

TRAVEL

Travel the state and beyond

AMERICAN WEST

Ghosts and the Mariachis

Mexican heritage is alive in Mesilla

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SPECIAL TO INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA

The magic of the land has already found you on the open road when the Camino Real, or the Royal Road, meets the American West. It is the glimmer of a sign that catches your eye and feeling of inspiration as the locals tell their stories. Somewhere in a centuries old building and down the hall from the stairwell the hair on your neck may stand up as you become tuned into realms long forgotten, but not gone. During a journey through the old, old west some of the most infamous unsolved mysteries lay in wait to be recounted. As you see the Rabbit Ears and pass the Weeping Wall on the way to Hermits Cave, score one more mysterious point for the Land of Enchantment.

Summoned by festival and mariachi during Dias de los Muertos, or Days of the Dead, the history of the Mexican heritage is alive in Mesilla, New Mexico. Held annually in the local graveyards and cemeteries, the past is rolling over into a new season of remembrance to be celebrated by any who make an appearance. Dona Ana County is filled with incredible wild

lands and is loved for its natural wonders, such as the peaks of the Organ Needles and the southwestern Chihuahuan Desert.

Fights and fandangoes, sheriffs and villains, no place was safe from a strange mix of prosperity and danger or joy and fear that is now legend and myth. It is said that outside the towns and near the Dripping Springs, locally known as the Weeping Wall; is where the 'spirit of the earth' lives. Romantic, and in Spanish, the area was known for 'duende: elf, imp or troll.' In an area of

such unbridled beauty, no story would complete without them, nor would it be complete without mention of one of New Mexico's most notorious unsolved murders.

Past a sheer rock wall seeping water and simply known as, Dripping Springs, the stories vary about the life and times of, El Ermitano, Giovanni Maria Agostini, known in his time as, 'the Hermit' and who died from mysterious circumstances, never to be solved. After Garcia led a group to the Organ Mountains to find the Hermit lying face down on his crucifix with a knife in his back, and wearing a penitential "metal girdle full of spikes." One of the many murders in the late 1800's in Dona Ana County.

By the 1870's Mesilla was in her glory, and with several stores, lawyers and doctors the hustle and bustle of Mesilla not only attracted businessmen and commerce, it also attracted outlaws such as the Billy the Kid. It was in Mesilla that Billy was tried and sentenced to death by hanging in 1881. Today, the ghosts of Mesilla are only a flash in a gold pan compared to all the activities in the towns surrounding the nearest major city, Las Cruces.

Las Cruces continues to intrigue as The Las Cruces Art

and Cultural District, recently received an international award from the Creative Tourism Network. Recognized by destinations worldwide that foster a new generation of tourism, characterized by active participation of tourists in artistic and creative activities. Take part in an active cultural guided Heritage Inspirations tour to the newest U.S. National Parks, the glistening gypsum dunes for a full moon White Sands Retreat, yoga, hike and soak. Venture into a Pioneers of the Past and Fron-



La Cueva Loop Trail is an approximate three mile loop trail features beautiful wild flowers, primarily used for hiking, walking, nature trips and bird watching. The Dripping Springs Natural Area is located east of Las Cruces, on the west side of the Organ Mountains. [Stacey Lane/Special to Independent Newsmedia]



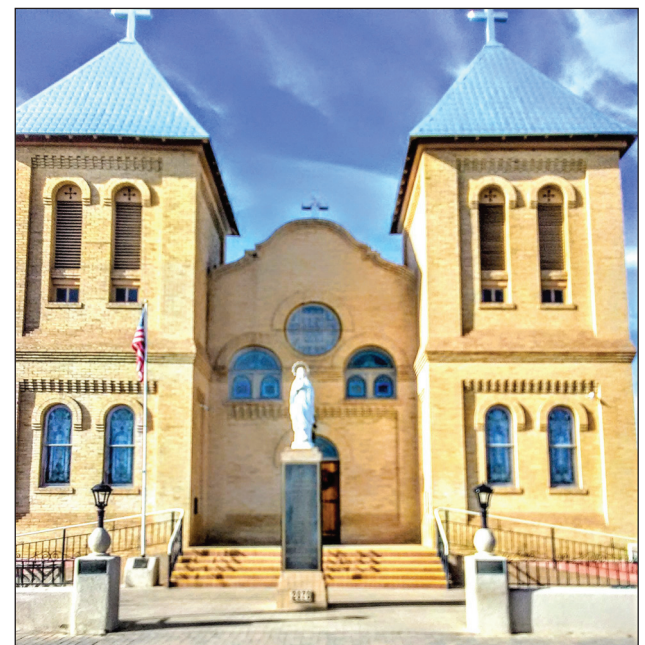
Like a mirage, dazzling white sands shimmer in the tucked-away Tularosa Basin in southern New Mexico. Tatum Lane Youngjohn taps into mindfulness and retreat mode centered in the wave-like dunes of rare gypsum sand at White Sands National Monument. [Stacey Lane/Special to Independent Newsmedia]

tiers of the Future: Science and Space as New Mexico is home to a great many research and development sites to name a few. Heritage Inspirations goes beyond the ordinary tourist route transcending traditional boundaries

Las Cruces' Mexican heritage is highlighted by the sounds of mariachi music year-round, singing "Las Mananitas" at birthdays and dancing at weddings to "La Marcha." Local mariachi legend, 90-year-old icon, Johnny

Florez, and his partner Aguirre light up the downtown Main Street on Sundays at the Mesilla Plaza.

In your search for beauty with the strange and your quest for the queer, the ghosts and the mariachi may find you. When it is time for you to rest and the White Sands are in the rearview, Hotel Encanto de Las Cruces offers a unique hotel reflective of the Spanish and Mexican Colonial history. After exploring the beautiful area,



The Basilica of San Albino is a Roman Catholic Church that overlooks the Mesilla Plaza. Established in 1852, the church is a beautiful place, where people gather, work together in the community and love one another. [Stacey Lane/Special to Independent Newsmedia]

the hotel is filled with an ambiance reflective of Mexican Colonial history and tradition. Enjoy beautiful year-round swimming or soak in the outdoor jetted hot tub. The Hotel Encanto de Las Cruces

arched doorways, tile floors and earthy color palette, with exquisite dining options is the perfect way to cool off and wind down after a big day in the desert or a fascinating tour.