

*Santa Fe and the Four Corners*  
*May 11 - 24, 2011*  
*With Road Scholar and Southwest Adventures*

With one month to go, the Easter Island portion of OAT's Chile and Argentina trip cancelled! What to do? I've always loved the Southwest and posted a question on the ITN Message Board to find companies with good itineraries. We've all moved way past the 44-people-in-a-bus type of tours and I was looking for a small group learning experience.



And I found it!

Road Scholar ([www.road scholar.org](http://www.road scholar.org)) is just what I hoped for and I thank Ada G. for sending me off in the right direction. After looking at their itineraries on the web I booked a 5 day Santa Fe Independent Cities Discoveries trip; followed by a 9 day "Anasazi Culture and the Four Corners Region" program. I was a little concerned about the size of the groups as well as the age range, but all turned out well. The Santa Fe trip had 14 participants; and the Anasazi Culture had 22 (along with a big 'ol coach bus seating 54 and one very strange couple!)

I also was able to do two day trips with a company called Great Southwest Adventures ([www.swadventures.com](http://www.swadventures.com)) and visited Taos as well as to O'Keefe country.

The two weeks were packed! On the Independent City Discovery we had morning meetings/classes on: local history, the art scene, Southwest literature, Native American music and local festivals. In addition we had walking tours to the historic district and the Canyon Road gallery district. We had afternoons free to explore Santa Fe on our own, and were given a "Culture Pass" to the museums and monuments. The hotel had a complimentary shuttle to take us just about anywhere we wanted to go. The local bus is \$1 for a day pass! This trip was so good, I would do it again!

*Many in our group were interested in Georgia o'Keefe and our leader arranged a special lecture for us.*



Evenings we met for cocktails and discussions, then continued to a restaurant. Some dinners were included, others were optional. When our leader learned that several of us were interested in Georgia O'Keefe, he put together a special after-dinner program for us.



The same day the Santa Fe Independent trip ended, the Anasazi Culture Program began. The main goal was visiting archaeological sites in the Four Corners Area - New Mexico, Arizona, Colorado and Utah and learning about the cultures that lived there in the past and that still live there.

Our first morning began with a four hour lecture on Puebloan Anthropology, Archaeology and Archeoastronomy by Peter Gold, a cultural anthropologist who accompanied us on our trip. We also had a tour manager who was very nice but not that well experienced.

Our field trips included Mesa Verde National Park, Hovenweep National Monument, Canyon de Chelly, Aztec Ruins, Salmon Ruins and Chaco Canyon including Pueblo Bonito. There was no dilly-dallying anywhere.

We also visited a store in Cortez, Colorado that had an excellent selection of Native American items. On the longer bus rides we listened to lectures or watched a DVD. All meals were included and we could often choose from the menu.

These trips left me wanting more. I think anyone interested in a learning vacation might want to look at these Road Scholar programs. The more "ordinary" itineraries might have large groups (I saw one with 42 people), but if you pick the more unusual itineraries, groups are sure to be smaller. Hotels were good - and I posted reviews on [tripadvisor.com](https://www.tripadvisor.com). Look for reviews by EstherP.!



*Beautiful Native American turquoise jewelry. There is no better places to buy and enjoy it than the Southwest.*



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Additional things to know

1. Our hotel was the Holiday Inn Express a little further out of town. There is a bus stop right outside the hotel and a mall just behind the hotel.

For the Santa Fe Independent City - our hotel was the Sage Inn, closer in to town and it had a free shuttle service anywhere you wanted to go within about 5 miles.

2. The food was wonderful on this trip -- we could order off the menu most times and there was no limit. Some people overdid it, I thought. Of the Road Scholar trips I've done, this had the best food

3. We had a tour manager (person who got us the keys, counted luggage, etc) and a wonderful guide - a cultural anthropologist well versed in the history of the area. He even did a ceremony for us at Chaco Canyon.

4. Wear light boots and take a walking stick when you visit the archaeological sites. It can be rocky and always dusty. Wear light colored clothing

5. The best place I found to buy Native American jewelry was in Cortez Colorado. We ate at a restaurant called "Nero's" and the store was right next door. Order your food, then run over to the store to check it out when its not so busy. You will have time afterwards to shop.

6. The hotels are good, but don't expect much at the Thunderbird Lodge -- it is very 1950's motel-like, but right at the entrance to the Canyon. Try the "Navajo Taco" in their restaurant!

7. You've probably been to Santa Fe before, but if you go a day or so early you can get a "Museum Pass" which given entree to about 5 museums. Its \$18.00. And..... even if you've visited the museum before, you can flash your pass and use their bathrooms. This is especially handy in old town Santa Fe. But there are easily accessible bathrooms in La Fonda Hotel.



*Joe Begay is a well known Navajo silversmith. I bought some beautiful things from him at his store in San Xavier Plaza in Tucson. He gifted me with a special drumming ceremony for a good journey.*