

Flagstaff's North Pole Experience

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Don't just tell the kiddos about how magical the North Pole is; show them. After time in Greer, The North Pole Experience—the magical portal to Santa's hometown—has moved to Flagstaff for the 2012 season, making it much closer to the Valley and 40 percent larger.

After years in Greer, the magical North Pole Experience (NPX) found a new home in Flagstaff for the 2012 season, which is currently underway. Partnering with the area's Little America Hotel, the experience is even more memorable, as the hotel is decked top-to-bottom in Christmas lights and holiday décor.

So what is the NPX? After taking a festive trolley ride (don't be surprised if elves by the names of Cocoa and Snowbear initiate plenty of Christmas carols) from Little America Hotel to the North Pole (via a magic portal), families with kids of all ages are dropped off at Santa's toy hall of fame. Display cases are decked with current and vintage toys—taking even grownups back to their childhood. Then, it is off to meet Alabaster Snowflake, Santa's main man. His explains how Santa and his elves go about making toys. After a chat with Alabaster, it is off to Santa's workshop, giving the kids a chance to work hand-in-hand with Santa's elves to create toys.

Once the toy-making is wrapped up, the families quickly head through the warehouse to see all the pretty-packaged gifts before settling in at Mrs. Claus' kitchen for cookies and snowman soup (hot chocolate). Up next, a course at Elf University during which the little ones learn what it takes to be an elf and a meeting in the mailroom to write letters to Santa. The kids will also find out if they are on the "nice" or "naughty" list. In the end, families wait by Santa's sleigh in order to have a one-on-one meeting with the man in red himself. That's right—families actually get to spend several minutes with Santa privately, taking pictures and sharing their Christmas wishes. Finally, it's back on the trolley, through the portal and back to the hotel for storytime with Mrs. Claus.



The perks of purchasing the overnight NPX package with Little America Hotel means a lovely holiday buffet dinner during the evening of the NPX tour. In the a.m., families also get to have breakfast with Santa.

NPX will be open through Dec. 28 and tickets can be booked online. Trolley and meal tickets will be conveniently e-mailed to you. Single adult workshop tickets are \$55; tickets for children 18 months and up are \$49. One-night Little America NPX room for four pricing starts at \$99. All-inclusive NPX Packages for a family of four, which include tickets to the NPX, one-night stay at the Little America Hotel, and meals including Little America's dinner buffet breakfast with Santa designed by the hotel's award-winning culinary team starts at \$455. Children ages 4 and under eat for free for both the NPX dinner and Breakfast with Santa. www.northpoleexperience.com.

NPX Pointers:

Be sure to bring a good camera flash. Most of NPX is quite dark so be sure to have a working flash to capture the moments—plus, the elves love to pose for pictures with the kids!

There might be a bit of downtime in the sleigh area as families await their turn to see Santa. There isn't a lot to see in this area of NPX so have snacks and small toys to keep little ones busy.

Though Flagstaff is chilly this time of year, dress in layers as the actual NPX is rather warm in spots.

From departure to return at the hotel, the experience is about two hours.