

**A GUIDE TO
MAGICAL, HISTORIC
SANTA FE**

David Bigeleisen

The sky is huge, the clouds heroic. In the summer the heavens open with a torrent of rain and an opera of lightning to rival Wagner. The colors are soft blue, soft pink, and adobe tan.

History is everywhere. Welcome to Santa Fe.

Rock Formation near Chimayo, New Mexico

All photos by David Bigeleisen.



My connection to Santa Fe has two periods. The first was in the mid 1950s, when my father worked at the laboratory in nearby Los Alamos, New Mexico. I was a little boy. I built miniature adobe houses on the banks of the Rio Grande and caught horned toads. It was a happy time. The second period began when my father's first cousin (and my godfather) Sam Ballen bought a historic hotel, La Fonda, on the plaza in Santa Fe. Sam had five beautiful daughters and I remain very close to them.

Santa Fe was founded in 1607 as la Villa Real de la Santa Fe de San Francisco de Assisi. That means the Royal Town of the Holy Faith of Saint Francis of Assisi. It served as a trading center for the hide and tallow trade between Mexico and St. Joseph, Missouri. Hence, the Santa Fe Trail.

Santa Fe was also a point of refuge for Jews who were escaping the inquisition from Spain and Mexico. They converted nominally to Catholicism, but retained Jewish customs. They sometimes refer to themselves as Conversos. For more on the Conversos, read *To the Ends of the Earth* by Stanley Hordes.

HOW TO GET THERE

The speediest way to Santa Fe is to fly to Albuquerque, New Mexico. A shuttle van or the train, called the Rail Runner, takes you to Santa Fe. You can also rent a car and drive north on Highway 25. It takes about an hour and a quarter and the signs direct you right to the plaza.

But if you want to relax and see something different, take the Turquoise Trail. Meander along Highway 40 East for just a few miles and then take Highway 14 North. You will see some beautiful scenery and the town of Madrid. Madrid is a small, abandoned coal mining town which is now an artists' colony. Stop for a snack and visit the old saloon, opera house, and museum.

EXPLORING THE GREAT SOUTHWEST

If you drive from San Francisco, you can get to Santa Fe in three days. But why not dawdle along the way? There's plenty to see. Take Highway 40 East and pass through



At the Santa Fe Farmers Market

Seligman, Flagstaff and Winslow, Arizona. You can stay at the Wigwam Motel in Holbrook, Arizona.

To get a feel for the great vastness of the Southwest, read one of Tony Hillerman's books. Or why not see it yourself? You can digress north to Canyon de Chelly. Spend a night or two at the Thunderbird Lodge, hire a guide and take a Jeep tour of the ancient ruins and cliff paintings. You are in Navajo Country. Keep going north to Mexican Water, Arizona, and Highway 160. Stop off for a rest at the trading post at Teec Nos Pos. It hasn't changed a bit since I was a boy of eight.

Continue on to Highway 64 and Shiprock, New Mexico. Shiprock is a volcanic outcropping. You can see it for miles and miles. It is heroic from any viewpoint.

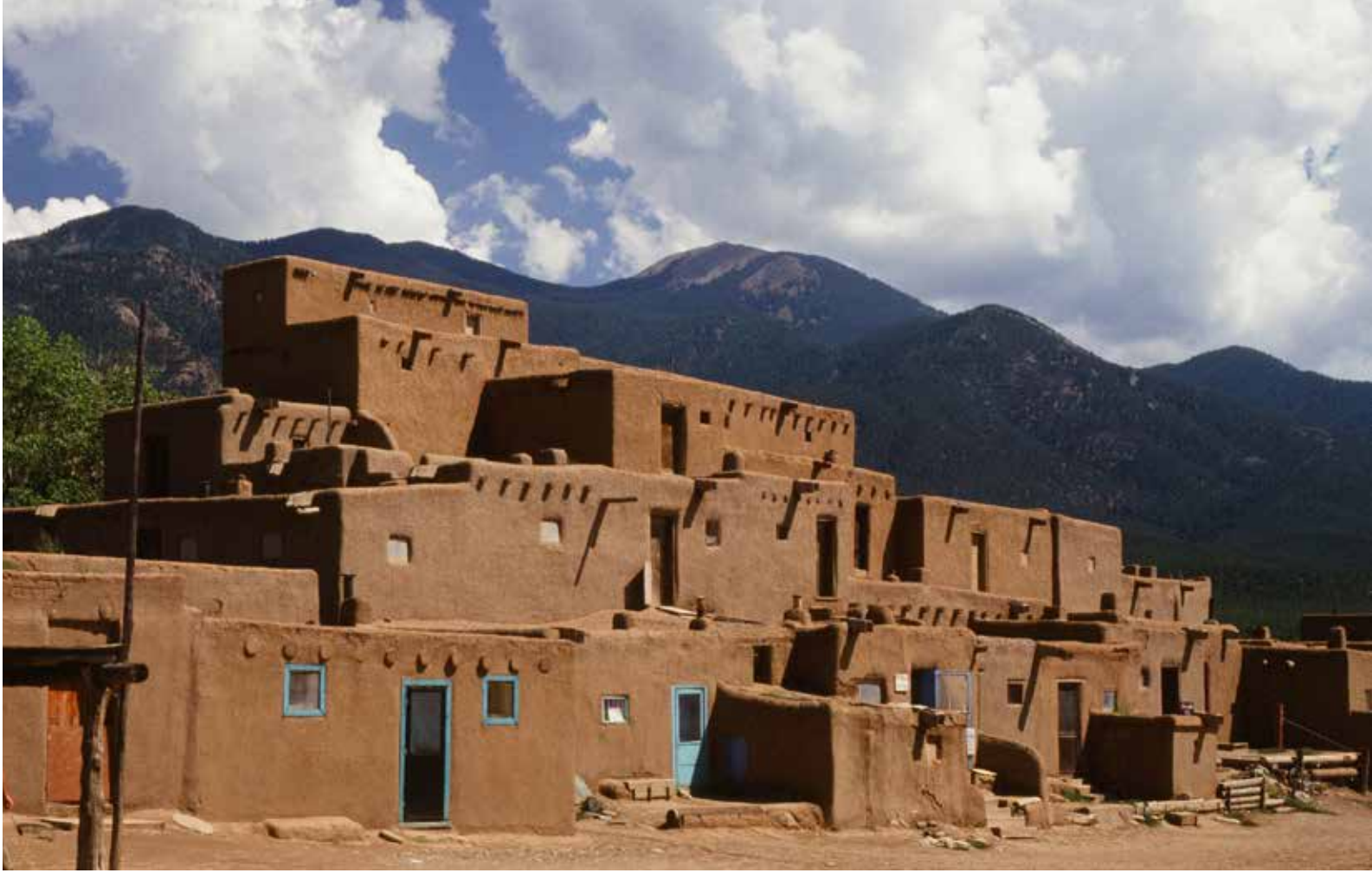


Cumbres and Toltec Scenic Railroad. This 64-mile narrow-gauge railroad runs between Antonito, Colorado and Chama, New Mexico. It gets its name from two geographical features along the route, the Cumbres Pass and Toltec Gorge

Your next way station is Farmington, New Mexico, an oil, gas and agriculture hub. Stop off at a pawn shop and buy an old six-shooter, or not. Continue east to Chama. You can hire a fishing guide, or take a ride on the coal-powered Cumbres & Toltec narrow-gauge railway, a beautiful trip.

Take Highway 64 South to Highway 84 and Abiquiu. Stop off at Los Ojos. This is a tiny place, home to a wool-growing and weaving co-operative that was founded by a veteran of the Freedom Riders of the 1960s. They sell wonderful handmade rugs.

Near Abiquiu is the Ghost Ranch where Georgia O'Keeffe and Alfred Stieglitz lived. It's now a guest house and conference center. If you decide to stay there, be sure to make a reservation.



Taos Pueblo is an ancient pueblo about one mile north of the modern city of Taos, New Mexico. The pueblo has been designated a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Taos Pueblo is a member of the Eight Northern Pueblos, whose people speak two variants of the Tanoan language. The pueblos are considered to be one of the oldest continuously inhabited communities in the United States.

Stop off at the amphitheater in Abiquiu. Then drive on past Hernandez. Ansel Adams took an iconic photo of the moon rising there. But it's all different now. Then drive on through Española and into Santa Fe.

Or you can drive straight east on Highway 40 through Gallup and Grants. Be sure to turn off at McCartys to visit the Acoma Pueblo, perched on a high mesa. In ancient times, the only access was by a narrow, steep trail. Thus, the residents protected themselves from enemies. Today, there is a road to the top. You can take a bus from the visitor's center.

Acoma has been the scene of many Hollywood movies. They make and sell a wonderful and distinctive black-and-white pottery. At one time in the nineteenth century a Sephardic

Jew named Solomon Bibo married a Native American woman. He became the governor of Acoma.

Now you can turn from Thoreau to Crownpoint. Once a month, Navajo women hold an auction of their hand-woven rugs. The auction remits all of the proceeds (less expenses) to the weavers. Thus they receive far more of the fruits of their labors than if you bought from a dealer.

You can continue north from Crownpoint to the ruins of Chaco Canyon. These are some of the most magnificent in the Southwest. Getting there is a project.

Now continue east past Albuquerque and north into Santa Fe.



*Valley view from the Cumbres & Toltec
Scenic Railroad, near Chama*

DISCOVERING THE SANTA FE PLAZA

Spend at least a day or two on foot near the plaza. There you'll find many museums, including the Georgia O'Keeffe Museum, displaying superb works by O'Keeffe and her contemporaries. The nearby museum of fine arts has many works by Southwest artists.

Stop by the portico of the Palace of Governors, now home to the New Mexico History Museum. Native Americans will be selling their own hand-crafted work at very modest prices.

Walk just a bit further east to 109 Palace Avenue. This is now a poster shop. During World War II it was the headquarters of the Manhattan Project. The nuclear weapons project was a secret, of course. So secret that the entire city of Los Alamos, where the first atomic bomb was built, was subject to very tight security. In the mid-1950s when my brothers and I were quite young, we had to pass through a guard station both to enter and leave Los Alamos.

The old post office has been converted to the Institute of American Indian Arts. A block from the plaza, it is not to be missed. San Francisco Street, on the other side of the plaza, as well as Water Galisteo streets, have excellent art galleries.

Walk about three quarters of a mile south on Old Santa Fe Trail to Old Pecos Trail. You will cross a little bridge across the Santa Fe River and come to four museums on a hill. They are the Wheelwright Museum of the American Indian, the Museum of International Folk Art, the Museum of Spanish Colonial Art, and the Museum of Indian Arts and Culture. My favorite of these is the folk art museum, with treasures from all over the world. The Wheelwright is an excellent place to buy handcrafted Indian silver. You can purchase a pass for all four museums.



Santa Fe Depot Rail Runner Station

Now take a day to visit the art galleries along Canyon Road. The road is also home to a community of Tibetan refugees, who have a culture and information center.

The Santa Fe Opera is world famous, with open-air performances in the summer. When the opera is not performing, the parking lot becomes an eclectic flea market. If you have knots in your muscles left over from driving, the spa and baths, or better yet a massage at Ten Thousand Waves, will help.

SEEING THE SIGHTS OUTSIDE SANTA FE

Now it's time to get out of town.

Without doubt, your first trip should be to Taos. The pueblo is the oldest continuously inhabited dwelling in

North America. When you visit, be sure to remember you are a guest in someone's house. Act with great respect. The residents will charge you a fee to visit, and another fee to use your camera. Be very careful not to photograph the residents; this is thought of as a very serious insult, akin to stealing one's spirit. They will confiscate your camera.

While you are in Taos—an art colony for more than a century—visit the Mabel Dodge Luhan House. There are two ways to get to and from Taos. The most obvious is the river road. Highway 68 takes you along the Rio Grande and through some striking scenery.

THE CHIMAYO VALLEY

On the way back (or up), take the mountain road. This takes you from Rancho de Taos through Las Trampas, Truchas and into Chimayo. Along the way you will see the studios

of Spanish weavers. Stop and visit; if you are lucky, you will see them at work.

Stop off at the charming little chapel Santuario de Chamayo. Legend has it that many people have been cured of infirmities by touching the earth at the rear of the chapel. Their cast-off crutches and braces are arrayed on the wall. If you visit on a sunny Sunday morning you can participate in the Sunday worship in Spanish outdoors.

A bit further south you will come upon my favorite Southwest restaurant, Rancho de Chimayo. You will probably need a reservation.

You join Highway 84 at Española, an agricultural hub. As you approach on Highway 76 you will see farm stands selling fresh fruit in the summer, and ristras, long strings of red dried chili.

SAN ILDELFONSO

The pueblo at San Ildelfonso was the home of the potter Maria Martinez. Her black-on-black handmade pottery is world famous. The women at San Ildelfonso follow Maria's tradition. If you are lucky, you will see them taking their finished pots out of the fire. You can purchase original pottery at the visitor's center or in the peoples' homes. It's fairly expensive, but the genuine article.

Near San Ildelfonso is Bandelier National Monument. The valley was inhabited by Ancestral Pueblans. You can visit the ruins of their ancient cliff dwellings. It has been one of my favorites since I was a boy.

OJO CALIENTE

Ojo Caliente is a natural hot spring. It has been a healing site since ancient times. You can get a massage at the fancy spa or stay in one of their cottages. The food isn't very good. There is an old tap in the courtyard at Ojo Caliente that

pours out water laden with arsenic, which people actually drink, claiming it is good for their health. It looks exactly as it did in the 1950s.

My last venture will take you to Kasha-Katuwe Tent Rocks National Monument. These are a series of cone-shaped hills composed of volcanic tuff. The two-and-a-half mile trail is pleasant, but gets crowded on the weekends. Go during the week.

WHERE TO EAT IN SANTA FE

In addition to Rancho de Chimayo, try La Choza on Alarid Street and The Shed on Palace Avenue. Cafe Pasqual's on Don Gaspar Street is very good. The politicians eat at the Pink Adobe. The Famous Plaza Cafe (on the plaza) has good, stick-to-your-ribs food. The food at La Fonda is good too.

Be sure to have a bowl of green chili stew (with or without meat), and a bowl of pozole – both local specialties.

WHERE TO STAY IN SANTA FE

La Fonda is the oldest hotel in North America. There has been a hotel on that site since 1610. The current building was erected in the 1920s by the Santa Fe Railroad and was recently renovated to accommodate modern travelers. My godfather, Sam Ballen, and his wife, Ethel, bought the hotel in the late 1960s. Over the years, Sam gave me a very small amount of stock in the hotel. Sam Ballen was a very colorful man. His autobiography is for sale in the executive office on the second floor. If you go, ask the secretary for a copy of Ethel's tips about Santa Fe. Be sure to tell them I sent you.

The hotel is full of original art, with several high-end shops and art galleries. It still has its original grace and charm. The Garrett Motor Hotel is another good place to stay.

LOCAL EVENTS

Some of the local events include the Fiesta after Labor Day, the rodeo, the Indian Market, and the Spanish Market. The art at the markets is usually superb.

There are various traditional ceremonies at nearby pueblos throughout the year. These are not highly publicized, but the concierge at La Fonda can help.

HAVE FUN EXPLORING

I hope this guide gives you a flavor for Santa Fe and the great Southwest. Let me know if you decide to go exploring in this magical part of the country that is near and dear to me.

David Michael Bigeleisen has been a lawyer for more than forty years. He defends criminal cases.



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