



REDISCOVERING *new* MEXICO

New Mexico is commonly known for its cutting-edge art scene, powdery ski slopes and green-chile cheeseburgers, but a journey to (or back to) this Land of Enchantment can thrill in ways you never expected. By Amy Carniol

Hot Air Ballooning

It's not unusual to see the New Mexico sky dotted with dozens of brightly colored hot air balloons. In lieu of a suitable environment for boating, ballooning is the pastime here, and residents often spend days off floating above ground. Guests, too, can see the world from a different angle. Hot air ballooning companies operate throughout the state, although the best bet is to depart from **Albuquerque**. A unique geographical phenomenon called the Albuquerque Box gives this city the world's most ideal weather for navigating hot air balloons.

While New Mexico enjoys more than 300 days of sunshine a year, play it safe and plan your balloon ride for early in your trip. That way, if the weather doesn't cooperate, you can reschedule for the next day. Flights are usually undertaken first thing in the morning, and passengers often help prep the balloon before sunrise. Dress appropriately, as temperatures early in the morning can dip down to freezing.

For a truly spectacular sight, come in early October, when the blue sky above Albuquerque becomes a rainbow of vivid hues and unusual shapes. More than 700 hot air balloons take flight during the **Albuquerque International Balloon Fiesta**, and hundreds of thousands of people from around the world stand with faces upturned and eyes wide to watch the largest ballooning event on earth.

Pueblos

New Mexico is home to a rare cultural phenomenon, where indigenous people live as their ancestors did more than 1,000 years ago. *Pueblos*, literally towns, first emerged in the 11th century, when the introduction of domesticated maize farming allowed the hunter-gatherer culture to settle in a permanent locale. Today, the 19 pueblos scattered throughout the state showcase a lifestyle that recalls a pre-industrial time. Several brown adobe homes are punctuated with beehive-shaped ovens, called *hornos*, and sport bright-blue doors as they draw inspiration from the colors and textures of the natural world.

While some pueblos welcome guests year-round, others only open their doors for special occasions. Depending on your specific destination, do your research beforehand to make sure you'll be allowed on the premises. In many



Hybrid Earthship at night



San Francisco de Asis Mission Church, Taos



The Sandia Mountains, Albuquerque



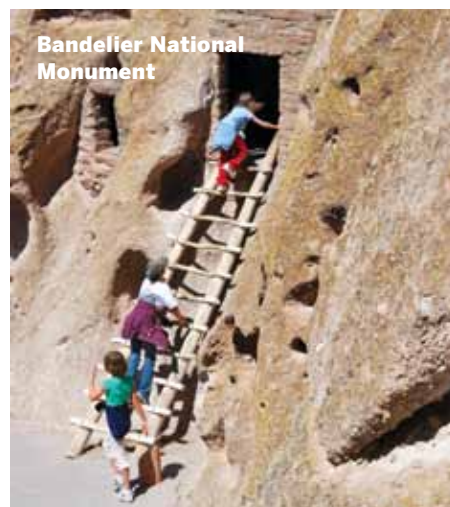
An adobe home in Santa Fe

pueblos, a camera permit, often available for a small fee, is required to take photos. The northernmost pueblo, located on 95,000 acres in **Taos**, is particularly hospitable, and the price of admission includes a 30-minute guided tour. At this National Historic Landmark, guests can enter working homes to get an inside look at how pueblo people live. While residents set up shop to sell food and crafts to tourists, the atmosphere is far from commercial, making it a perfect place to give kids a glimpse into a simpler way of life. For an authentic taste of pueblo cuisine, try the frybread, a round, deep-fried dough often served with honey.

Bandelier National Monument

Forty-five minutes outside of **Santa Fe**, Bandelier National Monument is a must-see site. This vast network of ancient cliff dwellings and wilderness terrain spans 46 square miles of New Mexico landscape. As elevations range from 5,340 feet to 10,199 feet, the area hosts a diverse cross-section of wildlife and was once home to a thriving

pueblo community. Today, guests can explore the hundreds of now-vacant homes, called “cavates,” which are carved from stone and built into the sides of cliffs. “For families, Bandelier is great in its versatility. All levels of hikers and walkers can enjoy the monument,” says Andrea Gates, managing director of the **Rosewood Inn of the Anasazi** in Santa Fe. Certain areas are easily accessible, while others are reached via a series of ladders and staircases.



Bandelier National Monument

A newly reopened visitor center, housing exhibits about Pueblo culture, is open year-round, though hours of operation vary by season. Weather can be unpredictable in the winter, so, if possible, plan your visit to Bandelier during the warmer months.

Earthship Biotecture World Headquarters

In contrast to the pueblos, which recall an ancient lifestyle, a truly visionary settlement in Taos offers a glimpse into the world of tomorrow. Here, futuristic homes called Earthships are made from all-natural and recycled materials, including dirt, tires and bottles. These off-the-grid, self-sustaining structures provide not only shelter, but also heating, cooling, power, water and a sewage system. They use energy from the sun for power, and the dense walls naturally regulate the temperature inside, no matter the weather. These homes even provide suitable environments for growing food.

Michael Reynolds, the founder of **Earthship Biotecture**, began developing this revolutionary architectural style in the 1970s, and



in 1994, Taos welcomed the first full-time Earthship residents. “To my knowledge, there are no other ‘green’ buildings that take every idea as far as Earthship does in terms of being fully integrated,” says Kirsten Jacobsen, education director for Earthship Biotechnology. While Earthship technology currently is employed all over the world, no other community has reached the scale of the main settlement in Taos, which boasts 60 homes and can accommodate up to 130. Visitors are sure to leave with a newfound understanding of the power of the natural world. While adults learn how to be more energy efficient, kids easily identify with how the Earthships’ systems work.

Spas and Hot Springs

“New Mexico’s spas ... often pay homage to the heritage of local tribes, with treatments incorporating indigenous materials and ceremonies, as well as ‘sacred spaces’ for meditation,” says Andrew Harper. **Ojo Caliente**, a truly awesome example of such a spa, is located just outside of Taos. Here, visitors to the hot springs can enjoy mineral baths and spa treatments in a funky, earthy environment set among striking red cliffs. This National Historic Site is the only hot spring in the world with its unique combination of iron, soda, lithium, sodium and arsenic.

For those travelers looking for a more upscale spa experience, New Mexico offers no shortage of options. At **The Inn of the Five Graces** in Santa Fe, visitors can treat themselves to customized, in-room massages that incorporate techniques developed in India more than 5,000 years ago.

Wineries

Oenophiles can feel at home in New Mexico, the oldest wine-producing region in the United States, though the wineries here have had quite a tumultuous past. From the 17th century through the 1800s, New Mexico wine production flourished. Adverse weather, combined with floodwaters from the Rio Grande, effectively later destroyed the vineyards. Production fell from almost 1,000,000 gallons of wine in 1884 to fewer than 2,000 gallons in 1910.

Since the 1980s, the New Mexico wine industry has enjoyed a fruitful resurgence, today producing almost 70,000 gallons of wine each year. “At pretty much any winery in New Mexico, you can walk in without an appointment and talk to the people who actually make the wine,” explains Olivia DeCamp, executive director of the New Mexico Wine Growers’ Association. The 42 wineries and

AREA ALLIANCE PARTNERS

HOTELS

Encantado, An Auberge Resort; Santa Fe
The Inn of the Five Graces; Santa Fe
The Lodge at Chama; Chama
Rosewood Inn of the Anasazi; Santa Fe

tasting rooms operating in the state today produce several varieties, from Pinot Noir to Sauvignon Blanc to Chardonnay. Visitors can vineyard-hop on their own schedules or join organized tours led by knowledgeable guides.

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While a few days in New Mexico will definitely yield an unforgettable trip, if you can extend your stay, so much the better. “There are so many activities to do here, the main comment we hear is, ‘I wish I had planned to stay a day or two longer;’ ” says Jeff Mahan, general manager at Santa Fe’s **Encantado Resort**. ✈

AN ART LOVER’S *new* MEXICO

New Mexico’s tranquil vibe and stunning landscapes have been inspiring artists for centuries.

Georgia O’Keeffe House,

Abiquiu: O’Keefe, an iconic figure in 20th-century American art, lived and worked here for almost 40 years. Be sure to book well in advance, as tours are limited throughout the year.

Canyon Road, Santa Fe: The third-largest art market in the country hosts a gallery crawl during the summer months.

Museum of International Folk Art, Santa Fe: Home to the largest collection of folk art in the world, this museum contains pieces from more than 100 countries.

Taos Pueblo, Taos: Travelers can purchase pottery and crafts here that incorporate generations-old materials and techniques.

High Road art studios, Santa Fe to Taos: Stop at studios along this scenic drive for face time with local artists.



Historic Taos Pueblo