

## North America Property

### Bohemian vibe attracts homebuyers to Taos

New Mexico town offers adventurous sports alongside adobe architecture



Storefronts along West Plaza Street in Taos © Alamy

10 HOURS AGO by: Troy McMullen

Driving south-east down Highway 64 in New Mexico feels like you're driving through the heart of the American West: dusty, desert scrub stretches out on all sides, with the Sangre de Cristo Mountains looming in the distance.

But the drive uncovers the ancient pueblo town of Taos, about 70 miles north of state capital Santa Fe, wedged between the Rocky Mountains and the plunging Rio Grande Gorge.

Its natural beauty, which inspired artists such as Ansel Adams and [Georgia O'Keeffe](#), basks in the desert sun virtually all year long. O'Keeffe, who made frequent trips to Taos between 1929 and 1949, often referred to this parched swath of the US as "the faraway".

Though many artists descended on Taos in the early 20th century, it was the counterculture of the 1960s — and the influx of hippies that came with it — that still defines the town's laid-back, bohemian vibe today.

That atmosphere continues to attract homebuyers — and in increasing numbers. The number of house sales in Taos rose 33 per cent in the second quarter of 2017 compared with the same period in 2016, according to data from Berkshire Hathaway HomeServices. In that time, the average price of a home in Taos rose 7 per cent to \$341,486, the realty group says. “Most people are drawn to Taos for its history and culture, but also for its relaxed lifestyle,” says David Cordova, an estate agent with Sotheby’s International Realty and a Taos native.



But it’s not just those looking for the laid-back vibe. Some come looking for a winter thrill. Twenty miles out of town is the Taos Ski Valley, one of the West’s top attractions. Its high elevation and the dry desert air make the snowfall — which averages 300 inches a year — super-powdery. The steep runs and breathtaking scenery of the 12,481ft Kachina Peak are a magnet for white-knuckle skiers.

In the summer, the area is a playground for visitors looking to bike, hike, fly-fish or white-water raft. Its year-round appeal, agents say, is the real draw for second-home buyers. “A lot of the sales activity comes from buyers in California and Texas as well as New York,” says Martin Molz, a broker with Engel & Völkers Taos. “And most of them want a weekend location that keeps them cool in summers but also gives them outdoor activity in winter.”

Another draw is the town’s striking adobe architecture. Adobe homes are made from bricks composed of earth and organic material such as straw or dung, handmade and dried in the sun. The use of adobe dates back thousands of years and is one of the world’s earliest building materials.

John Cancro, owner and broker at Taos Properties, says the state of New Mexico contains about a third of all adobe homes in the US. “The natural content of adobe makes it non-toxic and biodegradable, which are big pluses in the modern, environmentally-conscious housing market,” he says.



143 Tune Drive Taos, \$649,000

Adobe architecture dominates much of the town's central areas, such as the historic Taos Plaza, a magnet for tourists and second-home buyers alike. But great examples can also be found in more secluded spots outside the town, brokers say.

A short drive out of town, in the Sangre de Cristo mountains, close to the Rio Grande, is a two-bedroom adobe home dating back 250 years for sale at \$999,999. The home, being sold by Sotheby's International Realty, has 10ft-high ceilings, restored double adobe walls and wood flooring.

The village of Arroyo Seco, on the road between Taos and the Taos Ski Valley, is a popular artsy enclave. A four-bedroom home there on 35 acres is for sale for \$2.9m. It includes a 5,000 sq ft residence with four bathrooms and stunning mountain views. Pinon Investments of Taos has the listing.

Engel & Völkers is marketing a more modern-looking house, which uses elements of adobe design, in Taos for \$699,000. The three-bedroom property has a walled courtyard, a hot tub and is set in more than 3.7 acres. The property is located near Rio Grande del Norte National Monument, popular public lands of rugged, wide-open plains dotted by steep canyons and rivers.

"For many new homebuyers, being near the mountains and feeling the crisp fresh air, watching the sun come up, watching a coyote running across the field, that means everything," adds David Cordova, of Sotheby's. "That's the life of Taos."

## Buying guide

- Taos has a population of about 6,700 year-round residents
- The city receives more than 300 days of sunshine per year with an annual precipitation reaching just over 12 inches
- Taos Regional Airport handles most connecting flights into the city, but Santa Fe Municipal is the closest international airport about 80 miles south
- Taos Pueblo, one of the oldest continuously occupied Native American communities in the US, is two miles north of the city

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**\$1m** A newly built four-bedroom home with a swimming pool

**\$3m** A renovated five-bedroom adobe home with mountain views

**\$5m** A 15-acre property near the mountains with seven bedrooms, swimming pool and guest house

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*Main photograph: Alamy*

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