

New Mexico Nature and Culture With Naturalist Journeys & Caligo Ventures



December 3 – 10, 2020

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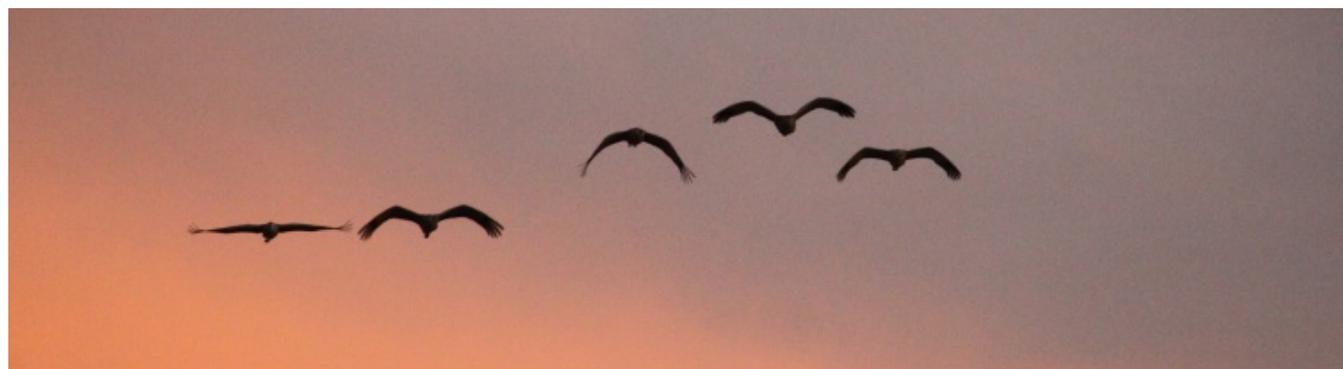
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Naturalist Journeys, LLC





Bring special meaning to your holiday season on a journey to a dramatic and beautiful part of the country. The winter solstice has great significance to Pueblo cultures, and both Albuquerque and Taos have special events to celebrate this festive time of year. Venturing to New Mexico off-season allows us affordable stays in Albuquerque and Taos at top-rate historic accommodations full of charm. Experience a wonderful blend of nature and culture and take care of your holiday shopping!

Discover outstanding geological and archeological sites, national monuments, historic trading posts, and modern galleries that feature some of the best Southwestern artists—past and present. By visiting the varied habitats of Bandelier National Monument and Bosque del Apache National Wildlife Refuge at this time of year, we avoid the crowds typical of other seasons.

Bosque del Apache, in fact the entire Middle Rio Grande valley, is one of the richest wintering areas for cranes and waterfowl in the Southwest. Each autumn and winter, tens of thousands of ducks (17 species!), geese, and cranes pour into the extensive fields, wetlands, and marshes of the valley.

In Albuquerque, we explore the birds and forested habitats of the surrounding mountains, and drive to the crest of the Sandia Mountains (over 10,000 ft) to seek out the three species of Rosy Finches at probably the most reliable place in the country to see them. While there, we enjoy the scenic bird's eye view of the Rio Grande valley. This is a Naturalist Journeys Sampler trip, with a blend of birding, travel photography, cultural attractions and fun!

Tour Summary

8-Day / 7-Night New Mexico Nature & Culture Tour
w/ David Mehlman
\$2690 from Albuquerque, NM
Airport is Albuquerque International Sunport (ABQ)

Tour Highlights

- ✓ Travel through scenic and historically rich New Mexican villages and landscapes
- ✓ Search for three species of Rosy Finches
- ✓ Witness one of the most population-dense wintering areas for waterfowl and cranes in the Southwest
- ✓ Explore an authentic pueblo and meet local artisans
- ✓ Gaze upon the majestic Sangre de Cristo Mountains—the southernmost subrange of the Rockies
- ✓ Drive the fascinating High Road between Taos and Santa Fe, stop at Chimayo and other historic sites including the Santa Fe plaza with its many colorful vendors and wares.
- ✓ Take your taste buds on an adventure with New Mexico's famous green chile (and learn the answer to the state question)!



Thurs., Dec. 3 Arrive in Albuquerque

Those that arrive by 2 p.m. may choose to visit Albuquerque's delightful Rio Grande Nature Center State Park, where we can take a short walk on trails through beautiful riverside bosque (what locals call the riparian cottonwood forest). Behind the large windows of the Antoine Predock-designed Nature Center building, we'll watch Wood Ducks, Gadwall, American Wigeon, coots and other wintering birds at a beautiful, willow-lined pond.

After birding and exploring the nature center, we settle into our lodgings, then if you wish, explore a bit of nearby Old Town, decorated in holiday garb, and gather for a welcome dinner at one of our favorite restaurants.

If you plan on arriving later, you will take a taxi to the hotel in Old Town, in time to join us for dinner. Meet in the lobby at 6:30 p.m.

Accommodations at the Hotel Chaco (D)

Fri., Dec. 4 Bosque del Apache | Cranes and Geese | Middle Rio Grande

The Middle Rio Grande, including Bosque del Apache National Wildlife Refuge in central New Mexico, is one of the richest wintering areas for waterfowl and cranes in the Southwest. Each autumn, tens of thousands of ducks and geese converge in the extensive wetlands and marshes of the valley. Some years this area harbors over 25,000 Snow and Ross's Geese, as well as tens of thousands of Sandhill Cranes! In the morning, the noise is deafening as birds fly out of safe roosting areas to neighboring farm fields where they feed. Eagles and marauding coyotes create quite a stir among the flocks—most often signaled by an explosion of thousands of Snow and Ross's Geese. This is truly an experience not to be missed!

Our first stop during the day will be the Bernardo Wildlife Management Area. This area has become a must-stop for any birding trip in the Middle Rio Grande. Managers plant extensive fields of corn, sorghum, and other crops to attract the cranes and geese. We will admire the spectacle from the viewing platforms and wildlife drive and walk a short distance to some viewing ponds.



After lunch in Socorro, we continue further south to the legendary Bosque del Apache National Wildlife Refuge. One admirable feature of this refuge is the layout of the road system, which provides excellent proximity to many species. During the day, we walk the trails and drive the roads of the refuge looking for birds and other wildlife such as Mule Deer, Coyotes, and Porcupines. Don't be surprised if a huge Wild Turkey or a herd of Javelina strut out from the brush! Bosque del Apache is legendary for the rarities that have occurred there over the years, such as the US's only record of Rufous-necked Wood-Rail! The refuge, too, is at the northern edge of the range of some desert species such as Verdin and Pyrrhuloxia, which sometimes show themselves at the feeders. The refuge and surrounding areas are also excellent wintering sites for many raptors. Bald Eagles, American Kestrels, Northern Harriers, and Red-tailed Hawks are fairly common. Ferruginous Hawks and Golden Eagles may also be seen in the area.

After sunset at the refuge, we enjoy a bit of local flavor for dinner in San Antonio before returning to our lodging at the Hotel Chaco in Albuquerque.

Accommodations at the Hotel Chaco (B,L,D)

Sat., Dec. 5 Sandia Mountain Rosy Finch Quest | Old Town Albuquerque

Today we explore the Sandia Mountains (Spanish for watermelon) on our drive up to the Sandia Crest. Although Albuquerque lies to the west of the mountains, our drive heads east and north to drive up the east side through a variety of oak, pine, and mixed conifer forests. This is a popular recreation area for residents, and we pass several picnic grounds and a ski area. There are places to bird en route, with a chance to see Northern Pygmy Owls, Williamson's Sapsuckers, Steller's Jays, Mountain Chickadees, Pygmy Nuthatches, and Clark's Nutcrackers. A portion of the drive is heavily forested, and at stops such as Sulphur Canyon and Nine Mile Picnic areas we may find more typically northern species such as Pine Grosbeaks, Cassin's Finches, Red Crossbills, or (if we are really lucky), American Three-toed Woodpeckers. Views are spectacular and eventually we reach tree line and the open, often snowy and wind-swept crest. There is a restaurant/shop here called The Crest House that maintains feeders, to which ALL THREE North American species of Rosy Finches come in to feed (Brown-capped, Gray-crowned, and Black). We will view the feeders from below, in the parking lot, and if it is blustery, we can watch from inside! We'll bring gifts of seed to aid the effort made by local banders to mark and study the intermingled and dynamic flocks.

The joy of a Sandia Crest birding day is that atop the world, the birds come to us! We also may have some good raptor viewing, with Merlin and Northern Goshawk both possible. We return to our lodgings by mid-afternoon so you can enjoy some free time in festive downtown Albuquerque. Dinner is at another great local restaurant.

Accommodations at the Hotel Chaco (B,L,D)



Sun., Dec. 6 Bandelier National Monument | Taos

This morning we leave Albuquerque and travel an hour and a half northwest to Bandelier National Monument, a gem of the national park system in the Jemez Mountains. The monument boasts the highest density of archeological sites of any national park, all in numerous distinctive and beautiful canyons carved into the Pajarito (“Little Bird”) Plateau. The ancestors of modern pueblo tribes inhabited this site—which has an abundance of water—even after abandoning others in their region. We walk trails established in the 600-foot-deep Frijoles Canyon to examine the historic structures. The geology of the area is fascinating as well: layers of pale ash and tuff encrust darker, denser strata beneath, portraying the rocks’ volcanic origin. We’ll also have the opportunity to look for some of the typical winter birds of the mountains of New Mexico, including Townsend’s Solitaire, Mountain Chickadee, Juniper Titmouse, 3 species of nuthatch, and, if we are lucky, Pinyon Jays.

After lunch in Los Alamos, we make a brief stop at the Bradbury Science Museum to explore the history of the Manhattan Project (another important aspect of New Mexico’s history) and then continue on to Taos. This drive involves a significant gain in altitude, from the desert shrub and grasslands surrounding Albuquerque to aspen and pine as we near Taos. It includes a very scenic stretch of road through the Rio Grande gorge and we may see Common Mergansers or Common Goldeneyes in the river. In Taos, which is the highest elevation we will reach on our trip, we could get a real sense of winter coming! Our hotel has a cozy fireplace. Dinner tonight is at the Inn.

Accommodations at The Historic Taos Inn (B,L,D)

Mon., Dec. 7 Explore Taos Culture: Museums, Pueblo, Downtown

This morning, just outside of town, we visit the stunning Taos Pueblo, or “Place of the Red Willows”, framed by the rugged Sangre de Cristo Mountains. Fifteen hundred Pueblo people still inhabit this village; it is a pleasure and a privilege to share time in their ancient home as they prepare for the family celebrations of Christmas and the winter solstice. After a guided tour, we take time to walk through some areas of the pueblo where we can visit with artists who live and work here. Many parts of the pueblo, including the Catholic Church, contain rock and adobe structures that date back a thousand years. Enjoy the mouth-watering smell of bread baking in the hornos (clay ovens), or the fragrance of juniper-log fires warming the artists’ homes.

After lunch and some free time in the afternoon, join your guide to visit the historic Martinez Hacienda, which re-creates the life of the prosperous Mexican family that first established the ranch in 1804. Or, you can choose to explore Taos—including shops, galleries, and the Kit Carson Home and other museums—on your own.

We sample another great restaurant in town this evening.

Accommodations at The Historic Taos Inn (B,L,D)



Tues., Dec. 8 Taos

Today we venture southwest to the historic town and pueblo of Abiquiu. On our way there, we first stop at the Millicent Rogers Museum. Founded in 1956, the museum's collections display regional art and some of Taos' finest historical pieces. Next, we proceed across the vast plain to the west of Taos, crossing the Rio Grande on a high bridge from which we get a dramatic view of the volcanic cliffs that frame it. We'll make a quick stop and take a short walk at one end of the bridge to fully embrace the magnificent landscape of the Rio Grande rift valley, surrounded by snow-capped mountains.

We then continue on to Abiquiu and visit the nearby Ghost Ranch where you can see the landscape that so inspired Georgia O'Keefe. There is a lovely hike of a couple hours here, and much to see. We have lunch here, or at a local restaurant, and then circle back visiting some birding hotspots along the Chama River. Some may wish to take a soak at the historic Ojo Caliente hot springs.

This evening we turn you loose as our hotel is right across from the Taos plaza, with its many shops. There are delightful restaurants or you can tuck in at the Taos Inn by the fire and dine in our hotel.

Accommodations at The Historic Taos Inn (B,L)

Wed., Dec. 9 Chimayo | Santa Fe | Albuquerque via the High Road

After breakfast, we make our way back to Santa Fe and Albuquerque, driving along the "High Road", a route that takes us through picturesque villages rich in Hispanic culture, such as Peñasco, Trampas, and Chimayó. This winding, 52-mile route offers glimpses of endless vistas, fiery-red strings of drying chiles, and beautiful mission churches. We'll visit the San Francisco de Assisi Mission Church in Ranchos de Taos, made famous by Georgia O'Keefe. We stop at the legendary Santuario de Chimayó, a National Historic Landmark and perhaps the most important pilgrimage site for Catholics in the country. The trip has nearly endless photo opportunities of the landscapes of the Sangre de Cristo Mountains, which have inspired Ansel Adams and many others, and where Robert Redford's *The Milago Beanfield War* was filmed.

We stop for lunch in historic Santa Fe where you can enjoy the rich sights and sounds of the famous plaza or some of the fine local museums for a couple of hours. We then head to our hotel near the Albuquerque airport, chosen so you can fly out at any time you wish tomorrow.

Enjoy a final dinner together with time to recount our adventures.

Accommodations near the Airport in Albuquerque (B,L,D)

Thurs., Dec. 10 Departures from Albuquerque

You may leave at any time today convenient for you as our airport hotel has a complimentary shuttle. (B)

Guide Dave Mehlman



Dave is a naturalist with interests in birds, migration, ecosystems and natural disturbances, plants, and gardening. He holds a PhD from the University of New Mexico. Dave worked for The Nature Conservancy for 25+ years as Director of its Migratory Bird Program. He has researched in Latin American and the Caribbean. An avid birder, Dave enjoys teaching about natural habitats and local cultures. He has published papers in scientific and popular journals.

Cost of the Journey

Plan Ahead!

Protect yourself with Allianz Travel Insurance. Please note, starting in January 2017, Naturalist Journeys pays 100% of your flight carbon offset.

Travel Information

Please plan to arrive at Albuquerque International Sunport by 2pm or before on Thursday, December 3. Please plan departures at your leisure on Thursday, December 10

Cost of the Journey

Cost of the main journey is \$2690 DBL / \$3250 SGL, per person, based on double occupancy, from Albuquerque, NM this cost includes: accommodations for seven nights, meals as specified in the itinerary (B=breakfast, L=lunch, D=dinner), airport welcome and transfer or hotel shuttle, land transportation during the journey, professional guide services, park and other entrance fees, and miscellaneous program expenses.

Cost does not include round-trip airfare to and from Albuquerque, NM or items of a personal nature such as laundry, telephone, drinks from the bar, gratuities for luggage handling or personal services.

Photo Credits

Gray-crowned Rosy-Finch, Dwayne Longenbaugh, Sundance Nature Photos (DWLO); Great Horned Owl, Greg Smith (GRSM); Pinyon Jay, Naturalist Journeys Stock (NJS); Steller's Jay, Peg Abbott (PEAB); Black Rosy-Finch, DWLO; Sunset Cranes, PEAB; Sandias Mountains, DWLO; American Wigeon, Tom Dove (TODO); Snow Geese, Hugh Simmons (HUSI); Sunhill Crane, PEAB; Red-tailed Hawk, Sandy Sorkin (SASO); Wood Duck, SASO.

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