

*New Mexico*

# TRADITION™

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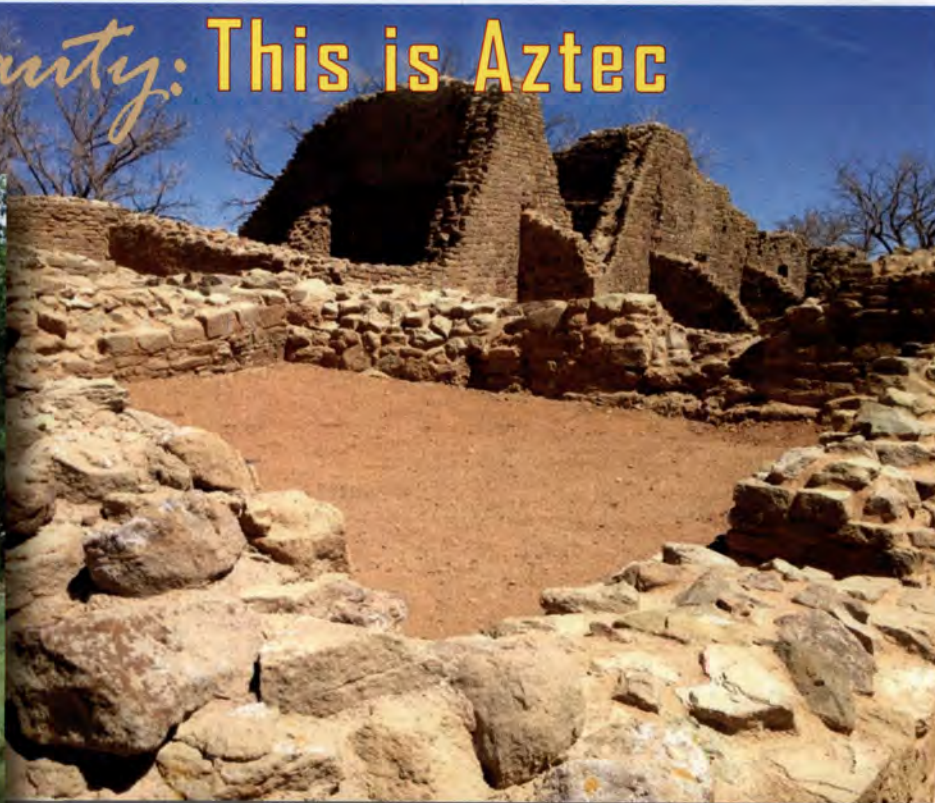


# — ANCIENT TRADITIONS —

## A Tradition of

## *Natural Beauty: This is Aztec*

By Chris Duthie



Above: Aztec Ruins National Monument, a UNESCO World Heritage site.  
Left: Southern Ute dancers are frequent guest performers in Aztec.

### **AZTEC: CLASSIC AMERICANA, AWESOME RECREATION**

Explorers, rustlers, homesteaders, wildcatters, railroaders: Aztec's effervescent history epitomizes the Great American West. An increasingly popular destination for Four Corners visitors in northwest New Mexico, Aztec is a community rich in multi-cultural heritage, civic pride and ancestral traditions.

Centuries ago, Aztec was a central gathering place and a thriving capital for Ancestral Puebloans. Today, Aztec Ruins National Monument, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, is a dazzling landmark to the roots of civilization. Mistakenly coined "Aztec" by others, the "ancient ones" lived and flourished at this very sacred and spiritual place until it was abandoned in the early 1300s. What was left behind is both fascinating and beguiling, including the three-story, 450-room West Ruin; mysterious T-shaped doorways; a reconstructed Great Kiva; and marvelous 900-year-old roof timbers that shelter intact plaster rooms.

In 1829, Mexican trader Antonio Armijo, 60 men and 100 mules visited Aztec Ruins en route to California. Starting in Abiquiu, New Mexico, Armijo followed established American Indian trails as well as the 1776 exploration of Franciscan missionaries Sivestre Velez de Escalante and Francisco Antanasio Dominguez. The Old Spanish National Historic Trail, designated by Congress in 2002, spans more than 2,500 miles and is regarded the longest and most arduous pack mule route in America.

Aztec visitors are also discovering Nikon-prompting assets that include more than 200 documented natural sandstone arches and

windows – all within an hour's drive of the city. Search out breathtaking Arch Rock in Hart Canyon, or visit the spectacular Anasazi Arch in Cox Canyon. GPS directions and maps are available via a PDF download at [www.aztecnm.com](http://www.aztecnm.com) or by emailing the Aztec Visitor Center at [goaztec@aztecnm.gov](mailto:goaztec@aztecnm.gov).

In town, Aztec Museum & Pioneer Village houses one of the finest collections of authentic western Americana. History comes alive at the doctor's and sheriff's offices, blacksmith and foundry, an 1880 pioneer cabin, general store and post office, and the Cedar Hill Church - all painstakingly reconstructed from the original buildings. Numerous properties throughout town are also listed on the National Register of Historic Places and the New Mexico State Register of Cultural Properties. The self tour starts at the Old Fire Station (now home to the San Juan County Historical Society) and meanders downtown and into the city's heritage neighborhoods. Many of these historic places are described in a downloadable document at [www.aztecnm.com](http://www.aztecnm.com) and in a special guide available at the Aztec Museum.

The city is equally attractive to outdoor sports enthusiasts. Navajo Lake State Park – located a half-hour drive away – features a 25-mile lake, 200-plus camping and picnic sites, two improved boat ramps and a marina. Navajo Lake is celebrated for its boating, sailing and other water sports, plus trophy fishing for brown, rainbow, and cutthroat trout, largemouth bass, crappie, bluegill, channel catfish and kokanee salmon.

Flowing from Navajo Lake, the lower San Juan River is ranked an America Top-10 Trout Fishing Waterway. A 4.5-mile, nutrient-rich section below Navajo Dam is so spectacular for fishing that it has



earned "Quality Waters" designation. (Special angling regulations are in effect.) Attracting fly fishing enthusiasts the world over, the river further compels with multi-hued sandstone canyons and desert vistas.

Back in town, Aztec's considerable natural assets include the Animas River, one of the West's remaining undammed waterways. Before it empties into the San Juan River (which in turn expands the Colorado River), the Animas flows through the heart of Aztec and is popular for swimming, fishing, rafting and tubing. It's also a key feature for some of the city's parks, which offer verdant playgrounds, picnic sites, tennis, baseball, softball, soccer, youth football, BMX biking, fishing, skateboarding and a new "splash and play" fountain for kids. And all of Aztec's parks are dog friendly, too.

If you love the thrill of high-desert mountain bike riding, Aztec boasts more than 30 miles of trails. Its thrilling showcase trail, Alien Run, is ranked among the more technically challenging and scenic in the Four Corners. Routed near an alleged UFO crash site, the Alien Run can be navigated by a novice yet it's immensely challenging for experts. Pack a lunch and camera, then take a ride for the ages.

Motor sports enthusiasts also enjoy Aztec. Hot spot and home to many top amateur and pro riders, the sand-and-clay Aztec Motocross track is rated among the best in the Southwest. It includes an AMA- and NMA-sanctioned supercross track designed in 2010 by No Limit MX for professional riders, as well as a separate learning/coaching area for less experienced riders. Nearby Kart Canyon Speedway hosts Quarter Midget Cars for heart-pounding motorized racing for kids. And at the legendary Aztec Speedway, IMCA-sanctioned modified, sport mod, hobby and mini sprint stock cars have been thrilling fans since the 1960s.

For more information about Aztec, call 888-543-4629, websurf to [www.aztecnm.com](http://www.aztecnm.com), email [goaztec@aztecnm.gov](mailto:goaztec@aztecnm.gov), or check the town's Facebook page at [www.facebook.com/aztecnewmexico](http://www.facebook.com/aztecnewmexico). Great photography of Aztec can also be found at [pinterest.com/cityofaztec/](http://pinterest.com/cityofaztec/).

## IMPORTANT AZTEC EVENTS

### JANUARY

Aztec Ruins National Monument Annual Birthday Party

### FEBRUARY

Aztec Ruins National Monument World Heritage Anniversary

### MAY

Aztec Animal Shelter 5K Charity Trail Run/Walk  
 Alien Run Mountain Bike Competition  
 Aztec Speedway RM Midget Racing Memorial Weekend  
 Aztec Fiesta Days

### JUNE

Aztec Speedway CLMA DIRTcar Southern Series  
 Relay For Life

### JULY

Annual Animas River Blues Festival

### AUGUST

National Night Out

### SEPTEMBER

Aztec Speedway CLMA DIRTcar Southern Series  
 Annual Antique Truck and Equipment Show  
 Annual Founders Day at Aztec Museum & Pioneer Village  
 Annual Animas River Green Chili Festival at Sutherland Farms  
 Annual Boots & Brews Fest

### OCTOBER

Pumpkin Festival at Sutherland Farms  
 Annual Aztec Highland Games & Celtic Festival

### DECEMBER

Aztec Christmas Festival

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