

CULINARY OUTDOOR TOUR TAOS

ESCAPE TO NATURE

Taos tour starts with Rio Grande rafting, ends with gourmet lunch

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Escape on a culinary outdoor adventure tour in Taos.

The new tour offered by Heritage Inspirations will begin with a rafting excursion on the Rio Grande and end at Vivac Winery with a gourmet lunch prepared by Chef Josh Willette.

"Everybody gets the same kind of appetizers served as they arrive at the winery," Willette said. "And what we do is we are doing a watermelon salad that has radishes, red onions, cotija cheese and a balsamic glaze and arugula. So it's a light, refreshing first course as everybody gets off the river and everybody's kind of hot in the sun all day."

Guests can select from three main course offerings. The grilled New Mexico beef sirloin is served with blue corn

onion rings, New Mexico chile calabacitas and peppercorn butter sauce. The suggested pairing is Vivac's Refosco.

The grilled chile-dusted ruby trout with cilantro lime crème fraîche is accompanied by New Mexico red chile calabacitas and a suggested pairing of rosé or cabernet sauvignon. The vegetarian tacos are made up of blackened tofu, apple and jicama slaw and charred jalapeño crema with a suggested pairing of petit verdot. For guests who prefer poultry, grilled organic chicken can be substituted.

For the culinary outdoor adventure tour, Heritage Inspirations has teamed up with New Mexico River Adventures and Vivac Winery to create the thrill-seeking experience. The tour will be offered daily through the fall. Reservations are required and can be made at heritageinspirations.com/tours/taos. The tour is \$299 per person,



COURTESY OF AMANDA POWELL

Heritage Inspirations has teamed up with New Mexico River Adventures for a culinary outdoor adventure tour in Taos.

plus tax, for a party of two or \$249 per person for a party of three. The tour includes a raft, paddle, wetsuit, life jacket, professional guides and lunch with wine pairing. Guests are encouraged to bring a backpack with water and clothes.

Participants will meet at 7:45 a.m. at the Heritage Inspirations Headquarters & Travel Hub at El Monte Sagrado Resort in Taos and return to the same location at 2:30 p.m.

The rafting portion of the tour travels through a canyon surrounded by quartzite and basalt lava cliffs that is home to bighorn sheep, coyotes and otters. Green sage, Apache plume and prickly pear cactus blanket some of the peach- and

orange-colored rock, according to Heritage Inspirations.

The rafters will be able to enjoy a gourmet lunch created by Willette, a Taos native.

"We suggest wine pairings at the (Vivac) Winery, or you can do a wine tasting if that's more up your alley," Willette said. "Everything is served with wine, and then also everything is cooked in front of the guests. ... I build an open fire, usually using either a local piñon, or sometimes I will use hickory or mesquite, depending if I get my hands on it. And everything's cooked in front of them on an open fire."

Willette, who has been cooking for about 14 years, has worked at Medley in Taos as



Culinary outdoor adventure tour includes a gourmet lunch at Vivac Winery.

well as restaurants in Napa, California, and Seattle.

"I started at the very bottom," Willette said. "And there's very nice fine-dining restaurants in Seattle. It was right on the marina, on the bay. It's called Palisade. And I started at the bottom and worked my way up, all the way up the rankings there, and then worked my way around. It's a big restaurant group, so I worked for a couple of their restaurants, and then from there, moved to Bellingham (California) and kind of ran a couple restaurants as head chef, and then that led me into working in Napa."

His time in Napa sharpened his wine knowledge.

"Bringing that all back to my hometown that I grew up in and being able to cook with local flavors, the red chiles, you know, things like that, and also the calabacitas," he said, has personal meaning to him.