



TRAVELERS' TALES,
FROM NEAR + FAR

EDITED BY
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EXPERIENCES

► Highway 84 passes through Abiquiu, New Mexico, on the stretch between Telluride, Colorado, and Santa Fe.





Savoring the Southwest

On an ultra-luxury road trip through Utah, Colorado, and New Mexico, **Rosecrans Baldwin** winds between hikes and hotels—exploring culinary traditions and forward-thinking kitchens along the way.

DRIVING HAD NEVER been my calling. For the decade I lived in New York City, I took the subway almost exclusively; living in Paris for a few years, I bicycled to work. But then came Los Angeles.

Moving to California showed me just how much I could enjoy exploring new places by car. Even more so during the pandemic. As in-state travel became the norm, my wife, Rachel, and I drove up to see the redwoods and out to see the desert.

We'd been itching to explore further when I heard about a culinary road-trip package from the outfitter **Black Tomato** (blacktomato.com) that focuses on Utah, Colorado, and New Mexico. Previous road trips of ours had involved sleeping bags and energy bars. (I know from experience that enough ketchup packets can make a meal.) This would be different: guests stay at three distinctive **Auberge Resorts** (aubergeresorts.com) and journey the 800 miles in a Mercedes—an AMG model, the company's high-performance tier. To be honest, it sounded fancier than perhaps anything we'd experienced before.

It was October. The summer crowds were gone, the heat was down. It seemed as good a time as any, perhaps the best, to start driving.

DAYS 1–2: UTAH

We flew in to Salt Lake City and drove less than an hour to Park City, a ski town probably better known as the home of the Sundance Film Festival, with all the attendant celebrity trappings. But the **Lodge at Blue Sky, Auberge Resorts Collection** (*suites from \$2,899*), a 3,500-acre working ranch outside town in the Wasatch Mountains, is a lavish hideaway from all that.

We drove to the end of a country road, past horses, old barns. The scale of the place wasn't apparent until we stepped out of reception and into an extraordinary view: an unfurling valley where guests can forage, fly-fish, and shoot skeet. Occasionally somebody forgets to close a gate and cattle roam among the freestanding suites. The hills were on fire with autumn colors—red maples, orange oaks, aspens gone yellow. On a post-unpacking walk, we turned a corner and a deer looked up from drinking in the creek. "I feel like we're staying in a private forest," Rachel said.



▲ Black Tomato equips road-trippers with a Mercedes for the drive between Auberge properties.

That night at the on-site restaurant **Yuta** (*entrées* \$36–\$52), a few steps from our door, executive chef Galen Zamorra stopped by the table as we split a dish of pheasant wrapped in Swiss chard. He had won a James Beard Award at Bouley Bakery in New York, but moved to Utah just before the pandemic. We talked about what it had been like to relocate to the mountains—particularly at this time. “The kids love it,” he said, as if nothing could be more obvious. “There’s just so much to do.”

The next day, on Zamorra’s recommendation, we stopped at nearby **Gracie’s Farm** (*instagram.com/graciesfarmbluesky*). This all-women operation—a bumper sticker in the dusty parking area read FARMHER—provides organic produce to Yuta and other local restaurants. Head farmer Lynsey Gammon explained that they use a “no-till” method to work the land—an unusual technique designed to conserve water, save fuel, and promote soil health. Resort guests can visit to learn about crop rotation, she said, or collect eggs for breakfast.

After a hike and a hilltop yoga session, it was time for cocktails. **High West Distillery** (*highwest.com*), practically Blue Sky’s only neighbor, is well represented on the lodge’s bar menu. I ordered the Horse Thief: tequila, blackberries, and High West whiskey. I could have had two—or four—but we had an early departure. Maybe that’s the irony of a good road trip. You hope to find a perfect spot, and once you do, you go find another.

DAYS 3–4: COLORADO

The 400-mile drive went fast. At first we were cruising down desert flats, golden under huge sheaves of cloud. About four hours in, outside Moab, a long line of cars waited to enter **Arches National Park** (*nps.gov/arch*), which we’d both seen before, so we headed into town instead. Moab is known as a cycling destination; a cousin who used to live there said to look for bike shops with espresso bars, since the mechanics tend to take both—bikes and coffee—equally seriously. A macchiato at **Bike Fiend** (*moabbikefiend.com*) proved him right.



▲ The Lodge at Blue Sky, in Park City, Utah, has a hilltop yurt for yoga or private dining.



▲ Truffle-honey-cured duck breast with carrots, cabbage, and fennel at Yuta, part of the Lodge at Blue Sky.

Heading into Colorado, the road wound down into the Paradox Valley, ringed by high sandstone walls, with aspens everywhere, like yellow bouquets. Suddenly, Telluride appeared: a tiny old mining village in a box canyon, the jagged peaks of the San Juans flying up on either side. My only point of comparison was Chamonix, in the French Alps, where a glacier practically rolls down to the cafés.

We checked in to the **Madeline Hotel & Residences, Auberge Resorts Collection** (*suites from \$1,102*), where our room came equipped with a backpack and walking sticks. Photographs of mountaineers hung on the walls. We ordered snacks at the lobby lounge, **Timber Room** (*small plates \$7–\$32*)—elk tartare, deviled eggs with house-cured arctic char—and night fell as guests sat around the firepits.

Tara Butson, a guide with **San Juan Outdoor Adventures** (*tellurideadventures.com*), met us after breakfast the next morning. She explained that Telluride is a magnet for extreme types: outdoor jocks trying to make it as pro skiers, trail runners, backcountry snowboarders. I asked about the tourists—were they similarly extreme? She laughed.

“Most just want that Instagram pic.”

I asked to see a lesser-known trail, so Butson drove us to **Deep Creek Trailhead** (telluride.com/hikingtrails), just above the Telluride airport. Soon we were climbing a path paved with yellow leaves. After an hour we reached a sloping meadow overlooking the valley. Straight ahead was Wilson Peak, the mountain on the Coors beer label and one of several nearby that top 14,000 feet.

Downtown later that afternoon, we saw plenty of the types Butson described: fit as can be, with dogs and beat-up trucks. In my early twenties, I’d craved that kind of lifestyle. These days, I’m satisfied with long walks and good espresso, like the one I found at the **Coffee Cowboy** (thecoffeecowboy.com), an old horse trailer that Butson recommended. Apparently the skiers know their macchiatos, too.

DAYS 5–7: NEW MEXICO

The drive to Santa Fe was the most majestic: roads winding between looming mountains before sneaking into the yellow fields of cattle country. Soon we were in New Mexico, with its mesas and rippling rose-colored hills. We passed **Ghost Ranch** (ghostranch.org), Georgia O’Keeffe’s summer retreat, which was surrounded by multilayered cliffs that seemed to glow. As the painter Marsden Hartley once wrote, “It is not a country of light on things; it is a country of things in light.”

Our final destination was the storied **Bishop’s Lodge** (*doubles from \$1,199*), a recently renovated 1920s hotel bordering Santa Fe National Forest. Our suite, next to the property’s 19th-century chapel, came with a view of the Sangre de Cristo Mountains and not one kiva fireplace but two, plus cocktail fixings from **Santa**



▲ Potatoes, zucchini, and Wagyu served family-style at Black Iron Kitchen, the restaurant at Telluride’s Madeline Hotel.

Fe Spirits (santafespirits.com). That night at **SkyFire** (*entrées \$15–\$140*), the resort’s restaurant, we had courses inspired by Mexican and New Mexican cuisine: a deconstructed shrimp tamale, roasted quail with chorizo and corn bread. “Bishop’s Lodge is a really treasured place for a lot of people,” our server, Violette Serna, told us. “Ask anyone.” She was the third generation of her family to work at the resort, she said, and her son had started the previous week.

New Mexican cuisine is probably my favorite regional American food, and I began our final day with a pair of breakfast burritos: first at **Posa’s El Merendero** (posaszafarano.com), then at the **Pantry** (pantrysantafe.com), where every table but one was packed. For a mid-morning dessert, some chile-flavored cocoa downtown at **Kakawa Chocolate House** (kakawachocolates.com). We worked it all off by touring the exhibits at the **Museum of Contemporary Native Arts** (iaia.edu).

Our afternoon lesson at the **Santa Fe School of Cooking** (santafeschoolofcooking.com) focused on chiles, the lodestar of local cuisine. “You can always tell when someone is from the Southwest,” said our instructor, chef Michelle Chavez. “If you’re roasting a chile 500 feet away, they’re going to turn around.”

The three of us prepared a feast: tamales with red chile and pork; handmade tortillas for chicken, cheese, and green-chile enchiladas. Rachel joked that dessert, apricot empanadas, seemed to be missing something. Chavez agreed. “There’s not a bad way to use chile,” she said, laughing. “Unless you’re not using chile. Then it’s bad.”

The last morning, talking through a week of Southwestern tastes and yellow aspens, Rachel and I realized the ride itself had been the best part, oddly enough. Driving had made room for surprise—pulling over for a canyon view or a quirky little shop. We were 15 minutes from the Albuquerque airport when the sky began to fill with hot-air balloons. I slowed down. We’d had no idea it was time for the annual **Albuquerque International Balloon Fiesta** (balloonfiesta.com). Here was another thing to marvel at. It reminded me that one of the greatest of all emotions is to feel amazed. 🌐

The author did an abbreviated version of the 10-day Wild Gourmet in the Southwest itinerary. blacktomato.com; from \$10,950 per person, including accommodations, breakfasts, and activities.

▼ A guest room at Bishop’s Lodge, in Santa Fe, built in the 1920s and reopened as an Auberge Resort in 2019.

