

TRAVEL

Santa Fe proves to be ideal for mother-daughter long weekend

BY CAROL GIES
SPECIAL WRITER

Day 1

Up at dawn, I shuffle through the mountain of brochures on my bed in the Hotel Loretto. There are 250 attractions in Santa Fe, and in the next four days I want to see every one of them. My 24-year-old daughter, Maureen, still under the covers, wants to sleep - and then go shopping.

I chirp through the day's itinerary, which happens to include a visit to a "Miraculous Staircase" in a chapel right next to our hotel.

Why, we could do it before breakfast. From under the bedspread she mumbles: "And this staircase is supposed to change my life - how?"

Somehow, Maureen and I had managed to clear our insane schedules - hers in Chicago and mine in Michigan - to spend the weekend away for her 24th birthday.

The question was, where. What place could possibly entertain a Gen X Big City girl, born to shop and be pampered and her hyperactive, tomboy mother? We settled on Santa Fe, New Mexico. But we would need



Mountain air: Maureen Gies takes in the pine-scented air and the wondrous scenery around Santa Fe on the Borego Trail.

more than opera and art to please this Odd Couple. Back to our story.

Assuming rejection of the staircase idea, I gather up my guidebooks and head over to the Loretto Chapel alone, armed with my camera and audio walking tour headphones.

Legend has it that in 1873, when the choir loft was built, there was a slight oversight - no staircase.

The nuns prayed and mysteriously, an old carpenter arrived on a donkey with a handsaw and hammer. Eight months later, a startling new staircase floated up to the choir loft.

In 33 steps (the same number of Christ's years on earth), it makes two complete 360-degree turns with no visible means of support. No one knew where the wood came from - it was not native to New Mexico. Then the carpenter vanished as strangely as he had appeared. Go figure.

I bought Maureen a postcard at the gift shop, which was larger than the entire chapel and full of miniature staircase souvenirs. The legend was even available on video.

From there, on to one of many tourist stops flanking Santa Fe's famous Plaza - the oldest public building in America - called the Palace of the Governors. The Spanish named the city "La Villa de Santa Fe" (The City of the Holy Faith) in 1598, as part of their grand mission to convert the Americas to Catholicism. (Santa Fe is the oldest state capital in the United States.)

The Palace of the Governors is really a cluster of grand adobe houses built for the string of Spanish officials that followed. It now houses more than 17,000 historical objects for tourists to behold. I saw 13,412 of them.

I made it back to the hotel room before noon to find the Birthday Girl asleep, just like that cheeky, black-haired baby of 24 years ago. I prod. She groans. "Does room service deliver cappuccino?" she groans. So much for history.

Day 2

It's a glorious, arid day of 73 degrees in The City of the Holy Faith. Well, actually, that was the climate-controlled environment of J. Crew. And Banana Republic. And Eddie Bauer - snuffed out by our city shopping maven just a block from the his-

toric Plaza.

Outside, we brush by a silver-and-turquoise parade of Native American rugs, jewelry and crafts displayed in front of the Palace of Governors.

"Too touristy," she says. And so we're off to find the real thing - the flea market in the Pueblo of Tesuque about seven miles north, next to the Santa Fe Opera. About 200 vendors in dusty stalls, with every conceivable art form, basket and bauble. Maureen negotiates a classic silver Hopi ring. I get an exquisite 50-year-old Navajo rug, both at a fraction of the prices we saw at the shops in town. "Only the tourists buy retail," she pronounces.

Then on to Canyon Road, famous for over 200 shops and galleries, just a 15-minute walk from our hotel. The artists are Native American - and worldwide. Contemporary and traditional. A courtyard of bronze life-size sculptures of children at play looks eerily like Pompeii immortalized in lava. Flowers fill fences, walkways and artsy containers everywhere.

We split up to find our personal treasures. I buy a silver Navajo bracelet.

Maureen adopts a yak. That's right. A yak. At Project Tibet, a courtyard of shops at 403 Canyon Road, it seems you can adopt a whole yak for \$99. Or half-a-yak, or even just a head or tail, depending on your budget and body part preference. The yaks are used by the nomadic Tibetans for milk, meat, blankets and clothing.

By donating \$99 to Project Tibet, you can add your name to the Yak Plaque in the courtyard - and support a Tibetan family for one year. I am a bit confused as to how you pack a yak if you choose to ship it - but Maureen assures me it stays with the Tibetan family. Santa Fe shopping? Done with that.

Day 3

OK, my turn to please her. Or was that beg? "Come on, Mo, it's only a 1-1/4-mile hike." I need a nature fix. We vector up Artist's Road in our rent-a-car toward the Santa Fe National Forest, about 20 minutes out of town, in search of the Borego Trail.

Along the way, we pass a large rambling adobe structure that is typical of the Navajo dwellings dotting the Santa Fe foothills.

"Look Mo, a pueblo!" Maureen, with bored glance: "That would be a condo. Two

bedrooms, starting at \$179,000." Carol, with heavy sigh: OK, let's go with "pueblo-inspired."

About 10 miles and several switchbacks later, the scruffy greenery morphs into wondrous pines and occasional aspens. Mo's hiking gear is a black designer halter, a bit sparse for the 10-degree drop in temperature - but always fashionable. The Borego Trail, canopied by monster pines, drops quickly to a frisky stream and heads straight back up again.

Over three hours later, at an altitude of about 8,000 feet, we return to the car, puffing wildly. Somewhere along our route, the 1-1/4-mile Borego Trail became the six-mile Aspen Trail. I score no points with the Birthday Girl for orienteering. Under pressure, however, she admits to loving the scenery and pure, un-urban mountain air.

Later

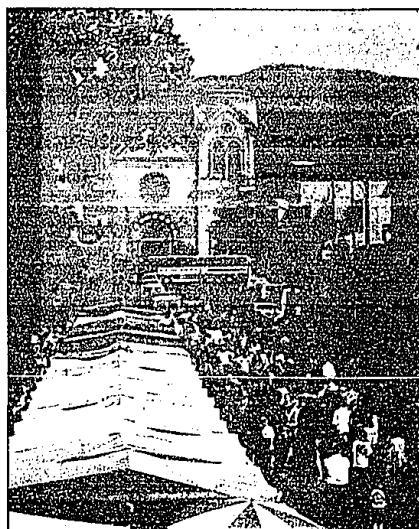
It's 10:30 p.m. We are alone in the thick, silent darkness. Our rented car is groaning up a steep, twisted grade toward the mountains. We are in search of "Ten Thousand Waves." I am thinking of an episode of the Twilight Zone and she knows it. "No worries, Mom. You're going to love this place," she promises. I did love this place. A true Japanese spa set in the foothills of the Santa Fe National Forest. (The princess is nothing if not consistent.)

We sink in an ichiban - a private room with hot tub. We have a late-night massage with dueling therapists in a double room that overlooks the mountain night. We are dressed in matching kimonos and turbans. I smell like cedar and look like Gloria Swanson. Native lute music and howling mountain wind compete with the slather and slap of Gianna and Leona's talented fingers on our tired hiking bodies.

The Royal One finally coos, "Now this is more like it."

Day 4

Back at the Hotel Loretto the next evening, we're showered and ready for our farewell dinner. "Let the Birthday Girl pick," she says. We begin our stroll through town looking for



Native American arts: Travelers can spend hours in the open markets of Santa Fe.

the perfect place. Walking with the Girl from Ipanem is a surreal experience. Horns blow, waiters appear in doorways to invite you in, doors magically swing open - the whole environment becomes hyper-responsive. We pass the famous Coyote Cafe and end up at "The Cowgirl Hall of Fame." Far from another museum, it is a feisty old haunt at the edge of town. We are way overdressed.

We burrow into a back booth in the open patio and scan the crowd. I look down at rather weird assortment of feet that includes dusty, torn cowboy boots, large black dog paws, naked, tattooed toes - and Maureen's straw designermules.

Well, at least mules are western. The booth creaks as we lean in to read our dog-eared menus. The decor is Early Chipped Paint, trimmed in rusty wagon wheels.

We order a barbecued chicken that looks like it stepped on a landmine - but is incredibly delicious. "Sorry the band ain't out here yet - I think the boys is still in there drinkin'," laughs our crusty waitress. We toast The Big 24 with a radioactive

Cowboy Margarita. During our four days, the princess had been buffed and polished, adorned with silver Hopi ring and became parent to a step-yak. The tomboy got sunburned and mosquito-bitten, but acquired a vegetable-dyed rug and a video of the Miraculous Staircase. We called it a somewhat unusual - but wonderful weekend in Santa Fe.

Carol Gies is vice president for marketing and center planning for the Taubman Co. She coordinates international tours and marketing for the company. She is also on the board of the Travel Industry Association. She writes a column for the Travel section.

CLARIFICATION

The phone number for the West Michigan Tourist Association listed in Great Escapes in mid-July was wrong. The correct numbers are (800) 442-2084 and (616) 456-8557. They offer a variety of publications and free trip planning services.



Downtime

- Hilton Garden Inn® Plymouth 248-420-0001 \$85
- Hilton Grand Rapids Airport 616-957-0100 \$69
- Hilton Inn Southfield 248-357-1100 \$75-\$95
- Hilton Northfield 248-879-2100 \$99
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