

AAA Explorer

APRIL/MAY/JUNE 2026

NEW MEXICO MEMBERS EDITION

SENSE *of* PLACE

An epic journey across the Southwest
shines a new light on architect Mary Colter



PICKLEBALL IN PARADISE

Pack a paddle and visit the world's most scenic courts

HOW HYBRIDS WON THE FUTURE

Can't decide between gas and electric? You're in luck!

GET YOUR FIX ON ROUTE 66

Nostalgic neon-lit diners offer a slice of the past

Central Avenue's Second Act

As Route 66 celebrates its 100th birthday this year, Albuquerque's **Central Avenue** is staging its own comeback tour. Between downtown and Nob Hill, three trailblazers—Wolf 'n' Swallow, Lure Raw Bar, and Mesa Provisions—are turning a historic strip into the city's most progressive dining corridor. **» LANEE LEE**

Oysters on the half shell at Lure Raw Bar



Wolf 'n' Swallow

After nearly a decade of hosting dinner-party pop-ups in New Orleans and Albuquerque, natural-wine expert Jennifer Jane and chef Ryan Houlihan finally planted roots with Wolf 'n' Swallow in August 2025. Set in a historic house with bright pink accents, bold art, and a wall decorated with vintage and modern plates, it's Albuquerque's first all-natural wine bar.

They pour more than 75 bottles, from clean classics to what Jane happily calls "the funkiest unfiltered natty stuff." She loves when guests say, "Wow, I don't recognize any of this!" so she can steer them toward discoveries like Polychrome, the state's only natural winemaker. Houlihan's self-described "chaos cuisine" is an ever-shifting menu of small plates, such as deviled eggs that constantly change flavors and vegan pickle-packed "charcuterie."

Lure Raw Bar

Lure brings the ocean to Nob Hill. Opened in summer 2025, it's the third Central Avenue outpost from restaurateur power couple Jennifer Beecher and chef Seth Beecher. It's also New Mexico's first true oyster bar, complete with a zinc bar, where oysters are shucked inches from your plate. Oysters, like Aphrodite from Maine and Wildcat from Washington, are flown in within 24 hours of leaving the water.

"We can offer a product that nobody else can in New Mexico," Jennifer says. Lure's sparkling raw bar might transport you to a Parisian brasserie, but New Mexico is never far: Think lobster roll sliders with Hatch chile, fan-favorite green chile hush puppies with red chile honey, and a calamari recipe inherited from Smirolls, an iconic Old Town restaurant that's now shuttered.

Mesa Provisions

Mesa Provisions didn't move far—just across the street into the former Zinc Wine Bar & Bistro—but the new space feels like a symbolic hug from chef-owner Steve Riley. His boundary-pushing comfort food, built on fresh local ingredients and polished technique, had out-of-towners snapping up reservations in the old space. Now, with a chic, two-story dining room and sophisticated cocktail bar (walk-ins are welcome), Mesa 2.0 is giving locals their seats back.

With a 2026 James Beard Best Chef: Southwest nod, Riley shrugs at the idea of fitting in: "I just do what I feel is right and hope others agree." Try the green chile cheddar biscuits (served with red chile honey butter) and the elevated riff on an El Pollo Loco classic—smoked half chicken, pepita cream, and fresh duck-fat flour tortilla.

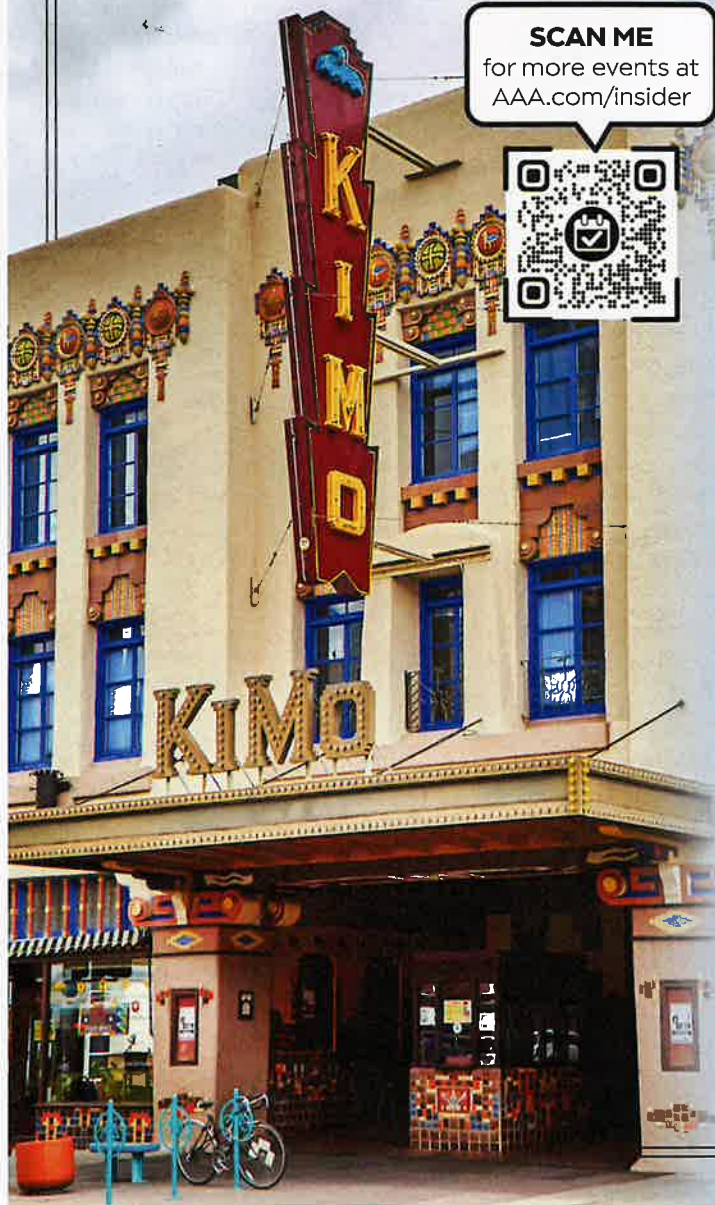
» COMPILED BY PAMELA PORTER

[ALBUQUERQUE]

Al Di Meola in Concert

APRIL 9 The guitar virtuoso and visionary composer will perform selections from a 50-year career that produced four gold and two platinum albums. His mastery of both acoustic and electric guitar landed him a spot on *Guitar Player* magazine's Gallery of Greats and a Lifetime Achievement Award from the BBC. *KiMo Theatre*. Tickets start at \$49.

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PETER UNGER/GETTY IMAGES

[ALAMOGORDO]

Legacy of Liberty Airshow

FREE! APRIL 18-19 Visit Holloman Air Force Base to witness precision aerial acrobatics performed by the Patriots Jet Team, some of whom are former pilots in the U.S. Air Force Thunderbirds and U.S. Navy Blue Angels. Airplane displays, STEM activities, and games attract all ages.

[RED RIVER]

Red River Car Show

FREE! JUNE 6 This annual event at Brandenburg Park draws about 150 cars, whose owners vie for prizes in 20 categories, including best paint, Mustang, classic truck, low rider, and muscle car. Kids' games, live music, and food abound.

[SANTA FE]

Rodeo de Santa Fe

JUNE 24-27 One of the largest professional rodeos in the United States, Rodeo de Santa Fe draws about 500 contestants each year. Expect to see the usual events—bronc riding, breakaway roping, steer wrestling, team roping, and ladies' barrel racing—along with kids' events such as sheep riding and a calf scramble. People with special needs can ride a horse around the arena and participate in mock rodeo events. Tickets start at \$20.

[LAS CRUCES]

Browse at COAS Books

FREE! ONGOING Wander through a maze of bookshelves at one of New Mexico's largest new and used bookstores, with two Las Cruces locations (Main Street and Solano Street). "There's always something new because hundreds of books are turned in for trade credit each day," says owner Mike Beckett of the family-owned shop.



Be sure to **designate a driver** if you plan to drink alcohol.