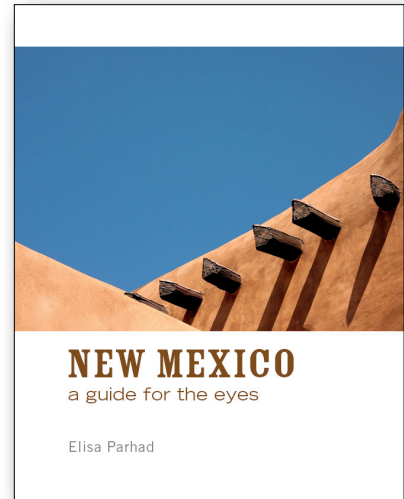


Q & A with the Author

Elisa Parhad, Author of *New Mexico: A Guide for the Eyes*

1. Tell us about *Guides for the Eyes*.

The genesis of this project can be traced back to 2001 when I was living in Japan as an English teacher. I had just finished a double degree in International Business and Cultural Anthropology and was enamored with the new sights, experiences, habits, and beliefs that surrounded me. But guidebooks were of little help for learning about intimate aspects of the culture, especially for someone who lived in the country long-term, or for anyone interested in more than restaurants, attractions, and places to stay. Like any good anthropology student, I was fanatical about learning and absorbing the meanings, names, and origins behind everything I saw, but the information came in bits and pieces that I had to hobble together. I wished this information could have been compiled in one place, all laid out in a digestible format that mimicked the visual manner in which you naturally experience the world. It didn't take long for me to figure out that this would be a problem everywhere I went. So I began to work on a solution for myself that others might enjoy as well. The *Guides for the Eyes* series is the product of this realization.



2. Of all the places in the world, why start with New Mexico?

Although my original thought was to inaugurate the series with Japan, I later decided to begin with a destination that was more accessible to me. I really didn't know how difficult it would be to capture all the 100 items on film (or should I say digital plate?) and just how much digging it might take to tell the most complete stories. Proximity was a huge deciding factor in the first topic, and it wasn't long before I came upon New Mexico—another culturally enigmatic place that would perfectly fit the vision of *Guides for the Eyes*.

My family moved to New Mexico from the Pacific Northwest when I was still a child—something I was not happy about at the time. I saw my new home with the eyes of an outsider, and of course, all those things I thought were weird and strange I now cherish as unique aspects of a very special place. Focusing on New Mexico for the first book allowed me to dig deeper into the traditions of a culture with which I was already intimately familiar.



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Q & A with the Author

This may be a cliché, but New Mexico is truly a “Land of Enchantment.” There are many elements, some not necessarily tangible, that have helped create the wonderful sense of its being. And so many people outside the state are unfamiliar with the unique culture there. The more I researched the state’s history and people, the more I realized how little I had known about the imagery surrounding me growing up. The natural and cultural landscape has had an immense influence on my personality, thinking, preferences, and style. Understanding more about the genesis and significance of aspects of its culture have enriched me just as much as the place itself.

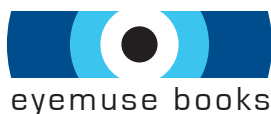
3. How did you become interested in this mix of anthropology, art, design, space, and place?

I’m lucky to have grown up in a family that places a great value on travel, exploring, and curiosity. My times abroad inspired the realization that we often overlook the clichés and mundane aspects of a place in our search for singular achievements or moments—whether these be historic battlefields, or gigantic skyscrapers. But a culture is really understood through its patterns of daily living—its people and the products, crafts, architecture, cuisine, and artwork they surround themselves with. The world is filled with different ideas of how to live that are shaped by each locale’s unique history, climate, natural resources, and religion. I’ve always found the results of these factors fascinating. I’d love to reach old age having explored as many different places as possible to experience all the wonderfully diverse ways of living and viewing the world.

Since I was a little girl I have been involved in the arts—I’ve been schooled in painting, drawing, design, printmaking, and ceramics. But I’ve never been as interested in individual artists as much as traditions of artistry. I feel more engaged with collective impulses rather than individual ones. I guess I was born with an innate need to know what motivates a whole people to do things a certain way.

4. Tell me about the process for the this book.

I began the project with a list of items that for me were the most notable features of New Mexico’s character. Of course, there were many more than 100 that I wanted to include, and I mourn the exclusion of green chile hamburgers, torreon structures, heishi beads, hoodoos...The list could have gone on and on. It was constantly being revised, even after I had finished the first draft of all the topics! More research just meant more “icons” I wished to include.



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While most of the initial research was done from my base in Los Angeles, I made extended visits to New Mexico in both the spring and fall of 2008 to finalize research and document the icons highlighted in the book. Basically, I drove all across the state, enjoying its amazing scenery and cuisine on the way, visiting sites and museums, but really in search of moments to capture in a photograph. Nothing was styled or staged—I worked in a snapshot style. Although at times the feat didn't seem possible in the time I had, somehow things had a way of just showing up for me. Both trips were incredible journeys I'll never forget.

5. Who should read this book?

As an author, it makes me excited to think I might have the power to introduce the local traditions of a place I love to others. In that way, this book is perfect for anyone about to take a trip to the Southwest. It will lend depth and understanding to a complex culture that has a fascinating history and its very own style that has evolved out of necessity and a unique blending of traditions. But the book will greatly appeal to locals as well, or anyone who has an appreciation for New Mexico and the greater Southwest.

6. Any plans for future books in the series?

Of course! I am taking a research trip to Japan in April 2009 to prepare for a future book on the country. Other states and regions being considered include Louisiana, Southern California, Texas, Hawaii, and the Pacific Northwest. EyeMuse Books is in talks with other writers who have expertise in other countries, so there are many possibilities out there. Perhaps farther into the future, the concept could move beyond place-based topics, to include such things as holidays and celebrations.

Title: **New Mexico: A Guide for the Eyes™**

Author: **Elisa Parhad**

Publisher: **EyeMuse Books**

Publication Date: **August 2009**

Pages: **224**

Illustrations: **103 photos, 1 map**

Edition: **First**

ISBN: **978-0-9820497-0-9**

LCCN: **2008940768**

Trim Size: **5.5 x 7 inches**

Price: **\$19.95**

Cover: **Hardcover**



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