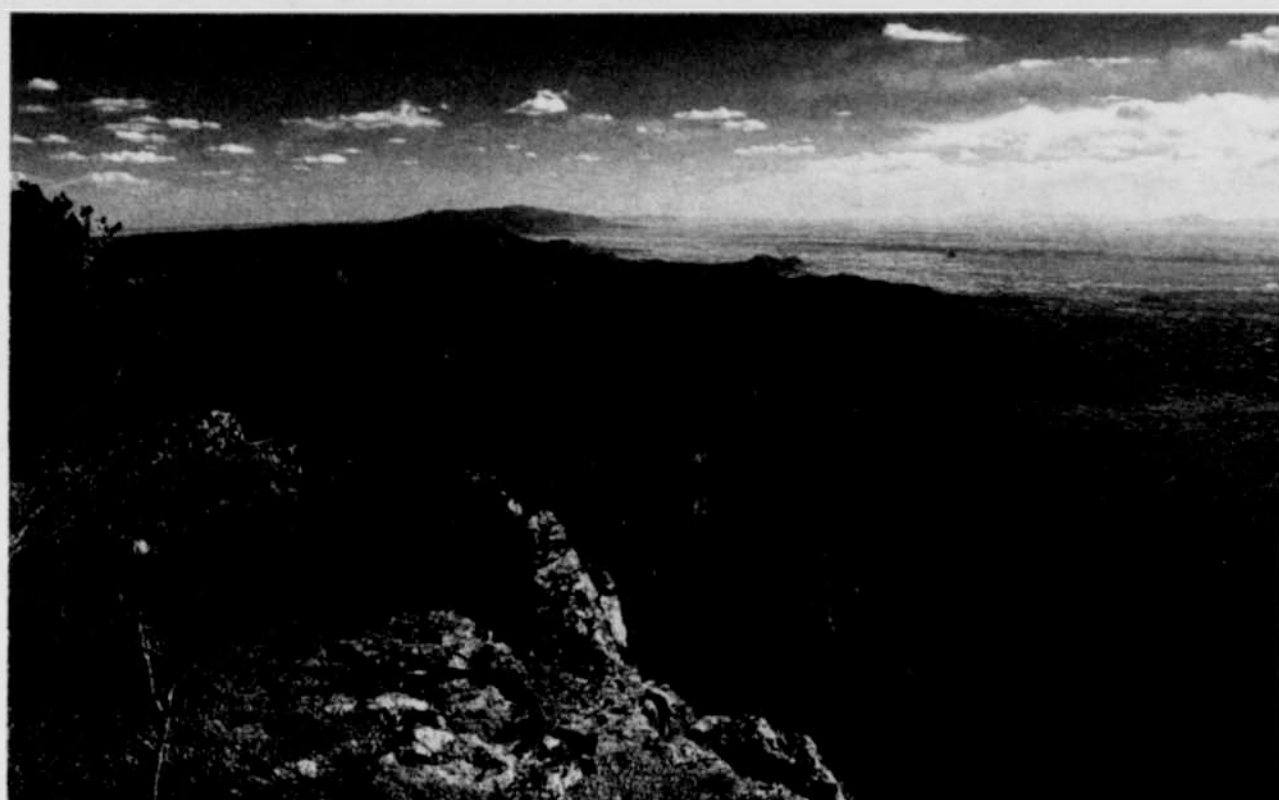




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the so-called "Low Road" (U.S. 285/84 to Hwy. 68), which cuts through a stunning section of the Rio Grande Gorge before climbing over high bluffs with mesmerizing views of mountains and mesas and descending into Taos. The High Road comprises a series of turns along local state highways—any innkeeper or local can give you the exact route—the main villages along the way are Penasco, Truchas and Chimayo.

Flying Star. What began many years ago as a modest indie coffeehouse and bakery in the Nob Hill section of Albuquerque has grown into a small empire of airy, inviting hangouts with several locations throughout greater Albuquerque and one branch in the trendy Railyard District of Santa Fe. Flying Star (flyingstarcafe.com) is the definitive place to people watch, mingle with friends, enjoy any meal of the day or while away an afternoon on your laptop (each locale has free Wi-Fi and plenty of outlets). There's strong coffee as well as beer and wine, and the baked goods (especially the dizzying variety of pies) are a standout. The original Flying Star in Nob Hill has a pronounced gay following, and a few of the other locations (downtown Albuquerque, Corrales Road and Santa Fe) are also particularly popular with the LGBT community.

The Taos, Santa Fe and Albuquerque ski areas. Regardless of what time of year you visit, or even whether you're inclined to ski, these high-mountain recreation spots offer much to see and do. During the warmer months, all three make excellent bases for hiking. Taos Ski Valley (skitaos.org) contains the trailhead for one of the most strenuous but rewarding hikes in the Southwest, the 8-mile round-trip scramble to Wheeler Peak (elev. 13,161 feet), New Mexico's highest. You'll find plenty of trails and breathtaking views at Ski Santa Fe (skisantafe.com) and Albuquerque's Sandia Peak (sandiapeak.com), too—the latter is served by the world's longest (2.7 miles) aerial tramway and is a highly respected mountain-biking venue.

If you've never been to the area, you may be surprised that North Central New Mexico is home to some outstanding skiing and terrific winter conditions (200-300 inches of

Above: The view from Albuquerque's Sandia Peak ski area

Below: The quaint village of Arroyo Seco, just north of Taos



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powdery snow each season, and lots of sunshine). Of the three areas, Taos Ski Valley is the most esteemed among serious skiers—its 72 generally steep slopes rank collectively among the most challenging in the country. Albuquerque's ski area is the smallest and contains mostly easy and moderate runs, while Santa Fe offers a surprisingly varied and extensive facility, with more than 40 runs, most of them intermediate to advanced.

Lodging suggestions. Keep in mind that Santa Fe has the highest nightly rates in the area and also the best overall mix of B&Bs, boutique hotels and chain properties. Albuquerque is a relative bargain, and some cool, hip hotels have opened in the past couple of years. And Taos is mostly the domain of smaller inns and B&Bs, although there are a handful of larger properties.

A few favorites: In Albuquerque, try the Hotel Andaluz (hotelandaluz.com), Hotel Parq Central (hotelparqcentral.com), and—about 20 miles north, en route to Santa Fe—the Hyatt Regency Tamaya Resort & Spa (tamaya.hyatt.com) in Bernalillo. Top picks in Santa Fe include the Inn on the Alameda (innonthealameda.com), Hotel St. Francis (hotelstfrancis.com), and gay-owned Inn of the Turquoise Bear (turquoisebear.com). And in Taos, you won't go wrong with the Taos Inn (taosinn.com), American Artists Gallery House B&B (taosbedandbreakfast.com), and Casa Gallina (casagallina.net). ☐

Read about the travels of Andrew Collins at thecountyhunter.com and gaytravel.about.com.



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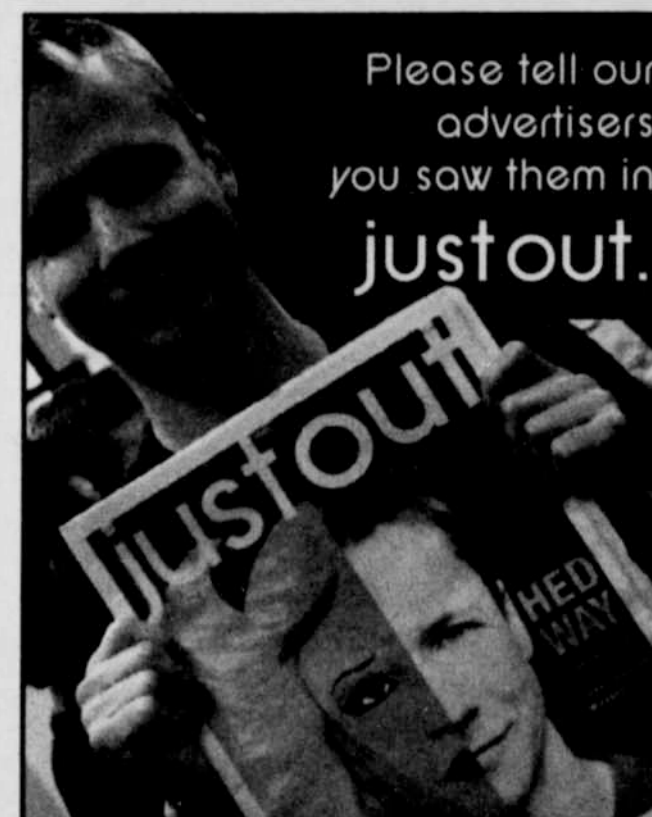
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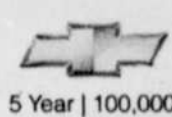
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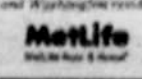
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