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1001
Nights
in the Land
of Enchantment



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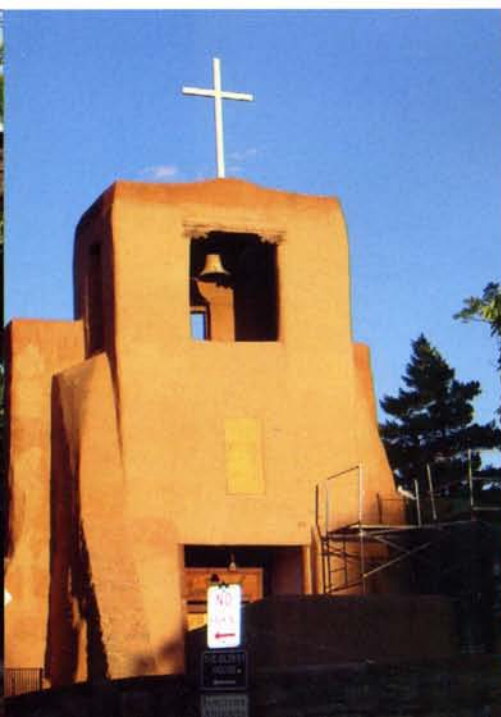
Mysterious, captivating, visceral, a feast for the senses, the Inn of the Five Graces embodies the artistic style and spirit of Santa Fe. It is no wonder this area of New Mexico has captured the hearts and minds of travelers, writers and artists for hundreds of years.

We began our journey late in the evening, adding to the glamour and transported ourselves into an immersion of the East meets West aesthetic at the Inn of the Five Graces. More like a temple of luxury in a fantasy land where fabrics and woods tell tales of far off adventures, echoing the past in their designs; this Inn is like no other. The Inn of the Five Graces is the brainchild of Ira and Sylvia Seret and expertly run and managed by their son Sharif. Ira is well known in certain circles, for his discovery of the Afghan coats, uber popular in the 1970's. These gorgeous coats originated in a small Afghanistan town of Istalif, high in the mountains north of Kabul. The likes of Jimi Hendrix and the Beatles were some of the ultimate end users of these beauties thus propelling the Serets to international style fame. This was a jumping point for additional fashion and interior design trends ...predominantly the introduction of the Dhurrie carpet, rarer than Kilim carpets, to the US market. The Serets are now instrumental in the redevelopment of the town market in Istalif, that was unfortunately destroyed in the ongoing conflict in Afghanistan. This has created a resurgence in the village itself, culminating in the introduction of the pottery to the US during the Santa Fe International Folk Art Market. The Seret's also launched a charitable organization, the Jindag Foundation, to feed and care for Tibetan Monks and nuns in exile in India in 2001.

The collections are extraordinary, as is the Inn, a true jewel in a town of art and style. I had my eye on a door from a Tibetan monastery that was destroyed and never replaced. The Seret and Sons showroom has a massive collection of these doors as well as myriads of furnishings, architectural antiques, rugs and textiles from Central Asia..gabbeks, dhurries, kazaks, and kilims. It was very hard to pry ourselves away from the enchanting suite, however, the art of Santa Fe beckoned us and we followed our agenda down Canyon Road to the art galleries and shops.

After a arduous day of sightseeing, we aimed for the famous Pink Adobe, within very close proximity to the Inn. It is a culinary treat with a nod to Southwestern fine dining. A fixture in the area since 1944, I was told to try the Wild Salmon with Green and Red Chile...superb. The Rack of lamb is excellent as well. Another great choice is the new blood, Coyote Café. We were blown away with the delicate treatment of the usual fare...try the Coyote Caesar salad-Eric's Futomaki Twist, a reconstructed salad in sushi form. Also notable was the Fiery Hot and Sweet Mexican White Prawns..enough for two people. These folks like their dining on the hot side...

No trip to the area is complete without a drive on the "High Road" to Taos. This ancient path took us through the town of Chimayo, and further through the high mountains of Carson National Forest..yes, named after the infamous Kit Carson. Make sure to stop and visit the oldest inhabited Pueblo in Taos for a true sense of American Indian culture to this day, still steeped in history of the land.



The town of Taos and Taos Ski Valley are two separate entities, rather far from each other, separated by switchbacks and cool mountain air. Located at 9500 feet, we landed in Taos Ski Valley at the lovely new Edelweiss Lodge and Spa. Our gorgeous 2 bedroom, 2 bath apartment was so relaxing and expertly decorated in High Mountain, southwest style. Obviously the address in Taos Ski Valley, the staff at the Edelweiss could not be more professional and caring. A full service resort, the Edelweiss has a complete fitness area as well as onsite dining and a well furnished game room. After a rejuvenating massage in the spa, we headed 7 minutes up a dirt road, to the Bavarian for a quick bite. This is not your Florida road...keep this in mind when making dinner plans...unless of course you are used to driving down a steep dirt road in the inky blackness of the Taos night.

Our need for adventure was calling, so we headed to the Rio Grande Stables a quick walk from the Edelweiss for a 3 hour ride up to 13,000 feet. Graciously and expertly hosted by Cowboy Bob, we traversed a hand carved trail straight up the mountain. Ordinarily, I would have been rather frightened and anxiety ridden as this trail was very steep and very narrow. However, Bob was so professional and reassuring that I just trusted his expertise and calmness. This was probably due to the fact that not only does he regal the adventure tourists such as ourselves with these rides, he also does some very important search and rescue work. He recently rescued a 72 year old man who had been hiking alone and became fatigued and disoriented and was essentially lost. He and his horses rode up the mountains at night and rescued this man, who is doing

fine, as far as we know. Now, no one is commenting on why on earth a person would do something like this, but we are all grateful that there are people like Bob available to save our wandering and rather impetuous souls.

No trip is ever complete and there is never enough time to drink in the atmosphere of a place such as Santa Fe or Taos. Our time was limited, so we chose a breathtaking hike to the Rio Grande River Gorge. Stunning beyond imagination, this gorge is a singular monument to the effects of erosion and the beauty of our planet.

A piece of your soul is always left in the desert...it is never enough to just visit. As Georgia O'Keefe, one of Santa Fe's most famous inhabitants said, "My life should be judged on what I have accomplished and where I have travelled," a wisdom that many of us can live by. —BY SUSAN SHORT

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