

ROAD TRIP

Girlfriend Getaway

New Mexico

ROAD TRIP! TWO OF BT'S EDITORS MOTORED THROUGH THE MOUNTAINS FROM CLOUDCROFT TO TAOS, MIXING WILD OUTDOOR ADVENTURES WITH SPICY LOCAL CUISINE, AN AFFORDABLE SPA VISIT, AND MUST-SEE HISTORICAL SITES. *By Jamie Beckman*

Street art in front of the IAIA Museum of Contemporary Native Art in Santa Fe—just one highlight of a much-anticipated road trip with BT photo editor Whitney Tressel (right).

PHOTOGRAPHS BY WHITNEY TRESSEL

PERHAPS TAUNTING BT photo editor Whitney Tressel with ghost stories wasn't the kindest, gentlest way to kick off our girlfriend getaway to New Mexico. In my defense, she revealed she was afraid of ghosts *after* we pulled up to the Lodge at Cloudcroft, a Titanic-era haunted mansion perched high in the Sacramento Mountains. And I honestly thought she was kidding. Over dinner in the candlelit lodge, I pumped our server, Tonya, for information about Rebecca, the hotel's friendly, lovelorn ghost who "makes herself known" by moving small objects.

I was riveted. Whitney was terrified. "I'm going to sleep with you tonight," she said. Again, I thought she was kidding. But she followed me upstairs, dragged her suitcase into my room, changed into a psychedelic T-shirt and pajama pants, climbed into bed, and fell asleep.

As I lay stiff and wide awake on one side of the four-poster Victorian-style bed, under a portrait of Mexican-American war hero Zachary Taylor, tapping out notes about our trip on my smartphone, my world-weary Louise to her excitable Thelma, I heard Whitney whimpering. *Should I break the touch barrier to wake her up?*

I nudged her shoulder and found her skin clammy. She had goosebumps. And it was my fault. "Jamie...?" she said, voice wavering. "Thank you. I just got a'scared." Caring for others isn't my strong suit, but in that moment, my heart went out to her in a way that the closeness of a road trip fosters. "It's OK," I said in my most soothing tone. "Everything is going to be all right."

Rebecca never did reveal herself, but we did have some spiritual adventures in the desert, where women have gone for centuries to be reborn. Journey with us through the Southwest!

DAY
01

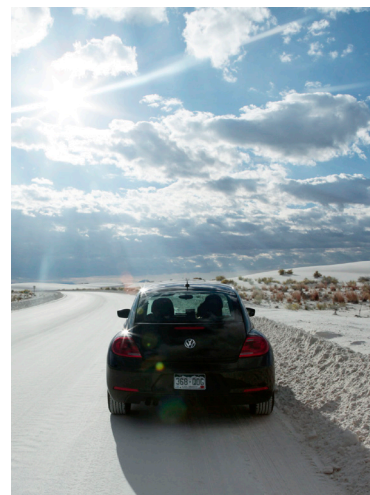
CLOUDCROFT TO ALBUQUERQUE

Whitney at the wheel, we wound down through the mountains from the Lodge at Cloudcroft (from \$99 per night, thelodgeresort.com) on Highway 82 in our rented Volkswagen Bug on our way to White Sands National Monument. Driving into White Sands, a vast, 10-acre desert scape of sparkling gypsum crests, mounds, and drifts, is like discovering a portal to another universe and pushing through to the other side (\$5, nps.gov).

We parked six miles in, where a ranger told us the "scenery gets good," and I bent down to scoop up a handful of gypsum sand, fine and soft to the touch. The tops of the dunes' curves are almost feminine—they move and change with the wind, the bone-dry landscape constantly shifting. Only the strong plants and animals survive—the ones that are able to adapt.

Like the bleached earless lizard and the defiantly vibrant pink sand verbena. And, I might add, Whitney and me. On rented purple and green plastic discs, we sledged down the dunes together, shouting, "I'm the winner!" "No, you're the winner!"—sometimes taking rough tumbles instead of elegant swooshes. Over and over, we stood up after falling, yelling, "I'm okay!" before clambering back up the dunes in our leather boots and jeans, eager to go again.

Sand in our clothes, we drove to Albuquerque on 25 North through pounding rains and angry navy-blue skies, looking in the rear-view mirrors at the clear blue sky and fluffy clouds that trailed behind us, as though we were inhabiting two separate worlds. When the radio turned staticky, I fiddled with music on my smartphone, searching for tunes we could agree



Our rental VW Bug tackles the powdery terrain of White Sands National Monument.

Driving into White Sands, a vast desert scape of sparkling white gypsum dunes, is like discovering a portal to another universe.



Clockwise from top: Minimalist elegance at Los Poblanos; a Carrizozo corner; the allegedly haunted Lodge at Cloudcroft; “I’m on top of the world!” in White Sands.

on, before we chose an album we both loved, the lyrics inscribed on our lives years ago: *Scarlet’s Walk*, by Tori Amos, about a coast-to-coast journey through America. Perfect. We belted “A Sorta Fairytale” in unison: *“Down New Mexico way, somethin’ about the open road / I knew that he was lookin’ for some Indian blood / Find a little in you, find a little in me / We may be on this road, but / We’re just imposters in this country, you know...”*

We took a detour in Carrizozo, New Mexico, to the homespun Carrizozo Café, furnished with wood paneling and mismatched kitchen chairs, and shared a Rocky Mountain Mudslide, the Everest of indulgent desserts, part fresh-made “ooey and gooey” brownie, part pecan pie, part vanilla ice cream, and part whipped cream (\$5, 575/430-9708). At the counter, we sat next to a sexy, weathered, real-life cowboy named Dave—black cowboy hat, plaid shirt—who ordered steak and beans and called us

“ma’am.” Back in the car, Whitney said what both of us were thinking: “Did you find him attractive?” “Yes,” I shouted. We half-joked that we wished he’d join us on the road.

Two hours later, at Sadie’s in Albuquerque, appetites back, we taste-tested three fiery salsas and a green chile cheeseburger topped with freshly chopped chiles, washed down with a dainty sip of the famous \$7 house margarita (sadiesofnewmexico.com).

Spent and stuffed, we headed to tranquil Los Poblanos Historic Inn, a 1930s ranch turned B&B and lavender farm (from \$165 per night, lospoblanos.com). Four regal peacocks strut the grounds; lavender bushes dot paths to spacious rooms with soaking tubs. In the summer, the inn holds aromatherapy, yoga, and cooking classes. After night fell, each of us in her own room this time, we burned wood in our fireplaces, smoke drifting up the flue as the warmth from bright-orange embers kissed us goodnight.

DAY
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ALBUQUERQUE TO SANTA FE

After filling up on organic blueberry pancakes and fresh-squeezed orange juice next to a table of six women on their own girlfriend getaway, we hit Los Poblanos' Farm Shop for souvenir tubs of the inn's Lavender Salve and other sundries, like blue corn mint soap and piñon incense (spa products from \$4).

Before leaving town, we popped by Grove Café and Market—better known as the place where Walter White poisoned Lydia Rodarte-Quayle with a ricin-laced Stevia packet in *Breaking Bad*, but much sunnier and lovelier in person. Our roasted tomato soups and farmers salads arrived quickly, works of vegetable art dotted with Marcona almonds, roasted golden beets, and local goat cheese (entrées from \$8, thegrovecafemarket.com).

The quickest way to get to Santa Fe is a straight shot on Highway 25, but we took the scenic route via the 54-mile Turquoise Trail (or State Road 14), named for the region's turquoise mining history (turquoise-trail.org). It was worth the extra time to sail through golden sagebrush fields, sipping hot coffee from travel cups and watching the Sandia Mountains pass by, clouds brushing up against the tops of snow-covered peaks.

Checking into downtown's Hotel Chimayó de Santa Fe, a tribute to the village of Chimayó, was a religious experience (from \$89 per night, hotelchimayo.com). Dark chunky wood furniture fills the lobby alongside Catholic candles set aflame, hanging Mexican blankets, a statue of the Virgin Mary, and wooden tiles painted with biblical scenes lining the fireplace.

We ambled through Santa Fe's downtown, past vivid street art and turquoise



Clockwise from top: Hearty hotcakes at Los Poblanos; the hotel's Farm Shop; pausing to take in the view along the Turquoise Trail; Santa Fe effortlessly mixes the old with the new; the scent of fresh lavender soothed our city-girl nerves.





Joseph the barkeep, sporting an apron, fuzzy beard, and samurai bun, psychoanalyzed us to pour us two perfect cocktails that eerily matched our personalities.



From top: A South-west-style latte at Golden Crown Panaderia; the “secret” bar on the top floor of Santa Fe’s Drury Inn; we’re still raving about the Grove Café’s autumnal soup and farm-fresh vegetarian salad.

jewelry in shop windows. After two days of being on the road, I (a road-trip newbie) begged Whitney (a road-trip pro) for a cocktail break. The proprietor of a photography shop told us about a new secret bar nearby. Intrigued, we walked around Saint Francis Cathedral and took an elevator to the top floor of the unassuming Drury Inn. There we found Bar Alto, a modern crow’s nest surrounded by sleek white-framed windowpanes with a sweeping view of the city (drinks from \$5, eloisasantafe.com/bar-alto). At precisely that second, the sun

was setting in a watercolor wash of tangerine orange and royal blue. We rushed outside, next to the outdoor pool, for the best vantage point. Back at our barstools, Joseph the barkeep, sporting an apron, fuzzy beard, and samurai bun, psychoanalyzed our tastes and our pasts (“What’s your favorite bar in New York?” “Where did you grow up?”) to pour us two perfect cocktails that eerily matched our personalities: a hot, dry, mezcal-and-tequila concoction for me, and a light, fruity old-fashioned for Whitney. Who knew she was a bourbon fan? I respected that. Relaxed, we pulled out our phones and compared photos from our trip, “liking” each other’s Instagrams and reminiscing about Cowboy Dave and our White Sands playground.

We strolled away happy, ready for Mexican food at The Shed: an appetizer of posole, a Pueblo stew of fat nixtamal corn, pork, and red chile; fuchsia-hued prickly-pear and strawberry margaritas; skewered shrimp atop fluffy Spanish rice; and enchiladas smothered with spicy green chile sauce (margaritas from \$8, entrées from \$12, the-shed-restaurant.myshopify.com).



DAY

03

SANTA FE TO TAOS

Running late, we put the pedal to the metal on 84 North, our VW Bug climbing into the hills to Abiquiu, scenery bursting with fluffy tufts of burnt-umber leaves and thin, lemon-yellow trees standing stock-straight. Whitney and I affectionately called them “our flame trees.”

We arrived in time to catch the noon



group tour of the Georgia O’Keeffe’s Abiquiu Home and Studio, a sprawling Spanish-Colonial estate where O’Keeffe lived from 1949 well into the ’80s (from \$30, okeeffemuseum.org). We stepped gingerly through her courtyard, past a hanging cow skull, into the room she used to freeze vegetables from her garden, and through her kitchen before reaching her studio. Sunlight streamed through the massive plate-glass windows, our pupils contracting as we drank in the view of Pederal mountain, its warm fall colors spilling down into the valley below, more inspiring than we could have imagined.

Back on the road, we drove south and then north again to Ojo Caliente Mineral Springs Resort & Spa, an affordable, egalitarian place for a quiet soak in mineral-rich pools, picturesque cliffs rising in the background (access from \$16, ojospa.com). We changed into our swimsuits and dipped first into the warm iron pool, then the steaming soda pool, sharing the greenhouse-like space with guests from teenagers to seniors, their eyes closed, faces

From top: We share a serene moment in one of Ojo Caliente’s luxurious private baths; my top must-see, Georgia O’Keeffe’s home in Abiquiu; O’Keeffe actually painted this view from her bedroom!



From left: Quiet conversation post-soak next to a private fireplace at Ojo Caliente; one of the restored Spanish-style rooms at Palacio de Marquesa.

serene. If you prefer alone time, it's worth the \$45 to upgrade to a private outdoor pool—with wood-burning fireplace, Adirondack chairs, and rustic cliffside view—for an hour. We relished the heat in the crisp November weather, taking turns throwing logs into the fire and sinking into piping-hot water that coursed into the pool from a giant faucet.

I told Whitney she had to try the Milagro body wrap with me, a \$12 ancient ritual thought to release toxins. We walked into a hospital-like room full of empty massage tables and awkwardly shed our robes. A spa attendant swaddled each of us in blankets, tucking us in tight, putting a towel over our eyes. For 25 minutes, we were mummies, motionless, listening to chiming New Age music. I could hear Whitney breathing in and out; I knew she was meditating. I, on the other hand, surprised myself when I started to cry in the darkness, tears soaking the towel, stress melting out of me. Were those the toxins? Time passed like molasses.



The rooms at Palacio de Marquesa in Taos are awash in pristine ivory paint and vibrant works by local female artists.

“Did she forget about us?” I whispered. But, no—the 25 minutes hadn’t ended yet. When the lights came on, Whitney and I turned and looked at each other sleepily. “I dedicated my love and kindness meditation to you,” she said. A lump in my throat, all I could think to say was, “That’s nice.”

At twilight, we set out for Taos. It was impossible not to feel the girl power when we stepped into Palacio de Marquesa, a restored 1920s Spanish-style casa designed to pay tribute to Taos women (from \$129 per night, marquesataos.com). The eight rooms, bearing names like “Matriarch Suite” for art patron Mabel Dodge Luhan, are awash in pristine ivory paint and vibrant works by local female artists, who designed everything from the blankets to the window shades.

Later, at cozy farm-to-table restaurant Aceq, we speared slices of ahi tuna and pork tenderloin doused in a heavenly balsamic reduction (from \$7, aceqrestaurant.com).

DAY
04

TAOS TO ALBUQUERQUE

Whitney and I had both long dreamed of visiting Taos Pueblo, a Native American community inhabited for roughly 1,000 years, a four-mile drive from our hotel. We pulled up to the UNESCO World Heritage site, with its unmistakable adobe structures, passed down generation to generation, and took a free tour led by a tribal member. We began in San Geronimo Chapel and circling the property, listening to the tribe's bittersweet history, from Spanish colonization to the government's return of spiritually significant Blue Lake in 1970 (\$16, taospueblo.com). Some of the pueblo homes are open to visitors—residents sell pottery, jewelry, food. Whitney bought a bundle of sage to smudge her new apartment (\$3); I purchased a tiny teal-and-black box, painted by a grandmother who told me she worked all her life so her grandchildren wouldn't have to spend their childhoods in day care. Swept up in the moment, I hugged her. In another pueblo, we sipped piñon coffee and devoured sugar-sprinkled puffy fry bread in a resident named Bertha's home (coffee \$3, fry bread \$6). We bid Bertha *tah ah*—the phonetic spelling of “thank you” in Tiwa, the native language—and drove back to Taos, peeking into art galleries before tearing ourselves away to catch our flight.

In the air, I peered at Whitney's laptop, admiring how she deftly clicked through our trip photos and filed them electronically.

On Georgia O'Keeffe's dining-room sofa in Abiquiu rests an Alexander Girard pillow with a red heart formed by words: “love' in many languages,” our tour guide had explained. In my language, “That's nice” means “I love you as a friend too, Whitney. I'm glad we got to know each other better in this beautiful place. Also, thank you for driving.”



Clockwise from top: El Santuario de Chimayó; kickin' it old-school beside a traditional fireplace at Taos Pueblo; we had eagerly looked forward to visiting the 1,000-year-old Native American Taos Pueblo.