

Chapter 1 : Hiking in New Mexico | Frommer's

New Mexico offers a surprising variety of terrain to explore: from the Chihuahuan Desert in the south, to remarkable alpine lakes in the Sangre de Cristo Mountains to the north. Includes easy one- and two-mile day jaunts, numerous eight- to mile hikes, and plus-mile backpack trips for the more ardent adventurer.

The terrain and climate vary from the heat and flatness of the desert plains to the cold, forested alpine areas of the northern region of the state. You can visit both going from 3,000 ft. This is a good first hike for those who come from lower altitudes but are in good shape. Otherwise, plan to hike and camp for several days. For a much easier hike in the Taos area, try hiking down into Rio Grande Gorge. The crater rim offers stunning views, and you can look down into the dormant caldera. Any time except winter is good for this hike. Though there are no marked trails, the hiking is easy in this area of low, eroded hills and fanciful rock formations. You may see petrified wood or fossils from the dinosaurs that lived here millions of years ago. A walk to one of the more interesting areas is about 4 miles round-trip and is best taken in spring or fall. The northwestern region is also home to El Malpais National Monument, where you can hike into great lava tubes. Also in the area is El Morro National Monument, known as inscription rock, a stunning pinnacle offering a moderate hike to its summit, with stunning views. This hike is an especially good one to take in spring or fall. In the southwestern region is the Gila National Forest, which has approximately 1,000 miles of trails, with varying ranges of length and difficulty. One favorite day hike in the forest is the Catwalk, a moderately strenuous hike along a series of steel bridges and walkways suspended over Whitewater Canyon. White Sands National Monument. Hiking the white-sand dunes is easy, if sometimes awkward, and the magnificence of the views is unsurpassed. Of course, you can choose from hundreds of other hikes. The best guides for the region are 50 Hikes in Northern New Mexico: Trail Closures -- The drought that has spread across the Southwest in recent years has caused the U.S. Forest Service to close trails in many New Mexico mountains during the summer in order to reduce fire hazard. Before you head out in this area, contact the ranger district nearest your destination. This information was accurate when it was published, but can change without notice. Please be sure to confirm all rates and details directly with the companies in question before planning your trip.

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