



# GAZETTE Lifestyle

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## Rollercoaster Of Waves Makes For Great Rafting on Rio

Whoohooo!

Adrenaline pumps as our raft crests a rollercoaster wave of white water. I laugh with exhilaration as we fly off the top of the wave, my paddle beating air two feet above the water.

“Hold!” hollers Joshua, our guide, as the raft dives head first under the next wave. “PADDLE! PADDLE! PADDLE!” gets us through it and out the other side, soaking wet and laughing riotously.

I glance behind me to see Josh sitting in the bottom of the raft, legs wedged under the thwart tube between us. He squirms out from under and regains his authoritative position on the back of the boat as we move into calmer water. “I can tell you now that we’re through it,” he says, “that rapid scares the hell out of me!”

We just came through the Class 4+ “Rock Garden,” the most difficult rapid on the Taos Box section of the Rio Grande River in northern New Mexico.



### *Destinations & Detours*

By Kayte Deiona



As we approach the boat that preceded us, they are hauling a paddler back into the raft — the first “swimmer” of the day on our five-raft convoy from Los Rios River Rafting in Taos.

“I was so scared!” laughs Kim, from Manhattan, sitting across from me, “But I knew it would be okay when I heard you laughing.” I am the only one on our raft besides the guide with Class 4+ experience. I’ve learned to let the sheer unadulterated thrill override the fear — at least when someone else is steering.

My friend Julie, sitting in front of me, got hardest hit by the wall of water. “Now you see why I insisted we do the Class 4 trip?” I ask smiling, looking at her ear-to-ear grin as the water

drips off her sunglasses. She nods enthusiastically. “That was awesome!”

The Taos Box is a 16-mile run through the Rio Grande Gorge, a rift between the Sangre de Cristo Mountains and the range to the west. Water from the San Juan Mountains in Colorado started draining down this expanse of volcanic lava three million years ago, cutting the deep canyon walls of the Gorge. The Box is part of the first river area to be classified as a national “wild and scenic river.”

There are 13 named rapids in this stretch of river, at least four of them Class 4 or higher, depending on how much water is running. Before lunch we rode some fun, but non-life-threaten-

*(Continued on Page 3B)*



**STAYING AFLOAT.** The Taos Box in New Mexico offers exciting rafting on the Rio Grande. —Courtesy of Los Rios River Runners

## River Rafting

(Continued from Page 1B)

ing Class 3 rapids that took us under the scenic Rio Grande Gorge Bridge. After lunch, we come into a nice long stretch of paddle-hard big-water rapids that follow each other with just enough time to catch your breath in between.

Our excursion from Los Rios River Runners is headed by Antonio, a senior guide, leading off in a bright yellow raft. The sweep raft bringing up the rear is also yellow, with three Navy gray rafts in between. Josh tends to keep to the back and study the way the other guides take their runs through the rapids before deciding which course to steer us through. The five of us on board are not complaining. Our goal is to have a blast while staying in the raft.

We paddle hard through the next rapid, "Boat Reamer." "Screaming Left Turn" is next, followed by "the Boulder Field" and "Enema" (Who names these rapids, anyway?).

"Sunset" is a deceptively calm name for some very exciting white water. We paddle like mad straight into the churning waves. Josh deftly maneuvers us through the relentless ridges and holes. High walls of water crash across us from the right, and on the next turn from the left, drenching all equally. My joyous laughter rises above the rushing water. The last wave spits us out and we paddle hard for the bank.

## Plan The Trip

- **If You Go:** Los Rios River Runners, (1-800) 544-1181, [www.losriosriverrunners.com](http://www.losriosriverrunners.com).

- **Where to stay:** Casa de Las Chimineas Bed & Breakfast Inn, 405 Cordoba Road, Taos, NM — (877) 758-4777; [www.visittaos.com](http://www.visittaos.com).

- **Where to eat:** Casa de las Chimineas provides breakfast and dinner, Los Rios provides lunch.

Also Lamberts for dinner, 309 Paseo del Pablo Sur, Taos, NM (505) 785-1009.

- Southwest Airlines: 1-800-I-FLY-SWA® (1-800) 435-9792; [www.southwest.com](http://www.southwest.com).

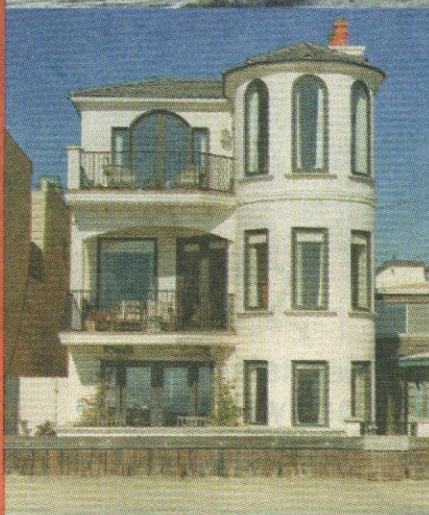
We turn to watch the sweep boat come through just in time to see the sunflower yellow vessel flip and the management team from Dunn and Bradstreet go flying into the foam. We paddle hard to the center of the river to catch any stragglers, but they all manage to regain their original raft safely. We congratulate Josh and ourselves on a job well done.

Los Rios River Runners are already rafting the Taos Box this year and will continue through June or July, depending on water levels. They offer tamer trips for paddlers and passengers on the Rio Grande and Chama Rivers through September.

You can read more from Kayte Deiona at [www.RainyDayTraveler.com](http://www.RainyDayTraveler.com) and <http://golosangeles.about.com>.

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