ROAD TRIP: SANTA FE TO TAOS

TAOS

MAP NOT TO SCALE
NOTE: GPS IS NOT RELIABLE NORTH OF ESPAÑOLA

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It’s not an exaggeration to say that Georgia O’Keeffe’s 1929 trip to Taos, to visit Mabel Dodge Luhan, altered the course of her life. She was exposed to art, ideas, and a landscape that inspired her. Taos has a rich history as the home of Taos Pueblo, which has been continuously inhabited for over 1,000 years, and has been an artists’ colony for more than a century. Today, Taos is a destination for art, outdoor adventure, and history.

From Santa Fe, take U.S. 84/285 to Española, then follow the signs for N.M. 68 to Taos.

1. THE LOW ROAD TO TAOS
From Española, follow N.M. 68 47 miles to Taos.

While the High Road to Taos, through Chimayó and the mountain villages of N.M. 76, is a wonderful excursion, the Low Road, which follows the Rio Grande through a scenic canyon along N.M. 68, can be equally adventurous. Between mile markers 24 and 25, you will see across the river the bones of an old road—you can just imagine traveling such a road in a Model T. At the village of Pilar, between mile markers 28 and 29, stop at the Rio Grande Gorge Visitors’ Center on the right and orient yourself to the geology and history of the area (note County Road 570 across the street—that will complete the loop of this Road Trip). About a mile after mile marker 33, pull out at the designated rest area and marvel at the view of the Rio Grande Gorge, a spectacular rift valley 29 million years old.

2. SAN FRANCISCO DE ASÍS MISSION CHURCH
Ranchos de Taos, between mile markers 45 and 46 on N.M. 68

The village of Ranchos de Taos is home to the San Francisco de Asís mission church. Georgia O’Keeffe famously painted the building, and it was photographed by Paul Strand and Ansel Adams, among others. A National Historic Landmark, the church continues to capture the imaginations of artists. It is not only a historic site but an active sanctuary, and an integral part of village life.

3. MABEL DODGE LUHAN HOUSE
240 Morada Lane, Taos, NM 87571; 575.751.9686; mabeldodgeluhan.com

Mabel Dodge Luhan bought this house, then named Los Galleros, in 1918, when she moved to Taos from New York and married Tony Lujan, a Taos Pueblo native. She attracted an international following of luminaries from across the fields of arts and letters: Georgia O’Keeffe, D.H. Lawrence, Ansel Adams, Miguel Covarrubias, Willa Cather, Carl Jung, Martha Graham, and many others. The house is currently an inn and conference center; public rooms are available for a self-guided tour.

4. THE TAOS INN AND DOC MARTIN’S RESTAURANT
125 Paseo del Pueblo Norte, Taos, NM 87571; 800.826.7466; taosinn.com

The lobby of the quaint, historic Taos Inn was formerly a plaza surrounded by buildings built in the mid-1800s. The largest house, purchased by Dr. Thomas Paul Martin in 1890, is now home to the excellent Doc Martin’s Restaurant; the cluster of buildings was enclosed and became the Hotel Martin in 1936, and later the Taos Inn; it has been a hub of the artistic, intellectual, and social activities of Taos ever since.

5. HARWOOD MUSEUM OF ART
238 Ledoux Street, Taos, NM 87571; 575.758.9826; harwoodmuseum.org

A jewel box of a museum two blocks from the Taos Plaza, the Harwood’s collection is a unique record of the community’s rich multicultural heritage, and of Taos’s role in the development of seminal American art. It features works by Agnes Martin, Joseph Henry Sharp, Beatrice Mandelman, R.C. Gorman, Ernest Blumenschein, E. Irving Couse, Dorothy Brett, Patrocinio Barela, Harrison Begay, and others.

6. THE RIO GRANDE GORGE AND BRIDGE
Ten miles northwest of Taos, on U.S. Highway 64, is the Rio Grande Gorge bridge. Spanning 500 feet over a 650-foot drop, the bridge’s completion in 1965 solved the problem of how to get across the massive canyon formed by the Rio Grande. Prior to the bridge being built, travelers had to travel miles out of their way, descend into the canyon, and ford the river. The bridge is designed for pedestrian traffic and offers spectacular views in all directions.

7. INTO THE GORGE
About a half-mile after the bridge (traveling west on U.S. 64), take a left on the West Rim Road (County Road 115). This parallels the gorge, and at the 8-mile mark, the road becomes County Road 567 to the right, toward U.S. 285 to Abiquiu or Santa Fe. Go straight and the road, now County Road 570, goes down into the canyon, switching back to display spectacular views of the gorge and Taos Mountain. It crosses the river through the Rio Grande State Park and eventually loops back to U.S. 64 at the village of Pilar. The river is a popular destination for picnicking, camping, fly-fishing, and white-water rafting. At Pilar, go right to return to Española or Santa Fe, or left to return to Taos.

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