

Chances are you're heading to Santa Fe, New Mexico this month. Many San Diegans make an annual pilgrimage to the opera, which runs through August 27, and others like to be in town for the Indian Market (August 20-21 this year). If these events aren't important to you, I'd suggest you wait and go in September, when the temperature has cooled off a bit and rain is less likely to fall. On a recent visit, I heard more than one local refer to July-August as the "monsoon season."

Whether you go this month or next, you're bound to have a wonderful time. Santa Fe – and nearby Taos – continues to add exciting attractions, as well as lodging and dining options. It's no wonder that northern New Mexico is one of the most popular destinations in the country. ▶

What's New In New Mexico?

Petunia No. 2, 1924.
Georgia O'Keefe. Oil on
canvas. © The Georgia
O'Keefe Foundation

◀ In terms of places to stay, Santa Fe's centrally located Inn of the Anasazi has long been the top-rated choice. However, its perennial place on Conde Nast's Gold List hasn't led to complacency. The hotel has just enlarged the lobby-level library and is in the process of adding a fitness room. They have also teamed with Santa Fe Mountain Adventures (SFMA, www.santafemountainadventures.com) so guests can enjoy guided hiking, mountain biking, whitewater rafting, fly-fishing, and horseback riding excursions. For the less athletic, SFMA can arrange yoga, pottery, and cooking experiences.

Also new this year: Inn of the Anasazi is now managing Las Palomas, a wonderful bed and breakfast inn three blocks from the plaza. Husband Richard and I stayed there on our last visit, and I was surprised to learn that owner Neil Rosenshein is a renowned tenor – last seen in San Diego as the Prince in *Rusalka* during San Diego Opera's 1995 season.

Las Palomas
courtyard

Rosenshein bought the property the summer he sang *Pinkerton* in Santa Fe

Opera's *Butterfly*. "I had the second act off, and I used the time to sketch out the changes I wanted to make," he told me. "I could see that the place had potential."

He went on to perform at the Metropolitan Opera, Chicago's Lyric Opera, and every major opera house in the U. S., as well as Covent Garden, Paris Opera, Australian Opera, and many others. However, after he met and married the love of his life ("she was in charge of artist relations at Houston Grand Opera and took her job seriously," the raconteur quips) life on the road had less appeal. While he continues to teach at Manhattan School of Music, his last singing performance was at Carnegie Hall in 2004.

Today, Rosenshein is busy making improvements to Las Palomas. On "the Pueblo side" of San Francisco Street, 20 adobe casitas date from 1880 and feature wood-burning kivas (fireplaces) and historic artifacts. Unit 8 has a religious figure in a glass-covered niche over the bed – so precious that Santa Fe authorities told Rosenshein if he wants



to move it, he has to move the whole wall. My favorite casita – number 4 – has a skylight over the king bed and a walk-in closet. The grounds include fountains, a hot tub, and a sauna.

Three units on the Territorial side of the quiet, residential street date from 1897, and another 16 were recently completed in the same style. Here, the brick walkways, gas lightposts, and outdoor hearth create quintessential old Santa Fe ambience.



"After living in hotels for so many years, I'm determined to make this place feel like home," Rosenshein told me.

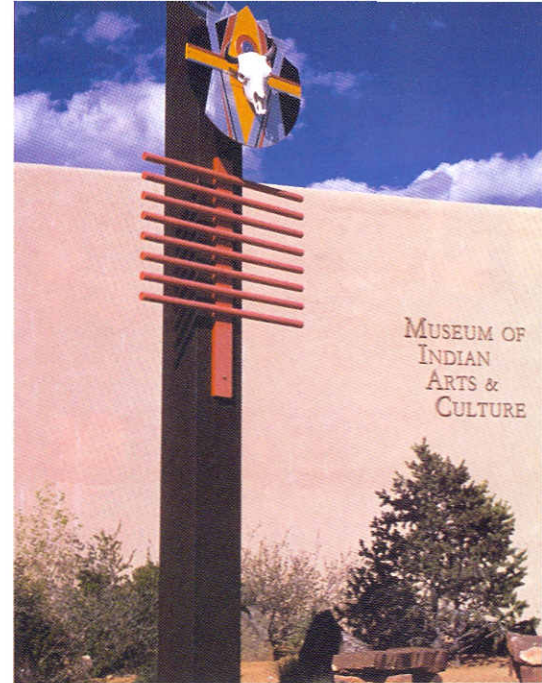
And he has succeeded. We stayed on the Territorial side, where every casita has a kitchenette furnished with colorful pottery dishes. Spacious living rooms have leather sofas, and beds feature high-quality linens and comforters. During our May stay, an open verandah had just been enclosed and converted to a charming breakfast room. The large morning buffet includes Mickey Mouse waffles for young guests. Nearby, the children's garden includes a tepee Rosenshein made, a rocking horse, and a large tree full of birdhouses.

From Las Palomas, it's just a short walk to the Georgia O'Keeffe Museum. Knowing this is Santa Fe's top attraction, I had huge expectations – and they were all exceeded. The galleries here are a manageable size and well lit. Near the entrance, an excellent 12-minute film on the artist's life runs in a small theater. It helped me put O'Keeffe's work in context and made it more meaningful.

The current exhibit, *Moments in Modernism, Georgia O'Keeffe and Andy Warhol: Flowers of Distinction*, brings together about 40 paintings of flowers by the two popular artists. I listened to the audio guide as I walked through the exhibit and, along with quotations from O'Keeffe on the gallery walls, felt that "the loner in the desert" herself was by my side telling me about her work. *Flowers of Distinction* runs through January 8, 2006 and is reason enough to plan a trip to Santa Fe. Her large, sensual blossoms provide a dramatic contrast to Warhol's loud and often unnatural ones.

Next to the museum, the O'Keeffe Café has won the Wine Spectator Award of Excellence two years in a row. Their wine bar is open 3-5:30pm, and lunch and dinner are served daily. In addition to a la carte selections, executive chef Tony Lewis offers a prix fixe tasting menu with and without wine pairings.

After lunch we drove up to Museum Hill to check out the Charles Loloma exhibit at the Wheelwright Museum of the American Indian. Featuring more than



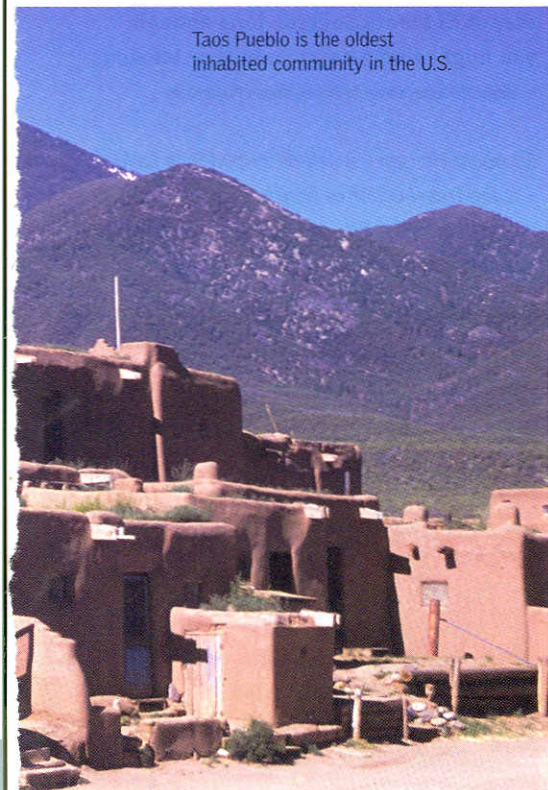
400 examples of pottery and jewelry, the Wheelwright exhibition covers the breadth of the artist's work from 1940 to 1988. If this interests you, don't tarry. The Loloma exhibit closes on October 23.

Nearby, I really enjoyed *Here, Now & Always* at the Museum of Indian Arts & Culture. After several hours walking from gallery to gallery, I felt like I'd just taken a course in Native American culture. I especially liked the videos where Southwestern natives told stories and helped me appreciate the exhibits. ▶

Museum of Indian Arts and Culture, Santa Fe

El Morro, Sagrado, Living Machi

Taos Pueblo is the oldest inhabited community in the U.S.





El Monte Sagrado

◀ Leaving Museum Hill, we followed a trail of Sotheby's open house signs through a very nice residential area with views of Santa Fe. The signs led to a 7,000-square-foot home on seven acres. We couldn't resist a closer look and were surprised to find that it was listed for only \$3.9 million. This was not Rancho Santa Fe.

A surprise of another type greeted us upon arrival in Taos. After checking in at El Monte Sagrado, we noticed a lush lawn, waterfalls, and tropical plants throughout the resort. Bamboo and begonias in this arid climate? It just didn't compute.

Turns out that owner Tom Worrell is on a mission to solve the world's water shortage. To meet this challenge, he's developed a Living Machine for recycling water and El Monte Sagrado is his living brochure. His system employs bacteria, fish, plants, and even snails to clean water that would otherwise be wasted.

"All the water used for irrigation, to fill the ponds, and create waterfalls is recycled," a member of the staff assured me. "This resort is a living laboratory, a model for ecologically sound development that Tom hopes will one day provide third-world countries with the

water they need."

I also learned that at El Monte Sagrado pools are chlorine free, energy comes from solar panels, most of the resort is heated and cooled geo-thermally, plastic is purified so it can be re-used, and kitchen scraps are composted for the garden. "Elegance off the grid," was another staff member's description.

The resort's 35 rooms represent the owner's desire to create a healthy global community. Two-bedroom suites named "China," "Morocco," "Spain," and so on, come with authentic decor. Likewise, one-bedroom casitas ("Tibet," "Bali"), grande casitas ("Egypt"), and spa casitas ("Caribbean"). Also included in the room count – 18 one-bedroom Native American junior suites.

I had to admit it was beautiful – the Sacred Circle lawn, babbling streams, adobe casitas – but the extravagant use of this much water in an arid environment continued to bug me – right up until my first appointment in the Living Spa.

Ah, the spa. Director Amy McDonald (recently lured from Tucson's Miraval) believes that the spa should be "a

healthful, blessed environment," and that their all-natural approach "is reflected in the quality of guests' experiences."

I can't argue with that. My High-Desert Body Treatment started with exfoliation using a mixture of wild-crafted sage, aromatic lavender flowers, Zuni salts, and Native American blue corn. Then I was covered in a mud consisting of white ash from mountains near Albuquerque and red clay from a Navajo reservation. By the time the last step – a great massage with a hydrating sage lotion – was completed, I somehow felt both relaxed and invigorated.

McDonald wants guests to have "life-changing experiences" in her spa and – to this end – new spaces and facilities were being added when we were there. In addition to a full range of massages, body therapies, and treatments, she offers energy work and life-style consultations. Her resource staff includes an OB-GYN, a midwife, an RN, a pet communicator, an Egyptian anointer, an intuitive, and a psychologist.

With all these services, it seems if you stay at El Monte Sagrado long enough you might find a new you in New Mexico.

— Elizabeth Hansen, photos by Adams/Hansen Photography

Elizabeth Hansen – a self-described "spa junkie" – is the travel editor of Ranch & Coast. When not traveling, she lives in La Jolla with her husband, photographer Richard Adams.

If You Go

This year's Santa Fe Opera season includes *Turandot*, Lucio Silla, Peter Grimes, *Barber of Seville*, and *Ainadamar*. (800/280-4654, www.santafeopera.com)

For details on the Indian Market call 505/983-5222 or go to www.swaia.org. Make reservations at the Inn of the Anasazi at www.innoftheanasazi.com, at Las Palomas at www.laspalomas.com, and at El Monte Sagrado Living Resort and Spa at www.elmontesagrado.com.