

S P I R I T T R A I L S



Tribes of the Southwest USA Trip #3

SACRED MOUNTAINS OF THE NAVAJO

10 days (9 nights)

Our journey will see us circumnavigate the Sacred Mountains area of the southwestern United States - land bounded by four great mountains that represent the spiritual limits of the Navajo Nation. The region is also imbued with the spirit of the Ancient Pueblo (Anasazi) people and the Hopi nation, and many of the sites we shall be visiting are sacred sites to Native American people. Travelling in a traditional clockwise fashion, we will gain a glimpse into aspects of Navajo (Dineh) cosmology, and insight into teachings of the "Beauty Way".

We will be spending a lot of time outdoors, hiking across beautiful vistas and taking in the many natural wonders of the Sacred Mountains. We will also be visiting Native American communities, as well as museums, National Parks and other locations where we can learn more about the culture. In addition, we will be honoured with the company of a Navajo guide throughout, who will help us understand the connection the people there have with the place.

Finally, we shall also have the chance to take part in a range of other activities, such as horse riding, water sports and town visits.

Itinerary:

Day 1:

We begin our journey in Albuquerque, New Mexico, where we will be met by our guide at the International Airport. We will share a **welcome dinner** together in the Old Town Mexican Restaurant, getting to know each other and talking about the exciting days ahead before settling down in a local motel.

Day 2:

After a good night's rest and breakfast, we shall head off to our first sacred mountain of the South, Turquoise Mountain, on our way to the awe-inspiring **Chaco Canyon**. Part of the Chaco Culture National Historical Park, it is an area of great spiritual significance to the Pueblo, Navajo and Hopi tribal peoples, and the site of a major urban centre more than one thousand years ago. We will hike the canyon then set up camp for the night, and around the campfire we shall enjoy dinner, drumming, singing and storytelling, and also learn a little about Navajo culture in preparation for our visits to sacred spaces in coming days.

Day3:

After an early breakfast in camp, we drive the scenic backroads to **Window Rock**, Arizona, the Navajo national capital and home to a red stone arch and mystical rock formation that is an important part of the Dineh cosmology. Here we will visit the Council Chambers Museum, constructed in the shape of a traditional hogan (a type of Navajo home whose origins are entwined with the sacred foundations of the nation).

Then we will travel south on scenic Old Route 66 to Flagstaff and **Sedona**, both sacred sites to local natives. Quality, authentic Native American arts and crafts are available for purchase from local artisans on route to Sedona where we will camp overnight. Included will be a hike to Red Rock formation with vortexes. Night time will be an experience in a place revered by many as a "special" site.

Day 4:

Rising with the morning star or near dawn, we head out to the south rim of the **Grand Canyon**, the vast natural monument hewn out of rock by the Colorado River, around which we shall hike so to better appreciate the vistas both above and below it. From here we then drive to the **Navajo Interactive Museum** in Tuba City, Arizona, dedicated to preserving the rich culture of the Nation.

Our next stop is **Page, Arizona**. Here we check into our hotel, and visit Lake Powell, a magnificent desert canyon reservoir with more than two thousand miles of shoreline, rosy sand beaches, blue-green water and spectacular red rock towers.

Day 5:

After all our travelling around, we now get the chance to relax for a day on **Lake Powell**, where a wide variety of activities on the water are available. Later we take a trip to **Antelope Canyon**, a spectacular screw canyon formed by sandstone erosion - and a great place for taking photographs - and we round things off at nearby **Marble Canyon**, where we will enjoy the sunset. Our camp tonight will be at Wahweap campgrounds beach by the lake, with dinner in camp.

Day 6:

Today we travel to **Monument Valley**, where we shall marvel at the panorama of colourful monoliths rising up out of the Colorado Plateau, light dancing off the layers of sandstone, siltstone and shale, a natural wonder made famous as a setting for so many Hollywood westerns. Our experience will be greatly enhanced by our Navajo guide, Paul Tohlakai, who will share with us the sense of history and spirituality of the place.

Driving north, we enter the realm of **Dibé Nitsaa** (Big Sheep Mountain), the sacred mountain to the north. We will stop over at **Mesa Verde**. Spanish for "Green Table", Mesa Verde was the home of the Ancient Pueblo people for

over seven centuries, from AD 600 to AD 1300. To date, the park protects over 4,000 of the most notable and best preserved archaeological sites in the US, including 600 imposing cliff dwellings as well as a village on the mesa top. Our next stop will be at the sacred mountain of the north before heading to **Durango**, Colorado, where we spend the night in a comfortable motel.

Day 7:

Leaving Durango, we will travel through the magnificent Southern Rockies to the Dine' Eastern Sacred Mountain of **White Shell Mountain** (Tsisnaasjini"), otherwise called Mount Blanca. This sprawling mountain is a site of significant importance to many Native American tribes for vision quest, pilgrimages, and contemplative practices.

Next we visit **Crestone, Colorado**, a town that is home to North America's largest international interfaith spiritual community, developed with guidance from Native American elders.

Our next stop is to the east of the San Luis Valley - the **Grand Sand Dunes National Park**, where the tallest sand dunes on the continent stretch nearly 750' above the valley floor. Here we shall have great fun hiking and sliding down the dunes, and there will be an opportunity to hike and cool off at the lush **Zapata Falls**. We will camp within the national park. The evening display of stars is especially brilliant here, and the programme will include Dine' star knowledge around the fire.

Day 8:

We head south once more, this time to the historic **Taos Pueblo**, "The Place of the Red Willows", at the foot of the majestic Taos Mountains in New Mexico. Here multi-storeyed adobe buildings have been continuously inhabited for more than a millennium by Tiwa-speaking Pueblo people; the town is an internationally renowned Native American community and has been recognised as a World Heritage Site and a National Historic Landmark. We will stay in Taos to enjoy the southwest flavour.

Day 9:

As we come to the end of our tour of the Sacred Mountains region, we follow the twisting Rio Grande river south towards Santa Fe, exploring the possibility of the various Pueblo native seasonal activities on the way. Reaching **Santa Fe**, New Mexico's capital, we have the opportunity to look round the many museums, historic buildings, galleries and other cultural sites, as well as sample the excellent restaurants, hostelrys, shops and arts venues of the city. Finally, completing our circle, we head back to our final destination and origin of **Albuquerque** and settle in for our last hotel night.

Day 10:

And so our journey together comes to a close, with a shuttle to **Albuquerque International Airport** for last farewells before flights home.

Includes:

Land transportation and airport transfers; guides and teachers; five nights' hotel/motel accommodation, double occupancy (single occupancy available for an extra charge, please enquire); four nights' camping; 3 dinners including welcome dinner in Albuquerque, 2 lunches, 3 breakfasts.

Activities involve responsible visitation to sacred sites with camping and other out-of-doors activities; hiking, horse-back riding, campfire lectures-discussions, and story-telling.

What to expect:

Escape the confinements of convenience and enter the realm of everyday living out in nature. We will be in sync with natural time, weather, and places in accordance with Native American philosophy of living. Commit to ten days of personal journey that will help to re-examine one's life and gain insight into the distinctive worldview and wisdom of an Indigenous culture.

Not only will participants delve into the beauty of the culture and vast landscape of the American southwest, you will gain an up-close and personal education on some of the challenges that Native Americans face today and the importance of cross-cultural sharing for improving the quality of life for the people of all walks of life as well as for the natural environment.

What To Wear:

Summers are hot, temperatures can reach the 90s (Fahrenheit); however, evenings can be cool. Be prepared with proper clothing befitting seasonal weather changes. You are advised to bring good hiking shoes, hat, sunblock and rain gear.

Health:

Obtain health clearance. Disclaimer available for any activities assumed by participants. Physical activities will not be excessive.

Culture:

Be prepared for any preconceived notions about Native American culture to be challenged. Come with an open mind and an open heart.