

# S P I R I T T R A I L S



*Tribes of the Southwest USA Trip #4*

## **NAVAJO CROSS-CULTURAL TOUR**

*9 days (8 nights)*

We will be not just visiting the Navajo Nation on a tour bus, but actually living amongst its people and working alongside them. We will be learning about the culture and history of the Navajo, taking part in community projects, and visiting important sites. We will prepare and eat our meals side by side with our fellow visitors and our Navajo hosts. Much of our time will be outside in the open, where we might better appreciate the lessons the Navajo have to teach us about our relationship with our environment.

### **Itinerary:**

#### **Day 1:**

After arrival at Albuquerque International Airport, we will be shuttled into town to a friendly motel for our first night. Here we will attend a **welcome dinner** at a local Mexican restaurant, giving us the chance to meet our fellow participants and begin getting to know each other before we immerse ourselves into the experience of living with the Navajo.

#### **Day 2:**

After a tour orientation at the motel grounding us in basic etiquette and helping us understand a little more about what we will be involved in, we begin our journey to our base camp in Piñon.

Along the way we shall stop off first at the **Acoma Pueblo** (known also as Sky City), one of the oldest continuously inhabited communities in America. The pueblo (a name given to Native American towns by Spanish explorers) is built on top of a high sandstone mesa, or steep-sided, flat-topped rock formation, and is set in a picturesque landscape. Acoma is also home to a Spanish mission built in the mid-seventeenth century.

The next stop is the capital of the Navajo Nation, **Window Rock**, named after a stone arch which frames the sky. Here we will take time to visit several of the excellent educational and cultural centres - the Navajo Nation Tribal Headquarters, the Navajo Nation Council Chambers and the Navajo Nation Museum - in order to learn more about the Navajo culture into which we are entering.

Our odyssey then continues through the scenic surroundings of the **Chuska Mountains**, which cuts into the Navajo Nation Forest, through the **Beautiful Valley** and on to **Canyon del Muerto**. This canyon was a site of a massacre of Navajos during the 'Indian Wars', and our visit will afford us the moment to contemplate the collision of cultures which that period represented, and the cost on the Navajo Nation.

From here we visit **Diné College**, a higher education institution established in 1968. It was the first college set up by Native Americans for Native Americans, and it continues to offer courses of specific interest to Navajo people, both those of a cultural nature such as Diné Studies, which encompasses history and language, and those with more directly practical applications, such as sustainable farming and environmental health.

Eventually we hit our destination: **Piñon**, Arizona, in the heart of the Navajo lands, where we will live in a base camp for the next five and a half days. The camp provides us with a comfortable traditional setting under the guidance of our tour leader Paul Tohlakai, where we will learn about Navajo ways from Navajo people. Our arrival will be celebrated with a light supper, before we are shown around the site and given an introduction to Navajo culture at the Sacred Mountains Sundance grounds. Whilst at our Piñon base camp, we will help prepare and eat our food communally, so as to learn about each other and ourselves as much as we learn about the Navajo people of whom we are guests.

### **Day 3:**

After breakfast in Piñon base camp, we shall head out to the magnificent **Canyon de Chelly** for the day. This awesome natural feature, with its imposing sheer walls, holds great significance to the Navajo people, as a nurturer, as a sacred monument, and as a home. The canyon is a site of ruins relating to the earlier Ancient Pueblo (Anasazi) culture, and shares geological connections with the Canyon del Muerto and Chuska Mountains, which we visited yesterday. Its more recent history marks it out as a Navajo stronghold during the 'Indian Wars', and today local people continue to farm its fertile valleys and occupy the traditional Navajo dwelling - the hogan - there, all whilst acting as custodians for a special spiritual place.

Our tour of the canyon shall continue with a two-hour **journey by horse** into its heart, an accompanying Navajo guide sharing the canyon's rich history with us, pointing out its geography, its history and its geology. We will stop off at the park ranger station to watch a short documentary film explaining more about local sites.

In the afternoon we will hike to the **White House Ruins**, another site of Ancient Pueblo inhabitation, and later drive to Spider Rock, a spectacular red

sandstone monolith rising out of the ground, considered to be the home of Spider Woman, an honoured deity in Navajo cosmology who gave them the gift of weaving.

Afterwards we shall return to our base camp, where we will enjoy another hearty meal together and feel the night draw in.

#### **Day 4-5:**

Now we are learning something of Navajo culture, it is time to begin settling into the rhythms of Navajo life. For the next two days we will be based around our Piñon camp, where we will take part in **experiential educational activities**, designed to wake up all our senses and help us better appreciate both our adventure and our lives.

We will be involved in activities such as land restoration and sustainable permaculture, and be shown skills like tipi set-up and traditional food preparation. We will share our energy with each other and our Navajo hosts as we discuss issues like alternative exploration of resources. At the heart of our labour will be our contribution to the building of the Dawn Star, a community centre for alternative education, and alongside us will be local Navajo residents.

In the evenings we will work together preparing and feasting on delicious Navajo food, sharing stories and music, and as the night sweeps across the sky we will hear of the Navajo people's cosmology and star knowledge.

#### **Day 6:**

Today we drive out into the Navajo Reservation's interior through Black Mesa, another Navajo stronghold during the 'Indian Wars'. We will make stop offs in Kayenta and at the Navajo Code Talkers Museum, before reaching the famously panoramic **Monument Valley**. Our appreciation of the views will be greatly enhanced by our Navajo guide, who will explain the valley's significance to the Navajo people in historical and spiritual terms. We will buy lunch from nearby Native American vendors before travelling to the **Navajo National Monument**, where the Ancient Pueblo people carved dwellings out of the cliff stone, farmed the canyons and hunted game. From here we then return to our Piñon base camp.

#### **Day 7:**

After a morning hearing traditional teachings, we will help gather together materials and build a Stone People Lodge, or **sweat lodge** in preparation for a purification ceremony in the evening.

During the day we will hike around the surrounding area in search of healing plants and food, explore nearby historical places, and receive traditional Navajo teachings.

In the afternoon local **craftspeople** will visit and demonstrate their skills to us, sharing their knowledge. Our final evening in Piñon will see us meeting with local Navajo people over dinner, a great opportunity for conversation and the exchange of ideas.

**Day 8:**

As we head back to our starting point we stop off to visit the historic **Hubbell Trading Post** in Granado, Arizona, where we can look through the wonderful collection of Native American arts and crafts traded from Navajo, Hopi and Zuni people, as well as older relics, and perhaps purchase a lasting memento of our unforgettable trip.

Once back in Albuquerque, New Mexico we shall spend one last night in our original motel, marking the end of our cross-cultural exploration of the Navajo Nation.

**Day 9:** Farewells and transfer back to Albuquerque International Sunport Airport for flights home.

**Includes:**

Land transportation and airport transfers; Navajo guide, interpreter and teachers; two nights' motel accommodation; six nights in traditional dwellings; fees to parks and museums; welcome dinner in Albuquerque; all meals in Piñon.

**What To Wear:**

Summers are hot, temperatures can reach the 90s (Fahrenheit); however, evenings can be cool. Be prepared with proper clothing befitting seasonal weather changes. You are advised to bring good hiking shoes, hat, sunblock and rain gear.

**Health:**

Obtain health clearance. Disclaimer available for any activities assumed by participants. Physical activities will not be excessive.

**Culture:**

Escape the confinements of convenience and enter the realm of everyday living out in nature. We will be in sync with natural time, weather, and places in accordance with Native American philosophy of living. Be prepared for any preconceived notions about Native American culture to be challenged. Come with an open mind and an open heart. Please be aware that in some communities, video cameras, still photography and audio recording are not permitted.