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Southwest weekend

Inside New Mexico's front-row seats to spring » A riverside getaway for you and your pooch » 3 restaurants you don't want to miss »

Outdoor day trip Albuquerque

Why go now: The river's swollen, the cottonwoods are blazing green—what better time for a spring adventure? **High-water mark:** This time of year, the middle Rio Grande rises by up to 3 feet, and now there's finally a way to get on it (see left). **Prefer to pedal?** Do it along the easy Paseo del Bosque (*trail info at cabq.gov; bike rentals at thebike smithllc.com*), a 16-mile paved path that hugs the cottonwood forest, where you might spot a roadrunner. **Prescription to refuel:** The spicy green-chile stew served with just-made tortillas at Duran Central Pharmacy (\$; closed Sun; 1815 Central Ave. N.W.; 505/247-4141), an Old Town diner. **Did you know?** The Sandia Mountains, which turn pink and green at sunset, are named after the Spanish word for "watermelon." **Vintage vino:** Spanish missionaries cultivated grapes here 140 years before California's first vines were planted, making New Mexico the country's oldest wine-producing region. **Try a glass:** At the Albuquerque Wine Festival (*May 28–30; \$15; Balloon Fiesta Park; abqwinefestival.com*), 25 local winemakers ply you with their best stuff.

1. Have a run at the Rio Grande

Newcomer **Quiet Waters Paddling Adventures** is making noise with its guided kayak and canoe tours. Launching north of town, your small flotilla navigates 15 scenic miles straight into Albuquerque. These are class I waters—nothing rapid about them—so paddlers can relax and enjoy the parade of old-growth cottonwoods, red desert vistas, and songbirds that provide the soundtrack for the one- to five-hour journey.

From \$45; quietwaterspaddling.com

BY TED ALAN STEDMAN

PHOTOGRAPHS BY ANDREA GÓMEZ ROMERO

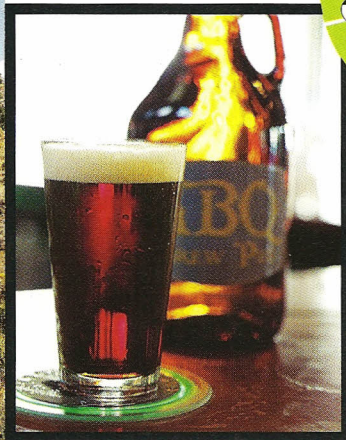
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Southwest Day trip



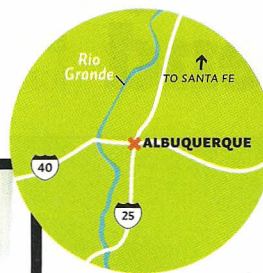
2. New Mexico's ghost towns

To get a glimpse of the state's most surreal landscapes, you need to hook up with the right guide. **New Mexico Jeep Tours** packs trekkers into four-wheel-drives and zips them 25 minutes north—to private lands behind the Sandia Mountains—for a romp through ancient Puebloan ruins, petroglyphs, and crumbling pioneer settlements. Keep your eyes peeled since tours frequently happen upon bands of wild horses. *From \$85 for three hours; nmjeeptours.com*



3. Pub grub, fiery beer

Opened last year in the busy Uptown District east of downtown, **ABQ Brew Pub** is earning street cred with its handcrafted beers and spiffed-up grub, like black mussels in a court bouillon of tomatoes, celery, and Spanish onion. Our favorite food-beer pairing: the fire-roasted pepper crostini chased with a pint of green chile-infused Pancho Verde. *\$\$; 6601 Uptown Blvd. N.E.; 505/884-1116.*



Getting there

Albuquerque sits at the intersection of I-25 and I-40, about 60 miles southwest of Santa Fe.



4. Your million-dollar view

It took a team of Swiss engineers two years to build the **Sandia Peak Tramway** along the rugged western face of the Sandia Mountains, 15 minutes east of town. As you glide 2.7 miles over deep canyons and granite spires on your way to the 10,378-foot peak—with views all the way to Santa Fe—be sure to thank them for the time. *\$20 round-trip; sandiapeak.com*



3 more reasons to get outside

» It would take weeks to see all the images chiseled into **Petroglyph National Monument**. Try the manageable Rinconada Canyon Trail, where 200 to 300 petroglyphs are visible amid volcanic rock and sand dunes. *Unser Blvd. N.W. at Western Trail; nps.gov/petr*

» To elevate your sightseeing, book a slot with **Rainbow Ryders**, one of the area's top ballooning outfitters. Depending on the wind, you'll soar to 3,000 feet and dip low enough to graze the Rio Grande. Breakfast and bubbly included. *From \$150; rainbowryders.com*

» North of Old Town, **Rio Grande Nature Center State Park** accesses 270 acres of riverside forest—ponds, meadows, and 100-year-old cottonwoods. Bring binocs: It's a migratory flyway for sandhill cranes and Canada geese. *\$3 per vehicle; 2901 Candelaria Rd. N.W.; nmparks.com*

Make it a weekend

Less than a year old, **Hotel Parq Central** brings a burst of sparkle to the up-and-coming EDo neighborhood, east of downtown. The high-ceilinged, desert-toned rooms are comfy, but if you want to double your space, opt for one of the three cottages, equipped with fireplaces and walk-out patios overlooking a perky garden of irises and lavender. *From \$160; hotelparqcentral.com*



SHARE YOUR WEEKEND FINDS. Favorite tram rides? Email your suggestions to the weekend guide editor at wgeditor@sunset.com