

TRAVEL

# A Rio Runs Through It: The Ultimate Guide to a New Mexico Road Trip

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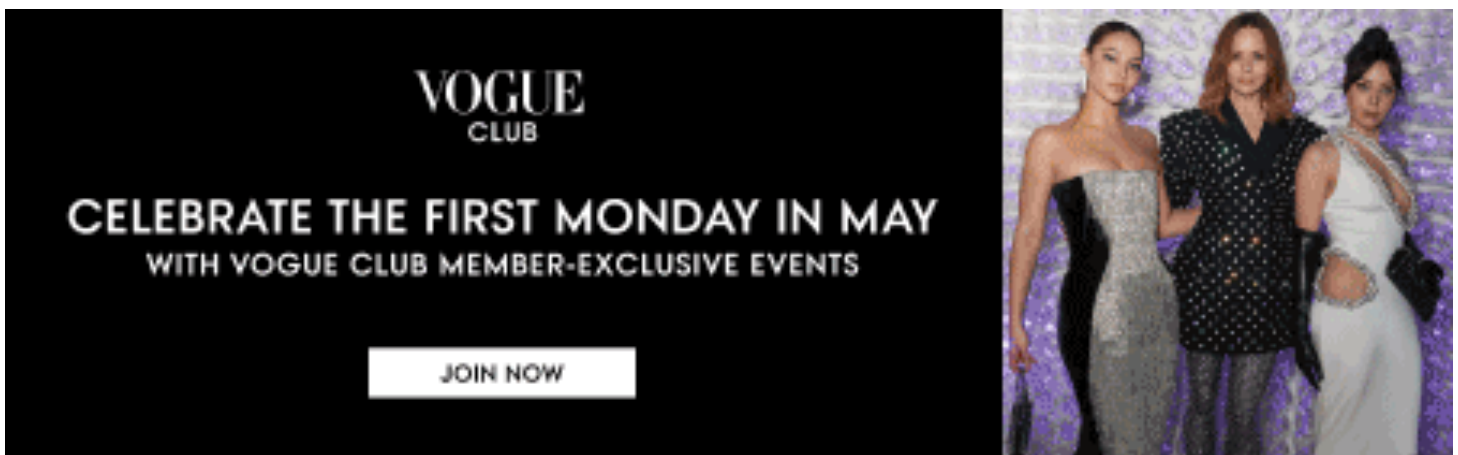


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I first visited northern New Mexico 13 years ago on a road trip. I had dreamed of this landscape, climate, culture, and color palette since first being exposed to Native American history and nature photography of the Southwest as a child. I wanted to return but lived internationally, so it wasn't until 2017 that I began to frequent the area again. At that time, I lived in the Yucatan and would come here to escape the dense, sweltering, rainy season (or the “buggy, sticky, itchy season” as I experienced it) and stay in an off-grid area in Taos County. Even without running water or electricity, or perhaps because of this, I was smitten. Why am I not living here, I thought. Soon after, I moved to the “Land of Enchantment”—or entrapment. (Or, most likely, a bit of both.)

Over the past few years, I began noticing that so much of the New Mexico-centric travel coverage I was coming across felt a little repetitive: geared towards the constant influx of tourists usually flying in and out of Albuquerque, staying in Santa Fe, then speedily heading up to Taos or Abiquiu for a quick day trip. So I set out to explore further, with a particular focus on small businesses, solopreneurs, artisans, and other special offerings, with the hope of sharing and celebrating those places and ventures that make New Mexico such a desirable and unique tapestry of high, low, old and new.



welcome to my totally subjective and not at all exhaustive suggested itinerary of where to eat, stay, shop, and play in New Mexico. It's focused on the north-south axis along the Rio Grande, between Truth or Consequences and Taos County. Five days is the suggested duration, though it could easily be extended to a week or more; or even broken down into

smaller jaunts, focusing on each town and the clusters of sights and surrounding areas. The choice is yours.

## Truth or Consequences

Initially known as Hot Springs, New Mexico, this small town of around 6,000 people about 150 miles south of Albuquerque changed names in 1950, as a result of winning a radio show competition. Situated on the Rio Grande—and as the original name would indicate—the area is known for its natural hot springs and public baths. T or C, as it's most commonly known today, is a quirky place. Signs around town read “hot springs, cool town,” and local folk are wont to share that “if you're here, you're not all there.” It makes for a particularly good spot to start or end a New Mexico road trip, as, quite simply, there is just not much to do but soak, relax, repeat.



exit sign off highway for town of Truth of Consequences, NM

Erik Von Weber

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[Sierra Grande](#), [Riverbend](#), and newcomer [Hot Springs Glamp Camp](#) all offer on-site soaking. At Sierra Grande, a recent addition to the Ted Turner Reserves portfolio, the water is pumped into tubs in the spa (with an outdoor option as well), while at Riverbend and the Glamp Camp, all soaking is *en plein air*. Riverbend, which has been operating as a hot springs resort under single-family ownership since 1988, is particularly noteworthy, with riverfront pools, including seven that are private (and therefore, clothing optional).



Dining options are limited in and around T or C, so it's best to be prepared. Definitely bring some snacks, and consider a stay at Sierra Grande where overnight guests benefit from an expanded continental breakfast that includes oats, bacon, eggs, green chile from nearby Hatch, NM, and more. Mile Marker 7 is an adorable drive-thru roadside café serving tasty coffee and tea concoctions, breakfast sandwiches, salads, and baked goods like jalapeno bagels and donuts. At La Baracca, chef Michael Demeo serves high-quality, inventive Mediter-Asian that is available on-site, as well as for pick up or delivery. La Baracca, Grapevine Bistro, and other local restaurants are also accustomed to delivering to the Truth or Consequences Brewing Co., an excellent meeting point on North Broadway where locals and visitors convene over in-house brews and eclectic programming that includes karaoke, trivia, open mic, and live music. The Brewing Co. also has a sister property, Sidekixx Bar & Kitchen, that doubles as a pizzeria and bowling alley; as well as a downtown bodega selling New Mexico-made spirits, snacks, and sundries.

On my most recent trip, in addition to Sierra Grande, I visited two other Ted Turner Reserves properties: namely Armendaris, situated on 360,000 acres of semi-desert, and Ladder, a natural oasis on over 156,000 acres. I had never before witnessed a conservation effort of this magnitude. Not only are there unspoiled landscapes, rich biodiversity, and preserved cultural heritage, each property offers private tours, flexible itineraries, highly knowledgeable guides, and the option to book accommodations at either the “Hacienda” or “Country House,” providing guests with a stay that is fully experiential.

## Albuquerque

With a population currently clocking in at over half a million, “Burque” is New Mexico’s largest town. And while it definitely delivers a dose of city energy, there is also a fascinating rural feel due to the Rio Grande flowing north to south, a continued agricultural presence in certain neighborhoods, and the fact it’s flanked by both the Sandia Mountains to the east and the West Mesa to the west.



A view over Albuquerque.

Photo: Getty Images

The various neighborhoods such as Nob Hill and the North Valley have strong identities, and notable restaurants, bars, entertainment, and shops abound. Hotel Chaco, in the emerging Sawmill District, is a convenient landing pad, with the Sawmill Market, an upscale food court in a former warehouse, next door, as well as Native, LGBTQ+, and woman-owned Bow & Arrow Brewing Co. close by, too. Chaco has an excellent on-site gallery, Gallery Hózhó, featuring paintings by artist Dave A. Naranjo (who brilliantly applies traditional Puebloan designs and aesthetics to modern athletic gear under the brand Khohay Apparel), painting and sculpture by Kelly Frye, glass works by Ira Lujan, and ceramics by Margarita Paz Pedro.



The Yard at Sawmill Market. Photo: Douglas Merriam

From there, it's just a short drive to Old Town, where local spots like The Nizhoni Soap Company, Back Alley Brujas, Lapis Room (where I mostly go for the art, but then get distracted by jewelry by Nadone and Desert Goddess), and Tiny Grocer ensure that this hyper-frequented area nevertheless avoids becoming a tourist trap.