

# Forbes

## Save Everything, A Message Of Hope: Sustainable Luxury Travel

By Wendy Altschuler



American bison, on the range. VERMEJO: A TED TURNER RESERVE

Ted Turner, who implores folks to “save everything”, owns around two million acres of land across America, making him the second largest private landowner in the U.S. Guests can stay at one of four properties in the [Ted Turner Reserves](#) lineup, located in New Mexico: Vermejo, Sierra Grande, Ladder, or Armendaris. At each property, guests can connect with nature through diverse resort activities like game drives, horseback riding, outdoor archery, hiking, mountain biking, and history tours.

[Vermejo](#), which sits on 550,000 acres on the New Mexico—Colorado border, is a standout property due to its responsible stewardship and commitment to protect natural ecosystems, which are hinged on the American bison and the native Rio Grande cutthroat trout populations. Vermejo has also earned a special seal of approval with its inclusion into a recently launched (November, 2020) sustainable hotel brand called [Beyond Green](#).

Travelers can now make informed decisions on where to travel, keeping the environment in mind, without sacrificing luxury and high-end accommodations — sustainable travel doesn't mean you have to give something up, it means you can gain something more.

With the [Beyond Green](#) network, led by founder and president, Costas Christ, properties in the portfolio undergo thorough site inspections (an initial one and one every two years) to ensure that the sustainability standards are met. Examples of monitored indicators include environmentally friendly green operation practices, protection and preservation of natural and cultural heritage, and the social and economic wellbeing of local people.



Horseback riding with a view. TED TURNER RESERVES

[Vermejo](#), one of the founding member properties in the Beyond Green portfolio, fits the brand's ethos of "traveling as a force for good". In an interview with Jade McBride, the Managing Director of Ted Turner Reserves, a title that includes the responsibility for guest operations on all Turner Lands, we delved a little deeper to learn more about the resort's green initiatives and connection with the Beyond Green methodology.

**Beyond Green, a global portfolio of sustainably minded properties in the Preferred Hotels & Resorts, Historic Hotels of America, and Historic Hotels Worldwide networks, includes Vermejo. How does the property fit the mold?**

Ted purchased the Vermejo property in 1996 and over the past 25 years he and Team Turner, have worked to restore and heal an ecosystem that had been altered by humans over the previous century. Thankfully for all of us they have had great success in their efforts and today we can enjoy this private National Park type of experience here. The model of our guest operations team is to serve as a revenue stream to continue our conservation efforts for generations to come. It's an honor and we feel very humble to stand among the properties in the portfolio who together have the collective goal to leave this world better than we found it.

**How does Vermejo support animal and ecology conservation?**

Some of our favorite projects to talk about are the Castle Rock Bison herd, Rio Grande Cutthroat trout, and riverbank restoration. [The Castle Rock bison](#), part of Ted's larger project to bring back the American bison from the verge of extinction, were transplanted, from [Yellowstone National Park](#) between 1920 and 1940. They've each been genetically tested to ensure they are free of bovine DNA and are one of the few remaining purebred bison herds in North America today, thriving in the Vermejo wilderness with very little human interaction.

The largest native trout restoration ever completed in North America involved bringing the native Rio Grande cutthroat back to the Costilla basin, over 60 miles of stream and 18 lakes on Vermejo. It required a 15-year effort to remove all non-native trout from the Costilla watershed. Now Vermejo is home to the largest population of Rio Grande cutthroat trout in the world.

In partnership with the [U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service](#), Vermejo has constructed 10 enclosures on the Vermejo River since 2014 and is adding two more to the Leandro Creek tributary in 2021. These enclosures keep the grazers away from the riverbanks to aid in the regrowth of willows, alders, and cottonwood trees. This reestablished overstory will shade and cool the creek, provide leaf litter, and improve the habitat for macroinvertebrates, fish, small mammals, birds, and the Rio Grande cutthroat trout. Side note: Beavers have already taken up residence in three of earlier enclosures constructed in 2014 and 2015. They are an indicator species of healthy balanced ecosystems.

**Nature, culture, and community are important pillars to Beyond Green's ethos. How does Vermejo take part in these important initiatives?**

By actively working to restore and support our land and all the creatures who call it home, regenerating streams, forests, and endangered species, while reducing waste, we support nature. We love celebrating the history and traditions of the people and species who were here before us and strive to share the stories of our Southwestern heritage with every guest and staff member who spends time at Vermejo. By sourcing our food and products locally as much as possible and working closely with our local schools and organizations to provide jobs, education, and donations, we support our community.



Aerial view of Vermejo. VERMEJO: A TED TURNER RESERVE

## **Vermejo offers special events that bring guests closer to nature. Can you tell me about the fun happenings that are taking place over the holidays?**

Our Vermejo staff is eagerly preparing for the holiday season. All our holiday offerings are steeped in nature and tradition.

[Thanksgiving](#) will feature a feast based on traditional favorites with a sprinkle of Southwestern flair. Our Turkey Trot will beckon guests out on the winding river trail for a lighthearted bit of competition in the chilly forest. There will be plenty of time for fireside storytelling, football on the lawn, scavenger hunts, and all the regular highlights of a stay at Vermejo, like horseback rides, and shooting sports, along with a fun tree-lighting celebration to kick-off the season.

One of our favorite [Festive](#) traditions is giving each family, group, or couple the chance to go on a privately guided tree-hunting expedition, exploring Vermejo to find and cut their perfect tree. Back at their accommodation a basket of decorations along with cookies and cocoa are a tree-decorating party waiting to happen. Holiday crafting, cooking and cocktail classes are intertwined with activities in the winter wilderness that invite us to wander and wonder at the beauty of nature.

[New Year's at Vermejo](#) is truly a chance to start the year rested and rejuvenated.

With acres of quiet solitude and an intimate celebration in Ted's Casa Grande mansion, it's the perfect mix of fireside fun, seasonal flavors, and outdoor exploration.

Our New Year's Eve is more Great Gatsby than Times Square. Think: singing round the grand piano, elegant aperitifs and canapes, classic card games, billiards or snooker, sparklers, and a champagne toast under the stars.

## **What special events are slated just for women at the ranch?**

So far the [Women's Forest to Table Workshop](#) is the first of many women-specific events we've hosted. In fact we've got two wellness retreats in the works that are generally popular with the ladies, one in [January](#) and one in [August](#). In addition, Vermejo is becoming more and more popular for girl's getaways and bachelorette parties that are off the beaten path.

## **Why is it important to spend time in nature and how does Vermejo's ethos encourage guests to explore the outdoors?**

Evidence continues to mount on all the benefits of time spent in nature. Just a few minutes in the trees lowers our blood pressure and stress levels, calms the breath, and opens the mind. Richard Louv's books, *The Last Child in the Woods*, and *The Nature Principle*, among so many others, detail these benefits.

At Vermejo, we do as much as we can outdoors, away from screens and technology. Guests quickly notice that there are no TVs in rooms and cell signal only works on AT&T phones. Almost all our activities and offerings encourage guests to get outside in nature, from lakeside cookouts to fitness on a trail instead of in a gym, we believe there's nothing better than the breeze in the trees and song of birds as the soundtrack to every adventure.

Our vehicles proudly sport Ted's famous bumper sticker, "SAVE EVERYTHING". We take that motto to heart, it's not just about restoring forests and streams, or history and culture, it's also about saving us, the human race.

We hope to provide a place where all who come to visit Vermejo can feel our world in balance and leave inspired by our message of hope.