

LA LUZ TRAIL

Albuquerque's crown jewel deserves a spot on your bucket list

BY AMY MORSE
FOR GO NEW MEXICO

Albuquerque sits at the foot of one of the most remarkable hikes in the American Southwest.

La Luz Trail in the Sandia Mountains is a 16-mile round-trip journey that climbs more than 3,600 feet — and it's worth every step.

What makes La Luz truly special is how much the landscape changes as you climb. You begin in the high desert foothills among flowering cacti and Woodhouse's scrub jays, pass through piñon and juniper woodlands, fragrant ponderosa pines and aspen forests alive with mountain chickadees and woodpeckers before emerging into open subalpine forest at the crest. Five ecological zones in a single day — few trails anywhere can claim that.

There are two great ways to experience it.



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The full out-and-back run takes about 7 to 12 hours. Start early and bring three liters of water, food and layers, since the

summit runs 20 degrees colder than the trailhead.

Or hike up and ride the Sandia Peak Tramway — the longest

aerial tram in the U.S. — back down, with an optional stop at Ten 3 restaurant at the summit. Check tram conditions in advance, as high winds can shut it down.

The mountains reward curiosity, too. The Sandias contain a billion-year-old rock thrust from deep beneath the Earth's surface, evidence of ancient seas and fossils visible near the top. Learn more about the plant and wildlife with the iNaturalist app, which helps you turn the whole climb into a treasure hunt.

Come prepared: download your route on AllTrails, check the weather (summer monsoons arrive fast), and bring trekking poles if you have knee or ankle concerns. And remember — these mountains are sacred to many Indigenous communities. Tread lightly.

La Luz is hard. Work your way up to it. It's worth every step.

For video footage of this beautiful hike and more details on how to prepare, watch the latest episode of the GO New Mexico podcast at abqjournalcast.com.