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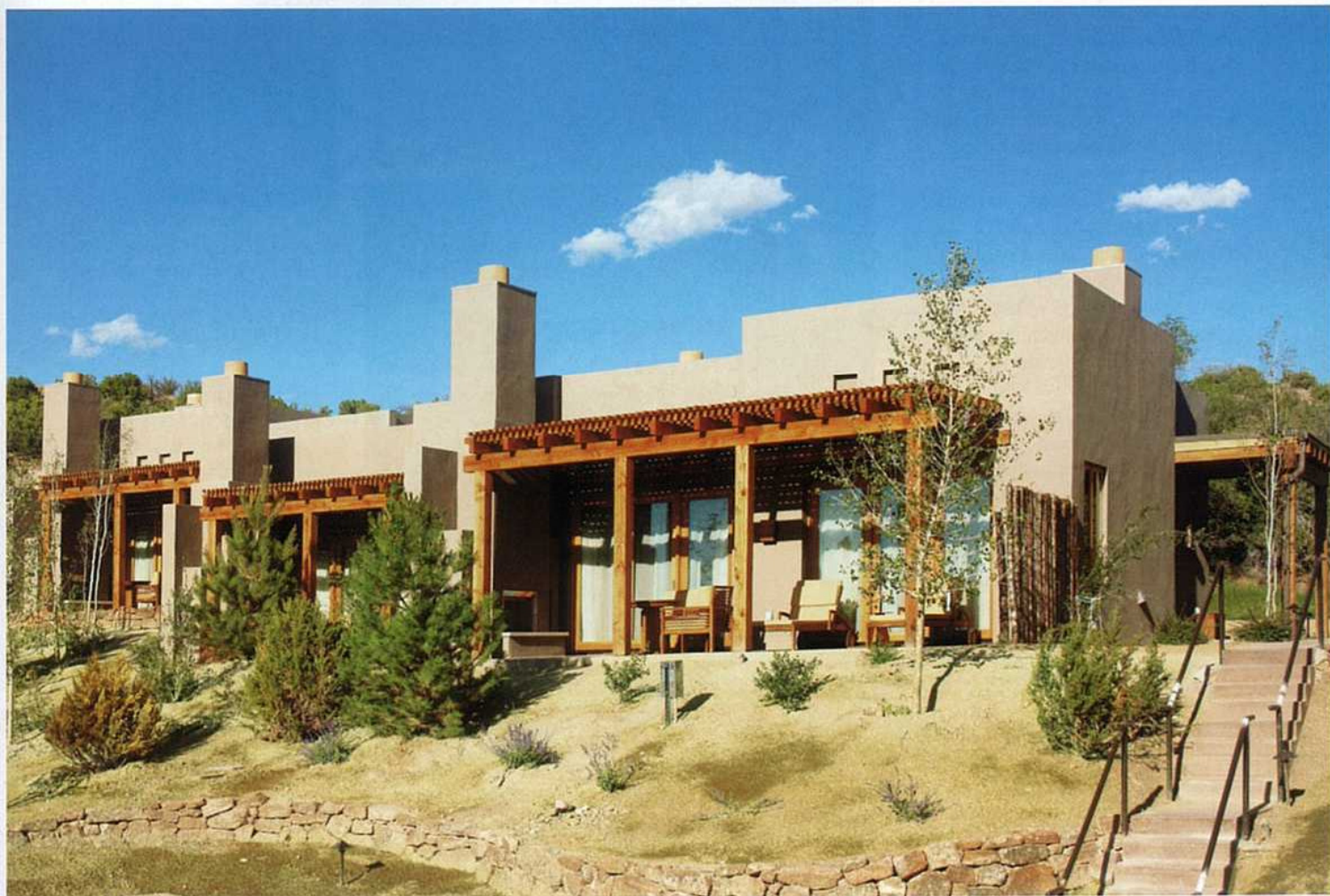
Our guide to this
year's hotspots

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Where to stay

Reviews of the month: USA ★ UK breaks ★ Shanghai ★ Warwickshire Plus Suite talk



USA ENCANTADO RESORT, NEW MEXICO

Ranch with dressing

A chic spa retreat in the desert offers an array of cultural and culinary delights, says E Jane Dickson

YOU COULD FLY to Santa Fe, but it kind of misses the point. You really need to drive there – through days of Wile E Coyote country and one-horse towns where a new sandwich at the coffee shop makes the evening news – to appreciate this oasis of 21st-century sophistication in the New Mexican desert.

The step change on arrival at Encantado, a spa-ranch resort in the foothills of the Sangre de Cristo Mountains, is immediate. On a chilly spring day guests are met at reception with mugs of ginger-and-

ginseng tea. In the dove-grey adobe *casitas* there is no hint of the 'dream-catcher' aesthetic ubiquitous in the region: no Mexican blankets, no pictures of grumpy Indians on the walls. Great attention is paid, however, to the integrity of materials. A gorgeous slab of bevelled timber is a table big enough to serve as a two-person desk. The same timber frames a mirror angled to catch a slice of sky. The vast granite bathtub could drown a heifer.

Part of the Auberge Resorts chain, Encantado plays to the discernment of its linens-and-

The ranch at Encantado Resort is about 7,000ft above sea level

cashmere clientele. The 'gift shop' is a satellite of LewAllen, one of Santa Fe's most exclusive art galleries. The spa, an airy maze set within picket fences, where privacy is assured by great falls of wisteria, sets more emphasis on natural healing than on nail extensions. The juniper massage is expert and thorough, leaving you in a kind of organically scented swoon.

The location, 7,000ft above sea level, plays its part in the resort's pleasantly spacey atmosphere. There are notes reminding guests that alcohol is three times more potent than ➤

Where to stay

➤ normal at this altitude and certainly the signature ¡Hay Chihuahua! cocktail – a Margarita with a depth charge of Cointreau – does the trick in minutes. There is just one restaurant on the ranch, but it is impeccable: Frank Lloyd Wright-style wood and stone complemented by subtle arts-and-crafts lighting and furnishings. The menu, too, is appropriately earthy, with a palette of flavours at once fresh and deeply considered (the Saturday-night restaurant crowd included at least three tables of food critics). Prawns glazed with guajillo chillis are served with a mysteriously delicious white-chocolate *mole*, while the rancher's standby, steak and chips, is raised to epic scale with foie gras butter and truffled *pommes frites*. Goat's-cheese cheesecake is a sure-fire plate-scraper.

Santa Fe, in general, is a gastronome's dream, with prices roughly half what you'd expect to pay in New York or San Francisco.



“The ranch's restaurant is impeccable: the Saturday-night crowd included at last three tables of food critics”

The pretty Central Plaza is just 10 minutes' drive from Encantado, so you can comfortably snooze off your lunch by the pool and mosey back into town for dinner.

The resort is well served for culture, too. New Mexico has long attracted arty types escaping the rat race (DH Lawrence and Georgia O'Keeffe found refuge here in the 1920s and 1930s). The 'O'Keeffe Experience', organised by Encantado's imaginative concierge

Above, the restaurant at Encantado. Below, sunset from the terrace

service, includes a private tour of the Georgia O'Keeffe Museum and a visit to the canyon lands around the artist's ranch at Abiquiu. Competitively priced opera packages are offered (the world-class Santa Fe Opera is nearby), and the hotel can arrange viewings at the many commercial galleries on Canyon Road, or even fittings for bespoke cowboy boots. Traditional five-star country pursuits such as golf, horse-riding and hot-air ballooning are also on hand.

Encantado's most spectacular attraction, however, comes free of charge. As the sun sinks on the desert, sand glints gold and cottonwood branches blaze like candelabra. On the wide horizon, range after range of mountains fade to black, like successive resolutions of an Ansel Adams print. A sundowner – ¡Hay Chihuahua! – has never seemed more appropriate.



ENCANTADO RESORT, 198 STATE ROAD 592, SANTA FE, NEW MEXICO, USA (00 1 505 946 5700; WWW.ENCANTADORESORT.COM). DOUBLES FROM \$315

4 MORE NEW MEXICO HOTELS

THE INN OF THE FIVE GRACES



This place in the heart of Santa Fe is decorated in an eccentric Wild-West-meets-Far-

East theme. It has *pueblo*-style architecture, with carved Afghan woodwork and Moroccan tiled bathrooms – fun for hippies at heart. 00 1 505 992 0957; www.fivegraces.com. Doubles from \$490

THE MABEL DODGE LUHAN HOUSE



The home of Mabel Dodge Luhan, patroness of Georgia O'Keeffe and DH Lawrence, is now a historic inn and 'artistic and literary retreat' in Taos. Carl Jung, Ansel Adams and Martha Graham were regular visitors. The guest rooms have vintage quilts and breathtaking views of the sacred Taos Mountains, but no TVs, phones or internet access. 00 1 575 751 9686; www.mabeldodgeluhan.com. Doubles from \$132

HACIENDA DEL SOL

This romantic Taos B&B backs onto 95,000 acres of protected land and has a shaded garden.



Guests can stargaze from a hot tub, or take a cookery class followed by a four-course meal for \$50 a head. 00 1 575 758 0287; www.taoshaciendadelsol.com. Doubles from \$176

RANCHO DE SAN JUAN

Set at the confluence of the Ojo Caliente (famous for its hot springs) and Chama rivers, this elegant



spa-ranch in Espanola has excellent hiking terrain, including Wheeler Peak, New

Mexico's highest mountain. There is also an award-winning restaurant. 00 1 505 753 6818; www.ranchodesanjuan.com. Doubles from \$450, including dinner for two