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Soothing Spa Weekends
• Luxe Eco Escape
• Healing Hot Springs
• Home Spa Staycation

come alive

Places to

Southwest Safari:
Wild Horse Sanctuary
Centuries ago, the ancients sought out New Mexico’s mineral-rich hot springs for their healthy attributes. Today, inns and B&Bs have sprung up around these age-old gathering spots, letting soak-seekers de-stress in settings ranging from a high-desert hotel to an alpine B&B to a riverside retreat. **Plus**—our table on page 39 demystifies the purported healing properties of some major minerals. **Illustrations by John Inserra**
Luxe Escape
Ojo Caliente

It’s one of the oldest natural health resorts in the country, and until Andy and Jen Scott’s family bought it in 1999 and began renovating the 142-year-old place, Ojo Caliente Mineral Springs Resort & Spa definitely looked its age. No longer.

Still in the process of upgrading their 1,100-acre resort and its facilities, about 50 miles north of Santa Fe on U.S. 285, the Scotts see themselves as stewards of this ancient, sulfur-free, natural mineral springs. Resort-ish it most definitely is—from its excellent on-site bar and restaurant, the Artesian, and yoga classes, to massages, body treatments, facials, and manicures, to its three private, clothing-optional pools, each with a kiva fireplace, and rooms ranging from the historic and somewhat bohemian facilities of the original hotel to the hedonistically upscale and swanky cottages, each with a TV, small kitchen, fireplace, and porch. The Scotts are also doing their best to maintain Ojo Caliente’s status as a community gathering place, which it has been for centuries, with promotions and discounts for employees and locals. These efforts not only retain Ojo’s unique New Mexican flavor, they set it apart from the removed, high-end otherworldliness of spas such as Tucson’s Canyon Ranch or Maui’s Spa Grande.

Founded in 1868 by Antonio Joseph, Ojo Caliente (Spanish for “hot eye”) soon became a sort of Lourdes of the Southwest—invalids from all over flocked to its waters for treatment and relief. People from around the world still visit it today, even if none of these healing
FROM SAN YSIDRO TO JÉMEZ SPRINGS, the road winds between red cliffs and sandstone mesas. When the canyon—carved by the Jémez River—deposits visitors in the town of Jémez Springs, it feels more like a homecoming than a weekend getaway.

Jémez Springs, population 439, is one of those New Mexico towns that feels immediately like home—even in early spring, before folks start seeking refuge from the summer heat in the Jémez Mountains’ cool pine forests. And while March weather brings temperatures in the 40s and 50s, along with the occasional snowstorm—the village sits at an elevation of 6,200 feet—more often than not the days are sunny and mild.

For hot-springs enthusiasts looking for lodging, there are a handful of inns, B&Bs, and small retreats in the area, including the Jemez Mountain Inn, in the center of town. There are also two different spots for soaking: Jemez Springs Bath House and the privately owned Giggling Springs. And while the area’s soda springs don’t necessarily have healing properties—they contain high levels of calcium bicarbonate, magnesium bicarbonate, and sodium chloride—there’s no denying the benefits of hot-water downtime in the high country.

claims has yet been vetted by the FDA. (No matter. Even if none of Ojo’s claims ever prove medically true, it feels amazing.)

Surrounded by national forest and public lands, Ojo’s 10 pools range from 80 to 109 degrees Fahrenheit, while in the average March the outdoor temperature ranges from 26 to 56. The primary pools, all coed (bathing suits required), are: the arsenic, the hottest, smallest, most gork-inducing, which supposedly relieves arthritis and is good for the skin; the outdoor iron pool, where the water burbles up through tiny pebbles underfoot—lovely for squishing one’s toes in; the soda pool, good for digestive problems and arthritis, and housed in an older building not unlike one of the old Ukrainian bathhouses in New York City; the Lithia pool, whose nearby pump has dispensed its unique water since the 19th century, and provides lithium, which relieves depression and digestion; and the outdoor cliffside arsenic pools.

Unfortunately, the detoxifying Mud Pool is closed for now (it’s open May through October), but the famous Milagro Wrap, where an attendant swathes you in a light cotton blanket before swaddling you in a heavier wool one, is a go. Well, after an hour in the sauna, an awesome massage, an evening spent visiting all the pools, a wonderful dinner and breakfast at the Artesian, a walk to the historic round barn, and a private outdoor pool the night before, I was enough of a noodle that I probably wouldn’t have even noticed the miracle of the Milagro. Next time.

Ojo Caliente Mineral Springs Resort & Spa, from $199 nightly, including springs access; private pools for two from $40; drop-ins, $16; spa treatments from $75; open 365 days a year; 50 Los Baños Dr., Ojo Caliente, (505) 583-2233, www.ojocalientesprings.com.

—Devon Jackson
After soaking, sustain your hot-springs buzz with a healthy meal at the Laughing Lizard Inn & Café, which specializes in pizzas, burgers, salads, and creative burritos. Open for lunch and dinner, it’s the scene of the village’s former mercantile, and rumor has it that, in 1929, Jack Dempsey gave an impromptu boxing demonstration here. Across from the bathhouse, Los Ojos Restaurant and Saloon serves a full menu, but also has pool tables and, on many nights, live music. (Also be sure to perch on one of the old-style barstools; a few years ago, a film crew borrowed them for a scene in *The Hi-Lo Country.*)

Though there isn’t much in the way of nightlife, Jémez Springs is the perfect jumping-off spot for hiking, fly-fishing, mountain biking, rock climbing, and cross-country skiing, as well as for archaeological sight-seeing at the nearby Jémez State Monument and Bandelier National Monument.

If undeveloped hot spots are more your style, visit Spence Hot Springs or San Antonio Hot Springs—simple rock pools tucked away in the Santa Fe National Forest. Spence Hot Springs is seven miles north of the village on N.M. 4. Park at the gravel lot on the east side of the road, then follow the short (but steep!) trail down, across the Jémez River, and up the far bank. To reach the San Antonio pools, head north from Jémez Springs for nine miles on N.M. 4, then turn west on N.M. 126, at La Cueva. From there, travel five miles north on National Forest Route 376. This road requires a high-clearance vehicle even in good weather, and is closed in winter.


—Laura Paskus
Budget & Bohemian
Truth or Consequences

ON A SPRING NIGHT AT RIVERBEND Hot Springs, I'm soaking with friends in steaming mineral waters, stars overhead, and views of Turtleback Mountain and the peridot-colored waters of the Río Grande rolling by. I confess aloud that John Fogerty's twang has been echoing in my head ever since I set foot in this relaxing oasis, and together, my friend Michael and I croon, "If ya get lost, come on home to Green Ri-vuh." Here there's the same sort of cold-beer-and-cutoffs vibe I feel every time I listen to Creedence Clearwater Revival.

Only a few hours ago we arrived in this burg of about 6,800, just 150 miles south of Albuquerque on I-25, and when we checked into our on-site accommodations, our party of seven Santa Feans were like kids on the first day of camp. Luna and Michael like the Mexican-style tile and cozy kitchenette of their King Suite, next door to Storm's similar accommodations. Both suites open to the communal picnic area, where guests can grill and gather. Kristen and Steve are taken with La Casita for its secluded setting and private patio, and my beau, Tommy, and I are pleased with Family Room 8—half of a refurbished, 1960s-era mobile home that's kitschy and comfy, with an eat-in kitchen so spacious that everybody gathers here to crack open beverages, break out the salsa and chips, and plan the next three days. Since we're on the river's edge but in the midst of downtown, we're ready to hit the Italian restaurant Café Bella Luca, the talked-about gallery Rio Bravo Fine Art, and the vintage-chic clothing store, Dust & Glitter.

Riverbend is one of about 10 such resorts in Truth or Consequences offering overnight accommodations and mineral soaks, but it's the only one with outdoor soaking tubs along the Río Grande. With March highs around 67 degrees, the soaking options here are still inviting, though some may opt for nearby choices within the Hot Springs Bathhouse Historic District like The Blackstone, The Pelican, Fire Water Lodge, Sierra Grande Lodge, and others that offer the same hot mineral waters (rich in calcium, thought to aid digestion; and chloride, known for its antiseptic properties), but in indoor settings.

This weekend, our tribe is loving Riverbend and its group-friendly experience. With kitchens in our rooms, we've all brought our breakfast favorites and preferred javas, and savor them before walking a few steps across the compound to the tubs, along with the rest of Riverbend's clientele. Judging from our chats, the guests are about equal numbers New Mexicans and New Mexi-fans. We meet the curious from El Paso, and a folk-roots band from Nevada City, California. And if the morning soak gets too hot? No prob: Just traipse down the stone steps and plunge into the cool Río Grande.

Our last night is the best: We've got music on the stereo and burgers (and garden burgers) on the grill, along with sweet corn, potato salad, and cold Negra Modelos. Months later, our group is still talking about the trip and ready to return. And CCR's lyrics run through my mind again: "Take me back down where cool water flows, ya'll . . ."

Riverbend Hot Springs, from $75 nightly, including public pools; private pools, from $10 per person; drop-ins from $10; 100 Austin St., Truth or Consequences, (575) 894-7625, www.riverbendhotsprings.com. More about Truth or Consequences resorts: www.spa-town.com

—Tricia Ware
Artsy & Outdoorsy
Gila Hot Springs

SOME CALL IT OLD-FASHIONED; others consider it endearingly homey. Owners Dean and Jane Bruemmer say The Wilderness Lodge is more comfortable than luxurious. I argue that the lodge and its hot springs are as comfortable as home, but also quiet, fresh, and surrounded by spectacular cliffs and wide-open wilderness.

On the west fork of the Gila River, 40 miles north of the art town of Silver City (read more in “Colorful Corner,” page 13) on N.M. 15, the lodge features a spacious front porch and private soaking pools, both with mountain views. The Bruemmers have run their bed-and-breakfast for 14 years in this century-old schoolhouse, built in nearby Hurley but moved to the Gila in the 1960s.

“People’s lives are so busy,” Jane says. This place allows them rest. The historic lodge, crooked on its foundation after being pieced together in its new location, is roomy enough for shared living rooms, a kitchen where Dean makes his famous apple pancakes, and five bedrooms. The four upstairs share a bath, while the downstairs suite has a private bath.

Speaking of baths, even those who say they’re not into Jacuzzis and whirlpools enjoy dips in the lodge’s two pools—one hot, one extra hot. The soaking pools, built of stone and floored with gravel, are sheltered by a curvaceous adobe wall and tucked into a garden of wildflowers. If you forget a swimsuit, soak anyway. “We won’t tell,” notes Jane. The waters are sulfur-free (no stink!) and chloride-rich (no nasty microbes!).

In keeping with the implications of its name, the village of Gila Hot Springs and the surrounding wilderness bubble with many more hot springs awaiting discovery by you: The clothing-optional mud pools of Gila Hot Springs, a short walk from the lodge, offer the most bohemian experience and extreme temperatures. Light Feather Hot Springs, a one-mile hike from the Gila Visitor Center, are a pleasant option for everyone, as soakers can adjust the temperature of the shallow pools by adding cold river water. And Jordan Hot Springs, a strenuous six more miles on foot (including 30-plus river crossings) from the Visitor Center via Little Bear Canyon, guarantee unrivaled privacy.

Between soaks, make the most of this no-frills, no-fluff retreat by hiking, swimming, or fishing. While exploring the Gila National Forest’s hundreds of miles of hiking trails or touring the Gila Cliff Dwellings (four miles up N.M. 15 and past the Gila Cliff Dwellings Visitor Center), you may notice a crow chasing wild turkeys, a golden eagle soaring up a canyon, or a garter snake sliding into the river. And since March brings warm days (around 62) and cool nights (think 32), you may also want to slide into a swimming hole, then sprawl on sun-warmed boulders along the river. Either way, you’re just here to relax.

The Wilderness Lodge, from $68 nightly, including springs access; HC 68, Box 85, Jackass Lane, Silver City, (575) 536-9749. Map and directions: www.gilahot.com

—Jennifer Olson
## Mineral Rites

Your quick-comparison guide to minerals, their benefits, and where to find them in New Mexico hot springs

<table>
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<tr>
<th>MINERAL</th>
<th>WHAT IT DOES</th>
<th>WHERE IT’S FOUND</th>
<th>AREA RESORTS</th>
<th>KNOW BEFORE YA GO</th>
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<tr>
<td>ARSENIC</td>
<td>Relieves arthritis, ulcers, and skin conditions</td>
<td>Ojo Caliente area</td>
<td>Ojo Caliente Mineral Springs Resort &amp; Spa</td>
<td>Fear not: A small dose of arsenic (such as this) is harmless.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CALCIUM</td>
<td>Soothes digestive ailments such as heartburn</td>
<td>Truth or Consequences, Jémez Springs</td>
<td>T or C has around 10 hot-springs resorts. In Jémez Springs, try Jémez Springs Bath House or Giggling Springs—or, in the nearby National Forest, Spence or San Antonio hot springs.</td>
<td>The forested springs are the most inexpensive option, but be aware, and don’t leave valuables visible in your vehicle when departing the parking area on foot.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IRON</td>
<td>Beneficial to the blood and immune system, promotes healthy skin tone</td>
<td>Ojo Caliente area</td>
<td>Ojo Caliente Mineral Springs Resort &amp; Spa</td>
<td>The Iron Pool has a natural pebble floor; some soakers love it, some find it a bit too earthy.</td>
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<tr>
<td>LITHIUM</td>
<td>Produces positive mental balance, relieves depression</td>
<td>Ojo Caliente area</td>
<td>Ojo Caliente Mineral Springs Resort &amp; Spa</td>
<td>Not only can you soak in the Lithium Pool, you can drink refreshing lithium-rich water from a cool fountain.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MAGNESIUM</td>
<td>Improves circulation and relieves inflamed muscles</td>
<td>Jémez Springs</td>
<td>Jémez Springs Bath House or Giggling Springs—or, in the nearby National Forest, Spence or San Antonio hot springs</td>
<td>Yikes, is that a Sasquatch? No, it’s just a naked hippie. Though the Forest Service frowns on it, in practice clothing is optional at the forested springs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHLORIDE</td>
<td>Kills microbes in the water, keeping it healthy for you</td>
<td>Truth or Consequences or the Gila region</td>
<td>T or C has more than 10 hot-springs resorts. In the Gila region, try The Wilderness Lodge; or, in the Gila Wilderness, Middle Fork Hot Springs.</td>
<td>Pack your hiking boots, and maybe your garden gloves as well. The Gila’s hot springs are the most pristine and primitive, but you may need to shore up your rock pool before soaking.</td>
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these days, it’s hard to imagine Albuquerque promoting itself as “The place where the sick get well and the well get prosperous.” But that’s exactly what the Duke City did in 1915. The campaign worked, and Albuquerque became widely known as a healing center for people suffering from tuberculosis.

“The one great advantage of New Mexico as a health resort is that the inhabitants welcome the newcomer,” reported Kyle Crichton in “The Miracle Country,” in the April 1929 edition of the New Mexico Highway Journal, which later became New Mexico Magazine. “In fact we’re rather brazen about the whole thing here at Albuquerque. We use the word ‘tuberculosis’ as openly as one speaks of the deficiencies of the late legislature, and people seem not to drop dead from fright.”

Also called consumption, The Great White Plague, and phthisis (from a Greek word meaning “to waste away”), tuberculosis is an infectious lung disease characterized by otherwise unexplained weight loss, fatigue, fever, chest pain, and coughing up blood. Though TB still exists today, the epidemic of the early 20th century was tempered greatly by the discovery of antibiotics in the 1940s. At the height of the TB epidemic in the United States, health-care professionals relied on European studies from the 1870s that extolled the value of mountain air, sunshine, bed rest, and nutritious foods for people with lung diseases—and so TB patients thronged to New Mexico.

In reality, though, New Mexico wasn’t the “Miracle Country” everyone hoped it would be. Some “lungers” (as TB sufferers were then called) recovered and went on to lead long, productive lives (famed architect John Gaw Meem was one), while countless others died. In fact, Albuquerque’s rates of cure were the worst in the country. Plus, the “formula” of sunshine, rest, fresh air, and nutrition—common sense when fighting any illness—was hardly a scientific breakthrough.

Still, we have that era to thank for laying the foundation of a health-care system that would benefit all New Mexicans. A vast infrastructure of research institutions and sanatoria sprang up. “All the big hospitals in New Mexico started as sanatoriums,” says Dr. Marcos Burgos, a TB expert with the New Mexico Department of Health and the University of New Mexico, “and it all revolved around weather, because at that time there were not any good drugs.”

Sanatorium patients, who paid $50 to $100 a month for their care, tended to be ambitious and young. Serendipitously, that’s how New Mexico recruited a core group of medical doctors from the finest universities. They probably wouldn’t have sought out New Mexico were it not for their own health troubles, and their influence was noticeable even as late as the 1980s, says medical historian Jake W. Spidle, Jr.

Even today, pulmonary medicine has a high profile in New Mexico. Lovelace Respiratory Research Institute, which investigates the causes of lung diseases and strives to find better treatments for them, traces its beginnings to Dr. William Randolph Lovelace, who moved to New Mexico in 1913 for the climate and later established the Lovelace Clinic in Albuquerque, primarily to serve TB patients. His great-niece, Jacqueline Lovelace Johnson, today heads the institute’s board of directors.

New Mexico’s healing history is a fascinating tale whose most compelling chapters were chronicled in New Mexico Magazine, beginning with its inception 87 years ago. By the time New Mexico Highway Journal made its debut in July 1923, the tuberculosis industry was in full swing, health seekers constituted 10 percent of the state’s population, and more than 44 sanatoria were in operation. Nude sun baths, garden-grown food, fresh cow’s milk, attentive medical care, and leisure pastimes such as croquet were part of the daily regimens.

But in his April 1929 article, author Crichton questioned the state’s reputation: “The one great drawback to New Mexico’s claims as a health center has been the lack of proper scientific data to back up our claims.” Crichton hoped that a new research laboratory at Southwestern Presbyterian Sanatorium, the precursor of today’s Presbyterian Health Services, might clear
that up: “We may get the shock of our lives in finding that some of our treasured claims consist mainly of a bunch of tripe.” As it turned out, those “treasured claims” didn’t hold much water, but more on that later.

In the 1930s, New Mexico: The Sunshine State’s Recreational and Highway Magazine, as this publication was then called, kept a spotlight on tuberculosis and the beneficial effects of climate and mineral springs. George Fitzpatrick, who served as editor from 1935 to 1969, was lured here by promises of health, and indeed recovered from TB. Under his editorship in the 1930s, two of the nation’s top tuberculosis specialists wrote articles for the magazine. Lending credence to the claim that New Mexico was a “magic land that cures sick lungs,” Drs. Carl H. Gellenthien and Walter A. Gekler explained why lower barometric pressure, lower humidity, and plentiful sunshine help the afflicted. “The climate of the Southwest alone does not cure sick lungs, but it can help the patient cure himself,” Gellenthien, who recovered from the disease here, wrote in October 1937. “For those who come seeking, New Mexico is the rainbow-end whose pot of gold is Health.”

Gekler, a medical director at two Albuquerque sanatoria and at another in Valmora, noted, in a January 1937 article, a “direct healing influence on the diseased areas in the lung following a change in altitude,” but advised tuberculosis patients not to bother coming unless they had the money to spend six to 12 months getting well. Not everyone did—TB shantytowns sprang up that were similar to the...
Depression’s “Hoovervilles,” full of desperate lungers too poor for sanatoria and hoping to be cured by the climate alone.

In the 1940s, New Mexico Magazine lavished attention on the state’s mineral springs. One writer visiting Ojo Caliente described a man so doubled up with rheumatism that he was carried into the bathhouse. Only days later, healed by the waters, he was hiking the hills on his own two feet. But such evidence is, at best, anecdotal. “Yes, of course, the hot water makes the joints loosen up, feel better, and all that sort of thing, but I’m not aware—except in a very marginal way—of virtually any problems that are quite significantly treated by hot springs,” says medical historian Spidle today.

In his last article for this magazine, published in June 1949, Gellenthien was still defending the notion that climate hastens recovery from TB, even as the medical community was shunning natural remedies in favor of new, proven drug therapies, beginning in 1946 with the antibiotic streptomycin.

Soon thereafter the sanatoria faded away as a failed experiment. Sure, New Mexico’s mountain air had the potential to maximize the immune systems of patients, especially those who came from crowded, polluted cities. But the claims made for climate-based cures were greatly exaggerated. “The weather was never proved to play any major role in the treatment of tuberculosis,” says Dr. Burgos. He concedes, however, that rest and better nutrition were helpful, as was any other practice that lessened stress.

In his book, Doctors of Medicine in New Mexico: A History of Health and Medical Practice, 1886–1986 (University of New Mexico Press, 1986), Spidle says that statistics about how many recovered from TB and how many died are shaky. It’s a fact that natives of New Mexico fared much better than those who moved here in hopes of a cure.

By the 1950s, issues of New Mexico Magazine rarely mention tuberculosis, although there appeared a six-page story about an explosion of new hospitals, some of them former sanatoria. Hot springs continued to earn coverage, though their claims of miraculous healings were now toned down.

**FRESH OUTLOOK**

In January 1980, New Mexico Magazine devoted an entire issue to the subject of health care. Gone was any lofty language about “fountains of youth” and “a broad and well traveled road that leads out from the shadows of ill health, straight into a smiling land of dreams come true!” The 1980 special issue showcased technology in the state’s hospitals, while acknowledging the complexity of the larger picture, which included a struggling Indian Health Service, country doctors, and the healing traditions of American Indians and Hispanics. A few years later, in “Hallowed Ground,” a 1987 article by Joseph Dispenza, New Mexico was depicted as a mecca for health seekers of another kind—a melting pot of people linked by the power of place and a preference for natural and spiritual healing methods.

**WHERE ARE WE NOW, AND WHERE ARE WE HEADED?**

After all these years, New Mexico remains firmly established as a health resort. Although the phrase health resort has had different meanings in different eras, the label and reputation have stuck. Today, the American Lung Association—founded in 1904 as the National Association for the Study and Prevention of Tuberculosis—deems the air quality in Santa Fe and Española as some of the best in the nation, and in 2008, the American Association of Retired Persons (AARP) ranked Santa Fe as the nation’s fourth healthiest hometown, with 283 sunny days a year and well-traveled hiking trails.

“I still think of New Mexico as a place where people come to heal,” says Dr. Marcos Burgos. “Not because of the medical expertise, but because of the environment as a whole. It is that kind of place—a healing place—and it’s very different from the rest of the United States.”

Diana Del Mauro, who covered the health beat for the Santa Fe New Mexican, has found relief from allergies and asthma in the glorious Santa Fe climate. When hiking in the fresh mountain air, she is sure that breathing never felt this good in the muggy, moldy Midwest, where she grew up.