

## Overlooked



PHOTOGRAPH BY RANCE BATTACIA FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

A NEAR MOUNTAIN Skiing in deep powder amid a shower from the snow guns on the Skyward trail at Whiteface near Lake Placid, N.Y., a village where you can even try dog-sledding.

### Skiers bypass New York's 44 resorts at their own risk.

By BILL PENNINGTON

DO you know which state has the most ski areas? It's not Colorado, Vermont, Utah, California or New Hampshire, though those are the usual suspects. The answer is New York. But somehow New York's 44 ski areas attract a sliver of the attention given mountains elsewhere. And on any given winter weekend, the surge of skiers and snowboarders on the Eastern Seaboard will point their cars north toward New England and speed past New York's ski areas is staggering.

There's nothing wrong with these New England resorts. Many are icons, and deserve to be. But if you live in the East, especially in and around New York City, that's no reason to overlook slopes that are as close, if not closer. If the average ski family makes three trips a season, why make all three to New England? And if you're traveling East, New York's areas will reward a close look. It's not as if New York's resorts are considered inferior. Among the most devoted skiers and snowboarders, New York's winter resorts are far from a secret. In Ski magazine's most recent annual ranking of Eastern ski resorts, Whiteface Mountain outside Lake Placid came in No. 3 and Holiday

Valley in Ellipticville was No. 5. Only two New England resorts, Smuggler's Notch at No. 2 and Stowe at No. 4 (both in Vermont), were ranked higher. And it's not as if New York's ski areas lacked cachet or credentials. Whiteface was host to the 1980 Winter Olympics races and Lake Placid was home to both the 1980 and 1932 Winter Olympics. Whiteface has the largest vertical drop (3,450 feet) of any resort east of the Rockies, yet it attracts about 200,000 skier visits annually, or roughly a fourth the number who visit the largest New England resorts. How is that possible?

"People mention skiing in Vermont and everyone thinks of white church steeples, village greens and a romantic country atmosphere," said Sandy Calligore, communications director for the state-run Olympic Regional Development Authority, which manages Whiteface ([www.whiteface.com](http://www.whiteface.com)) and Gore Mountain ([www.goremountain.com](http://www.goremountain.com)), another large ski area outside Lake George. "When someone says New York, they think of Manhattan and skyscrapers. Someone says New York skiing and somebody else thinks: How good can that be? But it's a big state. It's mostly country villages and big mountains."

Having grown up in New England, and having  
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## For Many a Follower, Sacred Ground

By FINN-OLAF JONES

TRUST an unknown future with a known God," urges the sign in front of the Sangre de Cristo Christian Church on the outskirts of Crestone, Colo., which is close to a four-hour drive south of Denver off Highway 17. The town might seem to be in the middle of nowhere, but if you're seeking a taste of the divine, you've probably come to the right place.

At 8,000 feet on the edge of the desert plains of the San Luis Valley beneath the Sangre de Cristo Range, this town and its environs have about 500 residents and two dozen different religious centers, including a cluster of Buddhist monasteries, a Catholic monastery, a Taoist retreat, a Hindu ashram, a Shumet center and several American Indian sanctuaries. This forested hillside haven, nestled on an enormous aquifer below the 4,000-foot Crestone Peaks, has long been considered sacred. "The Navajo and Hopi think of this as holy ground," said John Milton, a naturalist who runs shamanic Indian workshops on the serene 210-acre Sa-



MICHAEL BRANDEY FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES  
GOD'S COUNTRY Connie Bielecki, left, the Rev. Eric Hayer and Suzie Ryan at the Catholic Napa Hermitage, one of two dozen spiritual centers in Crestone, Colo.

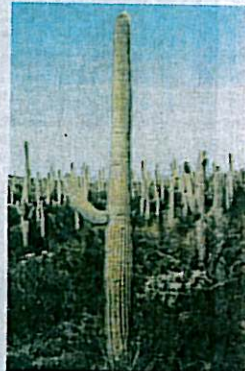
cred Land Trust along North Crestone Creek. "Elders from the community still come here to worship." An abundance of arrowheads and spears found in the area indicate that Crestone has long been a gathering spot for Indians. "This area was probably considered holy thousands of years before Europeans ever set foot here," Mr. Milton said. It's easy to see why. There's an  
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### AMERICAN JOURNEYS | Arizona Borderlands

## A Road Trip On the Edge Of America

By KEITH MULVIHILL

AS you enter the Organ Pipe Cactus National Monument in southern Arizona, it's not the park's namesake plant, thick with a cluster of many branches, that inspires gasps of awe, but thousands of saguaro, the iconic tall cactus of countless Western films. Upright and lanky, with whimsically outstretched arms, one after another the saguaros wave you in. In the 1930s, when the National Park Service went searching for the best examples of each ecosystem in the country, it chose this tract of 330,000 acres, abutting the Mexican border, to represent the Sonoran Desert. Organ Pipe is part of Arizona's larger borderland, the grand expanse of desert, grasslands and staggering peaks that make up the southern third of the state. Acquired in the Gadsden Purchase of 1854, which also included part of what is now New



JEFF TOPPING FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES  
ICON Saguaro also thrive in Organ Pipe Cactus National Monument.

Mexico, it was an area where people of many kinds and cultures had long mingled: Native Americans and Spanish missionaries, miners and ranchers, cowboys and vaqueros. In a road trip in this part of Arizona  
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**BREAKING GROUND**

**Viceroy Anguilla**

**WHAT** Oceanfront residential resort.  
**WHERE** Anguilla, in the British West Indies.  
**AMENITIES** A beach club and restaurants, among others.  
**PRICES** Available residences range from \$335,000 to \$9.9 million.  
**STATUS** The first phase is expected to open in the spring. About two-thirds of the residences have been sold so far.  
**DEVELOPER** The Kor Group.  
**CONTACT** (800) 357-1830 or www.viceroyanguilla.com.  
**DETAILS** Along two bays and 2,200 feet of beach near the western end of Anguilla, this 35-acre project is part of the Viceroy brand, which now includes two



hotels in Southern California and is expanding to planned developments in Mexico, Florida and Colorado. It will consist of 140 villa, town houses and condominium residences, which owners may choose to be rented and serve as hotel rooms when they are away. Either on bluffs or fronting the beach, the residences are all sold furnished, with their interiors designed by Kelly Wearstler. The free-standing villas, from 4,135 to 6,100 square feet, and the 3,200- to 4,300-square-foot, two-level town houses will have private infinity pools; the studio to three-bedroom condos will be in 107- to 16-unit buildings with shared infinity pools. Amenities other than the beach club will include five restaurants offering casual and fine dining, access to a 78-foot yacht, a club with activities for children and three tennis courts. There will also be a 20,000-square-foot Asian-inspired spa with a fitness center. The island's airport is nearby; flights from the United States connect to it through St. Maarten, Puerto Rico and elsewhere.

**The Orchard  
At the Cameros Inn**

**WHAT** Shared residences at a wine country resort.  
**WHERE** Napa, Calif.  
**AMENITIES** Access to a spa and swimming pools, among others.  
**PRICES** Shares from just under \$300,000.  
**STATUS** Nearly half the cottages have been completed to this point, with the rest expected soon.  
**DEVELOPERS** Plumjack Group and Cameros Holdings.  
**CONTACT** (855) 400-9831 or www.theorchardatcameros.com.

**DETAILS** The Cameros Inn opened in late 2003 on 77 acres at the southern end of the Napa Valley just east of the Sonoma County line. Named for the wine-growing region in which it sits, the resort is managed by the Plumjack Group, founded by San Francisco Mayor Gavin Newsom. There have been two dozen full-ownership houses built at the resort, and now this fractional-ownership project, the Orchard, is being added. It consists of 17 two-bedroom cottages sold in one-tench shares. Owners will be able to use their units three weeks a year, with more time granted depending on availability. The cottages are sold furnished, with details like cherry-wood floors, wood-burning fireplaces and Frette linens, as well as private decks and courtyards with outdoor showers and whirlpools. All the resort's amenities will be open to owners — an infinity pool overlooking vineyards, a lap pool lined with cabanas, another



pool for children and a fitness center with studios for yoga and pilates. The spa offers treatments that use ingredients from local vineyards and farms, including chardonnay grapes, olive oil and goat butter. There are three restaurants, one of which is open only to owners and guests, and meals are also served in the cottages. The airports in San Francisco and Oakland are about an hour away. **NICK KAYE**

**Breaking Ground** is a weekly look at projects, planned or under construction, that include weekend or vacation homes.

The Escapes section welcomes letters. Correspondence for publication must include the writer's name, address and a daytime telephone number, and should be sent to The Editor, Escapes Section, The New York Times, 620 Eighth Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10018 or e-mail to escapes@nytimes.com.

# For the Many, Sacred Ground



**CLOSE TO NATURE** A 30-second exposure of the stary sky above the Padmasambhava Stupa, one of two stupas in Crestone.



**WORLD OF SOUND** Downtown Crestone, above, is an old mining town surrounded by a world of spirituality: left, the talko drummer Koji Nakamura practices at Shumei International Institute, and a zither player overlooks the Sangre de Cristo Range; right, an evening prayer song, at the Haidakhandi Universal Ashram, and Peter May, a local fire chief, blows a conch shell to mark sunset.

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epic quality to these crags that rise out of the plains like ghost cathedrals of fantastic proportions. Deserts, forests and mountains figure so prominently in humanity's quests for the divine that Crestone's geographic hat trick seems ideal for universal worship.

But this is rugged and lonely high country that imposes a certain discipline on its visitors that doesn't exist in the gentler landscapes and climates of other American spiritual centers.

"Places like Sedona and Santa Fe are full of healers and seekers who change what they seek every week," said the local Zen abbot, Richard Baker Roshi, a fixture of the Bent scene in the 1980s and a major figure in introducing Zen Buddhism to the United States. "This has less distractions. Those who come here tend to be more directed in what they seek."

And the number of those seekers has been growing by 15 to 20 percent a year for the last five years, local residents and real estate agents say. Some become permanent members of the community, others buy second homes (communities can still be had for under \$100,000) and some are spiritual tourists.

Maybe the lure is in the twilight. At dusk, the setting sun gives the Sangre de Cristo Mountains — Spanish for "Blood of Christ" — an ethereal red hue. Standing at the 4-foot-high gold-tipped Tashi Gomang Stupa on a hillside overlooking the parched San Luis Valley up at the top of the mountain, the covered peaks from the Nada Hermitage, the Catholic monastery, brings to mind Northern Italy.

**B**UT Crestone itself, with its dozen ramshackle blocks of old miners' buildings, leaves no doubt that you are indeed in the West — though the sight of Tibetan monks in flowing robes and aging hippies lugubrious Vedic tones prompts the question: How far West?

"I threw a brick around here, and you'll hit it a mile away," said Mark Elliott, a British filmmaker and Buddhist who has lived in Crestone for two decades.

"When I first came here, it was practically a ghost town. I thought I would drop off the face of the earth. But Crestone has risen in the world since I've moved here, and I'm more connected to the world than I ever was as a tourist."

Crestone's emergence as an international religious crossroads started in the 1970s when Maurice Strong, a Canadian power company tycoon and an international diplomat, acquired a controlling interest in the 200,000-acre Baccarat ranch near the town. While Mr. Strong's wife, Hanna, was visiting the place, a local mystic named Glenn Anderson appeared at her doorstep.

"He was an old chap who had a lot of students in the valley," Mrs. Strong said. "He came right up and announced, 'I practiced in the '60s that a foreigner would come here and build an international religious center here. What took you so long?'"

The Danish-born Mrs. Strong was in-

spired enough to start the Manitou Foundation, which allocates land grants and money for religious orders that want to set up in the area. Tibetan and Bhutanese Buddhists have been the largest beneficiaries, with a half-dozen Buddhist centers in Crestone.

"This is probably one of the most important sites for Tibetans," said Mrs. Strong, a Buddhist who lives part time in Crestone. "This is where Tibetan culture will survive."

The hyperkinetic Mrs. Strong is far from done: At least two new Buddhist centers are being built, a hospice is planned, and she is spearheading opposition to proposed drilling for natural gas through the aquifer.

Most of Crestone's major religious centers are sheltered in the juniper and pine forests on the lower slopes of the mountains south of town, along a marred-out rutted dirt road called Camino Boca Grande, nicknamed the Holy Way. Signs and prayer flags point the way to temples and monasteries where visitors can explore a worldwide diversity of holy architecture and gardens. Many of the centers offer tours and overnight retreats for individuals and families.

One morning, having been invited by Baker Roshi to attend the 6 a.m. meditation at the Mountain Zen Center, I arose before dawn, wrestled the Holy Way to retain my kidneys, and was quietly let in the temple's back door. I joined a group of a dozen monks and novices in a walking meditation — slow-motion steps synchronized with deep breathing punctuated by brisk walks. At last, it seemed awkward, but by the time the sun's first rays had caught the surrounding peaks, I had fallen in line with both the communal litany and internalized concentration of the exercise. But a harder test waited: In 40-minute zazen meditation, sitting in lotus position facing the wall in the dim temple.

Any doubt about the discipline of being a Zen practitioner was, very slowly, evaporated as first one foot and then another fell asleep. I peeked at my watch 20 minutes into the meditation and the rustling of my sleeve seemed to reverberate in the silent hall. Must... not... move. As my thoughts and visions concentrated, the discomfort evaporated. By the time I re-emerged into a fully lit Rocky Mountain morning, I felt extraordinarily refreshed.

"Zen Buddhism is a gateway to the wilderness, so this place is very conducive to that," Baker Roshi told me, walking me back to my car as monks scurried about, tending to their morning duties. He also shared his thoughts on Heisenberg's uncertainty principle, gardening, and car transmissions. In Crestone, the sacred and profane seem effortlessly intertwined in daily conversation and activity.

"I like firefighting. The first thing I do when I see a fire is to go to it to let it know that I'm going to be present," said Peter May, one of the area's fire chiefs, who, as a practicing Buddhist, believes in the interconnected harmony of all elements. One of Mr. May's jobs is to oversee the half-dozen outdoor cremations that occur in Crestone each year.

"If you can recognize the relationship between yourself and the elements," he said, "you'd be surprised what can happen." Mr. May then recounted the time when a Tibetan lama interceded in a local fire by meditating for rain clouds, which eventually came.

**T**ALK like this, which might raise an eyebrow or two back in a more secular world, seems quite normal after spending a few days in the Crestone area. An innate sense of sanctity can overwhelm even the most urbane of souls in these rarefied heights. Hiking Crestone's nine-centred mountain paths, soaking under Van Gogh-ish night skies in the Joyful Journey Hot Springs, or going from temple to temple like a super-pilgrim transcending traditional culture and geographic boundaries gradually immerse a visitor in Crestone's otherworldliness.

But this isn't Aspen or Sedona chic. Those seeking high-thread-count fun, extravagant New Age knickknacks, easy listening metaphysics and great sushi will be disappointed. Crestone is devoid of five-star luxuries, or even a strong sense of commerce. There, paradise arrives at everyday low prices and



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things are kept simple: houses and cabins sometimes still sell for five figures, dinner checks are sometimes rounded down if you lack cash and locals crack a smile when newcomers lock car doors.

Not that Crestonians, fed merely their souls. Walk into Curt's Old Country Store and you will find yourself in a health-food emporium reminiscent of those found in big college towns, with offerings ranging from organic dog food to vegetarian jerky.

Next door, the town's go-to cafe, Shambala, is a comfortably laid-back spread of parlors in a former miner's home. "Unattended children will be given a double mocha and a puppy," reads a sign next to the kitchen counter, where chai, juices and delicious organic fare are liberally doled out.

If all this health and spirituality leaves one feeling a bit too earnest, then Crestone has a wonderful antidote. Duck into the purple-painted Silver Crest Palace — the only bar in town — which at first glance could be a Wild West saloon with a poker game in the main gallery and lots of drinking and smoking ("only organic cigarettes," a regular said) around the cherry wood bar. The easygoing attitude stems from the fact that the saloon becomes a private club several nights a week. When I was there the Crestone Yacht Club was in full session. Membership: 50 cents.

But ahoy! Monks, wizards, writers, artists, teachers, cowboys and cowgirls were among the crowd debating, playing poker, exchanging books, hitting on each other and occasionally throwing a tender's pituitary to Mrs. This usually sociable place functioned less as a bar and more as town pub with a metaphysical bent. The great religious and cultural crossover of the Holy Way unfolded there, loosened by smoke, booze, flirting and a laid-back sense of fun.

Perhaps Crestone was just revealing yet another of its seemingly countless paths to paradise.

## An Ecumenical Getaway

Crestone is a 220-mile drive from Denver International Airport. There are also daily flights to Alamosa Municipal Airport, which is 50 miles south of Crestone, on Great Lakes Airlines (www.flygreatlakes.com). Round-trip fares start about \$162.

While Crestone is a second-home haven, there are inexpensive places for visitors to stay. Golden Harmony (www.goldenharmony.com), 11811 S. 11th & W (1361 Chaparral Way; 719-255-4818; www.kdarparkin.com) is a comfortable and private New Age guesthouse in the Boca Grande area. Rooms are \$70 and \$80 a night, with a minimum stay of two nights.

Sangre de Cristo Inn (116 South Alder Street; (719) 256-4978; www.sangredecoristoinn.com) is a cheery, sangredecorist inn in the center of town. It is closed for January, but its eight rooms cost \$65 to \$75.

Many of Crestone's religious organizations offer seminars, tours

and overnight retreats. Shumei International Institute (www.shumeiinternational.org) in Crestone center is a Japanese-founded interfaith center that has spectacular architecture and gardens.

The naturalist John Nilton offers shamanistic and other workshops at the Way of Nature Fellowship (www.sacredpassage.com) in the serene wilderness of the Sacred Land Trust.

Nada Hermitage (www.spiritualhealinginstitute.org) is a Catholic monastery that follows Carmelite principles and offers worship services and retreats.

Crestone Mountain Zen Center (www.dharmasangha.org) has retreats and daily participation in monastic activities.

Haidakhandi Universal Ashram (www.hubajilaram.org) has retreats for individuals and families with children.

## BREAKING GROUND

### Viceroy Anguilla

**WHAT** Oceanfront residential resort.

**WHERE** Anguilla, in the British West Indies.

**AMENITIES** A beach club and restaurants, among others.

**PRICES** Available residences range from \$935,000 to \$9.9 million.

**STATUS** The first phase is expected to open in the spring. About two-thirds of the residences have been sold so far.

**DEVELOPER** The Kor Group.

**CONTACT** (800) 357-1930 or [www.viceroyanguilla.com](http://www.viceroyanguilla.com).

**DETAILS** Along two bays and 3,200 feet of beach near the western end of Anguilla, this 35-acre project is part of the Viceroy brand, which now includes two



♦ hotels in Southern California and is expanding to planned developments in Mexico, Florida and Colorado. It will consist of 140 villa, town house and condominium residences, which owners may choose to be rented and serve as hotel rooms when they are away. Either on bluffs or fronting the beach, the residences are all sold furnished, with their interiors designed by Kelly Wearstler. ♦ The free-standing villas, from 4,335 to 6,100 square feet, and the 3,300- to 4,300-square-foot, two-level town houses will have private infinity pools; ♦ the studio to three-bedroom condos will be in 10 7- to 16-unit buildings with shared infinity pools. Amenities other than the beach club will include five restaurants offering casual and fine dining, access to a 78-foot yacht, a club with activities for children and three tennis courts. There will also be a 20,000-square-foot Asian-inspired spa with a fitness center. The island's airport is nearby; flights from the United States connect to it through St. Maarten, Puerto Rico and elsewhere.