

The Best of Northern New Mexico

New Mexico's Pueblo tribes have one character who 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 among 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 The Most Unforgettable Northern New Mexico Experiences

- **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 often are served with *frijoles* (beans), *posole* (hominy), and *sopaipillas* (fried bread). See “Chiles, *Sopaipillas* & Other New Mexican Specialties” in chapter 2.

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- **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 11.
- **Santa Fe Opera** (☎ 800/280-4654 or 505/986-5900; www.santafeopera.org): One of the finest opera companies in the United States has called Santa Fe home for a half-century. Performances are held during the summer months in a hilltop, open-air amphitheater. Highlights for 2009 include the world premiere of *The Letter*, composed by Paul Moravec, the first performance at the Santa Fe Opera of Gluck’s *Alceste*, and new productions of Verdi’s *La Traviata* and Donizetti’s *The Elixir of Love*. See p. 154.
- **Museum of International Folk Art** (706 Camino Lejo; ☎ 505/476-1200; www.moifa.org): 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. 121.
- **Albuquerque International Balloon Fiesta** (☎ 800/733-9918; www.balloonfiesta.com): 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 3.
- **María Benitez Teatro Flamenco** (Institute for Spanish Arts; ☎ 888/435-2636; www.mariabenitez.com): Flamenco dancing originated in Spain, strongly influenced by the Moors; it’s 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 Lodge at Santa Fe from late June to early September. See p. 156.
- **Taos Pueblo** (Veterans Hwy., Taos Pueblo; ☎ 575/758-1028; www.taospueblo.com): 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. 218.

2 The Best Splurge Hotels

- **The Bishop’s Lodge Ranch Resort & Spa** (Bishop’s Lodge Rd., Santa Fe; ☎ 505/983-6377; www.bishops
- lodge.com): 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. 83.

- **Inn of the Anasazi** (113 Washington Ave., Santa Fe; ☎ **800/688-8100** or 505/988-3030; www.innoftheanasazi.com): Just steps from the plaza, this elegant hotel offers a taste of Anasazi architecture. The interior utilizes stacked sandstone with touches of Navajo artwork to create a warm ambience. Add to that excellent amenities and stellar service. See p. 74.
- **La Posada de Santa Fe Resort and Spa** (330 E. Palace Ave., Santa Fe; ☎ **800/727-5276** or 505/986-0000; www.laposadadesantafe.com): 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. 77.
- **Rancho de San Juan** (US 285 near Española; ☎ **505/753-6818**; www.ranchodesanjuan.com): Just 38 miles from Santa Fe, in the enchanting country near Ojo Caliente, this

award-winning inn offers complete luxury and the quiet of the country. The rooms in the inn, as well as the casitas set among the hills, are all decorated with impressive art and antiques, and have spectacular views. See p. 175.

- **El Monte Sagrado** (317 Kit Carson Rd., Taos; ☎ **800/828-TAOS** [8267] or 575/758-3502; www.elmontesagrado.com): With guest rooms and casitas set around a grassy "Sacred Circle," this eco-resort is the quintessence of luxury. 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. 191.
- **Hyatt Regency Tamaya Resort and Spa** (1300 Tuyuna Trail, Santa Ana Pueblo; ☎ **800/55-HYATT** [49288] or 505/867-1234; www.tamaya.hyatt.com): 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 25 minutes from Albuquerque and 45 minutes from Santa Fe. See p. 252.

3 The Best Moderately Priced Hotels

- **Santa Fe Motel and Inn** (510 Cerrillos Rd., Santa Fe; ☎ **800/930-5002** or 505/982-1039; www.santafemotel.com): Rooms at this inn, walking distance from the plaza, combine the ambience of the Southwest—bold colors and some handmade furniture—with a standard motel price tag. See p. 81.
- **El Rey Inn** (1862 Cerrillos Rd., Santa Fe; ☎ **800/521-1349** or 505/982-1931; www.elreyinnsantafe.com): If old-style court motels awaken the road warrior in you, this is your place. Built in the 1930s and added onto over the years, the King provides a variety of room types, all nicely appointed. See p. 86.

- Though it's actually an inn, one of the best moderately priced accommodations in Taos—with more luxurious options as well—is the **Old Taos Guesthouse** (1028 Witt Rd., Taos; ☎ **800/758-5448** or 575/758-5448; www.oldtaos.com). Surrounded by acres of country, it provides a lovely rural stay. See p. 199.
- Providing comfortable rooms with a Native American theme, the **Nativo Lodge** (6000 Pan American Fwy., NE, Albuquerque; ☎ **888/628-4861** or 505/798-4300; www.nativolodge.com), offers a bit of New Mexico culture at a reasonable price. See p. 249.

4 The Most Unforgettable Dining Experiences

- **The Compound** (653 Canyon Rd., Santa Fe; ☎ **505/982-4353**; www.compoundrestaurant.com): This reincarnation of one of Santa Fe's classic restaurants serves daring contemporary American food in a soulful setting. Such delicacies as the grilled beef tenderloin with Italian potatoes and foie gras hollandaise will please sophisticated palates—and probably simpler ones too. See p. 94.
- **Santacafé** (231 Washington Ave., Santa Fe; ☎ **505/984-1788**; www.santacafe.com): The food here borrows from an international menu of preparations and offerings. The minimalist decor accentuates the graceful architecture of the 18th-century Padre Gallegos House. One of my favorite dishes is the grilled rack of lamb with potato-leek gratin. See p. 100.
- **Geronimo** (724 Canyon Rd., Santa Fe; ☎ **505/982-1500**; www.geronimo-restaurant.com): Set in the 1756 Borrego House on Canyon Road, this restaurant offers brilliant flavors in a serene adobe atmosphere. The elk tenderloin here is Santa Fe's most prized entree. See p. 97.
- **The Shed** (113½ E. Palace Ave., Santa Fe; ☎ **505/982-9030**; www.sfshed.com): 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. 108. Sister restaurant **La Choza** is just as good, with a similar menu. See p. 107.
- **De La Tierra** (317 Kit Carson Rd., Taos; ☎ **800/828-TAOS** [8267] or 575/758-3502; www.elmontesagrado.com): 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 pan roasted East Coast cod served with truffle Persian potatoes is excellent. An expansive wine list completes the experience. See p. 205.
- **Joseph's Table** (108-A S. Taos Plaza, Taos; ☎ **575/751-4512**; www.josephs-table.com): 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 Madeira mushroom sauce. Delectable. See p. 206.
- With views overlooking Albuquerque's city lights and the mountains, **Bien Shur** (30 Rainbow Rd. NE, at Sandia Resort & Casino, Albuquerque; ☎ **800/526-9366**; www.sandiaresort.com) offers inventive food with a hint of Native America. The rack of lamb with a garlic mint au jus is excellent. See p. 260.

5 The Best Things to Do for Free

- **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 8.
- **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 dances to those commemorating the feast days of their particular saints—all in the mystical light of the northern New Mexico sun. See chapter 11 for more information on visiting pueblos.
- **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 not a hiker, you can get a sense of the canyon by walking across the Rio Grande Gorge Bridge. See chapter 15.
- **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. 266.

6 The Best Outdoor Activities

- **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, and, most recently snowboarders have become welcome too! See p. 222.
- **Sandia Peak Tramway:** The world's longest tramway ferries passengers $2\frac{3}{4}$ 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, and then enjoy the glimmering city lights on your way down. See p. 268.

- **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. 167.
- **Whitewater Rafting on the Rio Grande:** In spring and early summer, the region's most notorious whitewater trip, the Taos Box, takes rafters on an 18-mile jaunt through the Rio Grande Gorge. Less extreme types can enjoy a trip down Pilar and still get plenty wet. See p. 228.
- **Llama Trekking:** Also in the Taos area, two outfitters take hikers on day or multiday trips. You get to enjoy the scenery while the stout and docile creatures do the work. The trips come with gourmet food. See p. 228.
- **Hot-Air Ballooning:** One of the biggest treats about being in Albuquerque is waking each day and looking at the sky. Unless it's very windy or extremely cold, you'll likely see some colorful globes floating serenely on the horizon. You might even be startled with the sound of flames blasting as one flies over your head! The experience of riding in one is indescribable. You're literally floating, being carried along by nothing but the wind. Try it! See p. 274.
- **Bosque del Apache National Wildlife Refuge (Socorro; ☎ 505/835-1828):** About 80 miles south of Albuquerque, this is one of the nation's finest refuges. In winter, visitors come to see volumes of birds. In early December, the refuge may harbor as many as 45,000 snow geese, 57,000 ducks of many different species, and 18,000 sandhill cranes. Seeing them "fly out" to the fields in the morning, or "fly in" to the lakes in the evening is a life-altering experience. See p. 275.

7 The Best Offbeat Experiences

- **Watching Zozobra Burn (Santa Fe; ☎ 505/988-7575):** Part of Las Fiestas de Santa Fe held in early September, this ritual draws crowds to the core of the city to cheer as "Old Man Gloom," a giant marionette, moans and struggles as he burns. The Fiestas also include Masses, parades, dances, food, and arts. See p. 36.
- **Theater Grottesco (551 W. Cordova Rd. #8400, Santa Fe; ☎ 505/474-8400; www.theatergrottesco.org):** This theater troupe likes to shock, confuse, confound, and tickle its audience's funny bones. Their original works—presented for about a month each spring or summer, and sometimes in the winter as well—combine adept movement with sound, story, and, well . . . complete brilliance. See p. 156.
- **Black Hole (4015 Arkansas, Los Alamos; ☎ 505/662-5053):** Oddball history buffs will love wandering among this shrine to the nuclear age. Packed to the ceiling with the remains of the nuclear age, from Geiger counters to a giant Waring blender, it's peace activist Edward Grothus's statement about the proliferation of war and the materials that make it happen. See p. 166.
- **D. H. Lawrence Ranch (NM 522, San Cristobal; ☎ 505/776-2245):** North of Taos, this memorial offers a look into the oddly touching devotion for this controversial author, who lived and wrote in the area in the

early 1920s. The guest book reveals a wellspring of stories of pilgrimages to the site. See p. 219.

- **American International Rattlesnake Museum** (202 San Felipe St., NW; ☎ 505/242-6569; www.rattlesnakes.com): This Albuquerque museum offers a glimpse of reptilian

life. You'll see living specimens of common, uncommon, and very rare rattlesnakes of North, Central, and South America in naturally landscaped habitats. More than 30 species are included, along with oddities such as albino and patternless rattlesnakes. See p. 272.