.7%
1940	8,385	44.3%

1950	12,325	47.0%
1960	29,387	138.4%
1970	37,857	28.8%
1980	43,377	14.6%
1990	57,866	33.4%

2000	74,267	28.3%
2010	97,618	31.4%
Est. 2016	103,643	4.2%

U.S. Decennial Census
2016 estimate

As of the census of 2000, there were 74,267 people, 29,184 households, and 18,123 families residing in the city, including families living in the ETZ (Extra Territorial Zone). The population density was 1,425.7 people per square mile. The racial makeup of the city was ...



- **34.3% White American**
- **2.4% African American or Black**
- **1.7% Native Americans**
- **1.6% Asian**
- **0.1% Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander**
- **3.5% Two or more races**
- **56.8% Hispanic and Latino Americans (Hispanics may be of any race)**

Annual events ... Most of Las Cruces's cultural events occur late in the year.

- ❖ The **Border Book Festival** occurs the last weekend in April. It features a trade show, readings, film festival, workshops led by local artists and writers, and discussion panels
- ❖ The city hosts two wine festivals annually. The **Harvest Wine Festival** is held over Labor Day weekend, and features wines from New Mexico wineries, a grape stomping contest, several concerts throughout the weekend, food from several local vendors, and related shopping. The **Southern New Mexico Wine Festival** is held over Memorial Day weekend and also exclusively features New Mexico wines, local foods, and live music.
- ❖ The **Southern New Mexico State Fair**, usually (but some years) held the first week in October at the fairgrounds west of Las Cruces, promotes traditional agriculture. Boasting one of the largest junior livestock shows in the state, the fair invites youth from six counties in New Mexico and Texas to participate.
- ❖ The local **Day of the Dead** (*Día de los Muertos*) originated in Mexico, and is a celebration of the lives of those now dead. It is held November 1–2 by the Calavera Coalition, a nonprofit organization. The event is held at the plaza in Mesilla.
- ❖ Every year in October, Las Cruces holds a pumpkin harvest festival in Mesilla for the whole month of October. On Halloween, the Mesilla Valley Mall holds a "day of the walking dead", where zombies walk around the mall.
- ❖ The **Renaissance ArtsFaire**, founded in 1971, includes a juried art show and is put on by the **Doña Ana Arts Council** each year in November. It is held at Young Park.
- ❖ **Cowboy Days** is an event held in Las Cruces at the **Farm and Ranch Heritage Museum**. It is one of the largest events at the museum, and it is held over two days in early March. Some of the fun includes "children's activities, cowboy food and music, cowboy mounted shooting, horseback and stagecoach rides, living history, gunfight re-enactments, arts and crafts vendors, roping, horseshoeing and many other demonstrations."

- ❖ A **Cinco de Mayo** celebration is held May 3–4. Cinco de Mayo ("Fifth of May") is the celebration of Mexican heritage and pride. The event is held in Mesilla and provides arts and crafts, food vendors, and Mexican music.
- ❖ Another major event is the annual **4th of July Electric Light Parade**, celebration and fireworks display held July 3 and 4th. The celebration begins with a parade and ends with a firework display held at the Field of Dreams Football Stadium.
- ❖ One last major event held annually in the Las Cruces area is the lighting of the Mesilla Plaza. Every Christmas Eve, the historic plaza of Mesilla is lined with thousands of **luminarias**, which are brown bags containing candles and weighted sand. The evening consistently attracts locals and tourists.

Hospitals and Clinics ...

- ✓ **Memorial Medical Center** is a for-profit general hospital operated by LifePoint Hospitals Inc. The physical plant is owned by the City of Las Cruces and the County of Doña Ana, who signed a 40-year, \$150 million lease in 2004 with Province HealthCare, since absorbed into LifePoint. The hospital is a licensed 286-bed acute care facility and is accredited by JCAHO. It offers a wide range of patient services. The **University of New Mexico Cancer Center-South** opened in 2006 on the MMC campus. It is 5,300 square feet and has 9 exam rooms.
 
- ✓ **MountainView Regional Medical Center** is a for-profit general hospital operated by Community Health Systems (formerly Triad Hospitals). It opened for business in August 2002. It is a 168-bed facility with a wide range of patient services.
 
- ✓ **Mesilla Valley Hospital** is a 125-bed private psychiatric hospital operated by Universal Health Services. It is an acute inpatient and residential facility offering a variety of treatments for behavioral health issues.
- ✓ **Rehabilitation Hospital of Southern New Mexico** is a 40-bed rehabilitative care hospital, operated by Ernest Health Inc.. It opened January 2005. It treats patients after they have been cared for at general hospitals for injuries or strokes.
- ✓ **Advanced Care Hospital of Southern New Mexico** is a 20-bed long-term acute care facility operated by Ernest Health Inc.. It opened in July 2007.
- ✓ **Rio Grande Medical Group Ben Archer Health Centers** and **La Clinica de Familia Pinnacle Family Health Care**.
- ✓ **Covenant Clinics**
- ✓ **Las Cruces Urgent Care**

Museums ...

The **New Mexico Farm and Ranch Heritage Museum** is state-operated and demonstrates the history of farming and ranching in New Mexico. It is located just east of New Mexico State University (right ►)



The **New Mexico State University Arthropod Museum and Collection** contains approximately 500,000 arthropod specimens.

The **University Museum** (Kent Hall) at New Mexico State University focuses on archeological and ethnographic collections and also has some history and natural science collections.

The **Zuhl Museum** (located in the Alumni and Visitors' Center) at New Mexico State University focuses on geologic collections, including the finest collection of petrified wood on display and a large fossil and mineral collection.

There are four city-owned museums ...

The **Branigan Cultural Center** (right ►) examines local history through photographs, sculpture, paintings, and poetry. The building is on the National Register of Historic Places.



The **Las Cruces Museum of Art** offers art exhibits and classes.

The **Las Cruces Museum of Natural History** makes science and natural history more accessible to the general public and has an emphasis on local animals and plants.

The **Las Cruces Railroad Museum** is in the historic Santa Fe Railroad station. It exhibits the impact of the railroads on the local area.

The **New Mexico Veterans Museum**, a new state-owned museum, was announced in August 2008 and is planned to be constructed in Las Cruces.

Symphony ...

The **Las Cruces Symphony Orchestra** is an 80-member orchestra, conducted by Dr. Lonnie Klein. The orchestra consists of 47% students, 17% NMSU faculty, 20% other local musicians, and 16% professionals from outside Las Cruces. The venue of the orchestra is the NMSU Music Center Recital Hall.



Nearby points of interest ... The following points of interest are within a few miles of Las Cruces:

The town of **Mesilla**, located 3 miles (5 km) to the southwest, is a suburb of Las Cruces. It avoided the urban renewal that Las Cruces went through in the 1960s and still has its historic downtown plaza. The **Basilica of San Albino** (right ►) and many shops and restaurants are on the town plaza.



The **Space Murals Museum in Organ** has scale models of the Space Shuttle and Space Station *Freedom* and some relics of the Space Age.

Fort Selden State Monument (right ►) is a former United States Army post, active from 1865 to 1891. Buffalo Soldiers were stationed here. Douglas MacArthur lived here as a boy (his father was post commander). The fort is located in Radium Springs, 13 miles (21 km) north of Las Cruces on Interstate 25. There is a visitor center.



White Sands Missile Range, 25 miles east of Las Cruces on U.S. Highway 70, offers tourists a museum and a missile park. There is a refurbished V-2 rocket on exhibit.

Organ Mountains-Desert Peaks National Monument is a hiking area in the Organ Mountains (right ►). The entrance is on U.S. Highway 70 on the east side of the mountains, 17 miles (27 km) east of Las Cruces. Dripping Springs Natural Area is another hiking area, located farther south and on the west side of the mountains. Both areas are owned and managed by the Bureau of Land Management.



Prehistoric Trackways National Monument is the nation's newest national monument and is currently being developed just northwest of Las Cruces in the Robledo Mountains. This national monument protects 280-million-year-old fossil footprints and trackways discovered by Jerry P. MacDonald. These trackways (right ►) include tracks from numerous extinct animals such as *Dimetrodon* and *Edaphosaurus*.



Government ... Las Cruces is a charter city (also called a home rule city) and has a council-manager form of government. The city council consists of six councilors and the mayor, who chairs the meetings. The mayor is elected at-large, and each of the city councilors represents one neighborhood district within the city. Each resident of Las Cruces is thus represented by the mayor and by one city councilor. The mayor and city council members serve staggered four-year terms. City Hall is shown above ... it opened in April 2010.



The **ETZ** (Extra Territorial Zone) is a county managed governing body. The New Mexico State Legislature enacted a state statute that allows any municipal governing body or the board of county commissioners of any county to create Extraterritorial Zoning (ETZ) areas around cities. The ETZ area is a five-mile planning and platting boundary around the City of Las Cruces. The state law allows for such joint planning in areas outside unincorporated cities. In 1989, the City of Las Cruces and Doña Ana County established an Extraterritorial Zone for joint city and county planning, zoning, and subdivision approval. Joint planning is necessary due to the rapid suburban growth outside cities.



On June 20, 1910, under 36 Stat. 557, Congress organized New Mexico as one judicial district, authorized one judgeship for the U.S. district court, and assigned the District of New Mexico to the Eighth Circuit. The act became effective upon the admission of the State of New Mexico on January 6, 1912. On February 28, 1929, under 45 Stat. 136, Congress assigned the District of New Mexico to the newly-organized Tenth Circuit. The Federal Courthouse in Las Cruces serves Southern New Mexico.



Education ...

Public schools ... Public schools are in the Las Cruces Public School District, which covers the city of Las Cruces as well as White Sands Missile Range, the settlement of Doña Ana, and the town of Mesilla. The system has 26 elementary schools, nine middle schools, and six high schools. Of the high schools, Rio Grande Preparatory is an alternative high school.

High schools ...

- ✓ Las Cruces High School campus
- ✓ Arrowhead Park Early College High School
- ✓ Centennial High School
- ✓ Las Cruces High School
- ✓ Mayfield High School
- ✓ Oñate High School
- ✓ Alma d'arte Charter High School

Private schools ...

There are four private Christian schools. **College Heights Kindergarten** is a private Christian kindergarten, founded in 1954. **Desert Springs Christian Academy**, **Las Cruces Catholic School** and **Mesilla Valley Christian School** are the other three Christian schools in the area. Also, a small independent Baptist Christian school called the **Cornerstone Christian Academy** was established in 2005. A secular non-profit private school, **Las Cruces Academy**, aimed at gifted and academically advanced students, is offering grades K-5 with plans to eventually enroll grades K-12.

Colleges and universities ...

Four-year ...



New Mexico State University, or **NMSU**, is a land-grant university that has its main campus in Las Cruces. The school was founded in 1888 as Las Cruces College, an agricultural college, and in 1889 the school became New Mexico College of Agriculture and Mechanic Arts. It received its present name, New Mexico State University, in 1960. The NMSU Las Cruces campus had approximately 18,500 students enrolled as of fall 2012, and had a faculty-to-student ratio of about 1 to 19.

NMSU offers a wide range of programs and awards associate, bachelor's, master's, and doctoral degrees through its main campus and four community colleges. For 10 consecutive years, NMSU has been rated as one of America's 100 Best College Buys for offering "the very highest quality education at the lowest cost" by Institutional Research & Evaluation Inc., an independent research and consulting organization for higher education. NMSU is one of only two land-grant institutions classified as Hispanic-serving by the federal government. The university is home to New Mexico's NASA Space Grant Program and is one of 52 institutions in the United States to be designated a Space Grant College. During its most recent review by NASA, NMSU was one of only 12 space grant programs in the country to receive an excellent rating. In 2013, a new medical school opened on the campus of NMSU, called the **Burrell College of Osteopathic Medicine**. It is a private, non-profit medical college which trains osteopathic physicians. The first class is expected to begin instruction in August 2016.



Two-year ...

Doña Ana Community College is a branch of New Mexico State University. When it first opened in 1973 it had 500 students in six programs. In 2008, there were 4,607 full-time equivalent credit enrollments and 7,401 non-credit students served by 133 full-time faculty, 360 part-time instructors, and 155 part-time non-credit teachers, together with 227 full-time staff and 131 part-time staff. DACC operates centers in Anthony, Sunland Park, Chaparral, and White Sands Missile Range. Community Education is available at all centers and campuses.

Libraries ...



Thomas Branigan Memorial Library is the city's public library. It was constructed in 1979 and has a collection of about 185,000 items. The previous library building, also called Thomas Branigan Memorial Library, opened in 1935. That building is now the **Branigan Cultural Center** and is on the National Register of Historic Places.

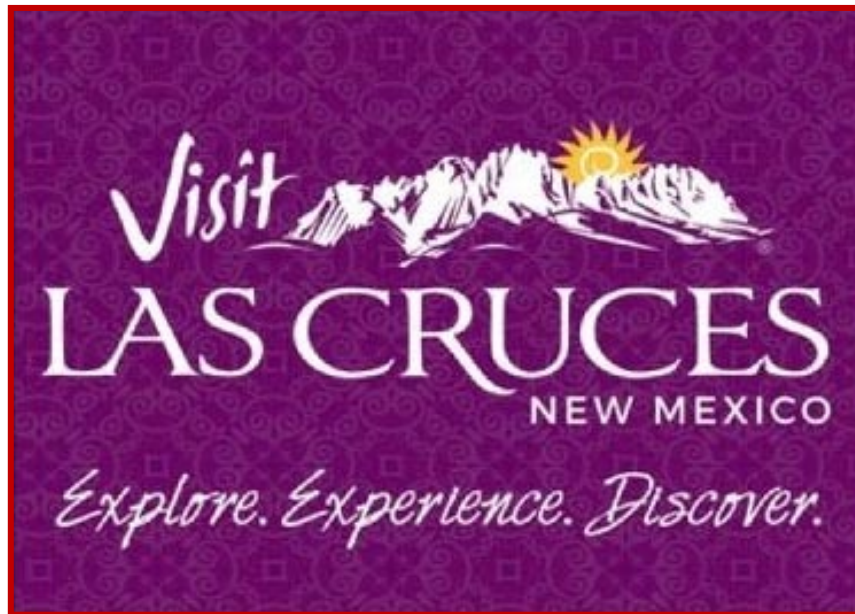


The two university libraries at the New Mexico State University campus, **Branson Library** and **Zuhl Library**, are open to the public. Any New Mexico resident can check out items from these libraries.

Sister cities ...

Las Cruces has two sister cities, as designated by **Sister Cities International**:

-  Ciudad Lerdo, Mexico
-  Nienburg, Germany



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