

Turquoise Trail National Scenic Byway

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Named for the rich turquoise deposits found throughout the area, the byway carves through wild rock outcroppings, piñon and juniper-dotted hills, and a couple of delightfully quirky towns. Embark on the byway from the north, just outside of Santa Fe, or from the south, just east of Albuquerque, on NM Hwy. 14. Perfect for a one-way jaunt between the two cities, the 52-mile byway takes only a bit longer to drive than the Interstate highway taken by most travelers.

San Marcos Café and Feed Store

A destination café with western country charm and a yard full of chickens, roosters and peacocks, this makes a good stop for a meal or snack at the beginning or end of Turquoise Trail explorations. Particularly known for its breakfasts, the café is open all day. About 20 miles south of Santa Fe. 3877 State Road 14 www.turquoisetrail.org/stops/detail/san-marcos-cafe

Cerrillos

Jog off the byway when you reach Country Road 57 for a look back in time at the washboard dirt streets and adobes of the ghost town Cerrillos. Imagine when the town was so famed that it was considered as the site for the capitol of New Mexico. Begun as a tent camp in the Cerrillos Mining District, it blossomed into a town with 21 saloons, 5 brothels, 4 hotels, and several newspapers during the mineral boom. Gold, silver, lead, zinc, and turquoise were all extracted from the surrounding hills. A century or so later, the remnants of its sleepy Front Street serve as a movie set, featured as the backdrop to more than a dozen films, most prominently, Young Guns and Young Guns II. A charming combination trading post, mining museum, and petting zoo displays everything from live llamas to lapidary tools, of sells turquoise mined by the owners. A few other shops, along with the historic Saint Joseph Church, make the stop memorable too. www.turquoisetrail.org/stops/category/cerrillos

Cerrillos Hills State Park

If in 1914, New Mexico's second year as a state, you were looking for the Cerrillos Hills by horseback or at the wheel of your Model T, you would have had no trouble finding them. A major highway passed right through the middle of what is now "the road less traveled," where hikers and bikers are about the only folks you'll see in the park. One of the oldest mining areas in North America, turquoise mining here dates to at least 900 A.D. and the blue stones found their way to Chaco Canyon, the Crown Jewels of Spain, and likely the ruins of Chichen Itza and Monte Alban in Mexico. It was a source of other mineral deposits too. Around the turn of the 19th century, New Mexico's production of turquoise was \$1,600,000, most of it coming from these hills. www.cerrilloshills.org

Ortiz Mountains Educational Preserve

An isolated cluster of mountains along the Turquoise Trail, the preserve protects a ponderosa and pinon habitat with everything from black bears and coyotes to horned toads and antlions, and over 80 species of birds. Owned by the Santa Fe Botanical Garden, the preserve is open for guided hikes by advance reservation only. 2 miles east of NM Hwy. 14 on County Road 55. www.santafebotanicalgarden.org

Madrid

Something of a metropolis along this route, the 150-person village of Madrid (accent on the first syllable) is a recovered ghost town that now exists as a creative community alive with small galleries, cafes, and shops. Chain businesses are forbidden by the landowners' covenants and everything here is a true original. Once-dilapidated clapboard homes and company stores from its coal and turquoise mining past have been dec'ed out by residents in gaily quirky fashion. Don't miss the old Mine Shaft Tavern, a real classic. Madrid hosts numerous festivals throughout the year, and its Christmas lights are known throughout the Southwest. www.visitmadridnm.com

Golden

Originally called Real de San Francisco, several large mining companies moved in around 1880 and changed the name to Golden. It turned out not to be golden for miners, and turned into a ghost town. A few crumbling ruins still provide excellent photo opportunities. Golden's most photographed building is the San Francisco Catholic Church, which was restored by historian and author, Fray Angelico Chavez. www.turquoisetrail.org/stops/category/golden

Tijeras

Tijeras Canyon forms the Southern gateway to the Turquoise Trail at I-40. The canyon separates the Manzano Mountains to the south from the Sandias to the north. Stop here at the Cibola National Forest office for information and brochures and visit the Tijeras Pueblo Archaeological Site. www.turquoisetrail.org/stops/category/tijeras

Sandia Park/Cedar Crest

The Sandia Mountains and Cibola National Forest, offer a scenic and recreational paradise full of outdoor activities including bicycling, hiking, horseback riding, climbing and skiing. This beautiful area is home to a diverse collection of animals and plants; and birdwatchers come from around the world to witness the hawk and eagle migrations. Just outside the community of Sandia Park, you'll find Tinkertown Museum, a collection of one man's life work that includes a handcarved animated miniature western town and a three-ring circus. Here you can follow the Sandia Crest National Scenic Byway, also called the "Crest Road", through the beautiful Cibola National Forest, if you wish.

www.turquoisetrail.org/stops/category/sandia-park/

Sandia Crest Byway was originally a U.S. Forest Service Byway. When Turquoise Trail was designated a national byway, Sandia Crest was included in the nomination and they now comprise one national byway, The Turquoise Trail Scenic Byway.