

ForbesLife

MountainTime

Christmas 2008

WIN A
PAIR OF
HEAD
SKIS
PAGE 4

HAUTE

CUISINE

5 HIGH-
ALTITUDE
RESTAURANTS

THE
DALAI
LAMA

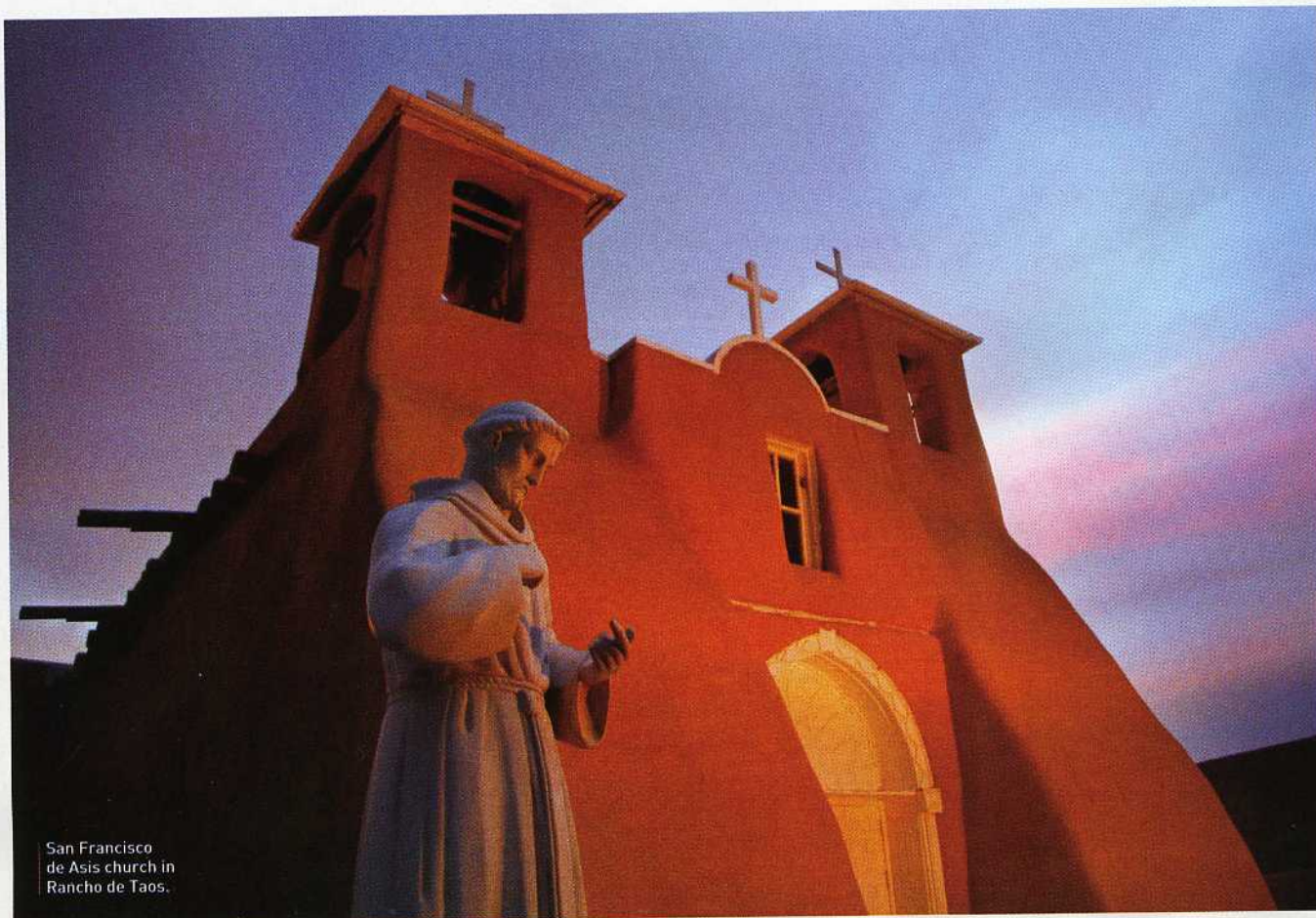
SPEAKS IN ASPEN

SKI HOTELS
GO GREEN

TAOS:
NATIVE CHIC

A JACKET
WORTHY OF THE ARCTIC





San Francisco de Asis church in Rancho de Taos.

TOWN WATCH

Taos, New Mexico

Never mind the New Age oracles and government-run marketing campaigns: Taos really is magical. To see for yourself, get behind the wheel early one morning and drive through the Taos Valley, elevation 7,000 feet, with shimmering cottonwoods down low, Georgia O'Keeffe clouds up above, and the snowcapped peaks of the Sangre de Cristo Mountains, named by Spanish settlers for the blood-red rock at sunset, all around. Funky adobes lurk on twisted streets that predate the United States itself, and the terraced brown buildings of the prehistoric Taos Pueblo look like geologic features.

Settled by the Spanish in 1540, Taos is one of those places where people stop to visit and, for reasons they can't quite explain, wind up staying for years. Much of what draws them in is what Taos is not. For one, it's not overpopulated. You may have to put your name on the waiting list at Michael's for huevos rancheros, but none of the mellow 5,000 year-round residents will be breathing down your neck. It's neither too cold (temps dip into the 30s and 40s on winter days), nor too hot (highs in the 80s come summer). Southwestern art shops surround the plaza square, but for every glassy-eyed artist there's a Libertarian with a 12-gauge just waiting for you to set foot on his land. (Donald Rumsfeld has a property here.) Though the town hosts a film festival, it lacks the glitz of those in Sundance or Telluride. There's hiking, mountain biking, and road riding in the surrounding Carson National Forest, but, unlike some Rocky Mountain towns, Taos doesn't wear its spandex on its sleeve. Its mountains rise to over 12,000

286

Difference, in inches, between annual snowfall in town (35) and at the ski area (321).

315,000

Median home price, in dollars, of residential properties in the Taos area

1680

Year New Mexico's Pueblo people revolted against the Spanish (who reconquered the area in 1696.)

feet, and Taos Ski Valley has superb steeps—1,294 acres of them—but it's remained off the beaten path. Last March, the resort began welcoming snowboarders for the first time in its 53-year history.

Stay at La Doña Luz Inn and ask for the upstairs room with the spiral staircase to the roof. If it's snowing outside, eat green chile stew by the fire at the Adobe at the Taos Inn, known as "Taos's Living Room." If it's sunny and warm, take a patio seat at Old Blinking

Light, a roadhouse en route to the ski area. Catch a sunset over an elk steak at the Stakeout restaurant, or watch locals cavort at the Alley Cantina. Just be sure to discover Taos the way people always have—by taking your time, chatting up whomever you bump into, and seeing where the spirit moves you. And don't be surprised if something magical moves you here for good. —MIKE KESSLER