

The Best of Northern New Mexico

New Mexico's Pueblo tribes have one character that stands out among many as a symbol of the spirit of this state: the fun-maker, called by a variety of names, most notably Koshare. Within the Native American dances, this black-and-white-striped character has many powers. He can cure some diseases, make rain fall, and increase fertility. Above all, the irreverent joker exposes our deepest foibles.

As you travel throughout northern New Mexico, you may see evidence of the Koshare-like powers in the land's magical beauty and in the tender relationships between cultures. This place has witnessed immense geologic upheavals, from volcanic explosions to cataclysmic ground shifts. It has seen tragedy in the clash between Spanish, Native American, and Anglo cultures. And yet, with its Koshare nature, it has transformed those experiences into immeasurable richness. Today, it is a land of stunning expanses, immense cultural diversity, and creativity—a place where people very much pursue their own paths.

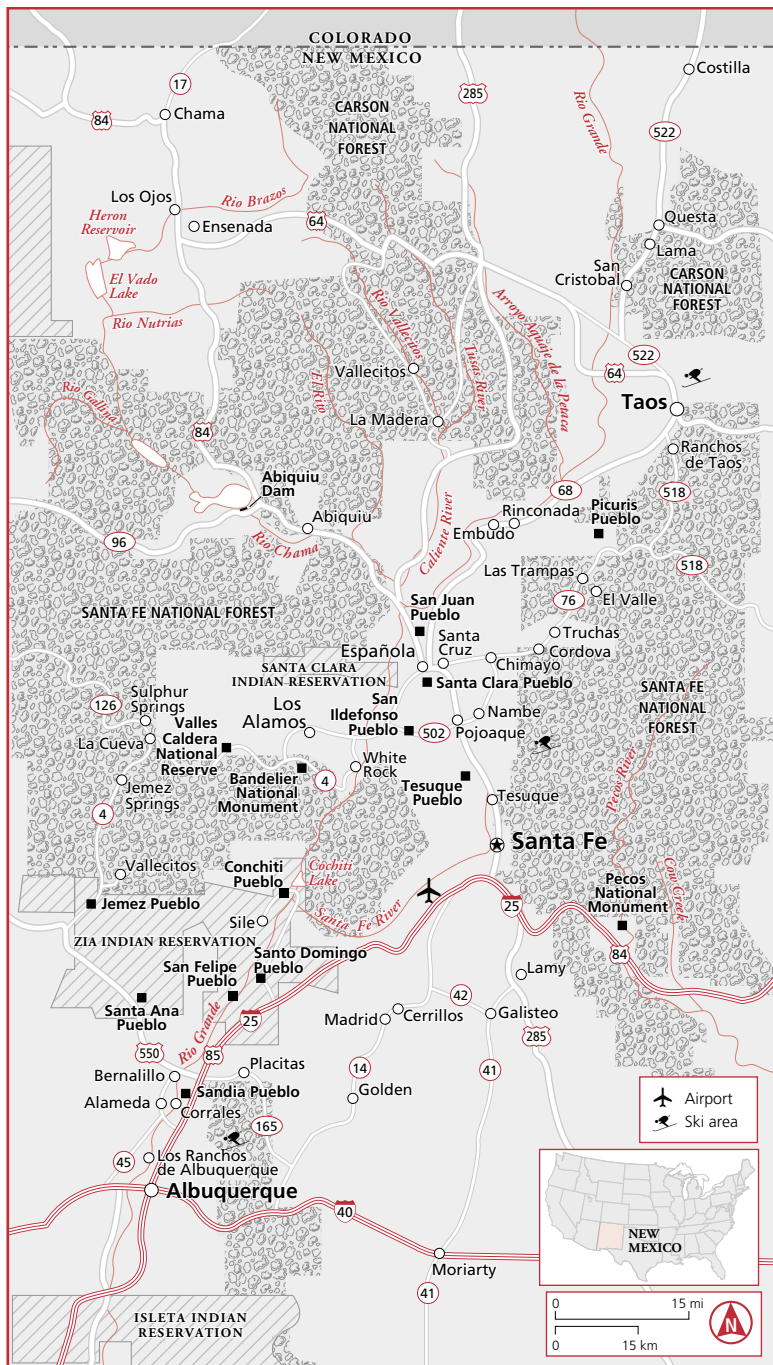
The center of the region is Santa Fe, a hip, artsy city that wears its 400-year-old mores on its sleeve. Not far away is upstart **Taos**, the little arts town and ski center of just 5,000 people that lies wedged between the 13,000-foot **Sangre de Cristo Mountains** and the 700-foot-deep **Rio Grande Gorge**. **Albuquerque** is the big city, New Mexico style, where people from all over the state come to trade. Not far from these three cities are the 19 settlements and numerous ruins of the Native American Pueblo culture, an incredible testament to the resilience of a proud people. And through it all weave the **Manzano**, **Sandia**, **Sangre de Cristo**, and **Jemez mountains**, multimillion-year-old reminders of the recent arrival of humans in this vast and unique landscape.

From skiing to art galleries, you have a wealth of choices in front of you when planning a trip to northern New Mexico. To help you get started, here are some of my favorite things to do, places to stay, and places to eat in and around Santa Fe, Taos, and Albuquerque.

1 Frommer's Favorite Northern New Mexico Experiences

- **High Road to Taos:** This spectacular 80-mile route into the mountains between Santa Fe and Taos takes you through red painted deserts, villages bordered by apple and peach orchards, and the foothills of 13,000-foot peaks. You can stop in Cordova, known for its woodcarvers, or Chimayo, known for its weavers. At the fabled **Santuario de Chimayo**, you can rub healing dust between your fingers. See “Along the High Road to Taos” in chapter 10.
- **Pueblo dances:** These native dances, related to the changing cycles of the earth, offer a unique chance to see how an indigenous culture worships and rejoices. Throughout the year, the pueblos' people participate in ceremonies ranging from harvest and deer

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dances to those commemorating the feast days of their particular saints—all in the mystical light of the northern New Mexico sun. See chapter 10 for more information on visiting pueblos.

- **Santa Fe Opera:** One of the finest opera companies in the United States has called Santa Fe home for nearly 50 years. Performances are held during the summer months in a hilltop, open-air amphitheater. Highlights for 2005 include Osvaldo Golijov's *Ainadamar*, based on the life of poet and playwright Federico García Lorca, and Puccini's *Turandot*. See p. 139.
- **Taos Ski Valley:** World renowned for its difficult runs and the ridge where skiers hike for up to 2 hours to ski fresh powder, Taos has long been a pilgrimage site for extreme skiers. Over the years, the ski area has opened up new bowls to accommodate intermediate and beginning skiers, too. See p. 210.
- **Museum of International Folk Art:** Santa Fe's perpetually expanding collection of folk art is the largest in the world, with thousands of objects from more than 100 countries. You'll find an amazing array of imaginative works, ranging from Hispanic folk art *santos* (carved saints) to Indonesian textiles and African sculptures. See p. 108.
- **Sandia Peak Tramway:** The world's longest tramway ferries passengers 2¾ miles, from Albuquerque's city limits to the summit of the 10,378-foot Sandia Peak. On the way, you'll likely see rare Rocky Mountain bighorn sheep and birds of prey. Go in the evening to watch the sun set, then enjoy the glimmering city lights on your way down. See p. 254.
- **Albuquerque International Balloon Fiesta:** The world's largest balloon rally assembles some 750 colorful balloons and includes races and contests. Highlights are the mass ascension at sunrise and the special shapes rodeo, in which balloons in all sorts of whimsical forms, from liquor bottles to cows, rise into the sky. See "Northern New Mexico Calendar of Events," in chapter 2.
- **Bandelier National Monument:** These ruins provide a spectacular peek into the lives of the ancestral Puebloan culture, which reached its peak in this area around 1100 A.D. Less than 15 miles south of Los Alamos, the ruins spread across a peaceful canyon. You'll probably see deer and rabbits as you make your way through the canyon to the most dramatic site, a kiva and dwelling in a cave 140 feet above the canyon floor. See p. 153.
- **Northern New Mexican Enchiladas:** There are few things more New Mexican than the enchilada. You can order red or green chile, or "Christmas"—half and half. Sauces are rich, seasoned with *ajo* (garlic) and oregano. New Mexican cuisine isn't smothered in cheese and sour cream, so the flavors of the chiles, corn, and meats can really be savored. Enchiladas are often served with *frijoles* (beans), *posole* (hominy), and *sopaipillas* (fried bread). See "Chiles, *Sopaipillas* & Other New Mexican Specialties" in the appendix.
- **The Galleries Along Canyon Road:** Originally a Pueblo Indian route over the mountains and later an artists' community, Santa Fe's Canyon Road is now gallery central—the arts capital of the Southwest. The narrow one-way street is lined with more than 100 galleries, in addition to restaurants and private residences. Artwork ranges from the beautiful to the bizarre. You can step into artists' simple studio galleries as well as refined

galleries showing world-renowned artists' works, such as paintings by Georgia O'Keeffe and sculptures by Frederic Remington. Be sure to stop for lunch at one of the street-side cafes. See "Walking Tour 2: Barrio de Analco & Canyon Road," in chapter 7.

- **Rio Grande Gorge:** A hike into this dramatic gorge is unforgettable. You'll first see it as you come over a rise heading toward Taos, a colossal slice in the earth formed 130 million years ago. Drive about 35 miles north of Taos, near the village of Cerro, to the Rio Grande Wild River Area. From the lip of the canyon, you descend through millions of years of geologic history on land inhabited by Indians since 16,000 B.C. When you reach the river, you can dip your toes in the fabled *rio*. If you're visiting during spring and early summer, and you like an adrenaline rush, be sure to hook up with a professional guide and raft the Taos Box, a 17-mile stretch of class IV whitewater rapids. See chapter 14.
- **María Benitez Teatro Flamenco:** Flamenco dancing originated in Spain, strongly influenced by the Moors; it is a cultural expression held sacred by Spanish gypsies. Intricate toe and heel clicking, sinuous arm and hand gestures, expressive guitar solos, and *cante hondo*, or "deep song," characterize the passionate dance. A native

New Mexican, María Benitez was trained in Spain, to which she returns each year to find dancers and prepare her show. This world-class dancer and her troupe perform at the Radisson Hotel in Santa Fe from late June to early September. See p. 141.

- **Old Town:** Albuquerque's commercial center until about 1880, Old Town still gives a remarkable sense of what life was once like in a Southwestern village. You can meander down crooked streets and narrow alleys and rest in the cottonwood-shaded plaza. Though many of the shops are now very touristy, you can still happen upon some interesting shopping and dining finds here. Native Americans sell jewelry, pottery, and weavings under a portal on the plaza. See p. 252.
- **Taos Pueblo:** Possibly the original home of Pueblo-style architecture, this bold structure where 200 residents still live much as their ancestors did a thousand years ago is awe-inspiring. Rooms built of mud are poetically stacked to echo the shape of Taos Mountain behind them. As you explore the pueblo, you can visit the residents' studios, munch on bread baked in an *horno* (a beehive-shaped oven), and wander past the fascinating ruins of the old church and cemetery. See p. 206.

2 Best Bed-and-Breakfast Inns

- **Hacienda Antigua** (Albuquerque): This 200-year-old adobe inn was the first stagecoach stop out of Old Town in Albuquerque and now offers a glimpse of those old days with refreshing modern touches. The guest rooms surround a quiet courtyard, and a pool and hot tub are tucked away.

The place sings of old New Mexico, with history evident in places such as La Capilla, the home's former chapel, which is now a guest room. See p. 238.

- **Dos Casas Viejas** (Santa Fe): These two old houses (*dos casas viejas*) offer the kind of luxury accommodations you'd expect

from a fine hotel. The rooms, each with a patio and private entrance, are finely renovated and richly decorated, all with Mexican-tile floors and kiva fireplaces. Enjoy your breakfast alongside the elegant lap pool or on your private patio. Treat yourself to the in-room spa treatments. See p. 74.

- **Casa de las Chimeneas** (Taos): This 80-year-old adobe home has

been a model of Southwestern elegance since its opening in 1988. The inn has a spa with a small fitness room and sauna, as well as complete massage and facial treatments. Rooms range from newer units with heated Saltillo tile floors, gas kiva fireplaces, and jetted tubs to more traditional ones with an antique feel. See p. 184.

3 Best Historic Hotels

- **La Posada de Albuquerque** (Albuquerque): Built in 1939 by Conrad Hilton as the famed hotelier's first inn in his home state of New Mexico, this hostelry on the National Register of Historic Places feels like old Spain. An elaborate Moorish brass-and-mosaic fountain stands in the center of the tiled lobby floor, and old-fashioned tin chandeliers hang from the two-story ceiling. All guest-room furniture is handcrafted. There are spacious rooms with big windows looking out across the city and toward the mountains. See p. 236.
- **The Bishop's Lodge** (Santa Fe): More than a century ago, Bishop Jean-Baptiste Lamy often escaped clerical politics by hiking into a valley north of town called Little Tesuque. He built a retreat and chapel that years later have become The Bishop's Lodge. All rooms are spacious and feature handcrafted furniture and local artwork. Activities include horseback riding, hiking, tennis, and swimming. See p. 69.
- **La Fonda** (Santa Fe): Though other hotels far surpass this one in terms of swank, this place still reigns for its old Santa Fe charm. The La Fonda was the inn at the end of the Santa Fe Trail; it saw trappers, traders, and merchants, as well as notables such as President Rutherford B. Hayes and General Ulysses S. Grant. A great place to wander through, have lunch, and even go dancing, its rooms vary broadly, all with the crookedness and originality of a historical place. If you have deep pockets, try the newer deluxe suites, which are a very refined choice. See p. 64.
- **The Historic Taos Inn** (Taos): This inn occupies a number of 19th-century Southwestern homes. Dr. Thomas Paul Martin purchased the complex in 1895; after his death his widow, Helen, turned it into a hotel. All rooms are unique and comfortable, decorated with Spanish colonial art, Taos-style furniture, and other interesting touches; though some have quirks that don't appeal to modern travelers. See p. 178.

4 Best Resorts

- **Hyatt Regency Tamaya Resort and Spa** (Albuquerque): Situated on Santa Ana Pueblo land, this grand resort has all a human might need to get away from the world. Three swimming pools, a 16,000-square-foot full-service spa and fitness center, the 18-hole

Twin Warriors Championship Golf Course designed by Gary Panks, and views of the Sandia Mountains make for plenty to do. Meanwhile, spacious rooms offer quiet for those who'd rather do nothing. It's only 15 minutes from Albuquerque and 45 minutes from Santa Fe. See p. 240.

- **La Posada de Santa Fe Resort and Spa** (Santa Fe): With the feel of a meandering adobe village but the service of a fine hotel, this has become one of New Mexico's premier resorts. It has a Zen-Southwestern-style spa and pool and

spacious spa rooms. Most rooms don't have views but have outdoor patios, and most are tucked back into the quiet compound. See p. 64.

- **El Monte Sagrado** (Taos): With guest rooms and casitas set around a grassy "Sacred Circle," this new eco-resort is the quintessence of refinement. Every detail, from the waterfalls and chemical-free pool and hot tubs to the authentic theme decor in the rooms, has been created with conscious care. See p. 176.

5 Best Places to Dine

- **Jennifer James** (Albuquerque): This French bistro-style restaurant serves contemporary American cuisine with plenty of panache. You might feast on pan-seared pork with apple bread pudding or grilled quail over endive and radicchio. See p. 246.
- **The Compound** (Santa Fe): This reincarnation of one of Santa Fe's classic restaurants serves daring contemporary American food in a soulful setting. Such delicacies as monkfish chorizo with watercress or grilled beef tenderloin with Italian potatoes will please sophisticated palates—and probably simpler ones too. See p. 82.
- **Santacafé** (Santa Fe): The food here borrows from an international menu of preparations and offerings. The minimalist decor accentuates the beautiful architecture of the 18th-century Padre Gallegos House. One of my favorite dishes is the Alaskan halibut with English peas and saffron couscous. See p. 87.
- **The Shed** (Santa Fe): The Shed, a Santa Fe luncheon institution

since 1953, occupies several rooms in part of a rambling hacienda that was built in 1692. The sauces here have been refined over the years, creating amazing flavors in basic dishes like enchiladas, burritos, and stuffed *sopaipillas*. The mocha cake is renowned. See p. 95. Sister restaurant **La Choza** is just as good, with a similar menu. See p. 94.

- **De La Tierra** (Taos): Located at the new eco-resort El Monte Sagrado, this elegant restaurant serves imaginative regional American food and other delights such as wild game. The venison medallions with garlic mashed potatoes is excellent, as is the rosemary skewered shrimp with corn polenta. An expansive wine list completes the experience. See p. 194.
- **Joseph's Table** (Taos): Now in new digs on Taos Plaza, this font of creativity serves delightful dishes with plenty of flair. Try the steak au poivre over mashed potatoes with a wild mushroom salad. Delectable. See p. 194.