

On the Hopi Arts Trail

BY SANDY SIMS



Oddly enough this stunning ridge of rock formation is called Blue Canyon. Far down an unmarked dirt road, visitors need a Hopi tour guide to get here. But getting here can be included of the new Hopi Arts Trail.

Photograph by John Fowler

We are cruising slowly through what is probably the oldest continuously inhabited community in the United States, Old Oraibi. The Hopi village perches atop Third Mesa—high above the desert. Some of the stones in these old houses may date back before 1150, when the village began. Two young Hopi women sit on their doorstep next to beautifully woven baskets. An old man sits in a chair outside, carving colorful Kachina dolls.

Evelyn, my Hopi tour guide is driving. She calls out to some of her friends. I am amazed to be here. For years, I've heard about Hopi Indians, legendary for their peaceful, gentle ways, and for their art. But also for guarding their privacy.

An earlier visit to Hopi Land:

We are eating lunch—four of us—in the Hopi Culture Center restaurant, which is about 4½ hours from Phoenix, Ariz. The Center is an adobe-style building on Highway 264. I'm devouring fry bread (made with blue corn meal), something like a fat tortilla, soft on the inside and a little crispy on the outside. Delicious.

My companions are Roy Talahaftewa, a renowned Hopi jewelry artist, whose work is sought after internationally; Evelyn Fredericks is an accomplished Hopi sculptor and a tour guide; and James Surveyor, a tall hefty young Hopi, is marketing manager for the new Moenkopi Inn and Suites—the first Hopi hotel.

The adobe-style hotel (adjacent to Tuba City), built to welcome visitors, has more im-

portantly created jobs for Hopis. The hotel is lovely with Hopi symbols and art throughout.

My three companions have become passionately involved in keeping the Hopi culture alive and healthy. This is a tricky subject because it involves tourism, a practice Hopis are wary of, for the misrepresentation they have experienced.

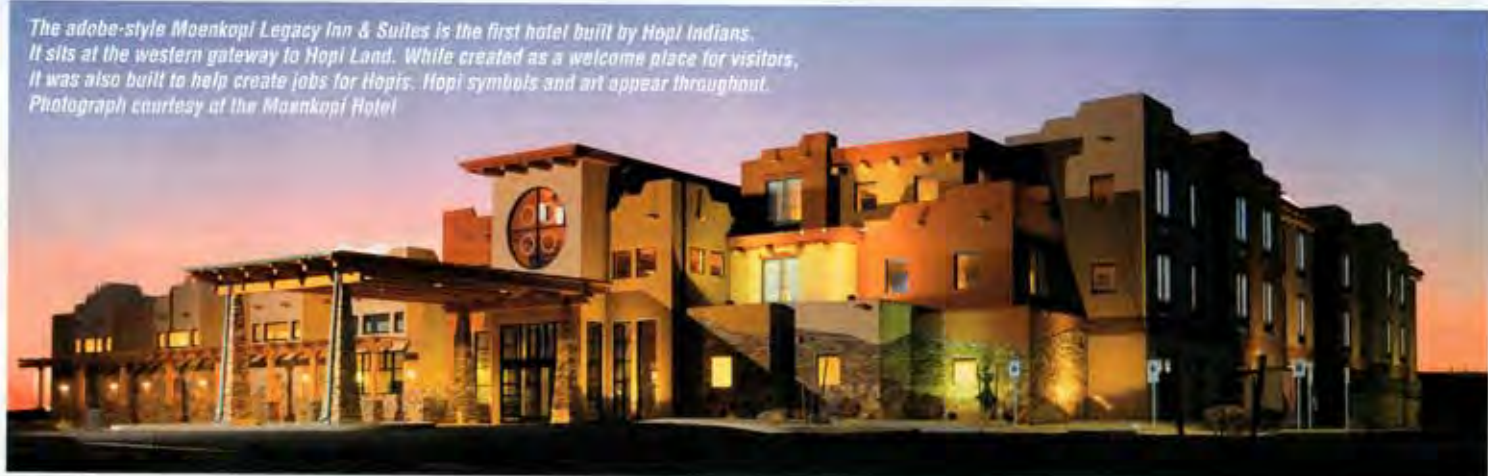
But Hopi unemployment is high, and tourism is the number one industry in Arizona, offering jobs and the opportunity to sell Hopi arts and crafts—the sole source of income for some. Many self-taught artisans carry on the work of generations.

Hopis also understand the value of telling their own stories.

Hopi Land is high desert, which to visitors driving along Highway 264 can seem desolate, scrubby, barren, where small, plain buildings

The adobe-style Moenkopi Legacy Inn & Suites is the first hotel built by Hopi Indians. It sits at the western gateway to Hopi Land. While created as a welcome place for visitors, it was also built to help create jobs for Hopis. Hopi symbols and art appear throughout.

Photograph courtesy of the Moenkopi Hotel



appear only now and then, and one can drive a long time before seeing another car. Dirt roads head off into rocky hills, and rainfall is less than 10 inches a year. Hopis are known worldwide for their excellent dry farming, which means relying completely on rainfall to water their crops.

Twelve Hopi villages perch atop three mesas overlooking the desert of Northern Arizona. In the villages Hopis practice rich spiritual ceremonies during the year to guide them through the seasons and stages of life, and call out for elusive rain to quench their arid soil.

"To most people, this land is desolate," Evelyn says. "To us it's a bread basket." The land provides seasonal food and medicine as well as materials for cultural items such as baskets and pottery.

"We have to juggle between two cultures," Evelyn says, enjoying her hamburger.

James Surveyor says it was difficult to convince traditional Hopis that they could open up to more tourism without hurting the culture. He helped them create limits. I was, for example, told not to wander in the villages without a guide nor was I to photograph in the villages.

Last year, the new Hopi Arts Trail tour was launched. Tour guides, like Evelyn, shepherd visitors to villages to visit galleries, which are sometimes in artists' homes, and also out

to hidden desert treasures. (It's OK to photograph inside galleries if the artist permits.)

Touring with Evelyn

Two months after our lunch at the culture center, I returned for a tour with Evelyn. She met me at White Bear Hopi Arts gallery on Highway 264. There I fell in love with a large, Madonna-like sculpture of a Hopi woman sitting with a child. Come to find out it was Evelyn's creation.

We climbed into Evelyn's Toyota 4Runner and headed for Roy Talahaftewa's gallery, a bright place where his remarkable jewelry and the work of other artists are displayed on shelves and under glass. In his workshop—an adjoining room—Roy demonstrated the painstaking process of silver overlay, unique to Hopi jewelry. He talked movingly of his work with budding artists—encouraging their art and their confidence as people.

After Roy's gallery, we rambled down unmarked, dirt roads that vein through these wide, open spaces to prehistoric Hopi petroglyphs at Dawa Park. And then to Blue Canyon where spectacular rock formations look like tall peaks of ice cream with deep red striations running through them. There, a group of Hopi school children on a field trip to the canyon were laughing and running up a hill.

As we skirted back over pock holes and rolled over bumps, Evelyn explained that Hopi culture is organized into clans and is matrilineal. (Children inherit their mother's clan.) She is a member of the Bamboo Clan. "Clanship is the strong glue. We are brothers and sisters to our clan members," she said. "In Hopi, you have duties and responsibilities, and you never lose that." Evelyn also grew up speaking Hopi. (These days children are learning Hopi in school.)

We end our tour at Old Oraibi where the women we see are weaving baskets and the old man carving Kachina dolls, just as their ancestors have hundreds of years ago.

If you go:

For excellent information about the Hopi Arts Trail's artists and tour guides, go to www.hopiartstrail.com

Another great Hopi website is www.experiencehopi.com

Lodging I can highly recommend:

The Moenkopi Legacy Inn & Suites - www.experiencehopi.com/hotel.html

Inn at 410 - www.inn410.com. This B&B is in Flagstaff, which is 2.5 hours from the Hopi Culture Center

(There are rooms to rent at the Hopi Culture Center, though I have not seen them. That website is www.hopiculturalcenter.com)



Evelyn Fredericks sculpts in stone and bronze. She works in her home, which she sometimes opens to visitors on the Hopi Arts Trail, for which she is one of the tour guides. This Madonna-like piece is called tranquility. Photography by Evelyn Fredericks

Kachina dolls, with their many unusual headdresses and attire, are unique to Hopi Indians. They can be found in galleries on the Hopi Arts Trail and in shops. An enormous variety of them can also be seen at the Heard Museum in Phoenix.

Photograph courtesy of Evelyn Fredericks



Roy Talahaftewa demonstrates in his workshop the painstaking process of doing silver overlay work unique to Hopis. He also overlays gold and sterling with gemstones. His work is sought after worldwide. Photograph by Sandy Sims



Evelyn Fredericks sculpture of a Hopi woman in traditional dress and hairstyle. Evelyn says tribal mythology and Hopi culture before modern times is what she draws on for inspiration. Photograph by Evelyn Fredericks