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High-Desert Heaven

Encantado resort offers a new look at Santa Fe.

BY SUSAN SAFIPOUR

I FELL IN LOVE with Santa Fe as a child, when my father would entertain me with stories of his summers there in the 1920s. The tales were very Wild West, and I would ask him over and over again to tell me about the time he ran into a mountain lion, and the gun-toting sheriffs were summoned.

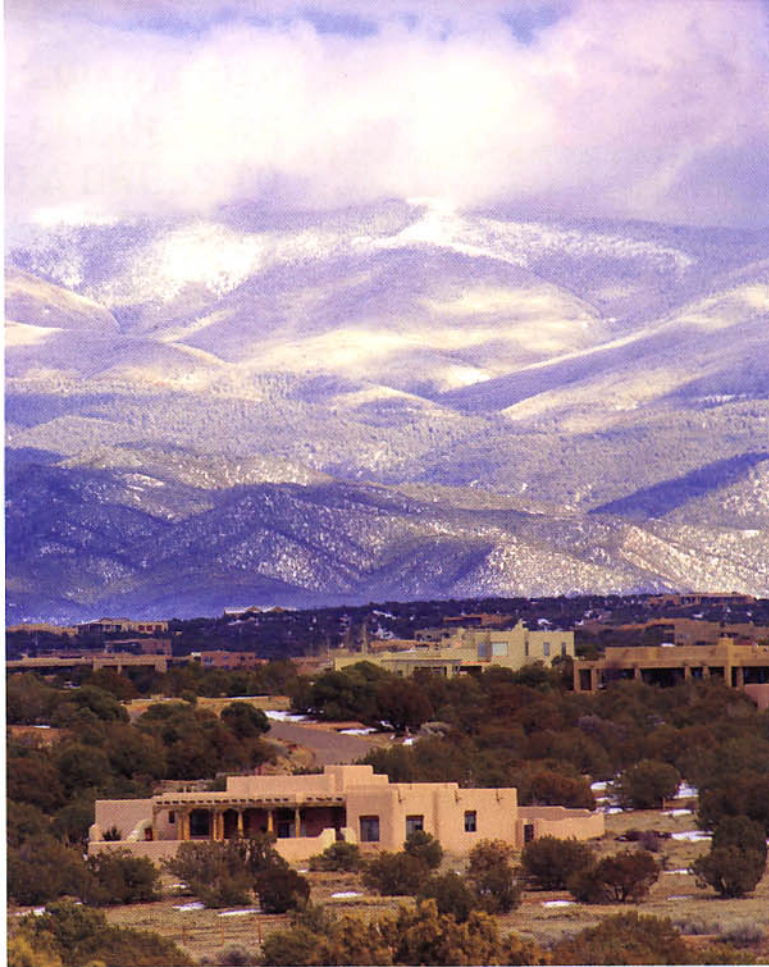
Since then, I've made every excuse to visit this high-desert town. Once, I even talked my college roommates into driving down from Boulder, Colorado, for a Grateful Dead concert that I wasn't the least bit interested in going to—just so I could get my Santa Fe fix. >>>

So, I was understandably tempted when I was invited to visit Santa Fe last fall to write about it for *Diablo*. The trip would be quick—two days, three nights—and I'd be staying seven miles outside town. What? Wouldn't that be like going to New York and staying in New Jersey? No, thanks.

But I found out that I'd be at a new Auberge resort, the 57-acre Encantado. Hmm. I know Auberge's luxury all too well. *Diablo* has featured its three sublime properties in Napa's Wine Country and Esperanza in Cabo San Lucas. Perhaps it would be fun to see the new resort—and still get a dose, if only a short one, of Santa Fe.

I started to unwind during the two-and-a-half-hour flight to Albuquerque and the one-hour drive through the desert to Santa Fe. I arrived at Encantado with time to unpack, check my e-mail, and meet my group for a tour of the resort and dinner.

The next morning, an expert backpacker from Santa Fe Mountain Adventures took us hiking among the aspens in the Santa Fe National Forest. We were lucky that a cold snap had hit earlier in the week: The aspens



PREVIOUS PAGE: (from top) The spa's outdoor lounge; inside a Santa Fe gallery. THIS PAGE: (clockwise from top) A Santa Fe view; an Encantado suite; the fire pit on the patio.



looked as if they were on fire. Mountain Adventures also offers mountain biking tours, horseback riding, and fly-fishing. You name it, the outfitter offers it—even Southwestern cooking demonstrations and stargazing.

Later, we strolled along Canyon Road in Santa Fe, with its gazillion galleries filled

with world-renowned contemporary and Native American folk art. In the early 1900s, Canyon Road was simply a neighborhood where artists lived and worked. After they started to display their art on the sidewalk one summer, the area began to develop into an international destination.



One evening, we had an after-hours tour of the Georgia O'Keefe Museum, a few blocks from Santa Fe's central plaza. The museum owns the largest collection of her work, including many of her most famous paintings. During our trip, we dined at Santa Fe's best restaurants: Geronimo and Coyote Café, which recently got a second wind with the arrival of a new chef, Eric DiStefano. We even had an afternoon on our own to explore Santa Fe's boutiques and crooked streets.

So, what did I think of Encantado? It is magnificent. My casita, nestled among the piñon, was spacious and luxurious—and

getaways

included a Native American drum for my drumming pleasure. The spa and its treatments are deluxe beyond deluxe. I tried the altitude adjustment massage, given on a heated water bed, and it was the best total-body massage I've ever had. I didn't want to get up. When I did, I went straight to the outdoor hot tub to watch the clouds sail by in that blue, blue sky.

Every course at Encantado's restaurant, Terra, was delicious and inventive. (Terra was declared one of the 20 best new restaurants of 2008 by *Esquire* within months of opening.) The resort even has true Santa Fe spirit, with its own private art gallery.



But, what makes Encantado *the* place to stay, trumping all of the other luxury hotels in historic and bustling downtown Santa Fe, is—surprise!—its location outside town. Encantado sits in the Sangre de Cristo foothills, and the view of the Jemez Mountains took my breath away, and forced me to relax and experience nature's beauty.

My favorite time to enjoy the view was when the sun set. The sky changed across a palette of seemingly infinite colors, becoming a work of art worthy of the best Canyon Road galleries. Afterward, I sat by the fire pit and counted the endless stars.

Not only did I get my Santa Fe fix, I fell in love with this high-desert town all over again.

For rates and information, go to encantadoresort.com. ■