



New Mexico

JOURNEY

THE MAGAZINE FOR AAA MEMBERS



More Than Hot Air

The lowdown on fresh
Balloon Fiesta views

LocalColor:
Ghost guide

Remembering
Tony Hillerman

Riverboatin' adventure in
Mark Twain's America

SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER 2014

Beyond the

When Skies Are Calling

Most people watch the International Balloon Fiesta with their feet firmly on the ground. For a really different view, head to the skies to get the balloonists' perspective. **Rainbow Ryders** is the only ballooning company authorized to lift off from Balloon Fiesta Park (others launch at least 5 miles away). A popular option is the sunrise Fiesta ride. The 4-1/2-hour float costs \$429 (and sells out quickly). (800) 725-2477; rainbowryders.com.

Find more information about the Albuquerque International Balloon Fiesta at balloonfiesta.com or cabq.gov/balloon.



Balloons

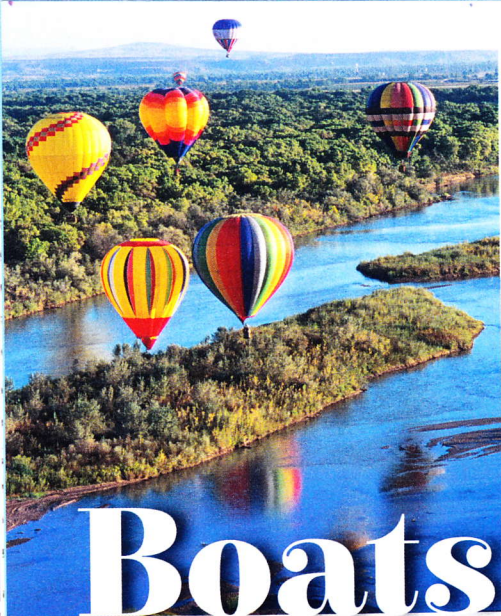


Boats, bikes, bubbly, and more offer a breath of fresh (hot) air during Albuquerque's famed fiesta

BY HALEY SHAPLEY

Hot air balloons have always been the star attraction at the Albuquerque International Balloon Fiesta. The event, now in its 43rd year and set for October 4–12, draws more than 850,000 spectators and more than 500 top balloonists from all over the world to the 365-acre Balloon Fiesta Park, where an explosion of colors and shapes devours the Duke City's green lawns and blue skies.

We all love our balloons, but even the most enthusiastic hot-air-loving fan could benefit from getting a little distance from the launch field to find new ways to appreciate this nearly two-week-long balloon frenzy. The following offers a sampling of fresh perspectives. >>>



Boats

>>> **Quiet Waters Paddling Adventures,**
\$69. 105 D Pleasant View Drive, Bernalillo.
(505) 771-1234; quietwaterspaddling.com.

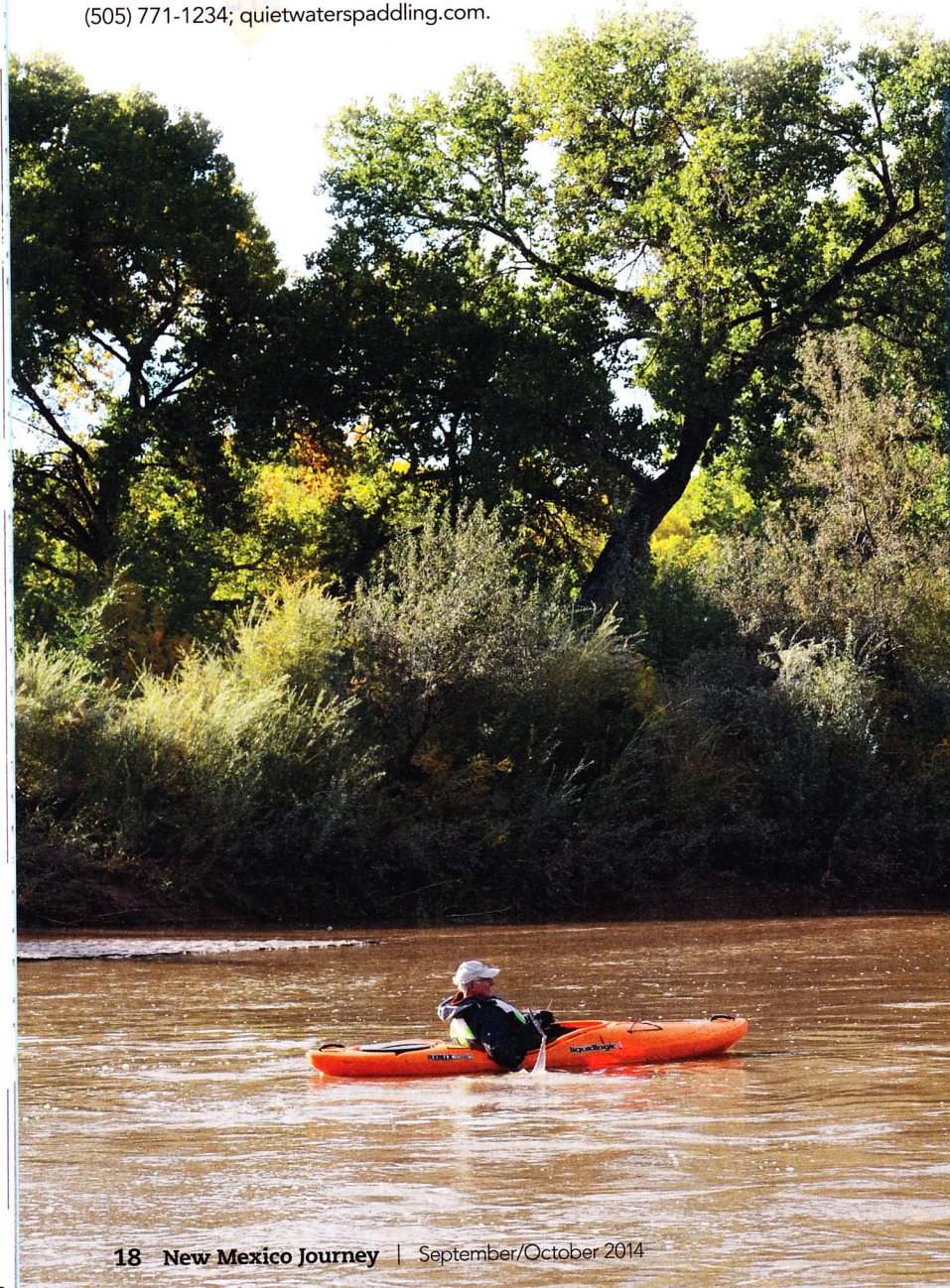
>>> **FLOAT THE FIESTA** Imagine the scene: A heavy mist envelops the Rio Grande, just as the sun reveals its first rays of the day. Beavers busily swim by, while birds soar gracefully overhead. As you paddle your canoe or kayak through the water, you look up to spot a colorful balloon floating silently through the sky, looking as though it belongs there just as naturally as the clouds. Then you see another, and another, until they're dotting the landscape like whimsically colored apples sprouting across an orchard.

"The atmosphere of the river at that time of day is really special," says Michael Hayes, president of Quiet Waters Paddling Adventures, which offers Float the Fiesta trips.

Yes, the trips start early—participants arrive at 5:30 a.m.—but they offer a way to experience the Fiesta unlike anything else. After launching from a spot 6 miles northwest of Balloon Fiesta Park, you'll float downstream. If the conditions are right, about halfway into the more than three-hour trip you'll be surrounded by balloons, some of which might do a "splash and dash"—that is, dip their baskets atop the river.

"You have spectacular views of the balloons, regardless of which way the wind is blowing," Hayes says. "But when the winds cooperate, we've had some amazing stuff happen. I've got photos of canoeists chatting with balloon pilots."

Afterward, you'll stop on a sandbar for a brunch of baked goods and lots of conversation about what you've seen—all before most people have started their day.



Bubbly

>>> **VIEWING PARTIES AT GRUET WINERY**

A celebratory champagne toast has been a post-flight tradition ever since the advent of ballooning. The custom continues today, and Fiesta fans can get in on the sipping by attending a viewing party at Gruet Winery, which has been producing sparkling and other wines in northeastern Albuquerque for 25 years. Starting at 7 a.m. on both Saturdays during the Fiesta, tasting parties include breakfast and a mimosa in the tasting room, located a half-mile from Fiesta Park.

>>> **Gruet Winery, \$20** (includes two glasses of wine and breakfast). 8400 Pan American Freeway NE. (505) 821-0055; gruetwinery.com.



Bikes

>>> THE BOSQUE BIKING ADVENTURE PACKAGE

If you want to two-wheel it around Albuquerque at your own pace, The BikeSmith offers a Bosque Biking Adventure Package that includes a bike of choice (hybrid, road, or mountain), a map with points of interest (customized upon request), and a garden-fresh meal at Old Town Farm, which, despite its city location, has a decidedly idyllic rural vibe.

The BikeSmith's designated route takes you on the Paseo del Bosque Trail, winding its way along the Rio Grande through a cottonwood forest and past attractions such as Tingley Beach, the Albuquerque BioPark Aquarium, and the Rio Grande Nature Preserve. Of course, bikers can see balloons along the trail, too. "It's the perfect escape," says Ross Consaul, co-owner of The BikeSmith. "You can park right in our parking lot, get on the bike and on the trail in a few minutes. It's like you left the city and went out into the wilderness."

>>> **The BikeSmith,**
rates start at \$35.
901 Rio Grande Blvd.
NW #124. (505) 242-9253;
thebikesmithllc.com.

>>> BIKES AND BALLOONS TOUR

After Heather Arnold and her husband, Josh (pictured), missed Mass Ascension one year while waiting in a long line of cars entering Balloon Fiesta Park, they knew there had to be another way to get a good view of the action. Inspired by their love of sightseeing by bicycle, they opened Routes Bicycle Tours and Rentals in 2011, and the Bikes and Balloons Tour was born, offering spectators who were willing to put in a little pedal power the opportunity to see the Fiesta from two wheels.

The tour begins at 5:45 a.m. at Los Poblanos Historic Inn and Organic Farm. Along the 16-mile round-trip to Balloon Fiesta Park, guides share Albuquerque and ballooning history. "As you ride along the Rio Grande Bosque Trail, you can see all of the balloons testing the weather out," Heather says. "They look like lanterns in the sky, which is really beautiful."

Once at the Fiesta, riders leave their bikes in a designated area and grab a burrito or farm-fresh breakfast prepared by Los Poblanos chefs.

New this year, Routes will also offer a shorter, less strenuous ride that is 6 miles roundtrip from the Albuquerque Marriott Pyramid North and runs along a dedicated bicycle and pedestrian path through the city.

"Cycling is so much fun because you really kind of feel the magic of the city," Heather says. "It becomes much more than just seeing the Balloon

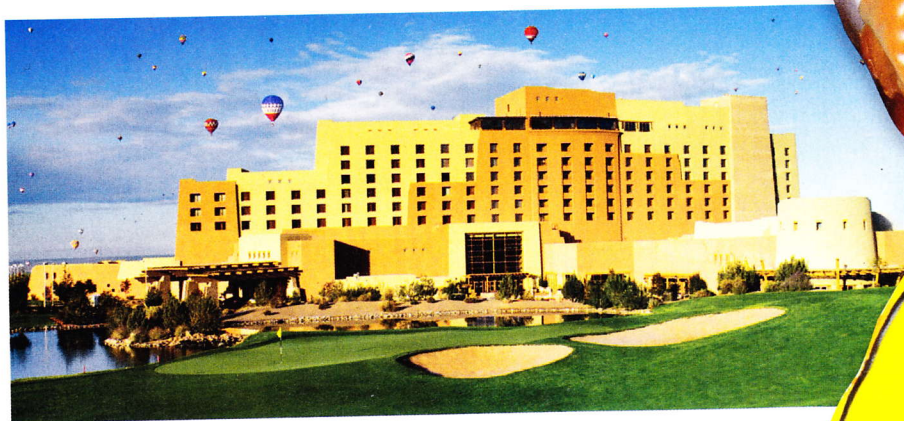
Fiesta. People are getting to see more of Albuquerque than they might otherwise."

>>> **Routes Bicycle
Tours and Rentals,**
\$50 beginner ride; \$65
advanced ride. 404
San Felipe Street NW
#B-1. (505) 933-5667;
routesrentals.com.



And More!

>>> BALLOON-SHAPED DOUGHNUTS With two locations in Albuquerque (one on the east side and one on the west), Rebel Donut is a must-stop during the Fiesta to sample hot-air-balloon-shaped doughnuts. While the colorful pastries are the stars during Fiesta time, Rebel Donut also offers several specialties that showcase local flavors, such as apple/green chile, blue corn with piñons, and Mexican chocolate. “We try to use them as our little way of showing off what our state likes,” says Rebel co-owner Carrie Mettling. **>>> Rebel Donut**, \$17 per dozen. 2435 Wyoming Boulevard NE. (505) 293-0553. 9311 Coors Boulevard NW. (505) 898-3090; rebeldonut.com.



>>> SUNRISE GOLFING AT SANDIA GOLF CLUB The early bird catches the worm, but does it also bag birdies? Grab an early tee time (starting at 7:30 a.m.) at Sandia Golf Club, located 5 miles west of the park and a prime balloon viewing spot during Mass Ascension—as you’re swinging, it just may feel as though your golf ball is going to drop right into a balloon basket. (Don’t worry; that’s pretty unlikely.) **>>> Sandia Golf Club**, prices for 18 holes start at \$71. 30 Rainbow Road NE. (505) 798-3990; sandiagolf.com.

>>> ANDERSON-ABRUZZO ALBUQUERQUE INTERNATIONAL BALLOON MUSEUM How do hot air balloons float? When did the Fiesta begin? How did balloons play a role in the Civil War? Learn the answers to these questions and more at this museum. During the Fiesta, it’s open from 5 a.m. to 5 p.m. and hosts special events, including what museum officials are calling a “happy place” (where spectators can chill out and play games), as well as a Furry Friends Fiesta Day on October 5 that includes a pet parade and dog-agility demonstrations. Located next to Balloon Fiesta Park and featuring floor-to-ceiling windows, the museum is a great place to watch all the brilliant balloons go by. **>>> Anderson-Abruzzo Albuquerque International Balloon Museum**, \$1–\$4 admission. 9201 Balloon Museum Drive NE. (505) 768-6020; balloonmuseum.com. 🌟

Haley Shapley is a freelance writer in Seattle.

Be sure to designate a driver if you plan to drink at an event where alcohol is served.



FROM LEFT: COURTESY SANDIA GOLF CLUB; STEVE LARESE