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

BY ALISON BECKNER

August 21, 2023

Photo: Getty Images

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.

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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.

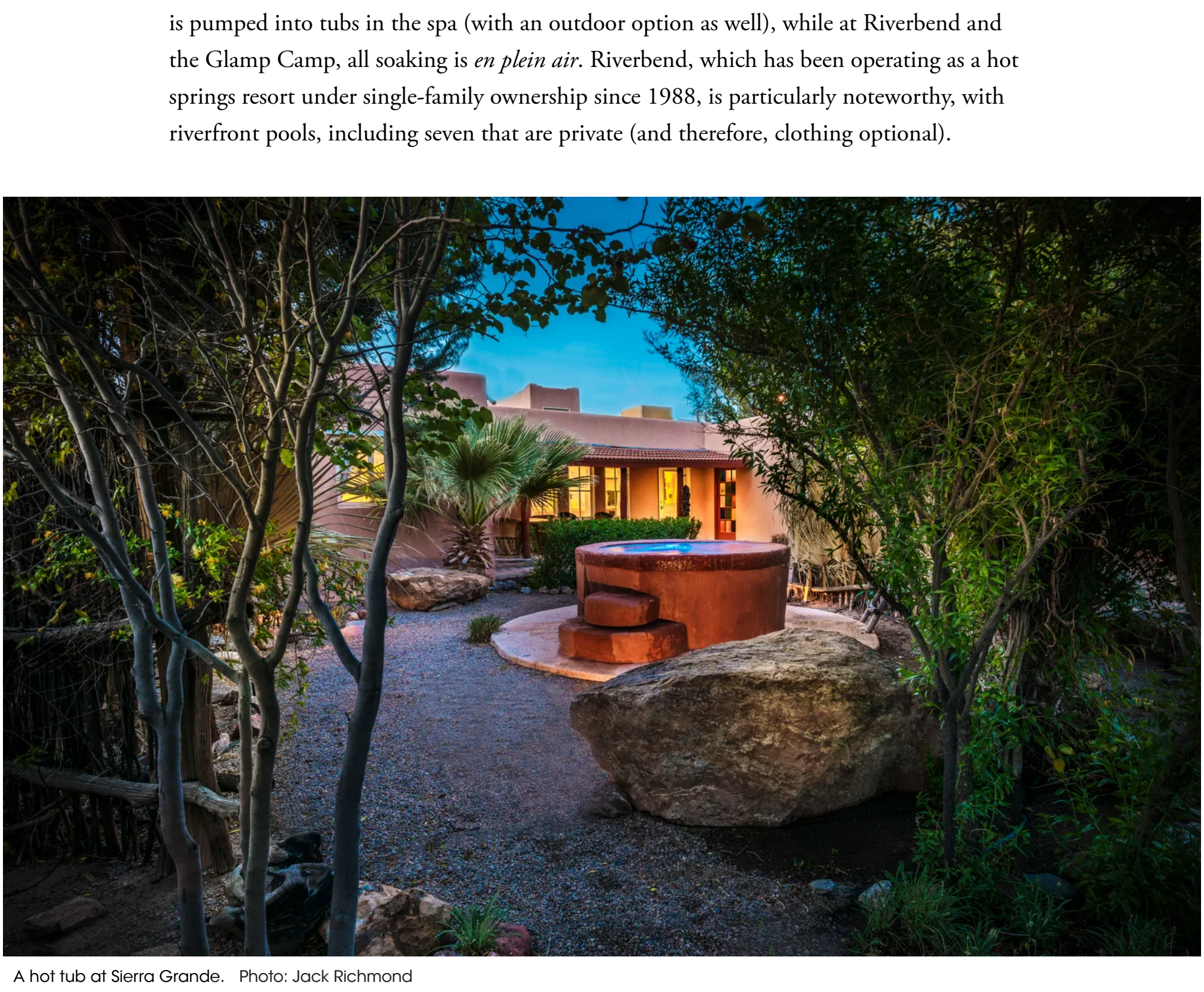
Truth or Consequences

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.

Truth or Consequences
ELEPHANT BUTTE LAKE STATE PARK
CITY OF ELEPHANT BUTTE

exit sign off highway for town of Truth of Consequences, NM
Erik Von Weber

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).



A hot tub at Sierra Grande. Photo: Jack Richmond

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 chili 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.

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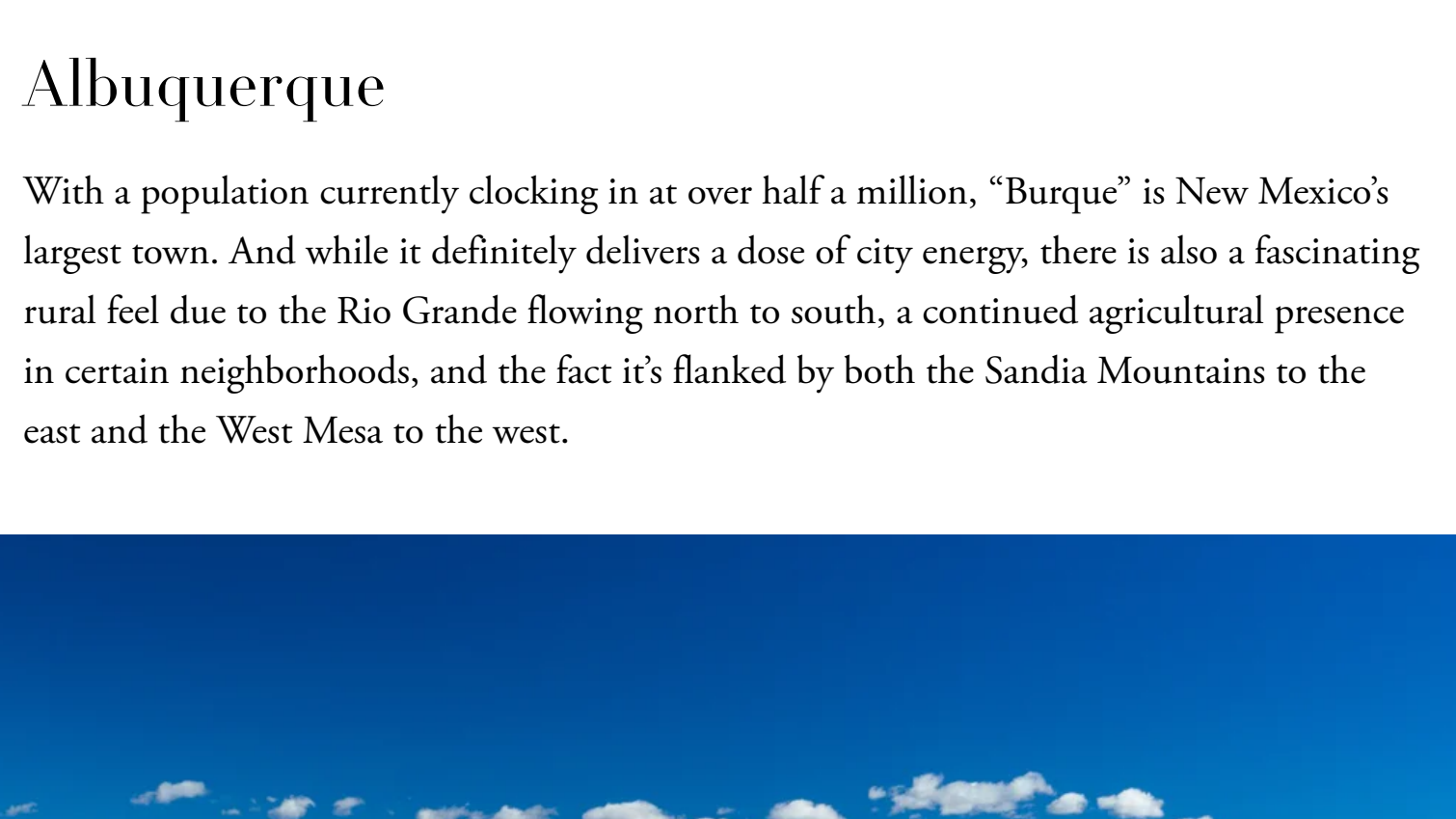


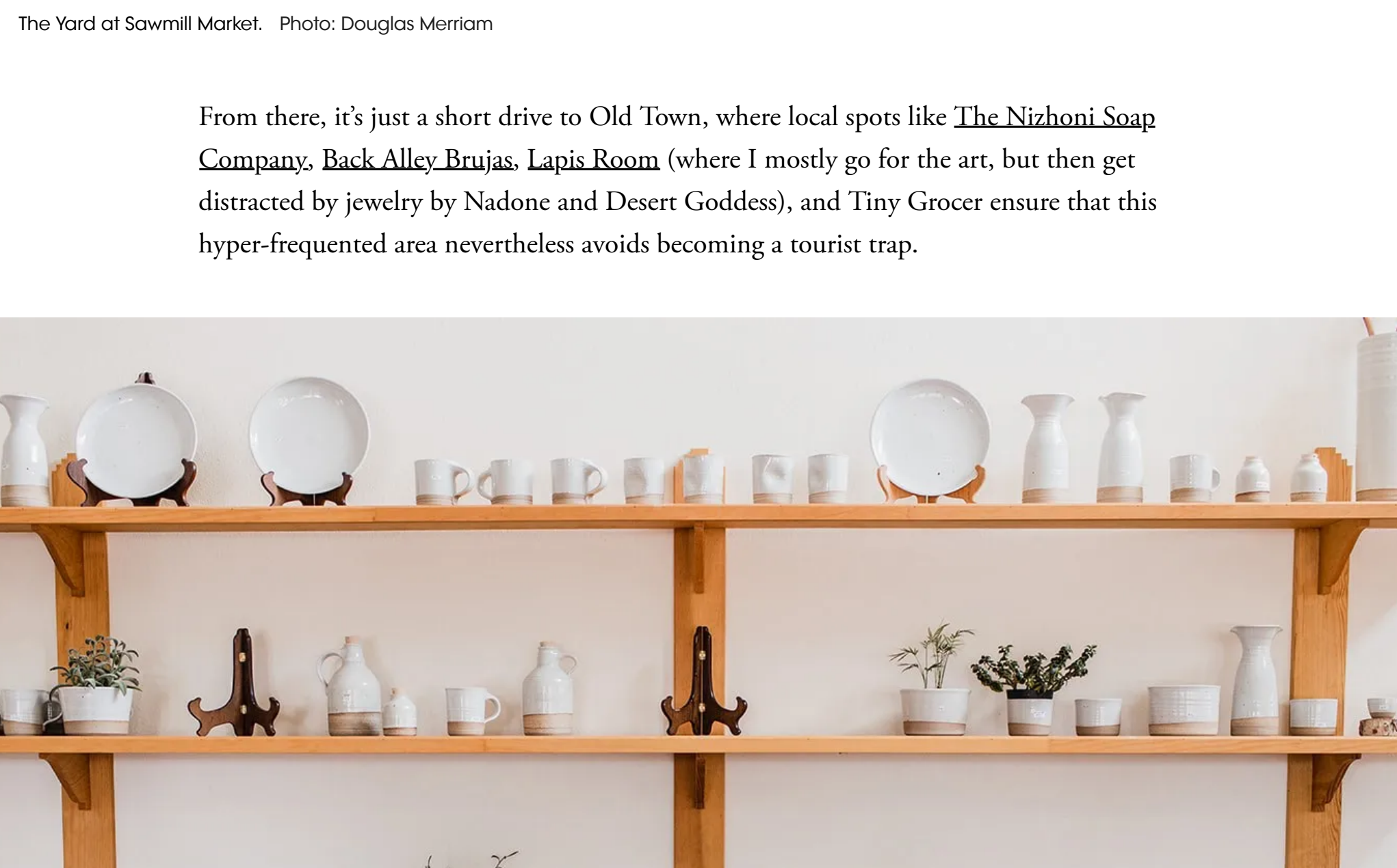
On my most recent trip, in addition to Sierra Grande, I visited two other Ted Turner Reserves properties: namely Armendaris, situated on 360,000 acres of semi-desert, and Ladder, a natural oasis on over 156,000 acres. I had never before witnessed a conservation effort of this magnitude. Not only are 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.

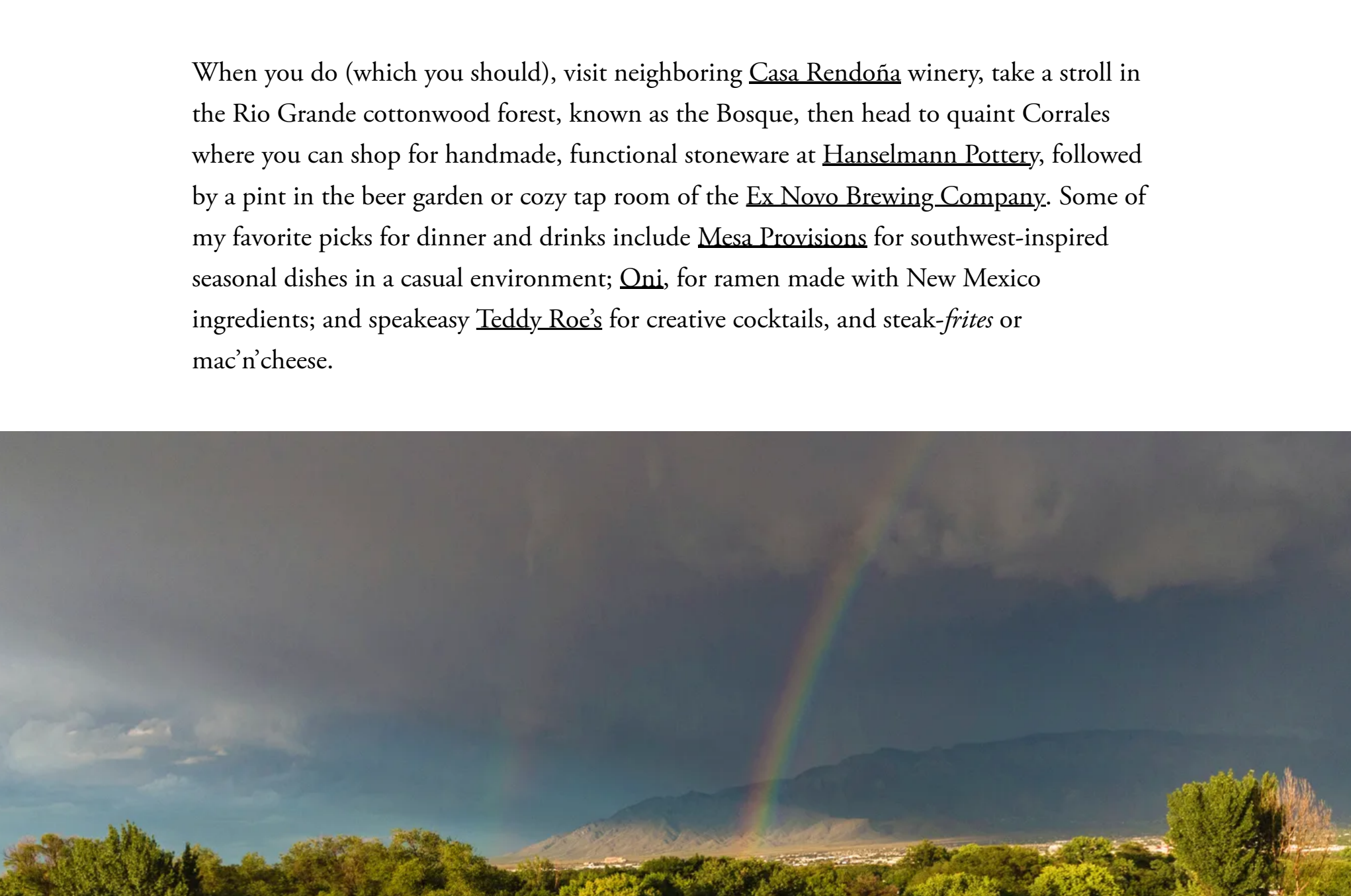


The Yard at Sawmill Market. Photo: Douglas Merriam

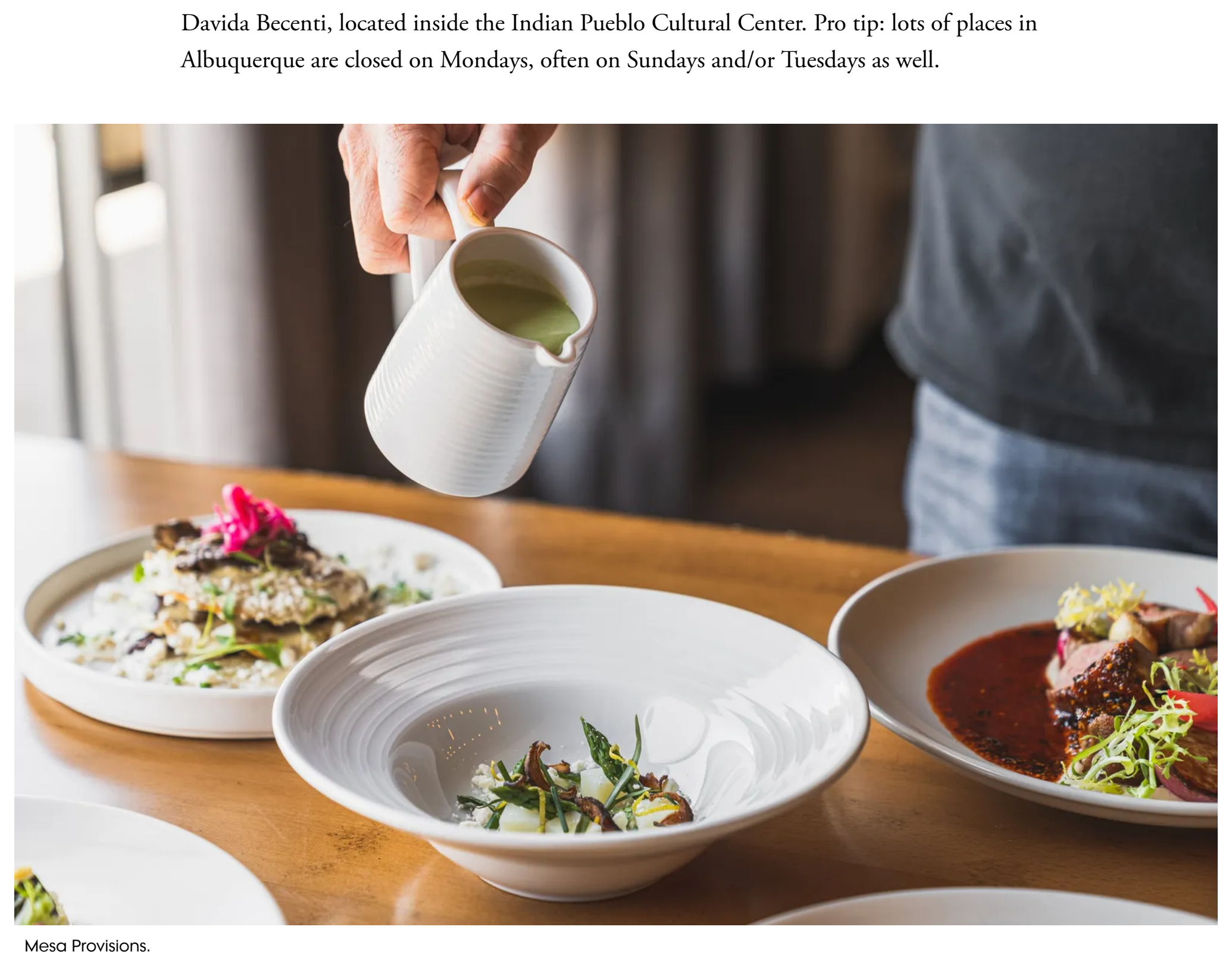
From there, it's just a short drive to Old Town, where local spots like The Nizhoni Soap Company, Back Alley Brujas, Lapis Room (where I mostly go for the art, but then get distracted by jewelry by Nadone and Desert Goddess), and Tiny Grocer ensure that this hyper-frequented area nevertheless avoids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

Hanselmann Pottery.
Photo: Elizabeth Wells

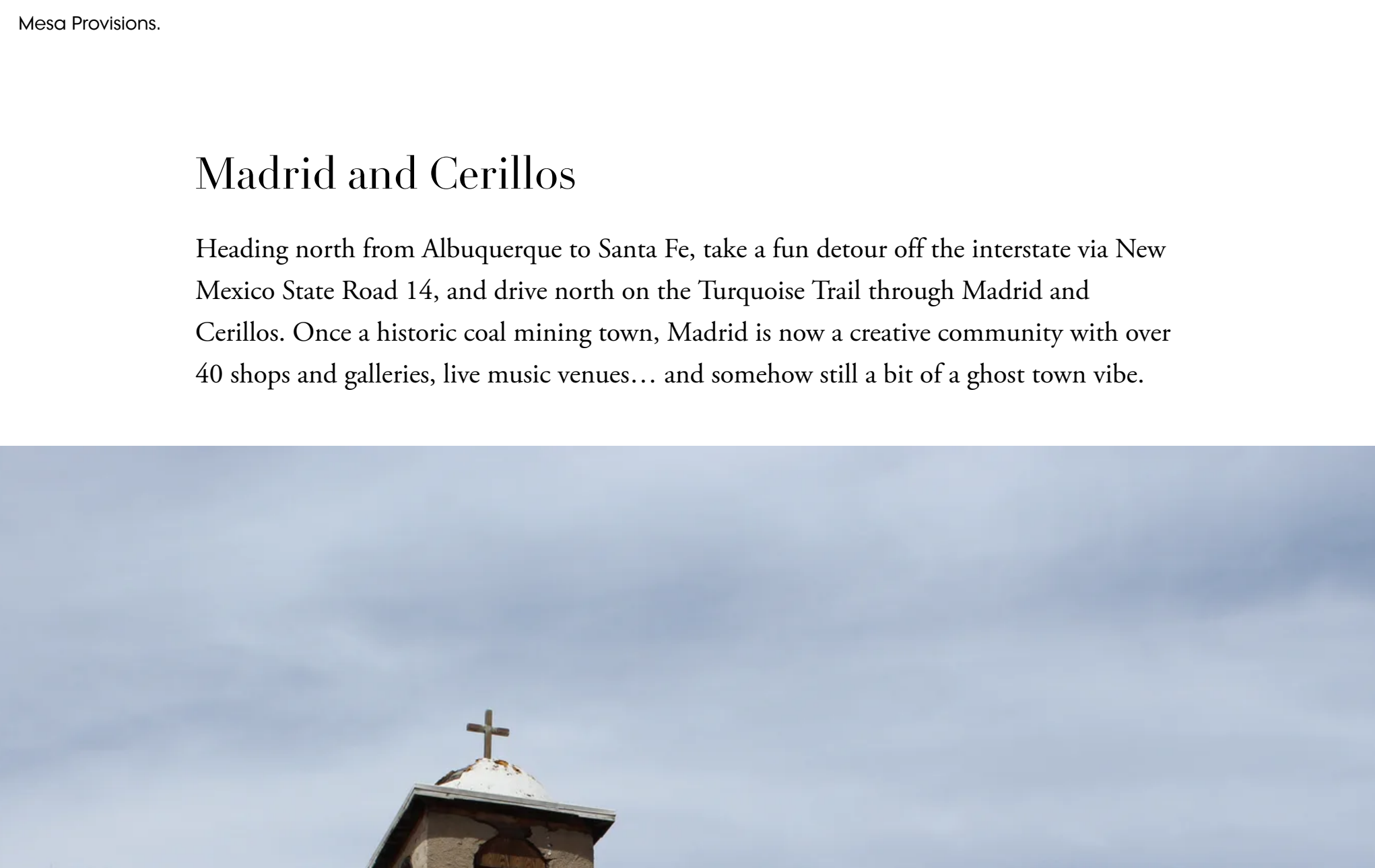
Another option for accommodations is Los Poblanos, a historic inn and organic farm set on 25 acres of lavender fields, giant cottonwoods, and lush gardens in the Rio Grande Valley. This family-run business remains committed to preservation and regenerative agriculture, boasting an outstanding farm-to-fork restaurant, a new spa, and a yurt devoted to wellness and healing arts. However, be forewarned, there is one big downside to staying here: this place is so scenic and serene that it can be hard to motivate to leave the property.



When you do (which you should), visit neighboring Casa Rendoña winery, take a stroll in the Rio Grande cottonwood forest, known as the Bosque, then head to quaint Corrales where you can shop for handmade, functional stoneware at Hanselmann Pottery, followed by a pint in the beer garden or cozy tap room of the Ex Novo Brewing Company. Some of my favorite picks for dinner and drinks include Mesa Provisions for southwest-inspired seasonal dishes in a casual environment; Oni, for ramen made with New Mexico ingredients; and speakeasy Teddy Roe's for creative cocktails, and steak-*frites* or mac'n'cheese.



Looking for some fuel for the road? Stop by Japanese gem Ihatov Bread and Coffee in Nob Hill, or try the Indian Pueblo Kitchen, an indigenous dining experience created by chef Davida Becenti, located inside the Indian Pueblo Cultural Center. Pro tip: lots of places in Albuquerque are closed on Mondays, often on Sundays and/or Tuesdays as well.



Mesa Provisions.

Madrid and Cerillos

Heading north from Albuquerque to Santa Fe, take a fun detour off the interstate via New Mexico State Road 14, and drive north on the Turquoise Trail through Madrid and Cerillos. Once a historic coal mining town, Madrid is now a creative community with over 40 shops and galleries, live music venues… and somehow still a bit of a ghost town vibe.

Photo: Cristian Rivera

Definitely don't miss Alchemy Studio to see work by high-frequency fiber artist Cheryl Ruth, functional pottery by Patty Bilbro, and gallery owner Lucy Barna's brand Votive Designs. Continuing north 3.5 miles to Cerillos, wander the dirt streets and take a peek at the architecture in the Historic District, poke around at the Casa Grande Trading Post, Mining Museum & Petting Zoo, or explore the Cerillos State Park trails a bit further up.

Santa Fe

Settled by the conquistador Don Pedro de Peralta in the first decade of the 17th century and sitting at over 7,000 feet in elevation, Santa Fe is the oldest and highest capital city in the United States. Though the population is well under 100,000, the so-called "City Different" has an impressive selection of indie shops, cool galleries, and top-notch museums, as well as walkable neighborhoods, and excellent epicurean offerings for all budgets and palates. All of that with a dose of easily accessible escapism, due to being geographically located in a valley of the Rio Grande and surrounded by over a million acres of national forest. I have also begun to feel a much-needed shift lately in terms of the demographic, especially in regard to entertainment and queer-led initiatives.

Santa Fe. Photo: Getty Images

Not to brag, but I have slept around town quite a bit, and my favorite landing pad remains The Parador, a 16-room inn (and former client) with a vibrant past and walking distance from the Plaza, Canyon Road, and the Railyard District. At the turn of the 19th century, the property was a farmhouse, replete with a barn and stables. It later became a family home, then served as the Rainbow Coalition's headquarters (and, therefore, a hippie commune) in the 1960s. Now under the stewardship of architect owners Denise Ip and Evan Geisler since 2018, this historical property has been carefully restored and re-envisioned, resulting in a creatively inspired abode that is both cozy and chic. Be sure to set your alarm for breakfast: Filipino chef Martin Blanco's Southeast Asian fare with Southwestern flair—and spicy homemade chai—is not to be missed.

A room at The Parador.
Photo: Elizabeth Wells

Fueled up and ready to explore, head over to Canyon Road where relative neighborhood newcomers like Amy Denet Deal's Native-owned sustainable art-wear brand 4Kinship; Cielo Handcrafted, a gallery that specializes in handcrafts from New Mexico and Peru; and Brooklyn transplant L'Ecole des Beaux Arts, a hybrid space for art supplies, including their in-house watercolors, clothing, and workshops; are all bringing fresh life to this area that is highly frequented, yet rather lacking in edge as of late. While there, for sure don't miss artist Alison Hixon's distorted, dreamlike, and completely fascinating work at the Susan Eddings Pérez Gallery—influenced by the human condition and her journey through life as a woman, Hixon works on a large scale, primarily with ink, watercolor, and gouache.

Inside 4Kinship. Photo: Wade Adakai

For more great art by titans like Nani Chocron, Shirin Neshat, and Jenny Holzer (coming this fall), check out SITE Santa Fe on Paseo de Peralta, then cross over to walk around the Railyard district. Some favorite spots include: the local farmer's market happens on Wednesdays and Saturdays; The Ark Bookstore; Opuntia for its impressive selection of teas, fresh bowls, and remarkable industrial architecture; and shopping at Double Take's vintage and consignment emporium on nearby Guadalupe Street. Oh, and when in the mood to move, head to the Railyard Performing Arts space, where Elise Gent has been offering Haitian and West African dance featuring live drummers for over 20 years, or try Rainier Amiel and her team of barre-tenders "dance-based strength training insanity" Tiger Barre classes. (On the weekend, "Sunday Service" with embodiment phenom and 5Rhythms facilitator Chloe Goodwin is the go-to.) Top off the tour with inventive handcrafted cocktails, mocktails, and bar bites at As Above, So Below Distillery.

The exterior of SITE Santa Fe.
Photo: Shayla Blatchford

Similar to Canyon Road, the Plaza district boasts a new crop of offerings these days as well. Visit the Geisler-designed Los Poblanos Farm Shop Norte + Bar Norte on Washington and Marcy, or head to La Mama, a fresh collaborative venture between L'Ecole des Beaux Arts' Sara Moffat, hospitality entrepreneur Jen Turner, and jewelry maker Anna Sheffield, where they're serving up fun summer programming like oysters, pizza, natural wine, and tarot on the porch and patio. In the mood for enhancements to stimulate your appetite? Pop by Verdes and Best Daze, for the Runtz and Slurricane, respectively. Oh, and great craft beers, tacos, and tunes at Desert Dogs Brewery & Cidery, discreetly tucked away on the second floor of a building on West San Francisco Street.

A table at La Mama. Courtesy of La Mama

In the unassuming Solana Shopping Center on West Alameda, Betterday Vintage proposes a well-merchandised selection of clothing and accessories for adults and children, as well as vinyl records for dedicated crate diggers. Next door, La Montañita Co-op offers an indie alternative to bigger-name grocers. From there, head over to Second Street Brewery's Rufina Taproom or nearby Tumbleroot Brewery and Distillery for primo libations, live music, DJs, crawfish boils, and more. Neighboring art collective Meow Wolf continues to crowd-please with both their permanent, immersive exhibition *The House of Eternal Return*, and music by artists that run the gamut from Dirtwire to Trevor Hall to Jasmine Infiniti.

Santa Fe, of course, has innumerable praise-worthy dining options, many frequented to the point that both locals and visitors alike have a hard time getting a table (hello Paloma and Paper Dosa!). One delectable crowd-pleaser is Sweetwater Harvest Kitchen. Now in its 11th year, this low-key and constantly buzzing spot serves breakfast, brunch, lunch, dinner, and (delicious) desserts seven days a week in a spacious, barn-like converted gallery just west of Saint Francis Drive. The globally-inspired menu is eclectic, totally gluten-free, and accessible to almost any palate due to vegetarian, vegan, and paleo options. Think: matcha green smoothie bowls, breakfast burritos, umami bowls, NM bison burgers, yucca root flatbread pizzas, salmon tacos, carrot cake, and chocolate avocado mousse. All of the consciously-sourced ingredients are fresh and natural, and the drink menu offers sustainable, organic, biodynamic wines and sake, as well as a selection of regional and imported beers, smoothies, *agua frescas*, adaptogenic beverages, and other non-alcoholic options.

Luminarias in Santa Fe during the holidays. Photo: Getty Images

Also noteworthy in Santa Fe is Tender Fire Kitchen: while it's slated to open a permanent location soon, in the meantime, try their delicious organic sourdough pizzas at El Rey Court, La Mama, and the newly opened Nuckolls Brewing in the Railyard. Stop into Mampuku for the town's top ramen; dine at James Beard semifinalist El Chile Toreado's food truck or restaurant; and for a higher-end experience, book a table at chef Eduardo Rodriguez's cozy restaurant, Zacatlán, tucked away on Aztec Street. Feel like staying in? Opt for a catered meal from Tajine, an organic, plant-based, vibrant, and flavorful Mediterranean-infused venture by Moroccan brothers Abdel Malek and Zakaria Belghiti Alaoui.

Off of Cordova, in what was once a grocery store, BODY Santa Fe is a massive lifestyle emporium that boasts a spa, wellness studio, shop, gallery, and French café Clafoutis. BODY's studio schedule includes one of the area's most popular ecstatic dance meetups, great yoga, new moon ceremonies, and weekly Nia classes.

A view over Bishop's Lodge, Auberge Resorts Collection.
Courtesy of Auberge Resorts

Heading north, skip the highway and take the back roads up to Tesuque. Stop in at Bishop's Lodge, an Auberge property, for shishito peppers, Baja tacos, and a glass of wine recommended by sommelière Missy Auge at the refined yet comfy SkyFire bar. There is often live music and the patio seating offers a photo-friendly viewpoint, particularly at sundown. Bishop's Lodge also has elevated programming that is open to the public, from collaborations with guest chefs and artists, and heart-centered holistic wellness experiences, like *Alchemy of Breath and Sound*, facilitated by yours truly.

Also in the area is Tesuque Village Market. Loved by locals, it's open daily for quesadillas, green chili chicken posole, baked goods, some of the best pizza around, as well as provisions and cute merch.

High Road to Taos

As if 7,000 feet in altitude weren't enough, I absolutely recommend taking the High Road to (or from) Taos. Not only does this scenic byway guarantee unparalleled views of the badlands—Sangre de Cristo mountains to the east and the Jemez to the west—there are some special spots to stop at along the way. After Tesuque, stop at the Nambé Trading Post and Museum of Western Film and Costume, run by Emmy award-winning costume designer Cathy Smith and her daughter, jewelry designer Jennifer Jesse Smith. The selection of home goods, art, books, rugs, and blankets is truly exceptional, as are the costumes and props on display from Smith's illustrious career.

The gate at Nambé.

Next stop is the Santuario de Chimayó, nicknamed "the Lourdes of America," and believed by the Pueblo and Tewa Indians to be a healing site long before the Spaniards arrived. Stroll around the grounds, enter the atmospheric chapels, then be sure to visit the vendors selling the famed Chimayó red and green chile. Samples are encouraged, and when you find the one (or ones) that you like, don't hold back. This is truly the best spot to stock up on this smokey, sweet, and yes, sometimes *very* spicy delicacy. The next stop is Eight Million Gods, a joy-filled treasure trove in Truchas featuring international folk art, collectibles, ceramics, clothing, and kitsch that owner Hayward Simoneaux carefully selects from around the world.

Inside Eight Million Gods in Truchas.

Continue your journey with a pit stop in picturesque Peñasco to visit the newly opened MAH Creative featuring work by artist owner Mary Arose, painters Hannah Heaton and Nancy Davis, printmaker Nick Beason, and upcycled Karmahigh Creations by Dyanna Beckwith. Arose and her husband David Hines converted the downstairs floor of the space into what is now the Peñasco Art Lodge, a two-bedroom, pet-friendly space that accommodates up to six people. Then visit Sugar Nymphs Bistro, a lively spot established in 2001, serving as a sort of *de facto* community center for the Peñasco area. Staples include the pulled pork sandwich, green chile cheeseburger, and the carrot cake; however, lighter fare like soups and salads are available as well.

Taos

This groovy mountain town that I am thrilled to call home is small but mighty, easy to navigate, and worth a closer look than many visitors realize when coming for the first time. A town with a scope far beyond its scale, Taos is first and foremost home to the Taos Pueblo, the heart of these sacred Tiwa lands; continuously inhabited for over 1,000 years, and a World Heritage site. There's the international devotional destination, the Taos Hanuman Temple, situated on over 10 acres of the impeccably maintained grounds of the Sri Neem Karoli Baba Ashram right near the center of town. There's a world-class ski resort—and some other popular ones, too, like locals-friendly Sipapu. There's spectacular hiking, legendary views, cold rivers, and hot springs. Additionally, Taos has a vibrant spectrum of local businesses, ranging from food and beverage outlets to art, wellness, music, community initiatives, and shopping.

Ancient dwellings of UNESCO World Heritage Site named Taos Pueblo in New Mexico. Taos Pueblo is believed to be one of the oldest continuously inhabited settlements in USA. miroslav_1

Arriving via the High Road or the Canyon, pop into Mountain Monk Coffee, a community-oriented venture in Ranchos de Taos, proposing "coffee, elixirs, and munchies that aim to reduce environmental impact and feed the soul." Check out their events schedule as well for workshops, yoga, and live music in the bucolic side garden. Also in Ranchos, consider booking one of the seven rooms at the new Desert Flower Hotel, a future farm-to-table property (they're only six months in) owned and operated by Xochitl and Jodie Wodrich, right off the main road. One room has a hot tub, two others copper tubs, and all reservations include homemade breakfast in the AM, and beverages like wine from nearby Vivac winery in the evenings on the weekend. (Renting this Mercedes-Benz Sprinter is an option that I'm particularly keen to explore.) Or how about booking one of the 20 vintage trailers or campsites at Luna Mystica, a starlit playground on 12-plus acres on the Hondo Mesa, and adjoining the Taos Mesa Brewery and epic open-air music venue "The Mothership." Meanwhile, at the higher end, El Monte Sagrado is the way to go.

A trailer at Luna Mystica. Photo: Amanda Powell

Photo: Amanda Powell

Heading up Taos's main axis, Paseo del Pueblo, but still on the south side, pop into The Coffee Apothecary for delicious concoctions and seriously good coffee—the beans are roasted in-house by Pablo Flores, who owns the shop with his partner Lydia McHaley—coupled with a cinnamon roll or muffin fresh from the oven at brand new Bread Club Taos next door. Just around the corner is Taxonomy, a new LGBTQ+ and Veteran owned and operated shop that sells plants, taxidermy, jewelry, and other "nature-inspired goods".

Bread Club Taos.
Photo: Corey B. King

The area around Taos Plaza and Kit Carson is best discovered on foot. Still on Paseo, be sure to visit Tony Putman's gallery Lun+Ojo, featuring prints, pottery, and jewelry by emerging and established artists, as well as stunning textile designs by local artist Laurel Taylor. The space is also a regular meeting point for openings and live music nights. Around the corner on Kit Carson, shop for small batch, handcrafted teas at tea.o.graphy, then walk over to Untitled Fine Art Gallery, a spacious sanctuary where traditional materials meet cutting edge techniques, and "quantum luminism" is the common denominator. Be sure to visit the meditation room, and really spend some time with gallery co-owner Kimberly Webber's contemporary symbolist large-scale, mind-boggling works in which archetypal figures appear through organic abstracted patterns, created by using dozens of sheer layers of powdered earth pigments, translucent resin glazes, as well as centuries-old alchemical processes that result in light-responsive works that appear to glow from within. (Also on Kit Carson, consider commemorating your visit by booking a studio session with Nicole Katzman at Taos Tintype.)

Heading back towards the Plaza, satisfy any culinary cravings by stopping by one of the following: legacy coffee shop, World Cup, now open for over 30 years; Manzanita Market, where you can both nourish morning through mid-afternoon while also shopping for books, postcards, and beauty products from local brands like Satya Botanicals and Taos Bee; and Chokolá, the best (and only) spot to stock up on locally made, single-origin bean-to-bar chocolate, as well as house-made pastries, mousses, sipping chocolates and more. A block away, Bomb Street Tacos caters to the crowds with roasted poblanos, carne asada, quesadillas, burgers, and even vegan options, all cooked at their on-site food stand. Op.cit Books is a welcoming environment to peruse new and used books, including sections devoted to local authors, culture, and history, while Mudd N Flood on Bent Street is a locally-owned and operated "mountain shop" with tees and totes by local artists, including the owners' daughter Gwendolyn Pieper.

Taos Plaza. Photo: Getty Images

Don't leave the center of town without also exploring the various streets around the Plaza, alternating between shopping at Reneux consignment and Native-owned collective ArrowSoul Trading Post for custom-made apparel and art by local artists like Jisk, Neight Larcen, Lost Ones Alliance, and Cristo del Norte; seeing some art at the Harwood Museum and Sage Fine Art Gallery (worth it for the work of photographer Birgit Gutsche alone); visiting an installation, talk or workshop at woman-owned OmniHum; then having a glass (or two) at Barra Vino or Corner Office.

Heading north, stop at Wild Leaven Bakery in Yucca Plaza for various types of fresh sourdough bread, as well as a bowl or cup of their (always vegan) soup of the day; then to Her Sacred Alchemy, Taos's top shop for all things mysticism, sacred sensuality, books and events carefully curated by single mom owners Nicole and Jess.

Photo: Alison Beckner

Though Taos is a small town with a population count hovering around just 6,700, there are plenty of notable places for dinner and nightlife. Yes, there is James Beard semi-finalist, the Love Apple, housed in an old chapel and probably the area's most popular dining establishment. Others to try include Medley, Aceq, and the latest addition, Byzantium Kitchen and Bazaar for New American cuisine. Rolling Still serves craft cocktails made with their house-distilled spirits and New Mexico ingredients, accompanied regularly by live music and DJs. The Revolt compound is home to a regular rotation of openings, performances, markets, live sets, and full-blown parties.

The latest and greatest evening scene in this groovy mountain town, however, are the events hosted by Daleee Ktaos. Hosted by Ricky Carlini—an Argentinian who moved to Taos 14 years ago to ski and "pretty much never left"—Daleee's mission is to create a meeting point where the community can connect around music. The Ktaos programming features a stellar lineup of world music acts, with a penchant for artists from Latin America and Africa, as well as trivia nights, family-friendly volleyball, BBQ sandwiches, a full bar, and jaw-drop views of the sun setting across the pueblo.

San Francisco de Asis Catholic Mission Church in Taos. Photo: Alison Beckner

Before hitting the road to head out of town, ensure you have some provisions for the journey ahead. At 6,969 feet already, if you're down to get a little higher, head to Taos Canyon Cannabis, where all of the premium genetics are grown organically, and most often within Taos County. The staff is super knowledgeable, and I appreciate how patient they are with a relative newbie like me.

Now, then, for food supplies. If you happen to be in town on a Saturday, stop at the Taos Farmers Market, which took up residency in the County Courthouse parking lot this season, and has a nice variety of vendors serving prepared foods like tamales, omelets, baked goods, and more. Or go to the Farmhouse Café and Bakery, located on an idyllic piece of land in the foothills of the Pueblo (which is open to visitors, by the way, and also has a little weekly farmer's market). The food is all fresh, organic, and sourced from over 20 local farms and ranches. Farmhouse founder Micah Roseberry has been an organic farmer and educator for over 25 years, and through her organization Growing Community Now, she provides gardening and nutritional education to Taos pre-K to high school students and serves 700+ local, organic meals daily to local youth. One last daytime food recommendation would be the Golden Piñon, headed up by chef Jaime Saenz Ramirez and serving a broad selection of hearty and flavor-filled Mexican, New Mexican, and American classics.

A turquoise bench in Taos.
Photo: Getty Images

Abiquiu and Cañones, via Ojo Caliente

For the final stint of this road trip, take US HWY 64 West, and cross the jaw-dropping Gorge Bridge in the direction of Ojo Caliente Resort and Spa. Stop in to rest and recharge in the healing mineral springs of one of the oldest natural health resorts in the country, then continue on towards Cañones, to The Land, a breathtaking homestead on 43 acres with a creek, a treehouse, yoga decks, hammocks, a barn, and five freestanding homes, each stylishly and thoughtfully designed by owner Jonathan Olinger, his sweetheart Maya Scales, and their friends. Backed up against 1.5 million acres of national forest, The Land abounds in stillness, and with virtually no light pollution, on clear nights guests are guaranteed a celestial light show.

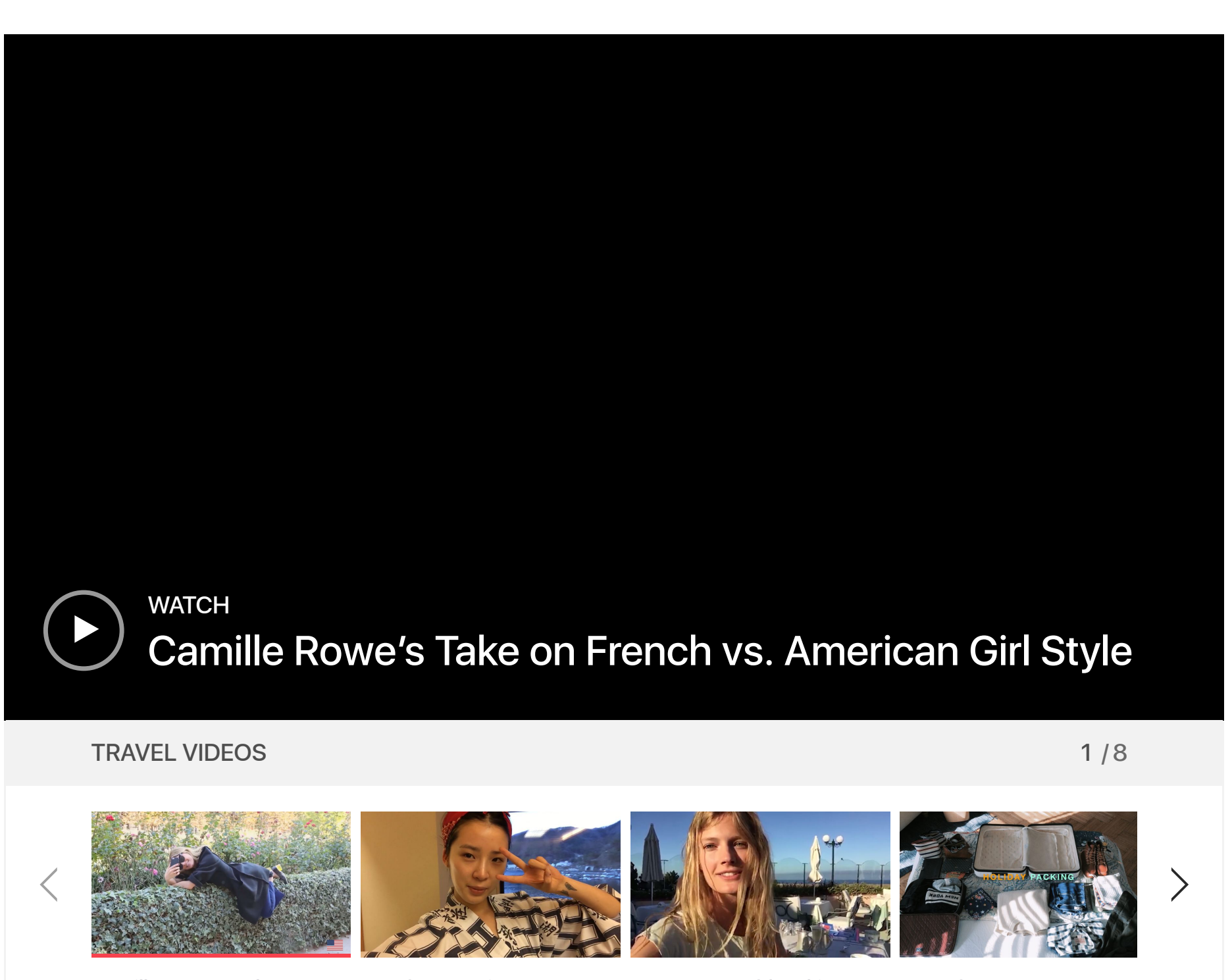
A room at The Land. Photo: Alison Beckner

By day, in addition to the obligatory Ghost Ranch-O'Keeffe Home and Studio doubleheader, venture a bit further afield. My last jaunt was full of firsts for me: I set out to hike the dry riverbed of Plaza Blanca, marveling at the massive rock towers composed of volcanic debris and somewhere around 18 to 27 million years old. (Access is limited and must be arranged in advance via the Dar Al Islam mosque and education center.) Then, through the introduction of a friend, I stopped in to chat with jeweler Tamara Kay at her shop, Nest, a hybrid shop/showroom that celebrates creativity, culture, and community. From there, I set out to visit the home studio of Hebé García, who also happened to be one of the artists whose work was on display at the shop. Garcia and her husband, both originally from Puerto Rico, live on a seemingly endless mesa above Abiquiu, with expansive views from the Pedernal to Taos Mountain and on up to Colorado. García specializes in figurative painting and ceramic sculpture, with narratives that weave mythology, feminism, poetry, culture, and history in a way that is both gentle and strong; deep, without being heavy.

Inside the studio of Hebé Garcia. Photo: Alison Beckner

Photo: Alison Beckner

Another singular spot to check out is the El Pueblo de Abiquiu Library & Cultural Center. Located on 17,000 acres of what was the first land granted to Indians in NM in 1754, and housed in a century-old adobe, it's the local incubator for the diverse cultural communities in the area. In addition to being an invaluable resource for history both past and in the making, ongoing programming includes conversations addressing ways to mitigate the effects of local tourism and economic development; educational programs around recognition of and respect for local, Indigenous, or faith-based organizations; and efforts to help the community explore its history and preserve its unique cultural identity. Schedule permitting, what better way to wrap up the trip on horseback than with either Ali Spagnolo's High Desert Horses (she also makes awesome repurposed leather goods) or Red Horse Riding Company, followed by a roadside pizza pick up from Mamacita's or some provisions from Bode's Mercantile and General Store? Then, it's time to settle back in at The Land for a relaxing southwest sunset.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