

LEGENDS &

Landscapes


Journey through the colorful history, charming towns and
stunning scenery along the Turquoise Trail

by Caroline Eubanks

*N*amed for the prized stone found in this region, the Turquoise Trail National Scenic Byway runs 54 miles between Albuquerque and Santa Fe, New Mexico. The byway and the surrounding historic area is made up of 15,000 square miles, cutting through canyons and atop Sandia Crest. The towns along the way are like postcards of the Wild West, well and truly “off the beaten path.” It’s a place where outlaws and Spanish missionaries, Native Americans and artists have settled over the years.

If you have time to explore, detour from I-25 in favor of this scenic drive, also known as NM 14. You can drive it in its entirety in a day. However, if time is on your side, take it slow. The trail can also be explored in either direction!

Cerrillos Hills



ALBUQUERQUE TO TIJERAS

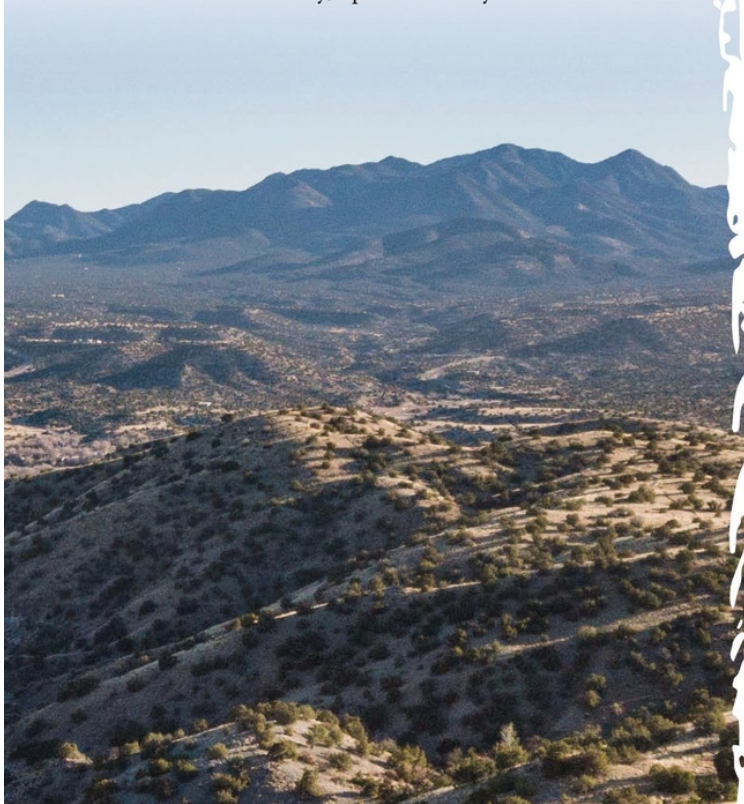
Once you've visited the highlights in Albuquerque, make your way east to Tijeras, a town tucked into the canyon, via the "Singing Road." This section of Route 66 has rumble strips that play "America the Beautiful."

While Tijeras is the starting point for many travelers on the Turquoise Trail, don't miss all that the community has to offer. Start at the Tijeras Pueblo Archaeological Site, the remains of a grouping of Pueblo dwellings dating back to 1313 A.D.

TIJERAS TO SANDIA CREST

Where NM 14 meets 536, travelers can detour to the Tinkertown Museum, a beloved roadside attraction since 1983. The museum features animated miniatures of a circus tent and a Western town as well as a section made with upcycled glass bottles.

Continue along 536 to reach the highest elevation of the Turquoise Trail, complete with hiking trails. Sandia Crest sits at 10,000 feet above sea level and can be accessed by aerial tramway, the longest in the world. After a long hike, enjoy the view and grab a bite at the Sandia Crest House Gift Shop and Café, which is known for its green chile cheeseburger. The Kiwanis Cabin is a popular photo stop for hikers. Sandia Peak Ski Area is also nearby, open seasonally.



Tijeras Pueblo Museum



Sandia Crest Trail





SANDIA CREST TO GOLDEN

Originally called El Real de San Francisco, the town of Golden was established for its gold mining industry in 1839. The Henderson Store, which has been family-owned since 1918, originally served as the community's general store. Today travelers can browse for pottery, artwork, rugs and American Indian-made jewelry.

Across the street, visit the Bottle House, where former mayor Leroy Gonzales welcomes visitors to see the colorful glass bottles and other found objects along his fence. On your way out of town, stop by San Francisco de Asis Catholic Church. The circa-1830 adobe mission church is one of the most photographed spots on the Turquoise Trail.

GOLDEN TO MADRID

It was originally established as a coal mining town. After the mine went bust, Madrid turned into an almost-ghost town. That is, until artists moved here in the 1970s and brought it back to life. Historic buildings were preserved, including the old company store, tavern and the still-operating Jezebel Soda Fountain. Many of these spaces are now art galleries and shops selling everything from tapestries to paintings and pottery. You won't find big-name chains here!

The Madrid Old Coal Town Museum covers the early history of the town. Artifacts include an antique train. The Mine Shaft Tavern is another long-running Madrid business. It suffered a devastating fire in 1944 but was rebuilt not long after. The pine and oak bar is identified as the longest bar in New Mexico.

Sculptures dot the main street, welcoming visitors year round. But the town's Fourth of July and Christmas celebrations are especially energetic with light displays and fireworks. Like Cerrillos, Madrid has also been seen on screen in the 2007 movie "Wild Hogs."

MADRID TO CERRILLOS

The final stop before arriving in Santa Fe is the town of Cerrillos. It shouldn't be missed, especially if you want to purchase the gemstone that gives the Turquoise Trail its name. The Pueblo Indians mined this area at least as far back as 900 AD and Cerrillos is home to one of the rarest types of turquoise.

A visit to the Casa Grande Trading Post, Petting Zoo & Cerrillos Turquoise Mining Museum is a fun way to learn about the process. It has an impressive mineral collection and creatures like goats and a llama.

Like in its neighboring towns, many of the old buildings, like the Black Bird Saloon from 1885, have been restored. Now a restaurant, the saloon serves favorites like breakfast burritos and elk burgers. The town, where Wild West legends like Billy the Kid spent time, has also been used as filming locations for 1988's "Young Guns" and 2013's "We're the Millers."

Spend time in the great outdoors by hiking the trails in Cerrillos Hills State Park. This area is also an incredible place for stargazing. Astronomy Adventures is one of the companies that offers guided tours to best see the night sky with telescopes. **T**



The Turquoise Trail awaits! Your AAA Travel Advisor can help you navigate all the details of your road trip. Visit AAA.com/Travel for more information.