

Taos, New Mexico

Tiptoe outside the South to ski and soak up a neighboring culture. By **Jennifer Mckenzie Frazier**

Taos, New Mexico, feels like a comfortable Navajo blanket, wrapping you with coziness and color. Pueblos with their sandy hues. Warmth despite the snow on the ground and majestic mountains as a backdrop. Crackling fires in kiva fireplaces and smoke billowing from chimneys.

This town, which sits on a mesa at the base of the Sangre de Cristo Mountains, magically speaks to the soul. This isn't Santa Fe, the neighbor less than two hours down the way, the tourist mecca with the flashy arts scene and chic clientele. There's no rat race here. It's tranquil, laid-back, and low-key. American Indian culture blends with Spanish and Anglo, embracing you and providing a weekend of discovery and a step outside your everyday zone. Get ready to slow down and enjoy. This is the place to do it.

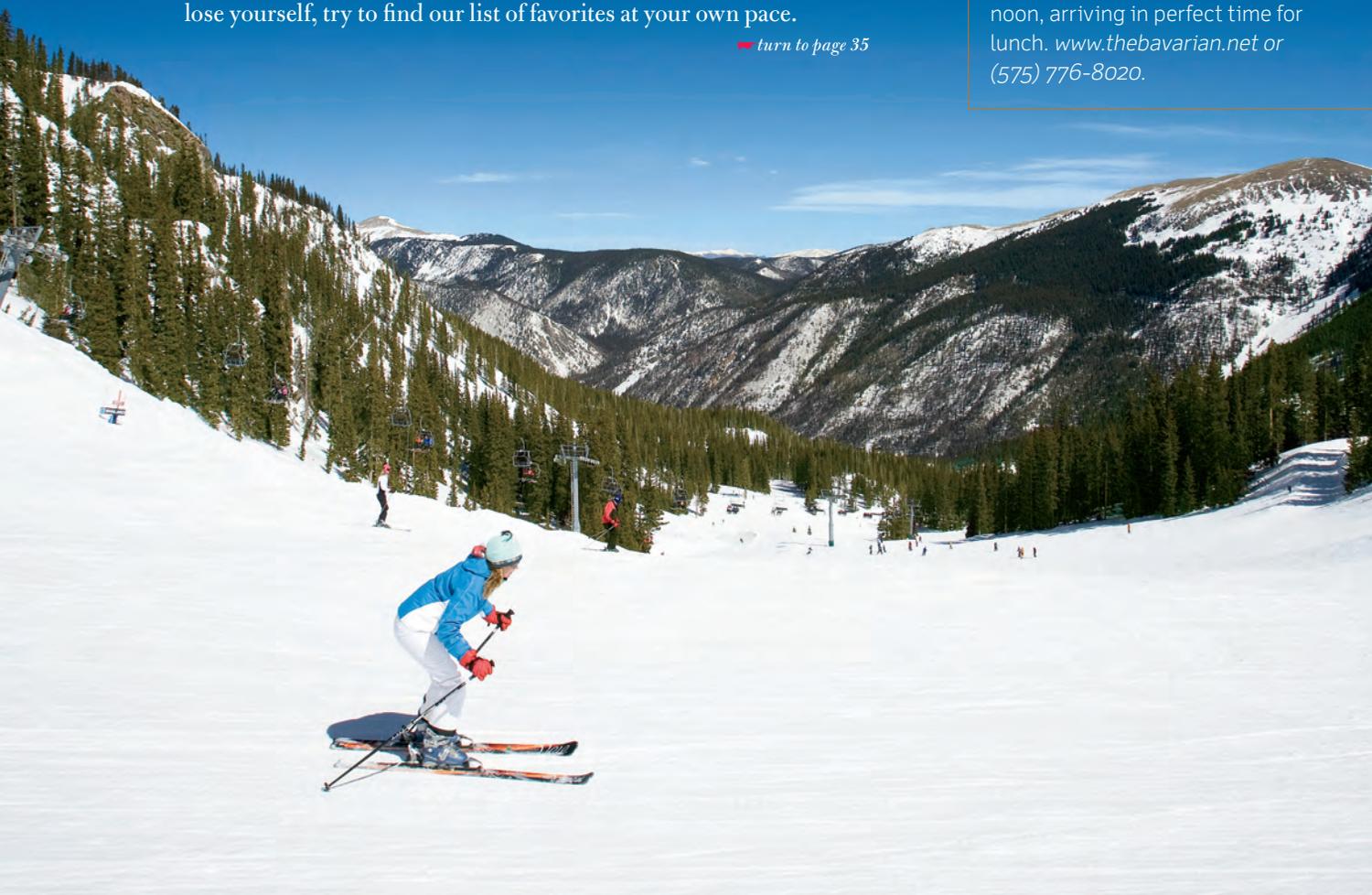
Schedule-Free Itinerary? This isn't that kind of weekend. You can get lost in Taos—and we mean that literally. One local explains, "Here in Taos, we don't really believe in addresses." So while you lose yourself, try to find our list of favorites at your own pace.

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Taos Ski Valley

This is the spot in New Mexico to go downhill skiing—it usually has the best snow in the state. Last year, the Taos Ski Valley allowed snowboarding for the first time. That was a heck of a big deal. The slopes close in early April; ski packages are offered. www.skitaos.org.

Take a ski break and grab some authentic Bavarian chow at The Bavarian Lodge & Restaurant. Skiers can plan mornings to ski the base of the Kachina chairlift around noon, arriving in perfect time for lunch. www.thebavarian.net or (575) 776-8020.



PHOTOGRAPHS: MEG MCKINNEY



CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: El Monte Sagrado's restaurant De la Tierra wows in both food and ambiance. Handmade crafts abound in Taos. San Francisco de Asis Church has inspired many artists. See nature by horseback.



FOR LODGING: You'll see the well-known chain motels, but if you want to experience the best, splurge and stay at **El Monte Sagrado**. Decorative pillows covered in chunks of turquoise. Ironwork modeled after Anasazi corn and branches. Sandstone walls. Escape. Choose from 84 rooms, casitas, or suites. Rates start at \$279. www.elmontesagrado.com or 1-800-828-8267.

FOR CULTURE: Time stands still in the multistoried buildings of the **Taos Pueblo**, continuously inhabited for more than 1,000 years. Many members of the tribe live here with no running water or electricity. Taste their homemade bread; see them make pottery, jewelry, and other crafts (and buy some to take home); and tour the pueblo. **Tip:** Check the Web site before visiting. The pueblo closes often for religious purposes. www.taospueblo.com or (575) 758-1028.

San Francisco de Asis (St. Francis of Assisi) Church is one of the most photographed churches in New Mexico. Ansel Adams used it as a source of inspiration. Stop in for a quiet moment. (575) 758-2754.

FOR ART: Built around the art collection of the gallery's namesake, the **Millicent Rogers Museum** is dedicated to the culture of the American Indian, Hispanic, and Euro-American people of the Southwest. You'll find a stunning collection of jewelry, textiles, sculpture, pottery, and more. www.millicentrogers.org or (575) 758-2462.

At the **Inger Jirby Gallery & Sculpture Garden**, her bold paintings cover the walls, a feast for the eyes. www.jirby.com or 1-866-758-7333.

FOR DINING: For breakfast, dine at **Taos Diner**, a local's spot we uncovered by accident. The Charles break-

fast burrito (with bacon, eggs, tomato, and feta cheese) or Copper John's Eggs (with green chiles and cheese) will satisfy you through the day. A must: the homemade biscuits. www.taosdiner.com or (575) 758-2374.

Our favorite for lunch is **Graham's Grille**, a modern little spot in the heart of town. Start with the rich and creamy corn-and-crab chowder. www.grahamstaos.com or (575) 751-1350.

On the historic Taos Plaza in the Hotel la Fonda de Taos, **Joseph's Table** rivals some of the best restaurants in the country and is a priority for an evening meal. www.josephstable.com or (575) 751-4512.

Another great dinner spot, **De la Tierra at El Monte Sagrado** is not only known for its amazing cuisine, but also for its architecture. www.elmontesagrado.com or (575) 737-9855.

FOR SHOPPING: For selection (but few bargains), head to the **Taos Plaza**, a circle of shops and restaurants, for souvenirs and locally made silver jewelry. Find the deals at the **Casa del Sol Gift Shop** (down the road from the heart of town). Then drive through the town of **Arroyo Seco** for precious boutiques and funky galleries.

FOR NATURE: Include the **Rio Grande Gorge Bridge** on your list. The steel structure overlooks the steep walls of this 600-foot-deep canyon. On a windy day, you can feel the bridge sway.

FOR THE LOCAL SCENE: Greta Garbo and Robert Redford got to **The Adobe Bar at Taos Inn** before you. But it's still the local pick for a drink and live music. They don't call it the "living room of Taos" for nothing. www.adobebar.com or 1-888-518-8267. ●