

The Best of New Mexico

I will never forget when I was in second grade, standing on the dusty playground at Alvarado Elementary School in Albuquerque, pointing west toward the volcanoes. “We went beyond those volcanoes,” I bragged to my friend about what my family had done over the weekend. “No way,” my friend replied. Actually, a number of times I’d been much farther than the 10 miles between us and the volcanoes, and I now know that the strong impact of the journey’s distance had to do with culture rather than miles.

In a half-day drive, we traveled to the Intertribal Indian Ceremonial in Gallup, where I ate blue, crepe-paper-thin *piki* bread and gazed up at people dressed in dreamy rich velvet, their limbs draped in turquoise. I saw painted warriors twirl in the dust and felt drum rhythm pulse in my heart. In short, we had traveled to another world, and that otherworldliness is characteristic of New Mexico.

Never have I taken my strangely exotic home state for granted, nor has more traditional culture let me. When I was a kid, we used to travel to Illinois to visit my grandfather, and when people there heard we were from New Mexico, they would often cock their heads and say things like “Do you have sidewalks there?” and “This bubble gum must be a real treat for you,” as though such inventions hadn’t yet arrived in my home state.

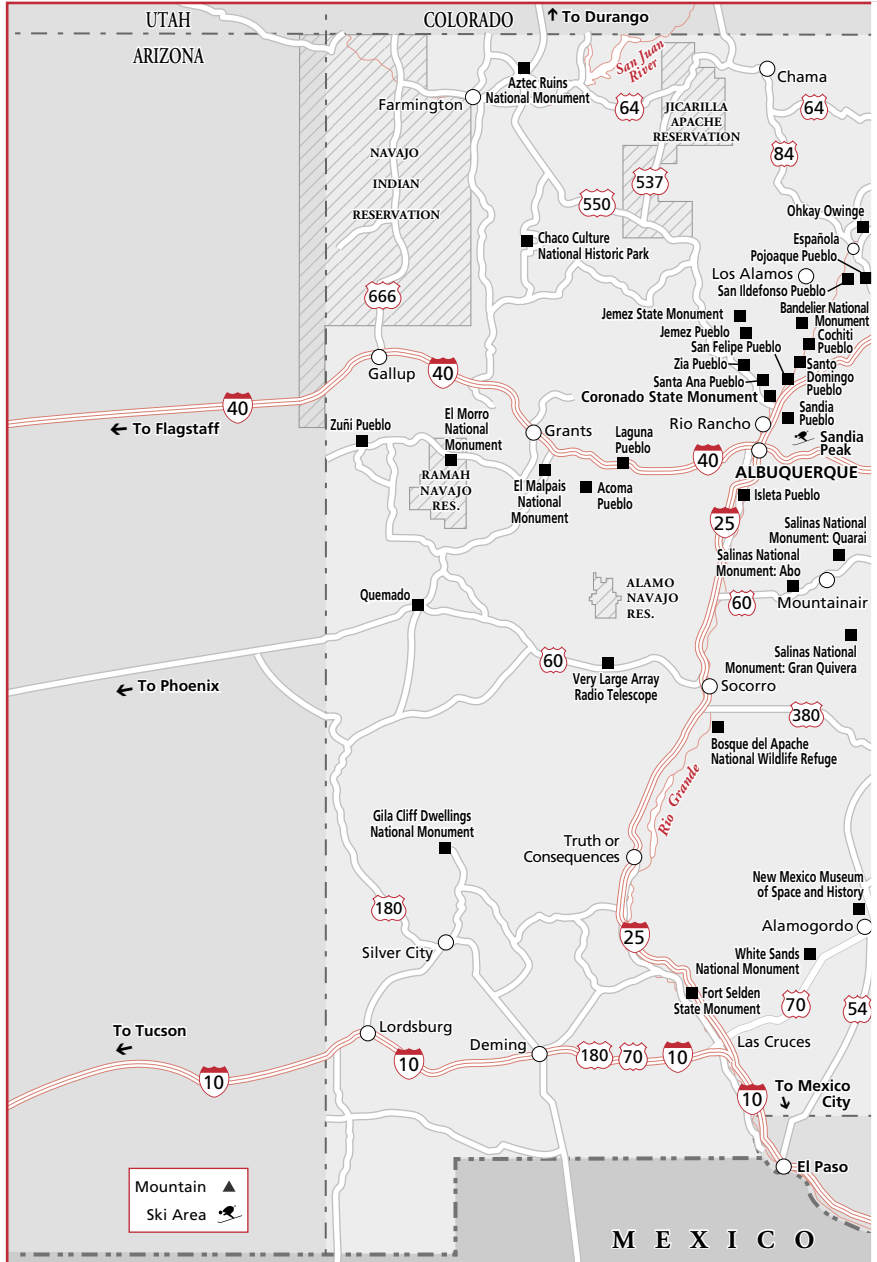
Our state magazine even dedicates a full page each month to the variety of ways in which New Mexico is forgotten. The most notable was when a New Mexico resident called the Atlanta Olympic committee to reserve tickets and the salesperson insisted that the person contact their international sales office. So, it seems people either don’t know the state exists at all, or they believe it’s a foreign country south of the border.

Ironically, those naive impressions hold some truth. New Mexico is definitely lost in some kind of time warp. Its history dates back far before Columbus set foot on the continent. The whole attitude here is often slower than that of the rest of the world. Like our neighbors down in Mexico, we use the word *mañana*—which doesn’t so much mean “tomorrow” as it does “not today.”

When you set foot here, you may find yourself a bit lost within the otherworldliness. You may be shocked at the way people so readily stop and converse with you, or you may find yourself in a landscape where there isn’t a single landmark from which to negotiate.

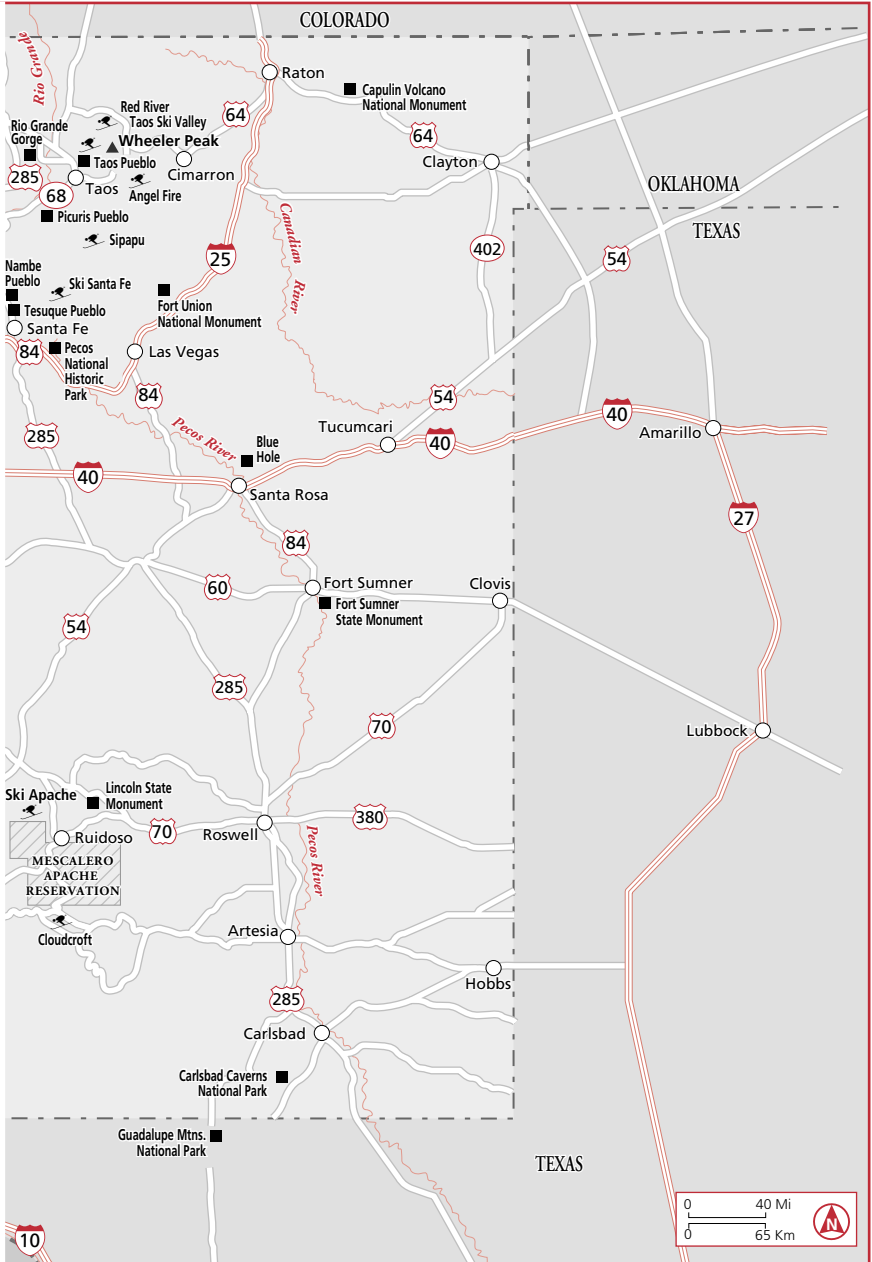
In the chapters that follow, I give you some signposts to help you discover for yourself the many treasures of this otherworldly state. But first, here are my most cherished New Mexico experiences.

New Mexico



Mountain ▲
Ski Area ⚡

MEXICO



1 The Most Unforgettable New Mexico Experiences

- **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 “New Mexican Cuisine” in the appendix.
- **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 p. 190.
- **Chaco Culture National Historical Park** (Nageezi; ☎ 505/786-7014): A combination of a stunning setting and well-preserved ruins makes the long drive to Chaco Canyon an incredible adventure into ancestral Puebloan culture. Many good hikes and bike rides are in the area, and there’s also a campground. See p. 266.
- **Santa Fe Opera** (☎ 800/280-4654 or 505/986-5900): 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. The big highlight for 2007 is a Santa Fe Opera-commissioned world premiere by Chinese-American composer Tan Dun—who won an Oscar for scoring *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*—titled *Tea: A Mirror of Soul*. See p. 176.
- **Albuquerque International Balloon Fiesta** (☎ 800/733-9918): 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 p. 87.
- **María Benítez Teatro Flamenco** (Institute for Spanish Arts, Santa Fe; ☎ 888/435-2636): 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 Benítez 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. 178.
- **Taos Pueblo** (Veterans Hwy., Taos Pueblo; ☎ 505/758-1028): 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. 224.

2 The Best Outdoor Experiences

For a list of the best outdoor activities, see chapter 4. Here are a few specific sights:

- **Rio Grande Gorge** (Taos): 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 Native Americans since 16,000 B.C. If you're visiting during spring and early summer and enjoy an adrenaline rush, be sure to hook up with a professional guide and raft the Taos Box, a 17-mile stretch of class IV white water. See p. 230.
- **Blue Hole** (Santa Rosa): You'll find this odd natural wonder in Santa Rosa, "city of natural lakes." An 81-foot-deep artesian well, its waters are cool and completely clear. Often it appears like a fishbowl, full of scuba divers. See p. 300.
- **Capulin Volcano National Monument** (Capulin; ☎ 505/278-2201):

Last active 60,000 years ago, the volcano is located about 27 miles east of Raton. A hike around its rim offers views into neighboring Oklahoma and Colorado, and another walk down into its lush mouth allows you to see the point from which the lava spewed. See p. 297.

- **Carlsbad Caverns National Park** (Carlsbad; ☎ 800/967-CAVE): Truly one of the world's natural wonders, these caverns swallow visitors into what feels like a journey to the center of the earth, where 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. 375.
- * **White Sands National Monument** (Alamogordo; ☎ 505/479-6124): Like a bizarre, lost land of white, this place is a dream for kids. They can roll around in the fine sand or sled across it, all the while discovering the mysterious creatures that inhabit this truest of deserts. Bring extra clothing, sunglasses, and lots of sunscreen (the reflection off the sand can cause some pretty nasty sunburns). See p. 349.

3 The Best Native American Sights

- **Indian Pueblo Cultural Center** (2401 12th St. NW, Albuquerque; ☎ 800/766-4405 or 505/843-7270): 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 it contains a wealth of art and artifacts. See p. 87.
- **Petroglyph National Monument** (6001 Unser Blvd. NW, Albuquerque; ☎ 505/899-0205): In the past few years, this monument has made national news due to conflict over whether to allow a road through these lava flows that were once a hunting and gathering area for prehistoric Native Americans. History in the making aside, the site has 25,000 petroglyphs (prehistoric rock carvings) and provides a variety of hiking trails

in differing levels of difficulty, right on the outskirts of Albuquerque. See p. 91.

- **Bandelier National Monument** (Los Alamos; ☎ 505/672-3861, ext 517): These ruins provide a spectacular peek into the lives of the Anasazi Pueblo culture, which flourished in the area between A.D. 1100 and 1550, a period later than the time when Chaco Canyon was a cultural center. (Recent findings suggest that some Chaco residents ended up at Bandelier.) 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. A visitor center and museum offer self-guided and ranger-led tours. See p. 188.
- **Pecos National Historical Park** (Pecos; ☎ 505/757-6414): 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, resonating

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. 185.

- **Acoma Pueblo** (Acoma; ☎ 800/747-0181 or 505/552-6604): This spectacular adobe village sits high atop a sheer rock mesa. Known as "Sky City," it is home to 65 or so inhabitants who still live without electricity and running water. The sculpted mission church and the cemetery seem to be perched on the very edge of the world. Visitors can hike down through a rock cut, once the main entrance to the pueblo. See p. 250.
- **Gila Cliff Dwellings** (Gila; ☎ 505/536-9461): Perched in deep caves within a narrow canyon outside Silver City, these ruins tell the mysterious tale of the Mogollon people who lived in the area from the late 1200s through the early 1300s. See p. 337.

4 The Best Museums

- **Albuquerque Museum of Art and History** (2000 Mountain Rd. NW, Albuquerque; ☎ 505/243-7255): Take a journey down into the caverns of New Mexico's past in this museum, which owns the largest U.S. collection of Spanish colonial artifacts. Displays include Don Quixote-style helmets, swords, and even horse armor. You can wander through an 18th-century house compound with adobe floors and walls, and see gear used by *vaqueros*, the original cowboys who came to the area in the 16th century. See p. 87.
- **Museum of Fine Arts** (107 W. Palace Ave., Santa Fe; ☎ 505/476-5072):

This museum's permanent collection of more than 8,000 works emphasizes regional art and includes landscapes and portraits by all the Taos masters as well as contemporary artists, including R. C. Gorman, Amado Peña, Jr., and Georgia O'Keeffe. The museum also has a collection of photographic works by such masters as Ansel Adams, Edward Weston, and Elliot Porter. See p. 152.

- **Museum of International Folk Art** (706 Camino Lejo, Santa Fe; ☎ 505/476-1200): 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. 155.

- **Taos Historic Museums** (Taos; ☎ 505/758-0505): What's nice about Taos is that you can see historic homes inside and out. You can wander through Taos Society artist **Ernest Blumenschein's home**, which is a museum. Built in 1797 and restored by Blumenschein in 1919, it represents another New Mexico architectural phenomenon: homes that were added on to year after year. Doorways are typically low, and floors rise and fall at the whim of the earth beneath them. The **Martinez Hacienda** is an example of a hacienda stronghold. Built without windows facing outward, it originally had 20 small rooms, many with doors opening out to the courtyard. The hacienda has been developed into a living museum featuring weavers, blacksmiths, and woodcarvers. See p. 223.
- **Millicent Rogers Museum of Northern New Mexico** (Millicent Rogers Rd., Taos; ☎ 505/758-2462): This museum is small enough to offer a glimpse of some of the finest

Southwestern arts and crafts you'll see, without being overwhelming. It was founded in 1953 by family members after the death of Millicent Rogers, a wealthy Taos émigré who, in 1947, began acquiring a magnificent collection of beautiful Native American arts and crafts. Included are jewelry, textiles, pottery, kachina dolls, paintings, and basketry from a wide variety of Southwestern tribes. See p. 221.

- **El Camino Real International Heritage Center** (30 miles south of Socorro off I-25, exit 115; ☎ 505/854-3600): This new museum traces the 1,500-mile historic route between Mexico City and the Española Valley north of Santa Fe. On view are artifacts, art, and devotional items used along the trail, along with state-of-the-art exhibits offering first-person stories of the trail. See p. 307.
- **The Hubbard Museum of the American West** (841 W. US 70, Ruidoso Downs; ☎ 505/378-4142): This museum holds a collection of more than 10,000 horse-related items, including saddles, sleighs, a horse-drawn fire engine, a stagecoach, and paintings by artists such as Frederic Remington, Charles Russell, and Frank Tenney Johnson. See p. 352.

5 The Best Places to Discover New Mexico's History

- **Old Town** (Albuquerque): Once the center of Albuquerque commerce, Old Town thrived until the early 1880s, when businesses relocated nearer to the railroad tracks. It has been a center of tourism since being rediscovered in the 1930s. Today you can visit shops, galleries, and restaurants in Old Town, as well as the Church of San Felipe de Neri, the first structure built when colonists established Albuquerque in 1706. See p. 88.
- **Georgia O'Keeffe's Home** (Abiquiú; ☎ 505/685-4539): Hand-smoothed

adobe walls, elk antlers, and a blue door—you'll encounter these images and many more that inspired the famous artist's work. When you view the landscape surrounding her residence in Abiquiú, you'll understand why she was so inspired. Be sure to make a reservation months in advance. See p. 195.

- **Palace of the Governors** (North Plaza, Santa Fe; ☎ 505/476-5100): This is where, in 1680, the only successful Native American uprising took place. Before the uprising, this was the seat

of power in the area, and after de Vargas reconquered the American Indians, it resumed that position. Built in 1610 as the original capitol of New Mexico, the palace has been in continuous public use longer than any other structure in the United States. Look for remnants of the history this building has seen through the years, such as a fireplace and chimney chiseled into the adobe wall, and storage pits where the Pueblo Indians kept corn, wheat, barley, and other goods during their reign at the palace. After the reconquest, the pits were used to dispose of trash. Most notable is the front of the palace, where Native Americans sell jewelry, pottery, and some weavings under the protection of the portal. See p. 152.

- **St. Francis Cathedral** (Cathedral Place at San Francisco St., Santa Fe; ☎ 505/982-5619): Santa Fe's grandest religious structure was built between 1869 and 1886 by Archbishop Jean Baptiste Lamy, in the style of the great cathedrals of Europe. Inside the small adobe, Our Lady of the Rosary chapel is full of the romance of Spanish Catholicism. The chapel was built in 1807 and is the only portion that remains from Our Lady of the Assumption Church, founded along with Santa Fe in 1610. See p. 153.
- **San Francisco de Asis church** (Ranchos de Taos Plaza, Taos; ☎ 505/758-2754): To me, this is the most beautiful church in the world.

Though some might not see how it could compete with elaborate structures such as Chartres or Notre Dame de Paris, I see it like a Picasso sculpture: Simple and direct, it has massive, hand-smoothed adobe walls and a rising sense that nearly lifts the heavy structure off the ground. Maybe that's why such notables as Ansel Adams and Georgia O'Keeffe have recorded its presence in art. See p. 223.

- **El Morro National Monument** (Ramah; ☎ 505/783-4226): In the Grants area, this sandstone monolith is known as "Inscription Rock," because travelers and explorers documented their journeys for centuries on its smooth face. See p. 256.
- **Cimarron**: Nestled against the eastern slope of the Sangre de Cristo mountain range, this town was a "wild and woolly" outpost on the Santa Fe Trail between the 1850s and 1880s and a gathering place for area ranchers, traders, gamblers, gunslingers, and other characters. See p. 292.
- **New Mexico Museum of Space History** (NM 2001, Alamogordo; ☎ 877/333-6589 outside NM, or 505/437-2840): Tracing the story of space travel, this five-story museum recalls the accomplishments of America's Mercury, Gemini, and Apollo programs, including New Mexico's participation in space exploration, from ancient American Indians to rocketry pioneer Robert Goddard to astronauts. See p. 344.

6 The Best Family Experiences

- **Albuquerque Aquarium** (2601 Central Ave. NW; ☎ 505/764-6200): Exhibits here focus on sea areas fed by the Rio Grande. You'll pass by many large tanks and within an eels' den; the star attraction 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 one of two destinations inside the Albuquerque Biological Park (the other is the botanic garden, discussed in the following entry). See p. 93.

- **Albuquerque Botanic Garden** (2601 Central Ave. NW; ☎ 505/764-6200):

Within a state-of-the-art, 10,000-square-foot conservatory, a desert collection features plants from the lower Chihuahuan and Sonoran deserts, and a Mediterranean collection includes many exotic species native to the Mediterranean climates of Southern California, South Africa, Australia, and the Mediterranean Basin. See p. 93.

- **Rio Grande Zoo** (903 10th St. SW, Albuquerque; ☎ 505/764-6200): 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. Major exhibits include the polar bears, the giraffes, the sea lions (with underwater viewing), the cat walk, the bird show, and ape country, with its gorilla and orangutans. The 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. You'll find numerous snack bars on the zoo grounds, and La Ventana Gift Shop carries film and souvenirs. See p. 94.
- **Sandia Peak Tramway** (10 Tramway Loop NE, Albuquerque; ☎ 505/856-7325): The world's longest tramway ferries passengers about 3 miles from Albuquerque's city limits almost to the summit of the 10,678-foot Sandia Peak. On the way, you'll likely see birds of prey and rare Rocky Mountain bighorn sheep. In the summer, you may see hang gliders taking off from the giant precipice to soar in the drafts that sweep up the mountain. Go in the evening to watch the sun burn its way out of the western sky; then enjoy the glimmering city lights on your way down. See p. 90.
- **El Rancho de las Golondrinas** (334 Los Pinos Rd., Santa Fe; ☎ 505/471-2261): This living museum re-creates an 18th- and 19th-century Spanish village. Kids like to visit the working molasses mill, the blacksmith shop, the shearing and weaving rooms, and the water mills, as well as the resident animals. See p. 158.
- **Santa Fe Children's Museum** (1050 Old Pecos Trail; ☎ 505/989-8359): Designed for the whole family to experience, this museum offers interactive exhibits and hands-on activities in the arts, humanities, science, and technology. Most notable is a 16-foot climbing wall that kids can scale, outfitted with helmets and harnesses. A 1-acre Southwestern horticulture garden features animals, wetlands, and a greenhouse. Special performances and hands-on sessions with artists and scientists are regularly scheduled. *Family Life* magazine named this one of the 10 hottest children's museums in the nation. See p. 160.
- **New Mexico Mining Museum** (100 N. Iron Ave., Grants; ☎ 800/748-2142 or 505/287-4802): This museum takes you down into a spooky, low-lit replica mine. You begin in the station where uranium was loaded and unloaded, and travel back into the earth through places defined on wall plaques with such interesting names as "track drift" (where ore comes up in cars from the mine) and "stope" (a room stripped of all ore and off-limits in an actual mine). See p. 252.
- **Living Desert Zoo & Gardens State Park** (1504 Miehl's Dr., Carlsbad; ☎ 505/887-5516): Spread across a vast plateau, this park offers visitors an hour-long trek through desert lands full of odd plants that survive on who-knows-what to zoo exhibits of hawks, cats, and bears. What's best about this zoo is that the animals aren't just captive, they're rehabilitating. See p. 370.

7 The Best Splurge Hotels

- **Hyatt Regency Tamaya Resort and Spa** (1300 Tuyuna Trail, Santa Ana Pueblo; ☎ **800/55-HYATT** or 505/867-1234): 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. 80.
- **Bishop's Lodge** (Bishop's Lodge Road, Santa Fe; ☎ **505/983-6377**): 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 hand-crafted furniture and local artwork. Activities include horseback riding, hiking, tennis, and swimming. See p. 130.
- **Inn of the Anasazi** (113 Washington Ave., Santa Fe; ☎ **800/688-8100** or 505/988-3030): 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. 124.
- **La Posada de Santa Fe Resort and Spa** (330 E. Palace Ave., Santa Fe; ☎ **800/727-5276** or 505/986-0000): 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. 125.
- **Rancho de San Juan** (US 285 near Española; ☎ **505/753-6818**): Located in the enchanting country near Ojo Caliente, this award-winning inn offers complete luxury and the quiet of the country. Private casitas set among the hills are decorated with antiques and have spectacular views. See p. 196.
- **El Monte Sagrado** (317 Kit Carson Rd., Taos; ☎ **800/828-TAOS** or 505/758-3502): With guest rooms and casitas set around a grassy "Sacred Circle," this new ecoresort 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. 203.
- **Bear Mountain Lodge** (2251 Cottage San Rd., Silver City; ☎ **877/620-BEAR** or 505/538-2538): This lodge, owned and managed by the Nature Conservancy, offers a nature-lover's paradise. The inn itself was built in 1928, but the grounds show evidence of hunter and gatherer visitors dating from 6000 B.C. Nature Conservancy staff members are on hand to guide visitors in their bird-, wildlife-, and plant-viewing pursuits. Rooms are large, with maple floors, high ceilings, and French windows. See p. 334.
- **Inn of the Mountain Gods Resort & Casino** (287 Carrizo Canyon Rd., Mescalero; ☎ **800/545-9011** or 505/464-7777): Even though the architecture of this new hotel on the Mescalero Apache Indian Reservation is a bit cold, the setting in the pines on the

edge of a blue lake compensates, as do the spacious rooms, the lush bedding, and the many activity options, ranging from gambling to fishing to golf to skiing. See p. 356.

- **The Lodge at Cloudcroft** (1 Corona Place, Cloudcroft; ☎ 800/395-6343 or 505/682-2566): For those who enjoy the old-world style of a

Victorian hotel, this lodge nestled on a pine-covered hilltop in southern New Mexico will certainly please. Rooms in the lodge are filled with antiques, from sideboards and lamps to mirrors and steam radiators. A high-elevation golf course and a new spa round out the experience. See p. 349.

8 The Best Moderately Priced Hotels

- **Wyndham Albuquerque Hotel** (2910 Yale Blvd. SE, Albuquerque; ☎ 800/227-1117 or 505/843-7000): Even though this hotel is near the airport, its proximity to freeways offer easy access to Albuquerque's attractions. The spacious rooms have a warm Anasazi feel, and the views are spectacular. See p. 78.
- **El Rey Inn** (1862 Cerrillos Rd., Santa Fe; ☎ 800/521-1349 or 505/982-1931): 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 types of rooms, all nicely appointed. See p. 131.
- **Santa Fe Motel and Inn** (510 Cerrillos Rd., Santa Fe; ☎ 800/930-5002 or 505/982-1039): Rooms at this inn are walking distance from the Plaza and provide ambience of the Southwest—bold colors and some handmade furniture—with a standard motel price tag. See p. 129.
- **Best Western Kachina Lodge & Meeting Center** (413 Paseo del

Pueblo Norte, Taos; ☎ 800/522-4462 or 505/758-2275): A mainstay since the 1950s when it was built, this hotel offers clean and efficient rooms set around a grassy courtyard studded with blue spruce trees. On the north end of town, it's close to most attractions. See p. 207.

- **Step Back Inn** (103 W. Aztec Blvd., Aztec; ☎ 800/334-1255 or 505/334-1200): In a modern building, this hotel presents a good dose of Victorian charm. Rooms are spacious and quiet, with unique touches such as colorful wallpaper and American antique armoire reproductions. Each is named after an early pioneer of the area. See p. 273.
- **Inn on the Santa Fe Trail** (1133 Grand Ave., Las Vegas; ☎ 888/448-8438 or 505/425-6791): This 1920s court motel set around a grassy courtyard has been restored to provide comfortable Southwestern style rooms with nice accents such as handcrafted furniture and light fixtures. See p. 290.

9 The Best Dining Experiences

- **AmbroZia Café & Wine Bar** (108 Rio Grande Blvd. NE, Albuquerque; ☎ 505/242-6560): This new restaurant claims it makes “Food for the Gods,” and I have to agree. The offerings might even give Apollo pause, so complex do they seem, but when they

hit the palate, the sensation is pure heaven. See p. 81.

- **The Compound** (653 Canyon Rd., Santa Fe; ☎ 505/982-4353): 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. 140.
- **Santacafé** (231 Washington Ave., Santa Fe; ☎ 505/984-1788): This restaurant, my all-time favorite, 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 their best dishes is the Alaskan halibut with English peas and saffron couscous. See p. 143.
 - **Geronimo** (724 Canyon Rd. ☎ 505/982-1500): 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. Come for lunch and sit on the patio to watch the action on Canyon Road. See p. 141.
 - **The Shed** (113½ E. Palace Ave., Santa Fe; ☎ 505/982-9030): 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 such as enchiladas, burritos, and stuffed *sopaipillas*. The mocha cake is renowned. See p. 148. Its sister restaurant, **La Choza**, is just as good, with a similar menu. See p. 148.
 - **De La Tierra** (317 Kit Carson Rd., Taos; ☎ 800/828-TAOS or 505/758-3502): Located at the ecoresort 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. 213.
 - **Joseph's Table** (108-A South Taos Plaza, Taos; ☎ 505/751-4512): 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. 215.
 - **The Bluffs** (3450 E. Main St., Farmington; ☎ 505/325-8155): Wooden partitions topped with glazed glass shaped like towering bluffs surround diners at this new restaurant serving sandwiches and salads at lunch and steaks and seafood at dinner. The turkey bacon club is amazing, as are any of the angus beef steaks. See p. 274.
 - **Blackjack's Grill** (1133 Grand Ave., Las Vegas; ☎ 888/448-8438 or 505/425-6791): Las Vegas has needed a sophisticated restaurant, and now it finally has one. The atmosphere is festive, especially on the patio, where diners sit under elm trees. My favorite dish is sautéed beef medallions with garlic mashed potatoes. See p. 291.
 - **Double Eagle** (2355 Calle de Guadalupe, Las Cruces; ☎ 505/523-6700): Continental cuisine is alive and well behind the walls of this historic hacienda (it's more than 150 years old) located in Las Cruces. The decor is lush and dramatic—chandeliers hung with Baccarat crystals—and the food is richly traditional. Steaks are the way to go. See p. 324.
 - **Diane's Bakery & Cafe** (510 N. Bullard St., Silver City; ☎ 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. Come here to feast on sumptuous baked goods and sophisticated meals such as rack of lamb. See p. 336.