



Escape Route

Warm yourself this winter at a sacred spa in New Mexico or a luxury dude ranch in Arizona.

BY LISA WATERMAN GRAY

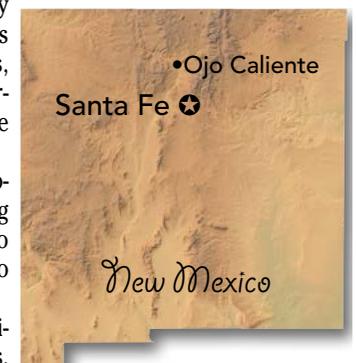
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We float effortlessly in a soda-infused (sodium) hot springs pool, its water said to improve digestion. Roughly hewn rock walls and a low ceiling enclose the silent space. In an iron pool, 109-degree water, considered beneficial for the blood, engulfs us while hundreds of smooth pebbles massage our toes. After dark, spotlights create a magical experience while illuminating cliffs beside our warm private pool. Thousands of bright stars decorate the sky.

This is Ojo Caliente Mineral Springs Resort & Spa in rural northern New Mexico that's about an hour north of Santa Fe. It's a beautiful spot for an escape from wintry Midwestern precipitation and chill. This place has received many kudos for its spa services and hot springs. Profuse wildflowers, tall rock walls, and meticulously maintained gardens create a natural beauty. Whispering is strongly encouraged in Ojo's springs and spa areas to provide visitors with a quiet and relaxing experience.

For nearly 3,000 years, Pueblo Indians have believed the four geothermal, sulfur-free mineral springs clustered here possessed healing powers. Spaniards found the springs in the 1500s, but it was Antonio Joseph, the first New Mexico territorial representative to Congress, who opened the first Ojo Caliente Mineral Springs resort in 1868.

Today, Ojo draws visitors from across the globe who wish to experience these warm therapeutic waters. Twelve pools offer soothing soaks, varying in degrees from 80 to more than 100, each offering its own specialty to bathers. The lithia spring pool has been credited with improved digestion and reduced



Left: A soak in iron-infused mineral water at Ojo Caliente Mineral Springs Resort & Spa is said to benefit one's blood and immune system. Ojo Spa Resorts

Right: Take a dip in the inviting outdoor pool at Tanque Verde Ranch.

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Below: Try a prickly pear margarita at the ranch's Dog House Saloon.

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Below right: Relax in cozy accommodations at Ojo Caliente Mineral Springs Resort. Ojo Spa Resorts



depression. Iron and arsenic mineral water reputedly benefits the blood and immune system, as well as decreasing arthritis pain and stomach ulcers while improving skin conditions.

A nearby mud bath pulls toxins from the skin. Guests slather their bodies with liquid pale brown mud before sitting in the sun to bake dry. An adjacent pool or outdoor shower removes the caked-on covering.

BEYOND BATHING

In addition to the therapeutic waters, the resort spa tempts guests with its Native American-inspired treatments. Available after a brief pool soak, the Milagro Relaxation Wrap begins when you enter a darkened room where soft music plays. A bath attendant covers your eyes, wraps you in a thin cotton blanket and then swaddles you with a wool blanket. Designed to enhance detoxification, the 25-minute wrap relaxes many visitors (although some people may feel slightly claustrophobic).

For a different Ojo experience, lace up your sturdy shoes and fill your water bottle before hitting the hiking and biking trails.

Hike to the hilltop and find ancient Posi Pueblo ruins, as well as petroglyphs and abandoned mica mines.

SLEEP, DINE, SHOP

Guests have many lodging choices here. Listed on the National Register of Historic Places, Ojo's renovated 1916 TV-free hotel rooms feature half baths. Hotel guests continue the longstanding tradition of showering in the bathhouses, which may not suit some overnight guests.

Cozy cottages feature TVs and refrigerators plus lovely private front porches and baths; or enjoy a private outdoor soaking tub when you book a luxurious suite. Several spacious private homes featuring mul-

tipled bedrooms, baths, and kitchens accommodate up to a dozen people. In addition, the RV camping area offers showers and toilets, as well as accessible sinks.

When hunger strikes, savor eclectic global and local cuisine, plus vegetarian and spa-inspired dishes, at the quaint adobe-walled Artesian Restaurant. A massive gift shop sells CDs featuring Native American flute music, natural body care products, waffle-weave robes, and sleek swim suits.

Although winter temperatures in this area range from the upper 20s to upper 40s, there's minimal precipitation to deal with — and Ojo's hot springs will definitely ease the chill.



THE NEW WEST

If you're traveling with children, Tucson's Tanque Verde Ranch (AAA Four Diamonds) is just the spot to warm up in winter while indulging your inner cowpoke. Wide paths wind between adobe buildings with rustic log porch posts amid boulder-sized yucca plants and barrel cacti.

Part dude ranch and part luxury resort, Tanque Verde borders the Saguaro National Park and Coronado National Forest. Established in 1868, the property is listed among Historic Hotels of America and is one of the country's oldest dude ranches.

Take a morning trail ride through Saguaro National Park for dusky mountain views along rocky, narrow trails flanked by a plethora of cacti. At the midpoint, sumptuous mountaintop breakfasts may include blueberry pancakes, hash browns, and cheesy ranch eggs with chilies, plus sausage and fresh biscuits.

More than 150 horses accommodate all levels of riding experience, including intermediate and loping testing and riding. Guests may also watch a "whisperer" as she calms skittish horses or help to herd stubborn calves into pens while on horseback. It's not as easy as it looks.

For more active fun, grab a mountain bike to explore single-track trails on this 640-acre ranch, or go fishing or cool off in the deep blue outdoor pool that's surrounded by palms and cacti; there's also a spacious indoor pool. Book a massage in the spa to work out the kinks after trail rides.

Four- to 12-year-olds can attend children's activities, while adults enjoy tennis, yoga, and wellness activities.

In addition to Southwestern-inspired dining room fare, guests may enjoy Mexican fiesta dinners and outdoor barbecues served with a side of Western music, cowboy tales, and rope tricks. Adults can sip refreshing beverages in the Dog House Saloon, where leather-backed bar chairs and servers dressed in Western garb create an old-school ambiance.

Lodging options abound. Spacious salons (think standard room) offer two queen beds and classic Southwestern surroundings. Mexican blankets and hand-painted bathroom tiles also decorate the space. Beyond the patio door are tall saguaro cacti and mountain views. Larger casitas (suites) also are available.

The all-inclusive rate package features three daily meals, cowpoke cookouts with live entertainment, guided hikes through rugged canyons, or sunrise nature walks, and plenty of time on horseback. A la carte pricing is also available.

Whether you absorb Ojo's therapeutic warm waters amid New Mexico's high desert or book a family escape to a Western-style Arizona resort, remember to remove your watch, turn off your phone, and prepare for a one-of-a-kind getaway. •

Lisa Waterman Gray is a contributor from Overland Park, Kan.

BEFORE YOU GO

Ojo Caliente is located about two hours northeast of Albuquerque's airport. The resort is at 50 Los Banos Drive, Ojo Caliente, N.M. A sister resort spa, Sunrise Springs, is in Santa Fe, about an hour south of Ojo Caliente. For more information, call (888) 939-0007 or visit ojospa.com.

Tanque Verde Ranch, 14301 E. Speedway Blvd., is about 23 miles east of Tucson's airport. For more information, call (866) 413-3833 or visit tanqueverde.com.

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