

Sunland Park, New Mexico

At 5,000 years old, Sunland Park, NM is rich with cultural heritage and ready to share it with you. Located at the base of Mt. Cristo Rey, with the beautiful Florida Mountains to the north, Sunland park is a small town of 13,000 people, and the southernmost city of Dona Ana County. Historically, the community of Sunland Park was known as a colonia, a subdivision usually developed illegally, unincorporated, with housing below code, high unemployment, high poverty rates and few services. Despite the harsh lifestyle, the people of Sunland Park grew to become like a family, and worked together to get things done. The city started to transform in 1901, with the construction of the rail line from Arizona to El Paso known as the South line. The South line brought new people and increased prosperity to Sunland Park.

In 1950 the Sunland Race Track brought excitement and investment to the area, attracting top racing talents from the East and West coasts, along with many horse-racing fans and spectators. Texas state laws did not allow betting at racetracks so the park was built on the New Mexico side, which had no laws against betting. With the decline in industry in the 1990's the state of New Mexico asked its legislature to incorporate slot machines into the racetrack park in an effort to save the business. Things are looking up for Sunland Park - in 1999 the gaming license was granted and a casino opened in the racetrack complex.

The most fascinating thing about this town is the way the residents stuck together and formed a strong community. Sunland park was once a very small and economically disadvantaged town that fought together to survive and grow into a prospering gaming destination. This long-inhabited town is rich in history and has preserved its separate and unique identity despite its proximity to the industrial areas of El Paso, Texas and Juarez, Mexico.

Source(s):

Hoffman, Eva J. "A Guidebook to Amtrak's Sunset Limited." Flashing Yellow Guidebooks, Golden, CO, 2009

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