



Timeless traditions.

New directions.

The Picuris Pueblo and Hotel Santa Fe



When you come to Hotel Santa Fe, you enter a world that is very different from other fine hotels. As you arrive on the grounds, you are struck by the building itself. Sitting in harmony with its secluded wildflower gardens and mountain background, the Hotel's design is based on the multi-level, terraced adobe pueblos first built by New Mexico's native people a thousand years ago.

At the entrance, a welcoming sign portrays the "penne" or "one deer," an animal considered sacred by Native Americans for its gifts of food and clothing. The deer is a fitting symbol for the Hotel Santa Fe. For just as it brought sustenance to Native Americans in the past, the Hotel is bringing new economic life to the ancient Picuris Pueblo.

Picuris, a small remote Indian pueblo, is the majority owner of Hotel Santa Fe in partnership with a group of private investors. It is a unique success story—the only venture of its kind in the entire country. But the Hotel is more than a business opportunity for the people of Picuris. It is a proud showcase for their culture.

Native American artworks, including sculptor Allan Houser's "Apache Spirit Dancers" and "The Offering," a contemporary "Totem Pole" by Doug Coffin and "Hopi Maiden" and "Lukachukai Woman" by Doug Hyde grace the grounds. You are greeted by the words "Mah-waan, Mah-waan," the traditional welcome of the Picuris in their Tiwa language, carved over the door. Inside the lodge-style lobby, comfortable New Mexican furniture invites you to relax. Native American flute music plays softly and in the fall and winter a crackling pinon fire in the kiva fireplace is a timeless tradition that warms both the body and soul.

The History

The origin of the Picuris remains a mystery. It is known that people lived in the green mountain valleys between Santa Fe and Taos as early as 750 A.D. But whether the Picuris descended from those people or came from elsewhere is not known. We do know that around 1250, the Picuris moved from a pueblo called Pot Creek to establish their new home in a lush valley hidden by mountain peaks. There, they prospered. The easternmost of the New Mexico pueblos, they fostered trade between the plains Indians and their pueblo neighbors. For centuries they traded, grew crops, made beautiful pottery from shiny rose-colored micaceous clay and practiced their ceremonies tied to the seasons, the earth and the sanctity of life.

But in 1591, life in the secluded valley changed forever. Spanish explorers, in their restless search for wealth, souls and conquest, discovered the area. They told of a thriving pueblo, eight or nine stories tall, with a population in the thousands. Within a few years, travelers described Picuris as one of the largest pueblos in New Mexico and gave it a new name, San Lorenzo, by which it is still sometimes known today.

Spain at that time was in the grip of religious fervor, attempting to impose Catholicism on every soul under Spanish rule. In New Mexico, priests and troops stationed at the Indian pueblos relentlessly tried to force the native people to embrace Christianity and abandon the religious practices which had been part of their daily lives for thousands of years.

The results were often violent. The Spanish invaded religious chambers, burned sacred articles and punished those who resisted. The Indians fought back, and by 1675 the situation had become volatile. Spanish authorities in Santa Fe jailed and flogged 47 tribal leaders accused of "idolatrous violations." One of those leaders was PoPe, a Tewa-speaking man from Ohkay Owingeh (formerly San Juan Pueblo).

PoPe gathered allies from the other Tewa pueblos, the Tiwa-speaking Picuris and Taos Pueblos, the Towa from Jemez and the Apaches del Acha. On August 10, 1680, the feast day of San Lorenzo (ironically, the saint for whom the Spanish had named Picuris), they struck. They killed or drove out all the Spaniards in their northern homelands, then pushed on to Santa Fe, where other Native American forces were already laying siege to the town. Their combined power forced the Spanish, including Governor Antonio de Otermin, to retreat all the way back to Mexico.

But the Spanish were not gone for good. Twelve years later, Don Diego de Vargas led a mostly bloodless reconquest of New Mexico. In 1693, he returned with the Spanish settlers to lay siege to Santa Fe, and had to violently pin down resistance, including Picuris Pueblo. This time, the Spanish were more tolerant of native religion.

The Picuris abandoned their pueblo in 1696 to settle in southern Colorado and eastern Kansas with the Apaches. The Picuris reestablished their trading connections with the plains Indians, but within a few years they were cut off by raids from the Comanche, who were fiercely expanding their territory. By 1706, ten years after leaving the pueblo, the Picuris were decimated by the Comanche and the rapid spread of European diseases like smallpox, for which Native Americans had neither resistance nor cure. The governor of Picuris was desperate to save his people and turned to his old enemy, the Spanish governor in Santa Fe.

The Spanish wanted to reconcile their differences with the pueblos, so the governor dispatched troops to find the Picuris and bring them home. After this rescue, the Picuris formed much closer ties with the Spanish—joining them in fighting the continuing encroachments of the Comanche, whose murderous raids completely wiped out several undefended New Mexico pueblos. During this time, European settlers moved closer and closer to Picuris, bringing with them still more foreign diseases, which killed and further weakened the native people.

At the beginning of the Pueblo Rebellion, the population of Picuris Pueblo was three thousand. By the turn of the twentieth century, only a hundred remained. Diminished in numbers, but not in spirit, the Picuris set about rebuilding their way of life.

The Present

In modern times, the Picuris have continued to struggle—but now the enemy is economics. As the United States evolved from an agrarian society to one of manufacturing and commerce, the hidden valley was left behind. Its remote location, which lent it such great beauty, made economic development difficult. Commercial farming was tried, but proved unprofitable. Many people had to move away from the pueblo for jobs in nearby communities and across the United States.

However, traditional life at Picuris has remained relatively unchanged. The village is governed as it has been for centuries—by a council elected by the people. Those who live far away return home for feast day celebrations. And the kiva, a circular chamber built underground, remains, the center of spiritual life.

Paradoxically, Catholicism—the religion the Spanish tried to force on the Picuris—is now widely accepted. In fact, members of the tribe are devout in the harmonious practice of both the Catholic religion and their own Native American rituals. The Pueblo's major feast day remains the Feast of San Lorenzo, and is observed with traditional dances, church services, foot races and family gatherings. Holidays such as Christmas and Easter are celebrated in much the same way.

It is this sense of tradition that helped the Picuris overcome a hardship in 1989, when the adobe church of Picuris, believed to have been built in 1776, collapsed due to water damage. The people of Picuris, with their strong belief in their traditions and their will to persevere, rallied.

Over eight long years they lovingly rebuilt the church by hand, brick by brick, just the way it was done by their ancestors. Men came from nearby communities to help with the heavy work. The women did the plastering. Even school children helped. Volunteers from all over pitched in, and today the church stands again. With its hand-carved vigas and beautiful eighteenth-century altarpieces, it is truly a monument to determination.

However, efforts to stabilize the Pueblo's economy were not so successful. In order to provide jobs and bring visitors to Picuris, tribal leaders opened a gift shop, grocery store and small museum. Their restaurant, the Hidden Valley Restaurant, which serves tasty traditional Native American and New Mexican fare, became very popular both with locals and travelers on the road from Santa Fe to Taos. Unfortunately the restaurant was not profitable and is now closed. Even with the remaining new enterprises, the pueblo lagged. It seemed there was no end in sight.

Hotel Santa Fe

In 1988, a group of Santa Fe-based business people, including Joe Schepps, hotel and real estate developer; Bill and Nancy Zeckendorf, Santa Fe and New York real estate developers; Paul Margetson, professional hotel manager; Richard Yates, architect and developer; and Earl and Deborah Potter, attorney and community leaders; approached the Picuris Pueblo with an innovative idea. They would join forces with the tribe to build and operate a hotel in the thriving city of Santa Fe. Subsequently, Luther Hodges, a local businessman and former Deputy U.S. Secretary of Commerce, joined the Hotel ownership and management group. Since the project involved an Indian pueblo, loan guarantees were provided by the United States Government through the Bureau of Indian Affairs and the Picuris were granted fifty-one percent ownership of the Hotel.

Although the idea of a new hotel represented a way out of their economic troubles, it was unsettling to the Picuris. Some said it would never work. Others were concerned about entering into such a close relationship with outsiders, who were viewed by some tribal members with a degree of distrust. It took months of careful discussion and negotiation, but the spiritual leaders and tribal council were finally convinced. The Picuris entered into an agreement that would be a significant step toward their goal of financial independence.

In 1990, construction of the Hotel began. Many Picuris tribal members signed on with the construction crew, while others trained for staff positions at nearby hotels. Hotel Santa Fe opened its doors on March 28, 1991, marking a new era of economic development for the Picuris Pueblo.

Today, the Hotel benefits the Picuris in many ways. Tribal members are employed at the Hotel and many Native Americans from other tribes worked at the Hotel until the opening of several tribal casinos lured them away! The Arts and Crafts Shop is owned by the Picuris, and has helped to revitalize the Pueblo's artistic traditions, especially the making of their beautiful micaceous pottery. Most importantly, the Hotel, with its strong connection to pueblo culture, is a great source of pride to the Picuris as they look for new opportunities to safeguard their financial future.

The Future

The Picuris Pueblo is involved in several other projects designed to improve its economy. The Parks and Wildlife Program oversees fish ponds on Pueblo land. Employees of the program maintain boundary lines and prevent poaching. Fishing permits are available to both residents and visitors, and many Hotel Santa Fe guests choose to spend a few hours fishing in the peaceful surroundings.

The Picuris Pueblo's traditional arts and crafts show was originally held to pay for the restoration of the church. It was so successful that it has now taken on a life of its own. It is held every year on the first weekend in July when Native American, Hispanic and other artists travel from all over New Mexico to exhibit and sell their work. Food and festivities abound, with the proceeds funding the maintenance of the church.

Another proud accomplishment of the Picuris is the return of the buffalo to their lands. Once a symbol of power and replenishment for Indian people, its dwindling numbers and forlorn state mirrored the decline of many native tribes. Now, as members of the multi-tribal Bison Cooperative, the Picuris are helping to restore the buffalo as both a food source and traditional spiritual enhancement for Native Americans. Today, the buffalo (more than 100 head) graze freely on Picuris land and are a great source of inspiration.

Like the buffalo, the Picuris have begun to flourish again. They are courageous people whose faith in their traditional ways have kept them together through adversity, and whose vision for the future has taken them in bold new directions. Though small in number, the Picuris always beat the odds.

We hope you will enjoy your stay at the Hotel Santa Fe and your connection with this remarkable group of people.



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