

See all Travel



Inside Taos Pueblo, the tiny American town that's hardly changed in 1,000 years

Enigmatic and insulated, the culture of this little New Mexico community has long been misunderstood – until now

By Kate Eshelby

25 October 2023 • 2:00pm



Ad



Evanger's Classics Goin' Fishin' Can oz, case of 12

\$34.35 Evanger's Classic Recipes Goin' Fish
12.5...

Chewy.com

Standing in front of the Sangre de Cristo mountains, deep within the state of New Mexico, I watched as dough boules were placed into an outdoor oven, dome-shaped, like an earthen beehive. Nearby, the Red Willow Creek shot green into this high desert as it wove through the Native American pueblo of Taos, where lines of wooden racks for drying corn stood against tiers of caramel-gold adobe houses, which rose like giant steps.

Though “pueblo” is the Spanish word for village, it was used by the conquistadors – who arrived in America’s southwest in the 1500s – to denote New Mexico’s indigenous communities, who subsequently came to be known by some as “Puebloans”. Today, New Mexico is home to America’s fourth largest number of indigenous people, with 19 pueblos, and despite history’s cruelties, their culture is still very much alive.



Vistors can stay in the nearby Earthships, off-the-grid homes which can be rented by the night | CREDIT: Kate Eshelby

It was this which had drawn me to Taos Pueblo – called Tuah-Tah (“the place”) in its residents’ native language, Tiwa – which has been home to the Red Willow people for more than a thousand years, recognised as one of North America’s oldest continuously inhabited communities and a Unesco World Heritage site.

Set in the state’s north – 150 miles from Albuquerque and 45 from the Colorado border, surrounded by miles of wide, open horizons and blusher-pink hills, blue-silver sagebrush and red-and-white mesas rearing out of the plains – to reach the pueblo, you must cross a gigantic gash in the earth: the 30-mile-wide Rio Grande Gorge, part of the Rio Grande Rift, a primeval, volcanic canyon through which the Rio Grande River tumbles.

Choosing to remain without electricity or running water, still governed by traditional beliefs and the laws of nature, I was eager to understand how such a place lives in harmony with the modern world around it.



The culture of New Mexico's indigenous is still very much alive in the pueblos | CREDIT: Alamy Stock Photo

I was not the first to be drawn here. After the conquistadors, who came in search of the fabled cities of gold (which turned out to be the mica minerals which still shimmer in the adobe) came filmmakers (scenes of cult films, such as *Easy Rider*, were filmed here) and artists, like Georgia O'Keefe, who painted the town's architecture.

I, however, had come to Taos Pueblo to do a bread-making course – which at first might seem an odd reason to travel from the UK to a community in the northern reaches of New Mexico. But bread, it seems, is a fitting introduction: baked as it is in traditional hornos ahead of

the pueblo's many feast days, the biggest of which – despite honouring a patron saint imposed by Spanish missionaries – is San Geronimo Day on September 30, when black-and-white striped, sacred clowns appear, and the community joins to break bread.



Bread in Taos is baked in traditional horno ovens ahead of the pueblo's many feast days | CREDIT: Kate Eshelby

Despite the influences of Catholicism, the indigenous peoples of Taos Pueblo also keep strong ties with their native religion, and all their dances, songs and prayers honour nature, which remains a guiding force in everyday life.

When the boules had risen, we ate great hunks of the soft, warm bread, dripping in butter, looking across the dusty plaza towards the stark geometry of this ancient place. Afterwards, 28-year-old local guide Jaylen took me for a walk around town.

“Previously we had no doors or windows,” she explained as we passed a series of long, wooden ladders leading up the varying levels of the buildings like Escher’s endless staircases. “Instead, we entered our rooms from the roof, using these. And instead of running water, we haul the water from the river with buckets.”



San Geronimo Church is at the heart of the community | CREDIT: Alamy Stock Photo

Certain areas of the pueblo are cordoned off, where the ceremonial chambers, known as kivas, lie hidden under the ground. Much about the pueblos remains enigmatic, protected from the commodification that's befallen many similar sites. "Everything here is done by ceremony," said Jaylen. "Some are open to outsiders, but the sacred ones are not."

We came into a plaza, from which various narrow alleyways radiated, dotted with small shops selling silver jewellery set with turquoise, elk and buffalo hide drums, and colourful moccasins. I looked out at the glistening adobe houses and the mountains beyond, and

hoped very much that Taos Pueblo would be here, just as it is now, for another thousand years.

Advertisement

Essentials

The Phoenix has rooms from £345 per night, sleeping four.

British Airways flies from London to Denver from £600 return, from which it is a five-hour drive to Taos. Guided tours of Taos pueblo can be arranged with Heritage Inspirations from £250 for the horno baking day. For more information visit taospueblo.com.

This article has been edited to correct an error in a previous image caption.

Have you visited Taos Pueblo? Please share your experience in the comments section below

From The US Editor Newsletter

Sign up for insight and opinion to help you make sense of the changing geopolitical landscape



Sign up

Related Topics

North America



The Telegraph values your comments but kindly requests all posts are on topic, constructive and respectful. Please review our [commenting policy](#).

Show comments

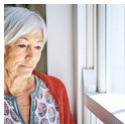
More stories



Le Creuset is in trouble. Aga sales have slumped. Is the middle-class kitchen dead?



BBC radio star struggles with ‘too many white colleagues’



‘My brother has left me a house, but I don’t want it’



Shane MacGowan, frontman of the Pogues, dies aged 65



Former Labour chancellor Alistair Darling dies aged 70



Academy head in tears over pupil violence at his school



Best hotels in New York

Explore hotels that have been tried, tested and rated by our experts

[View All](#)

More from the United States



A \$200,000 Adele ticket symbolises everything that's wrong with Vegas today

By Robert Jackman

10 Nov 2023, 9:30pm



Relief for skiers as resorts see bumper snowfall – and there’s more on the way

By Patrick Thorne

10 Nov 2023, 11:00am



How Americans became the world’s most risk-averse travellers

By David Farley

2 Nov 2023, 8:30pm



The 10 best ski resorts for guaranteed snow

By Telegraph Ski

2 Nov 2023, 5:14pm



Why Jersey Shore is the new Hamptons

By Jo Fernandez

1 Nov 2023, 5:00pm



The magical pull of Sedona, where the LA set go looking for answers to life’s deep questions

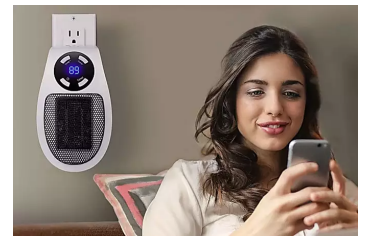
By Adam Bloodworth

29 Oct 2023, 12:00pm



Symptoms of Psoriasis (Some Signs May Surprise You)

Sponsored - bestsearches.net



Wayfair Sheard Seat Belt Compatible Trav...

Sponsored - Wayfair

Why Has This Heater Been Selling Out...

Sponsored - todaysdailygadg...



A LEGO Fest Is Coming To Austin, Fun For Al...

Sponsored - Awesome Famil...



Gift Trends In 2023 May Surprise You

Sponsored - orpenny.com

More from The Telegraph



Obliterated, review: brainless teenage-boy's fantasy nonsense is a new low for Netflix



Oil price climbs as Saudi-led cartel agrees to cut production - latest updates



Homophobic remarks made about me at council meeting, alleges three-times sex change lawyer



UK weather live: Schools closed as snow hits south of England



BBC boss questions why Today show didn't feature Newsnight exclusive



In its hubris, China is making the mistake that has doomed empires

Visit the US



Best hotels in Boston

Explore hotels that have been tried, tested and rated by our experts

[View all](#)



Best hotels in Miami

Explore hotels that have been tried, tested and rated by our experts

[View all](#)



Best hotels in Chicago

Explore hotels that have been tried, tested and rated by our experts

[View all](#)

Voucher Codes >

The latest offers and discount codes from popular brands on Telegraph Voucher Codes



[Travelodge discount codes](#)

easyJet

[easyjet discount codes](#)



**National
Trust**

[National Trust discount codes](#)



[TUI discount codes](#)



[Hotels.com discount codes](#)



[Crystal Ski promo codes](#)

Follow us on:



[Help Centre](#)

[About us](#)

[Telegraph Extra](#)

[Reader Prints](#)

[Branded Content](#)

[Syndication and Commissioning](#)

[Guidelines](#)

[NEW Privacy Policy](#)

[Terms and Conditions](#)

[Advertising Terms](#)

[Fantasy Sport](#)

[UK Voucher Codes](#)

[Betting Offers](#)

[Modern Slavery](#)

[Tax Strategy](#)

[Broadband and Mobile Deals](#)

[Wine Cellar](#)

[The Chelsea Magazine Company](#)

[Newsletters](#)

[Do Not Sell](#)

[About Ads](#)