

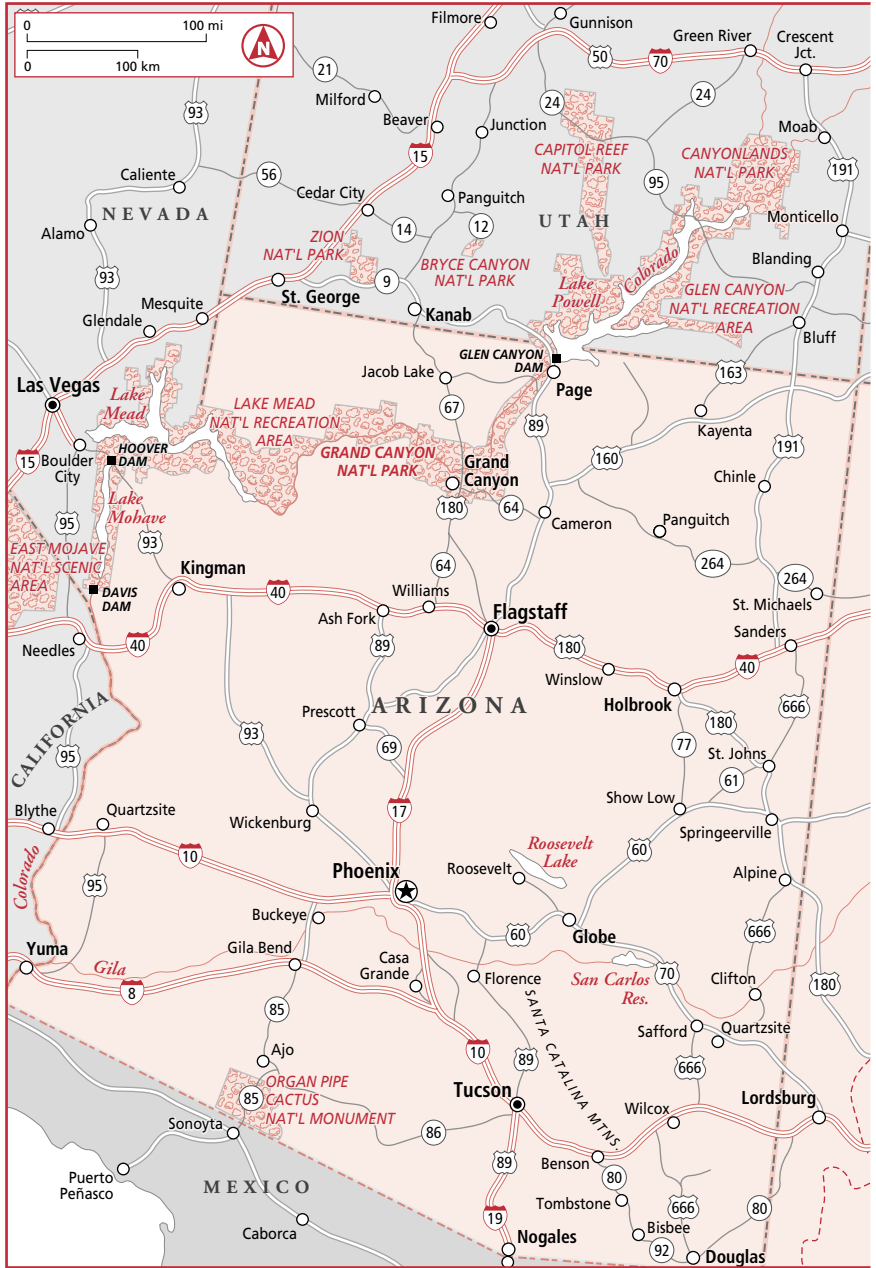
The Best of the Southwest

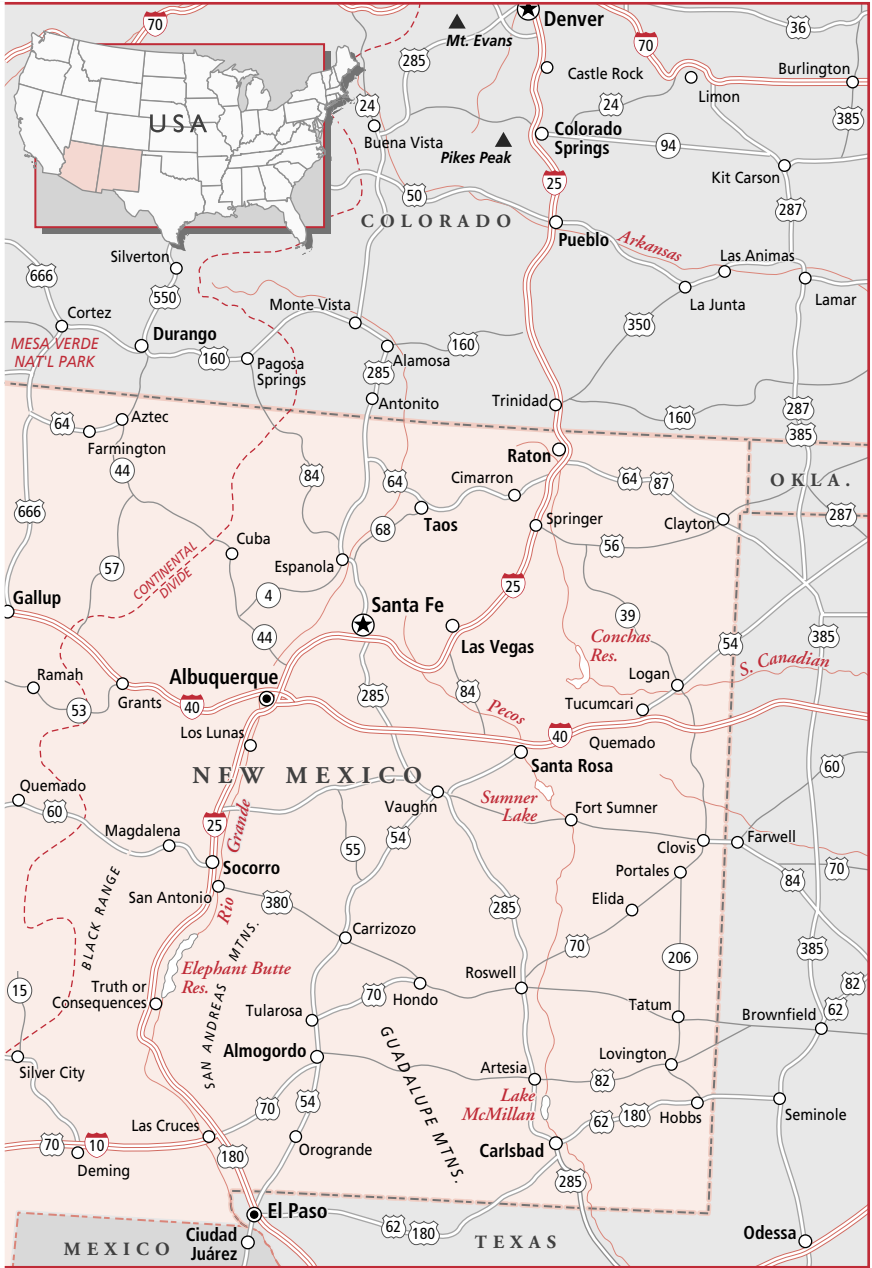
Planning a trip to a region as large and diverse as the American Southwest involves a lot of decision making, so in this chapter we've tried to give you some direction. We've chosen what we feel is the very best the region has to offer—the places and experiences you won't want to miss. Although the sights and activities listed here are written up in more detail elsewhere in this book, this chapter should give you an overview of the highlights and get you started.

1 The Best of the Natural Southwest

- **Monument Valley Buttes at Sunset** (UT and AZ): These stark sentinels of the desert are impressive at any time, but they take on a particularly dignified aura when the setting sun casts its deep colors over them, etching their profiles against a darkening sky. Although the park generally closes before sunset, you can arrange a sunset tour—it's well worth the cost. See p. 117.
- **Rio Grande Gorge** (NM): A hike into this dramatic gorge is unforgettable. You'll first see it as you come over a rise heading toward Taos. It's a colossal slice in the earth formed during the late Cretaceous period (130 million years ago) and the early Tertiary period (about 70 million years ago). Drive about 35 miles north of Taos, near the village of Cerro, to the **Wild Rivers Recreation Area**. From the lip of the canyon, you descend through millions of years of geologic history and land inhabited by Indians since 16,000 B.C. If you're visiting during spring and early summer and like an adrenaline rush, be sure to find a professional guide and raft the Taos Box, a 17-mile stretch of class IV white water. See "Getting Outside," in chapter 8.
- **Carlsbad Caverns National Park** (NM): One of the world's largest and most complex cave systems is in southeastern New Mexico. The 80 known caves have spectacular stalagmite and stalactite formations. Explore the Big Room on a 1-mile self-guided tour, then catch the massive bat flight from the cave entrance at sunset. See p. 314.
- **White Sands National Monument** (NM): Located 15 miles southwest of Alamogordo, White Sands National Monument preserves the best part of the world's largest gypsum dune field. For a truly unforgettable experience, camp overnight so that you can watch the sun rise on the smooth, endless dunes. See p. 299.
- **Arizona–Sonora Desert Museum** (AZ): The name is misleading—this is more zoo and botanical garden than museum. Naturalistic settings house dozens of species of desert animals, including a number of critters you wouldn't want to meet in the wild (rattlesnakes, tarantulas, scorpions, black widows, and Gila monsters). See p. 369.

The American Southwest





- **Saguaro National Park (AZ):** Lying both east and west of Tucson, this park preserves “forests” of saguaro cacti and is the very essence of the desert as so many people imagine it. You can hike it, bike it, or drive it. See p. 372.
- **Desert Botanical Garden (AZ):** There’s no better place to learn about the plants of Arizona’s Sonoran Desert and the many other deserts of the world. Displays at this Phoenix botanical garden explain plant

adaptations and how indigenous tribes once used many of this region’s wild plants. See p. 430.

- **Zion National Park (UT):** At the Narrows in Zion, sheer 1,000-foot-high walls enclose you in a 20-foot-wide world of hanging gardens, waterfalls, and sculpted sandstone arches, with the Virgin River beneath your feet. This is one of the park’s many awe-inspiring experiences. See p. 561.

2 The Best Outdoor Activities

- **Hiking** (throughout the region): What’s unique about hiking in the Southwest is the variety of terrain, from desert to alpine forest to badlands to canyons. In Utah, you can hike right past all three stone formations at Natural Bridges National Monument (p. 96) or explore the hoodoo formations in Bryce Canyon National Park (p. 567). Some of our favorite places for a hike in New Mexico are the El Malpais badlands (p. 273), the hauntingly sculpted rock formations at Abiquiu that artist Georgia O’Keeffe made famous in her paintings (p. 282), and White Sands National Monument (p. 299).

In Arizona, a hike down into the Grand Canyon or Havasu Canyon is not for the unfit or the faint of heart, but it will take you on a journey through millions of years set in stone. This trip takes plenty of planning and requires some strenuous hiking. See “The Grand Canyon South Rim” and “A South Rim Alternative: Havasu Canyon,” in chapter 16.

- **Ballooning** (NM and AZ): With the International Balloon Fiesta in Albuquerque bringing more than 750 balloons to the area, Albuquerque has become the sport’s world capital. Fortunately, visitors can let loose the

tethers and float free, too. Most of the operators are in Albuquerque; see p. 249 for recommendations. Ballooning is also popular in Arizona; see “Getting Outside,” in chapters 12 and 13, and “Organized Tours,” under “Sedona & Oak Creek Canyon,” in chapter 15 for information on companies in Tucson, Phoenix, and Sedona.

- **Horseback riding** (NM and AZ): New Mexico’s history is stamped with the hoof, dating from the Spanish conquistadors’ introduction of horses to the New World. Riding in New Mexico still has that Old West feel, with trails that wind through wilderness, traversing passes and broad meadows. Some of the best rides are in the Pecos Wilderness and on Taos Pueblo land. See “Getting Outside,” in chapters 7 and 8.

Cowboys still ride ranges all over Arizona, and so can you if you book a stay at one of the state’s many guest ranches (formerly known as dude ranches). You might even get to drive some cattle down the trail. After a long or short day in the saddle, you can soak in a hot tub, go for a swim, or play tennis before chowing down. See chapters 12, 14, and 15.

- **Mountain Biking** (NM and AZ): Almost anywhere you go in New Mexico, you'll find trails. We've hooked onto some fun old mining roads in the Black Range down south and explored sage forest on the rim of the Taos Gorge in the north. See the "Biking" sections under "Getting Outside," in each New Mexico chapter, especially chapter 8, "Taos."

In Arizona, among the red rocks of Sedona, you can pedal through awesome scenery on some of the most memorable single-track trails in the Southwest. There's even plenty of slickrock. See "Getting Outside," under "Sedona & Oak Creek Canyon," in chapter 15.

- **River Rafting** (NM and AZ): Whether you go for 3 days or 2

weeks, no other active vacation in the region comes close to matching the excitement of a raft trip. In Arizona, nothing beats a Colorado River rafting trip through the Grand Canyon. Sure, the river is crowded with groups in the summer, but the grandeur of the canyon more than makes up for it. See "Other Ways of Seeing the Canyon," under "The Grand Canyon South Rim," in chapter 16. In New Mexico, the wild **Taos Box**, a steep-sided canyon south of the Wild Rivers Recreation Area, offers a series of class IV rapids that rarely lets up for some 17 miles, providing one of the most exciting 1-day white-water tours in the West. See "Getting Outside," in chapter 8.

3 The Best Scenic Drives

- **Monument Valley Navajo Tribal Park** (UT and AZ): This valley of sandstone buttes and mesas is one of the most photographed spots in America. It's familiar to people all over the world from countless movies, TV shows, and commercials. A 17-mile dirt road winds through the park, giving visitors close-up views of such landmarks as Elephant Butte, the Mittens, and Totem Pole. See "Monument Valley Navajo Tribal Park," in chapter 6.
- **High Road to Taos** (Santa Fe, NM): One of New Mexico's primo experiences, this road traverses the mountains from Santa Fe to Taos, passing by chile and apple farms in old Hispanic villages. Stop in Chimayo to see unique wool weaving, in Cordova to find lovely woodcarvings, and in renegade Truchas, where life remains much as it did a century ago. Most important, the route crosses the base of New Mexico's grandest peaks. See

"Taking the High Road to Taos," in chapter 7.

- **Turquoise Trail** (Albuquerque, NM): Meandering through the broad Galisteo basin, this is the scenic route from Albuquerque to Santa Fe. The two-lane road runs through piñon-studded hills and old mining towns such as Madrid and Cerrillos, where 2,000 years ago Native Americans hammered turquoise and silver from the hills. Today artists and craftspeople have revived the towns. See "En Route to Santa Fe: Along the Turquoise Trail," in chapter 9.
- **Lincoln Loop** (Ruidoso, NM): Elegant art, ancient petroglyphs, and Billy the Kid memorabilia draw road warriors to this 162-mile loop in southeastern New Mexico. It begins in the mountain resort town of Ruidoso and cruises to Lincoln, where travelers can "walk in the footsteps" of the notorious punk Billy the Kid. Next it passes imaginative petroglyphs,

through the Mescalero Apache Reservation, and back to Ruidoso. See “A Scenic Drive Around the Lincoln Loop,” in chapter 11.

- **The Apache Trail** (east of Phoenix, AZ): Much of this winding road, which passes just north of the Superstition Mountains, is unpaved and follows a rugged route once ridden by Apaches. This is some of the most remote country in the Phoenix area, with far-reaching desert vistas and lots to see and do along the way. See “A Side Trip from Phoenix: The Apache Trail,” in chapter 13.
- **Oak Creek Canyon** (Sedona, AZ): Slicing down from the pine country outside Flagstaff to the red rocks of

Sedona, Oak Creek Canyon is a cool oasis. From the scenic overlook at the top of the canyon to the swimming holes and hiking trails at the bottom, this canyon road provides a rapid change in climate and landscape. See “Sedona & Oak Creek Canyon,” in chapter 15.

- **Mount Lemmon** (Tucson, AZ): The views of Tucson from the city’s northern foothills are great, but the vistas from Mount Lemmon are even better. With a ski area at its summit, Mount Lemmon rises from the desert like an island emerging from the sea. Along the way, the road climbs from cactus country to cool pine forests. See “Getting Outside,” in chapter 12.

4 The Best Native American Sights

- **Ute Mountain Tribal Park** (CO): These ruins differ from others in Colorado because they’re on the Ute Mountain Indian Reservation, and the only way to see the reservation is on a guided tour conducted by members of the tribe. You’ll see ruins and petroglyphs similar to those in Mesa Verde, but with an informed personal guide and without crowds. See p. 88.
- **Mesa Verde National Park** (CO): Home to the most impressive prehistoric cliff dwellings in the Southwest, Mesa Verde (Spanish for “green table”) overwhelms you with its size and complexity. The first national park set aside to preserve works created by humans, it covers some 52,000 acres just outside Cortez. Among the most compelling sites are Spruce Tree House, Square Tower House, and Cliff Palace, a four-story, apartment-style dwelling. See “Mesa Verde National Park,” in chapter 6.
- **Hovenweep National Monument** (UT): This deserted valley contains some of the most striking and most

isolated archaeological sites in the Four Corners area—the remains of curious sandstone towers built more than 700 years ago by the Anasazi (ancestral Puebloans). These mysterious structures still keep archaeologists guessing. See p. 88.

- **Monument Valley Navajo Tribal Park** (UT and AZ): For most of us, Monument Valley *is* the Old West. We’ve seen it dozens of times in movie theaters, on TV, in magazine advertisements, and on billboards. The Old West may be gone, but many Navajos still call this home. A Navajo guide will give you the Navajo perspective on this majestic land and take you into areas not otherwise open to visitors. See p. 115.
- **Indian Pueblo Cultural Center** (Albuquerque, NM): Owned and operated as a nonprofit organization by the 19 pueblos of New Mexico, this is a fine place to begin an exploration of Native American culture. The museum is modeled after Pueblo Bonito, a spectacular 9th-century ruin in Chaco Culture National Historic

Park, and contains art and artifacts old and new. See p. 244.

- **Petroglyph National Monument (NM):** This site has 25,000 petroglyphs (prehistoric rock carvings) and a variety of hiking trails geared to differing levels of difficulty. It's right on the outskirts of Albuquerque. See p. 247.
- **Bandelier National Monument (NM):** Along with the Puye Cliff Dwellings, these ruins provide a spectacular peek into the lives of the Anasazi culture, which flourished in the area between A.D. 1100 and 1550. Less than 15 miles south of Los Alamos, the ruins spread across a peaceful canyon. The most dramatic site is a dwelling and kiva (a room used for religious activities) in a cave 140 feet above the canyon floor—reached by a climb up long pueblo-style ladders. See p. 191.
- **Pecos National Historical Park (NM):** It's hard to rank New Mexico's many ruins, but this one, sprawled on a plain about 25 miles east of Santa Fe, is one of the most impressive. It resonates with the history of the Pueblo Revolt of 1680. You'll see evidence of where the Pecos people burned the mission church before joining in the attack on Santa Fe. You'll also see where the Spanish conquistadors later compromised, allowing sacred kivas to be built next to the reconstructed mission. See p. 190.
- **Aztec Ruins National Monument (NM):** These ruins of a 500-room Native American pueblo abandoned by the Anasazi more than 200 years ago feature a completely reconstructed kiva 50 feet in diameter. See p. 129.
- **Heard Museum (AZ):** This Phoenix institution is one of the nation's premier museums devoted to Native American cultures. In addition to historical exhibits, a huge kachina collection, and an excellent store, it has annual exhibits of contemporary Native American art as well as dance performances and demonstrations of traditional skills. See p. 430.
- **Tonto National Monument (AZ):** East of Phoenix on the Apache Trail, this is one of the only easily accessible cliff dwellings in Arizona that you can still visit; you don't have to just observe from a distance. See p. 458.
- **Montezuma Castle National Monument (AZ):** Located just off I-17, this is the easiest cliff dwelling to get to in Arizona, but visitors cannot enter. Nearby Montezuma Well also has some small ruins. See p. 496.
- **Canyon de Chelly National Monument (AZ):** Small cliff dwellings up and down the length of Canyon de Chelly are visible from overlooks, while a trip into the canyon itself offers a chance to see some of these ruins up close. See p. 109.
- **Navajo National Monument (AZ):** Keet Seel and Betatakin are some of the finest examples of Anasazi cliff dwellings in the state. Although the ruins are at the end of long hikes, their size and state of preservation make the sites well worth the effort you'll expend to see them. See p. 114.

5 The Best Family Experiences

- **Albuquerque Aquarium (NM):** For those of us born and raised in the desert, this attraction quenches years of soul thirst. Exhibits focus on sea areas fed by the Rio Grande River. You'll pass by many large tanks and within an eels' den. The culminating show is a 285,000-gallon shark tank, where many species of fish and 15 to 20 sand tiger, brown, and nurse

sharks swim around looking ominous. The aquarium is part of the Albuquerque Biological Park. See p. 247.

- **Rio Grande Zoo (NM):** More than 1,200 animals of 300 species live on 60 acres of riverside bosque among ancient cottonwoods. Open-moat exhibits with animals in naturalized habitats are a treat for zoo-goers. Albuquerque's zoo has an especially fine collection of elephants, mountain lions, koalas, reptiles, and native Southwestern species. During summer, a children's petting zoo is open, and the New Mexico Symphony Orchestra performs. See p. 249.
 - **Santa Fe Children's Museum (NM):** Designed for the whole family, this museum offers interactive exhibits and hands-on activities focusing on the arts, humanities, science, and technology. Most notable is a 16-foot climbing wall that kids can scale, outfitted with helmets and harnesses. The museum regularly schedules special performances and hands-on sessions with artists and scientists. Recently, *Family Life* magazine named this one of the 10 hottest children's museums in the nation. See p. 170.
 - **Carlsbad Caverns National Park (NM):** Truly one of the world's natural wonders, these caverns swallow visitors as they embark on what feels like a journey to the center of the earth. Nocturnal creatures thrive, and water drips onto your body. Stalactites and stalagmites create another
- universe of seemingly alien life forms. Kids won't like the fact that they can't go climbing on the formations, but they'll be too fascinated to complain much. See p. 314.
 - **Arizona–Sonora Desert Museum (AZ):** This Tucson attraction is actually a zoo featuring the animals of the Sonoran Desert. It has rooms full of snakes, a prairie-dog town, bighorn sheep, mountain lions, and an aviary full of hummingbirds. Kids and adults love this place. See p. 369.
 - **Shootouts at the O.K. Corral (AZ):** Tombstone may be “the town too tough to die,” but poor Ike Clanton and his buddies the McLauray boys have to die over and over at frequent reenactments of the famous gunfight. See p. 474.
 - **The Grand Canyon Railway (AZ):** Not only is this train excursion a fun way to get to the Grand Canyon, it also lets you avoid wearisome parking problems and congestion. Shootouts and train robberies are to be expected in this corner of the Wild West. See p. 545.
 - **Zion National Park (UT):** The Junior Ranger/Explorers program, available at most national parks, is particularly extensive here. Morning and afternoon activities all summer are geared toward teaching kids what makes this natural wonder so special. They'll have so much fun, they won't even notice they're learning. See p. 561.

6 The Best Luxury Hotels & Resorts

- **La Posada de Santa Fe Resort and Spa (Santa Fe, NM; ☎ 800/727-5276):** 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. The resort has a Zen-Southwestern-style spa
- and pool and spacious spa rooms. Most units don't have views but do have outdoor patios, and most are tucked back into the quiet compound. See p. 144.
 - **Hyatt Regency Tamaya Resort and Spa (Santa Ana Pueblo, NM; ☎ 800/**

55-HYATT): 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, and the 18-hole Twin Warriors championship golf course designed by Gary Panks make for plenty to do. Meanwhile, spacious rooms offer quiet for those who'd rather do nothing. Though the resort is surrounded by acres of countryside, it's only 15 minutes from Albuquerque and 45 minutes from Santa Fe. See p. 240.

- **Hyatt Regency Scottsdale Resort and Spa at Gainey Ranch** (Scottsdale, AZ; ☎ 800/55-HYATT): Contemporary desert architecture, dramatic landscaping, a water playground with its own beach, a staff that's always ready to assist you, several good restaurants that aren't overpriced, and even gondola rides—it all adds up to a lot of fun at one of the most smoothly run resorts in Arizona. See p. 402.
- **The Phoenician** (Scottsdale, AZ; ☎ 800/888-8234): This Xanadu of the resort world brims with marble, crystal, and art. With staff members seemingly around every corner, the hotel offers its guests impeccable service. Mary Elaine's, the resort's premier dining room, is among the finest restaurants in the state, and the views are hard to beat. See p. 403.
- **The Boulders Resort and Golden Door Spa** (Carefree, AZ; ☎ 800/

553-1717): Taking its name from the massive blocks of eroded granite scattered about the grounds, the Boulders is among the most exclusive and expensive resorts in the state. Pueblo architecture fits seamlessly with the landscape, and the golf course is the most breathtaking in Arizona. See p. 405.

- **Arizona Biltmore Resort & Spa** (Phoenix, AZ; ☎ 800/950-0086): Combining discreet service and the architectural styling of Frank Lloyd Wright, the Biltmore has long been one of Arizona's most prestigious resorts. This is a thoroughly old-money place, but it continues to keep pace with the times. See p. 407.
- **Loews Ventana Canyon Resort** (Tucson, AZ; ☎ 800/234-5117): With the Santa Catalina Mountains rising in the backyard and an almost-natural waterfall only steps away from the lobby, this is Tucson's most dramatic resort. Contemporary styling throughout makes constant reference to the desert setting. See p. 352.
- **Enchantment Resort** (Sedona, AZ; ☎ 800/826-4180): A dramatic setting in a red-rock canyon makes this the most unforgettably situated resort in the state. If you want to feel as though you're vacationing in the desert, this place fits the bill. Guest rooms are constructed in pueblo architectural style; the spa is one of Arizona's finest. See p. 506.

7 The Best B&Bs

- **Kokopelli's Cave** (Farmington, NM; ☎ 505/326-2461): This is an actual cave, but it's like no other cave you've ever seen. Carved deep into the side of a cliff, it's a three-room luxury apartment complete with carpet,

VCR, kitchen, and space enough for a family. Best of all is the bathroom where water pours off rocks, creating a waterfall. Golden eagles nest in the area, and ringtail cats tend to wander across the balcony. See p. 132.

- **Hacienda Antigua** (Albuquerque, NM; ☎ 800/201-2986): This 200-year-old adobe inn, once a stagecoach stop, now offers a glimpse of the old days with refreshing modern touches. The guest rooms surround a quiet courtyard, and a pool and hot tub nestle near towering cottonwoods. 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.
- **Casa de las Chimeneas** (Taos, NM; ☎ 877/758-4777): This 1925 adobe home has been a model of Southwestern elegance since it opened as a B&B in 1988. The inn has lovely gardens, comfortable rooms, and a spa, as well as complete massage and facial treatments. The newest rooms have heated Saltillo tile floors, gas kiva fireplaces, and jetted tubs. The older section is delightful as well, with more of an antique feel. See p. 206.
- **The Royal Elizabeth** (Tucson, AZ; ☎ 877/670-9022): In downtown Tucson just a block from the Temple of Music and Art, this Territorial-style historic home is filled with beautiful Victorian antiques and architectural details. Guest rooms have lots of touches not often seen in historic B&Bs, including "vintage" phones, TVs, fridges, and safes. See p. 349.
- **La Zarzuela** (Tucson; ☎ 888/848-8225): Perched high on a hill on the west side of Tucson, this luxurious B&B boasts great views, colorful decor, and loads of outdoor spaces where guests can relax in the warmth of the desert. See p. 354.
- **Rocamadour Bed & Breakfast for (Rock) Lovers** (Prescott, AZ; ☎ 888/771-1933): Set amid the rounded boulders of the Granite Dells just north of Prescott, this inn combines a spectacular setting with French antiques and luxurious accommodations. You won't find a more memorable setting in the state. See p. 491.
- **Briar Patch Inn** (Sedona, AZ; ☎ 888/809-3030): Oak Creek Canyon, near Sedona, where you'll find this collection of luxurious cottages, is an oasis in the desert. Few experiences are more restorative than breakfast on the shady banks of the creek. See p. 508.
- **The Inn at 410** (Flagstaff, AZ; ☎ 800/774-2008): This restored 1907 bungalow offers a convenient location in downtown Flagstaff, pleasant surroundings, comfortable rooms, and delicious breakfasts. Rooms feature different, distinctive themes, and eight of them have their own fireplaces. See p. 527.
- **Cochise Stronghold B&B** (Cochise County, AZ; ☎ 877/426-4141): Surrounded by the national forest and mountainsides strewn with giant boulders, this B&B is one of the state's most remote inns. The passive solar building was built from straw bales and is not only energy-efficient but also quite beautiful. See p. 481.

8 The Best Places to Savor Southwest Flavors

- **The Compound** (Santa Fe, NM; ☎ 505/982-4353): This reincarnation of one of Santa Fe's classic restaurants serves daring contemporary American food. Such delicacies as a seafood pan roast (black bass, halibut, and calamari) served with peas and potatoes, or seared Portuguese pork tenderloin with chorizo and crispy potatoes, will please sophisticated palates and probably simpler ones, too. See p. 154.

- **Santacafé** (Santa Fe, NM; ☎ 505/984-1788): The food is Southwestern with an Asian flair, and the minimalist decor accentuates the beautiful architecture of the 18th-century Padre Gallegos House. The dishes change according to the seasons. One of my favorites is seared chile-garlic prawns served with fresh pea (or lima) and mushroom risotto. See p. 157.
- **Diane's Bakery & Cafe** (Silver City, NM; ☎ 505/538-8722): Diane Barrett, who was once a pastry chef at La Traviata and Eldorado in Santa Fe, has brought refined flavors to the little mining town of Silver City. You'll feast on sumptuous baked goods and sophisticated meals such as rack of lamb. See p. 338.
- **Roaring Fork** (Scottsdale, AZ; ☎ 480/947-0795): Roaring Fork's chef, Robert McGrath, has long been one of the most creative chefs in the Phoenix area. The atmosphere is lively, and everything from the bread basket and bar snacks to the entrees and desserts shows an attention to detail. See p. 418.
- **Janos/J Bar** (Tucson, AZ; ☎ 520/615-6100): Serving a combination of regional and Southwestern dishes, Janos has for many years been one of Tucson's premier restaurants. It's just outside the front door of the Westin La Paloma resort, and is as formal a place as you'll find in this city. J Bar is Janos's less formal bar and grill. See p. 364 and p. 366.
- **Terra Cotta** (Tucson, AZ; ☎ 520/577-8100): Café Terra Cotta was one of Arizona's pioneers in the realm of Southwestern cuisine. The beautiful, art-filled restaurant in the Tucson foothills continues to serve creative and reasonably priced meals. See p. 366.
- **Cowboy Club Grille & Spirits** (Sedona, AZ; ☎ 928/282-4200): In the building where the Cowboy Artists of America organization was founded, this thoroughly Western restaurant is a great place to try such Arizona specialties as buffalo filet mignon, rattlesnake, and cactus fries. See p. 511.
- **The Turquoise Room** (Winslow, AZ; ☎ 928/289-2888): Located in the little-visited town of Winslow in the restored La Posada historic hotel, this restaurant conjures up the days when the wealthy still traveled by railroad. Rarely will you find such excellent meals in such an off-the-beaten-path locale. See p. 100.