



New Mexico Magic

Can mountains and deserts really impart healing energy? Escape to a wellness spa near Santa Fe and Taos and find out.

BY LAUREL KALLENBACH

SOAKING IN THE IRON POOL, ONE OF four mineral-rich hot springs at Ojo Caliente Mineral Springs Resort & Spa, I gaze at New Mexico's red cliffs and turquoise-blue sky. As the warm, iron-infused water bubbles up from the pebbles under my feet, I ponder the indigenous people who lived here 600 years ago. Like me, they enjoyed the soothing waters of the Soda Spring (good for digestion), Arsenic Spring (relieves arthritis) or Iron Spring (helps the immune system, prevents fatigue).

I've just returned from a hike up to the Posi pueblo ruins; little but pottery shards remain where an adobe town once stood. But magnificent views of sage-covered mesas and the Sangre de Cristo mountains look much the same as they did for the Posi dwellers — and for Spanish explorers who came in the 1500s questing for gold and the Fountain of Youth. They named the mineral springs

Ojo Caliente, meaning "hot eye," a healing center of the Southwest.

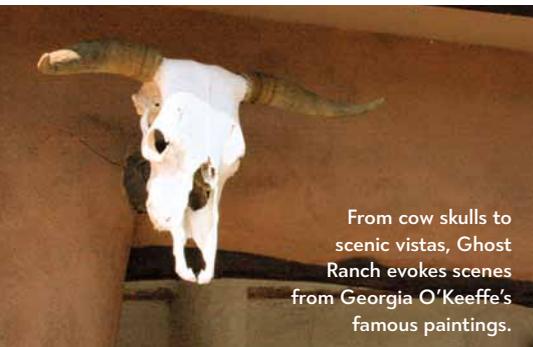
Have I been drinking too much of the Lithia Spring waters (a mineral mood booster), or is this peaceful place helping me connect the dots and regain my sense of balance? At Ojo, I've slathered myself in mud and baked in the sun, mountain biked along the river, enjoyed a facial and foot massage, and eaten organic meals. I also visited Ghost Ranch, whose rock formations painter Georgia O'Keeffe immortalized.

Nature. Exercise. Self-care. Inspiration. Rest. Dots connected.

I'm one of the many who visit New Mexico searching for today's equivalent of the Fountain of Youth. This legendary region's holistic spas provide cutting-edge treatments that can help you do more than just relieve stress — they help you reunite body and soul. No wonder this state is called the Land of Enchantment.

Healing Waters, Healing Earth

Northern New Mexico's reputed rejuvenating powers are one reason thousands of healers — from traditional folk *curanderos* to acupuncturists to massage therapists — live in or near Santa



From cow skulls to scenic vistas, Ghost Ranch evokes scenes from Georgia O'Keeffe's famous paintings.

PHOTOS (TOP, LEFT AND BOTTOM LEFT), LAUREL KALLENBACH



Far left: Chimney Rock, at Ghost Ranch, is just one of New Mexico's many famous landscapes.

Middle: An ancient church in Las Trampas.

Below: El Monte Sagrado Living Resort and Spa in Taos.

Fe and Taos. The indigenous and Hispanic cultures also support a spiritual connection to the land. In Native American pueblos, which are sovereign tribal lands, people still observe ancient

sacred ceremonies and feast days. The communities are also steeped in a history of *milagros* (miracles), such as those in the village of Chimayó: Its adobe church, built upon purportedly sacred earth, is the site of so many miraculous cures that its walls are hung with discarded crutches.

Ojo Caliente became the country's first health spa in 1868, and stories of its curative powers also enjoy a long history. Fermin Medina, who lives in the Picuris pueblo near Peñasco, N.M., stayed for a month during 1952 at Ojo Caliente with his arthritic, bedridden grandmother. Only 12 years old, he pushed her wheelchair daily to the mineral-rich waters. "The treatments made my grandmother feel better, and within a year she was walking again," says Medina, now 70, who soaks to ease back pain after two surgeries.

He and his wife, Rumaldita, occasionally enjoy Ojo's Milagro Wrap (\$12). "First you soak in the hot pools for 20 minutes, then they take you into a room and wrap you in blankets for half an hour. Boy, do you sweat!" he explains. This treatment draws on the time-tested value of perspiration, an ancient purification ritual for many tribes.

Connection to nature is also part of the

magic of outdoorsy spa retreats such as Ojo Caliente, Ten Thousand Waves in Santa Fe, and El Monte Sagrado in Taos. They're all favorite stops for cyclists, river rafters, llama trekkers, rock climbers and skiers ready to soothe tired muscles after a day in the mountains, on the rivers or on the slopes.

Spas With a Southwestern Twist

There's a New Mexico spa to suit every taste, whether you prefer one located in a city, at a resort, in a hotel or outdoors. BODY, a Santa Fe holistic center, offers a day spa, yoga studio, fitness center, boutique and organic cafe. "My intention for BODY is to help people experience something that makes them feel better — whether it's one healthy lunch, a yoga class or a life-altering massage," says owner Lorin Parrish.

Can a spa retreat change you? Parrish thinks so. She recalls a woman who ate her first raw-foods meal four years ago at BODY's cafe; recently she returned as an all-raw devotee. "She'd lost 15 pounds and no longer has digestive problems," says Parrish.

Ensnoring yourself in a beautiful, serene environment can prove transformative in itself. And experimenting with new forms of self-care offers a good way to nurture yourself into a new frame of mind. Many of New Mexico's eclectic



spas let you experiment with types of bodywork you might not have experienced before, like Native American-inspired treatments.

North of Santa Fe at Buffalo Thunder Resort (owned by the Pojoaque Pueblo and managed by Hilton), the Wo' P'in Spa offers treatments with regional, indigenous herbs such as sage, birch and juniper, whose hydrating properties are important in the desert. The 80-minute Sage and Stone Facial utilizes nuggets of turquoise, which Pueblo culture esteems as a beauty enhancer.

"We respect the native traditions; each treatment reflects the deep roots of the Pueblo heritage," says Wo' P'in Spa director Carey Ferrante. In fact, Pueblo elders created the spa's →





Flowing Spirit Hot Stone Massage. The Pojoaque people have long believed desert stones carry ancestral spirits, a belief that informs the arrangement of those warmed stones on your back, hands and feet.

Recuperative Retreats

A spa getaway can be especially helpful after long bouts of hard work, illness or other circumstances that knock you out of sync with your body. It can even help you feel more alive and creative. Photographer Douglas Beasley, 53, travels from his St. Paul, Minn., home to New Mexico



We tend to get caught up in work and lose focus on our personal life. Being at the spa gets us back together as a couple."



Spa retreats can be especially rejuvenating for couples in search of quality downtime.

annually to teach photo workshops. When he's not downhill skiing or training his lens on the dramatic landscapes, he's soaking up serenity at Ten Thousand Waves, a Japanese-style bath sanctuary on a mountainside just outside Santa Fe.

"It's nice to chill before and after workshops, which are always intense," Beasley says. "Soaking and getting massages clears my mind and allows me to be more open to creative and photographic possibilities."

Ten Thousand Waves also offers opportunities to sample treatments seldom found anywhere else. Nose to Toes is an 80-minute sampler (\$149) that includes

Japanese head, neck, shoulder and foot massage, as well as gentle Thai stretches and Hawaiian lomi-lomi massage strokes. Afterward, you emerge transformed.

Beasley believes relaxation in itself is essential to good health. "By soaking, I enjoy the benefit of doing nothing besides watching snowflakes fall on the pines."

Such simplicity can be immensely healing — and can be accomplished on a budget. Though spa treatments are pricey, you can economize by choosing just one, which gives you full access to the facilities. If you're comfortable using the clothing-optional communal tubs at Ten Thousand Waves, you can spend hours lounging in the sun and using the foot bath and the Relax Room (both of which are complimentary) in the Zen setting — all for only \$20.

"It doesn't matter how much time or money you spend at the spa; you'll find mental and physical well-being here," says Mónica Muñoz, manager of El Monte Sagrado Living Spa in Taos. "You can turn a one-hour treatment into a whole afternoon." That includes use of the fitness center and the chlorine-free, tropical-rainforest pool — and you can sip tea by the fountain in the Asian-décor spa or melt in the sauna.

Spa for Two

Taking quiet time alone at the spa is one way to recharge; another is to share the serenity with a friend or family member — which can revitalize that relationship as well. Lorie and Jim Hendricks of Dallas, Texas, visit El Monte Sagrado Living Resort and Spa about twice a year as a way to decompress from their manufacturing business. "We tend to get caught up in work and lose focus on our personal life," says Lorie, 40. "Being at the spa gets us back together as a couple rather than coworkers."

The Hendrickses enjoy the natural beauty of the resort, where suites, casitas, streams and waterfalls are organized around a sacred circle of 300-year-old trees planted by the Taos Pueblo people. "El Monte Sagrado is our place to unwind," says Lorie. "Stress is not good for the body and soul; every time we take this spa retreat, we say, 'Ah . . . this is where we need to be!'"

Laurel Kallenbach lives in Boulder, Colo. She is a regular contributor to Experience Life.



Northern New Mexico Spa Retreats

BODY: This Santa Fe wellness center has a spa, yoga studio, fitness center, childcare, boutique and organic cafe. Spa treatments: \$45–\$250. 505-986-0362; www.bodyofsantafe.com

Buffalo Thunder Resort: Fifteen minutes north of Santa Fe, this Pojoaque Pueblo-owned resort includes a Hilton hotel, golf courses, restaurants, casino and a huge collection of Native American art. Accommodations: \$159 and up. Spa treatments: \$64–\$225. 877-848-6337; www.buffalothunderresort.com

El Monte Sagrado Living Resort and Spa: Taos's secluded resort offers luxury guest rooms, casitas, restaurants and a spa in a lush, eco-friendly setting. Accommodations: \$199–\$569. Spa treatments: \$120–\$300. 888-213-4419; www.elmontesagrado.com

Ojo Caliente Mineral Springs Resort & Spa: Guest rooms, restaurant, bathhouse and spa surround the mineral hot springs an hour from Taos and Santa Fe. Mineral pools day pass: \$16–\$24. Accommodations: \$119–\$449 per night (includes use of pools). Camping available. Spa treatments: \$12–\$220. 800-222-9162; www.ojospa.com

Ten Thousand Waves: The Japanese-inspired spa is minutes from downtown Santa Fe. Communal tubs (for treatments less than one hour): \$20 (unlimited time). Private baths: \$29–\$39 per person (one hour). Accommodations: \$99–\$269 per night. Spa treatments: \$65–\$179. 505-992-5025; www.tenthousandwaves.com