

choco canyon

From mud wraps to milagros, the City Different surprises with its superb chocolate treats

Say “Santa Fe cuisine,” and most people think of chile and blue corn tortillas. I think of chocolate. Not your regular, run-of-the-mill candy bar, but zesty orange-chile chocolate bark or piñon-caramel confections. From luscious truffles to chocolate *milagros* coated with edible gold and silver, this town boasts a cacao concoction for every taste and budget. Whether you want to eat it, drink it, or be smeared with it from head to toe, local entrepreneurs can fulfill your every chocolate fantasy.

Todos Santos

125 E Palace #31, 505-982-3855

A veritable patron saint of chocolate, Todos Santos opened its doors in historic Sena Plaza in 1998. Owner Hayward Simoneaux’s gourmet confections have been featured on the Food

Network and in numerous magazines. His signature *milagros*—in the forms of saints, as well as hearts, eyes, and other body parts—are gilded with edible gold and silver leaf. “I sell a lot of heart *milagros* for weddings,” he says. “Or maybe your friend broke her leg and is in the hospital, so you take her a leg *milagro*. It’s sort of a chocolate prayer.” The chocolatier makes his own molds and creates his own recipes, many with unusual ingredients like basil and candied fennel. The shop carries both dark and milk chocolates, including exotic variations with flavors such as jasmine and lemon verbena. The English toffee and the plain dark-chocolate truffle are bestsellers.

Señor Murphy Candymaker

La Fonda Hotel, 100 E San Francisco, 505-982-0461;

Santa Fe Place, 4250 Cerrillos, 505-471-8899, www.senormurphy.com

A New Mexico tradition since 1972, Señor Murphy has two shops in the City Different and two in Albuquerque. All outlets are supplied by a Santa Fe factory, where the same folks have been hand-crafting chocolates and other sweets with a distinctive Southwestern twist for more than 30 years. “Our specialty is candy with chile and piñon nuts,” says owner Rand Levitt. The Bolito, a ball of dark fudge dipped in dark chocolate and rolled in crushed almonds, is a big seller. Tasting it, I could see why. The Caramales—vanilla fudge covered with fresh caramel, rolled in roasted piñons, and wrapped like a tamale—are a Southwest favorite. The shop also offers an extensive collection of sugar-free confections; the mint chocolate variety won my vote for best in show.

The ChocolateSmith

1807 Second #35, 888-473-2111, 505-473-2111, www.chocolatesmith.com

Stepping into The ChocolateSmith is dangerous. Luscious samples await. Combinations my brain wanted to reject—orange chocolate with red chile, or the spicy bite of the addictive Pecos Peanut



JULIE DEAN

Choc-full: Todos Santos’ artful confections fill this petite dresser from Vienna.



COURTESY CHOCOLATE MAVEN

Pastry pastiche: The Maven's myriad baked goods have been voted a Santa Fe 'Best' for years.

The Sonoran
Desert chile
offers "a BURST
OF FIRE that
lingers with a
COMPLEX-
FLAVORED
BURN."

Butter—proved delectable to my tongue. The unlikely blend of flavors in the White Chocolate Lemon Lavender Bark was delicious, but the Sierra Blanca, with both dark and white chocolate and a hint of fire, won the day. The shop opened in 2003 with the unique concepts of "weatherproof" chocolate pâté coated in colorful wax, and hand-wrought dark chocolates with Southwestern flavors made with organic and Fair Trade ingredients. The pâtés come in several flavors, as well as fun shapes—hearts, fish, chiles, cowboy hats. They're also available in squares for backpackers, and in party rounds that can be served like wheels of cheese. One of the most creative additions to the Southwest theme are "pottery shards" of white chocolate decorated with petroglyph-like designs in dark chocolate.

Chocolate Maven Bakery & Cafe

821 W San Mateo, 800-511-0113, 505-984-1980, www.chocolatemaven.com

The Maven opened as a commercial bakery in the early 1970s. Current proprietors Daram Khalsa Segal and Gurukirin Khalsa moved to the present location in 1995. The bakery's offerings, which lean heavily toward its namesake, have been voted Santa Fe's best for several years running—especially the decadent Brownie Chocolate Extravaganza, a warm, cakey treat piled with chantilly cream and ganache. As if 25 cakes, 10 types of brownies, and 5 spicy hot chocolate drinks don't provide enough choices, there are also chocolate cookies, croissants, scones, muffins, and cheese-cake. The Maven also offers handmade, European-style chocolates in many varieties, among them kirsch, Grand Marnier, and Earl Grey. Each dark gem has just a hint of the respective flavor. The café's two dining rooms serve breakfast and lunch daily.

Kakawa Chocolate House

847 Niñita, 866-982-0388, 505-982-0388, www.kakawachocolates.com

Mark Sciscenti has been selling his unique blends of Mesoamerican and European drinking chocolates through local chocolatiers for years. Last October, the pastry chef and herbalist opened his own shop. In addition to blending historic drinks with herbs, nuts, spices, vanilla, honey, and raw sugar, Sciscenti makes his own pastries and chocolates, using only the high-grade stuff made from the best beans in the world. Kakawa offers 25 dark-chocolate truffles, more than half of them dairy-free and sweetened with agave syrup rather than sugar. Some evoke the essence of the Southwest with spicy blends including a rare Mexican Sonoran Desert chile that offers, in Sciscenti's words, "a burst of fire with a medium plateau that lingers with a complex-flavored burn." Yowza.

Cafe Pasqual's

121 Don Gaspar, 800-722-7672, 505-983-9340, www.pasquals.com

Traditional Mexican mole sauce, made with chocolate and up to a hundred spices, is served in several local restaurants, but owner-chef Katharine Kagel's Puebla, Mexico-style offering has just the right zing for my palate—not too sweet, not too bitter, and the perfect complement to her chicken enchiladas. For 25 years, famed Cafe Pasqual's has met the chocolate challenge not only with its exquisite mole sauce but also with such desserts as the Mocha Pot de Crème, Killer Chocolate Cake, Chocolate Pecan Pie with Chantilly Cream, and the not-to-be-missed foamy Mexican hot chocolate.

Nidah Spa, Eldorado Hotel

309 W San Francisco, 800-955-4455, 505-988-4455, www.eldoradohotel.com

Who *doesn't* want to be smeared from head to toe with Sedona mud mixed with cocoa and mole spices, then wrapped in layers of Mylar and wool like a giant enchilada, while your feet are expertly massaged? The Nidah offers a mud wrap that will overwhelm your senses with the essences of chocolate and chile while giving your skin a healthy tingle. There are other chocolate spa treatments around the country, but only in Santa Fe do they spice it up with a little chile and cumin. Your wrap is topped off with a back massage and a generous layer of shimmering golden body lotion. If you want to coat your insides as well, High Desert Piñon Cocoa is available in the spa's Elixir Lounge or in the shop to take home.—*Kayte Deioma* **SF**