

The Inquisitive Traveler

By Patty Burness

Santa Fe: The other S.F.

After a two and one-half hour flight into Albuquerque and an hour's drive north, I emerged 7,000 feet above sea level in the colorful town of Santa Fe. Each year at harvest time, locals go all out to showcase chiles — they add wine and great food to the party and call the extravaganza the annual Santa Fe Wine and Chiles Fiesta. This September will be the eighteenth celebration, and as you can imagine, the event's growth has been explosive. More than 60 local chefs are featured as well as others from elsewhere in the country, and wine is brought in from around the world. For foodies, the fiesta is a definite add to the "must do" list.

I checked into the La Posada de Santa Fe Resort & Spa, located just off the plaza. Dating back to the 1880s, this beautiful six-acre oasis in the midst of downtown Santa Fe sits amid lush gardens and adobe architecture. My luxe suite, decorated in classic burnt sienna tones, overlooked the pool and was situated just above the spa. Perfect, because I was about to get into the fiesta spirit with a special spa treatment — the chocolate-chile wrap. As crazy it as it sounds, combining

antioxidant properties of chocolate with the warmth of chiles stimulates circulation. After a finish with sage and juniper moisturizer and left to steam in eucalyptus oil, I melted. It's the perfect antidote for whatever ails you. Refreshed, I was ready to explore the other S.F. before the fiesta got underway.

Along the walk from La Posada to the historic plaza, Santa Fe really comes alive. You'll see galleries, enchanting alleyways, a myriad of shopping opportunities and a number of tempting places to eat — including Roque's Carnitas, Santa Fe's famous street cart. Roque and his wife, Mona, have served up tasty treats on the plaza since 1987. Just across the way, in front of the Palace of the Governors (the oldest public building in the U.S.), Native Americans sell beautiful jewelry and colorful weavings. A few blocks from there, you'll find the Georgia O'Keefe Museum — don't miss it. It's through her art that many have experienced the incredible beauty of the Southwest. And a couple of blocks the other side of the plaza lies Canyon Road. Once a game trail and art colony, it is known today for nu-

merous art galleries, innovative restaurants and unique shops (save time to get those cowboy boots).

Santa Fe natives love their food as much as Northsiders do. And in celebration of the fiery ingredient for which the region is known, there are four days of serious eating and drinking during the Wine and Chile Fiesta (for the faint at heart, not every dish incorporates chiles). The full fiesta experience includes guest chef luncheons, wine seminars, cooking demos, intimate winemaker dinners as well as the Reserve Wine Tasting & Auction and the Grand Food & Wine Tasting. Needing to do thorough research, your Inquisitive Traveler squeezed in as much as she could during her short stay.

I started my marathon spree with lunch at The Compound on legendary Canyon Road. Usually in charge is chef-owner Mark Kiffin, but today, he assisted chef Jody Denton from Merenda's in Bend, Ore. Each course surpassed the one before it — from buttery potato cake and poached oyster, to pork served served three ways (ribs, belly and seasoned ground in filo), to the triple cream panna cotta for dessert. Each was paired with the right wine, including a 2003 Bethel Heights Estate Chardonnay from Denton's native Oregon (Willamette Valley).

Dinner at Tulips was a show-stopper. Chef-owner Steve Jarrett was at the helm and Susan Ridley, co-owner of Hendry in Napa, poured some of her signature wines. The restaurant is a converted private home. Dining is in small, cozy spaces with low ceilings and old wood floors. Chef Jarrett's grilled beef tenderloin with feta mashed potatoes was wonderful with the 2004 Block 28 Zinfandel's dark fruit flavor and smoky spice. The richness of the 2005 Block 24 Primitivo with a bittersweet chocolate almond torte was also a winner.

The next day's Reserve Wine Tasting & Auction was wildly successful. With a lively auctioneer leading the group, local education organizations benefitted from the crowd's largesse. And, of course, the lunch was remarkable. Several chefs created the meal, including two San Franciscans — Michael Tusk of Quince and Laura Werlin, the queen of cheese. Each dish was innovative and flat out delicious. As John Schaefer won the Honorary Wine Achievement Award, attendees savored his well-known wines with every bite.

Time to explore beyond downtown. Not more than 20 minutes southwest of the center, you'll find the Sunrise Springs Resort Spa nestled in the Sangre de Cristo Mountains. This 70-acre eco-escape is idyllic — a



Adobe hideaways at La Posada



Santa Fe's plaza



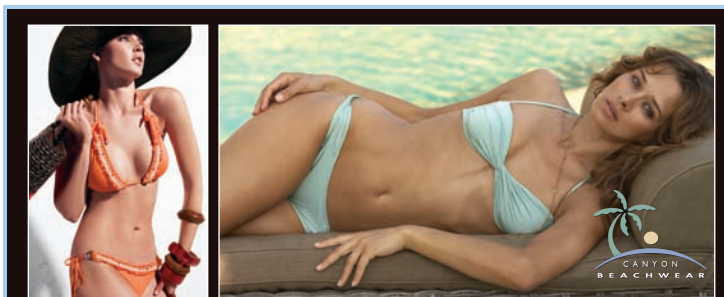
Roque and Mona's carnitas cart



Native American handicrafts for sale



The place to shop photos: Patty Burness



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mesmerizing combination of organic gardens, spring-fed ponds, a posh spa, and an arts center for pottery, yoga, meditation and other creative endeavors. There's even a Japanese tea house. (My casita was in the middle of it all.) The resort's commitment to sustainability and being green extends to the locally grown, organic amenities, and of course to Blue Heron, their well-known restaurant housed in a century old adobe house.

It's in Blue Heron's gardens that the chef and gardener work hand in hand to ensure the freshest ingredients. Tonight, Black Mesa Winery shared the table with creations by chef Tracy Ritter. This was only fitting as the wines were from New Mexico and chiles were the "star" of the night. Think of it: Organic beef filet with a chile relleno and smoked red chile teamed with Coyote 2006,

a Cabernet/Petite Syrah/Zinfandel blend. It was a home run.

The final stage of my visit included a stop at the Santa Fe Farmers Market. One of the country's oldest markets, I saw first hand how the tantalizing aroma of roasting chiles keep shoppers happy. Then it was on to a demonstration at the Santa Fe School of Cooking. There, Native American food expert and photographer, Lois Ellen Frank, reminded everyone that the New Mexico "state" question is: Red or green? Her chipotle chiles in a dried sweet cherry sauce over a buffalo tenderloin scored with a 2004 Cosentino Cabernet.

I finished off at the Grand Finale where chefs and winemakers kept hundreds of Fiesta-goers smiling. After lunches, dinners and tastings, you might think you were full — but who

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