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## Guest Column:

# Visit Jemez Springs to Feed a Child's Curiosity about Culture, Geography & History

By ERICA ASMUS-OTERO

One of the many amazing characteristics of children is their love of learning, specifically, wanting to know more about the world in which they live. Outside of books, one of the best teaching mechanisms to foster that love of learning is to engage all the senses with a hands-on experience.

New Mexico is ripe with learning opportunities because of its diverse geography, history and cultures such as those found in the cool mountain Village of Jemez Springs.

Located about an hour northwest of Albuquerque and an hour and a half from Santa Fe, Jemez Springs has been drawing people to its mineral hot springs for centuries. In fact, the Jemez (Walatowa) people began occupying the area around the 15th century because of its hot springs. The original geyser that erupted in the 1880s transformed the village into a tourist destination and is still located at the plaza, enclosed by a rock wall and gazebo.

Naturally, commercial bath houses sprang up, including Jemez Springs Bath House, which is a State Historical Site. Jemez Hot Springs have been soothing visitors with their outdoor pools for years. Though children 12 and under are not allowed in hot springs bath houses for safety reasons, parents can enjoy a quick soak to reap the benefits of these mineral waters.

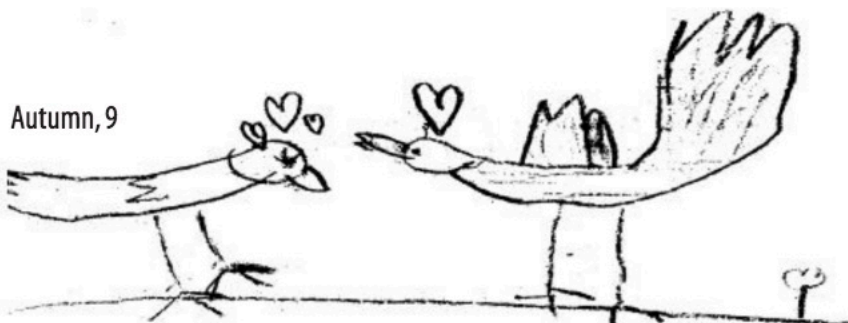
A short walk up the road is Jemez Historic Site, featuring the 500-year-old ruins of a pueblo, along with remnants of the San Jose de los Jemez Mission, which was built around 1621. An easy 1.5-mile trail meanders through the site and offers a glimpse into the past. The Walatowa Visitor Center, en route to Jemez Springs along N.M. 4, houses fascinating artifacts and exhibits and even provides guided tours of Red Rock Canyon at various times of the year. Children will love the Indian Fry Bread, dripping with honey, or Indian Tacos across from the center. Soda Dam, less than a mile north of Jemez Historic Site, is always a favorite stop for families. The dam is made up of minerals that have built up over thousands of years. A 300-foot gushing waterfall makes for amazing photos. Several picnic spots are available in the neighboring Santa Fe National Forest, where kids love to splash around in the stream or even try their hand at fishing.

About 20 miles north of Jemez Springs lies one of only six super volcanoes in the world – Valles Caldera National Park, whose waters are the source for the hot springs in Jemez Springs. For complete information and itinerary suggestions, be sure to visit [jemezsprings.org](http://jemezsprings.org) and follow us on social media for updates at Facebook/JemezSprings.

Erica Asmus-Otero is communications director for the Village of Jemez Springs.

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