

Pueblo Indians once considered these naturally heated waters sacred, as did the Anglos who followed them, seeking relief from aches and disease near the turn of the 20th century. Eleven pools are filled with different types and combinations of waters containing iron, soda, lithium, sodium, and arsenic. The Mission Revival-style adobe hotel built here in 1916, now listed on the National Register of Historic Places, houses the Artesian Restaurant, decorated with historic photographs. Don't miss the mud pool—it's fun in warm weather (spread it on, let it dry, and wash it off—your skin never felt so soft).

If you prefer your hot springs au naturel (in all senses of the words), head to Jemez Springs, where the surrounding forests are

filled with naturally heated springs containing over 20 minerals and gases. Just north of town are the Spence Hot Springs. It takes about ten minutes to hike from the road to the rough stone pools, which offer wonderfully hot water (95–105°F) and inspiring views of the hills, particularly at sunset—and it's free.

TEN THOUSAND WAVES: Tel 505-982-9304; tenthousandwaves.com. *Cost:* rooms from \$209 (off-peak), from \$249 (peak); shared tubs \$25 per person. **OJO CALIENTE MINERAL SPRINGS:** Ojo Caliente. Tel 800-222-9162 or 505-583-2233; ojospa.com. *Cost:* rooms from \$149; mineral springs from \$20 per person. **SPENCE HOT SPRINGS:** Jemez Springs. Tel 575-829-3535; fs.usda.gov. **BEST TIMES:** fall, winter, and spring.

A Real Find—the Quiet Kind

SILVER CITY

New Mexico

Silver City is overshadowed by more stylish Santa Fe (see p. 746) and funkier Taos (see p. 753), but it is one of New Mexico's gems. Rich in history, surrounded by 3 million acres of the wild Gila National Forest, and with a population of just 10,273, it's small enough to be both friendly and manageable, and has been dubbed one of America's "10 coolest towns."

The city's historic downtown architecture evokes its Victorian heyday as a mining center—silver was discovered in them thar hills in 1870—in what was once Apache country. Western history buffs can take a self-guided tour through the early years of one of New Mexico's most infamous native sons: William Bonney, aka Henry McCarty, aka Billy the Kid. He grew up here, and you can see his boyhood home, the hotel where he washed dishes and waited tables, and the jail (now a warehouse) from which he escaped at age 15 by climbing the chimney.

Sitting on its own 178 acres just outside of town, the Bear Mountain Lodge was built as a ranch school in 1928. This comfortable 11-room getaway is known throughout the Southwest as a



A full moon rises over the Santa Rita Copper Mine just east of Silver City.

mecca for outdoor enthusiasts who like their creature comforts. It's particularly known for its bird-watching, and riders bring their bikes and horses to explore the trails. For a Santa Fe-style meal, check out Diane's Bakery & Café: You'll be thrilled with just about anything here, from home-baked green chile cheddar toast for breakfast to the perfectly prepared grilled rib eye with southwestern dry rub and spicy buckshot butter.

Take New Mexico Highway 15 north 44 miles to Gila Cliff Dwellings National Monument, which preserves examples of the cragside homes of the area's original inhabitants who lived here in the late 1200s. The people of the Mogollon culture grew corn, squash, and beans and lived in natural caves

that they made homelike with walls and roof beams. Five of the caves contain the ruins, about 42 rooms altogether. They sit in the middle of the country's first designated wilderness area, a gorgeously rugged expanse of forested hills and naked rocky peaks. Hiking trails abound and there are natural hot springs among the trees nearby, where you can soak and contemplate life as a troglodyte.

WHERE: 236 miles southwest of Albuquerque. **BEAR MOUNTAIN LODGE:** Tel 575-538-2538; bearmountainlodge.com. *Cost:* from \$160. **DIANE'S:** Tel 575-538-8722; dianesrestaurant.com. *Cost:* dinner \$50. **GILA CLIFF DWELLINGS:** Tel 575-536-9461; nps.gov/gicl. **BEST TIMES:** late spring-early fall.

Touching the Heavens

THE VERY LARGE ARRAY & THE LIGHTNING FIELD

West of Socorro, New Mexico

Out on the high desert plains of west-central New Mexico, the sky is the biggest natural feature, so the most interesting view is often upward. It's fitting, then, that two major structures have been built west of Socorro

with the same general theme—the intersection of sky and earth—but with radically different methods and motivations.

Science fiction buffs will recognize the giant radio antennas of the Very Large Array (VLA) from the movie *Contact*; it's where the astronomer played by Jodie Foster first hears alien signals. It's easy to imagine voices from other worlds as you stand on the barren Plains of San Agustin, surrounded by 27 huge white dishes. Each is 82 feet in diameter and weighs 230 tons; together in a Y-shaped formation, they act as a single dish 22 miles across, one of the premier astronomical radio observatories in the world. At its highest resolution, the array can pick out a golf ball from 100 miles,

allowing astronomers to watch galaxies spin and planets form in the far reaches of space. The VLA is also used for atmospheric and weather studies and to track satellites.



The radio antennas of the Very Large Array act in concert with each other.