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Botanical Gardens to Love

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The biggest surprise when visiting Albuquerque, NM, is that a city with only nine inches of average annual rainfall can support the wealth of flowers and trees growing in its magnificent BioPark Botanic Garden! This compares to 46 inches annually in our area.

Built in 1996 as an addition to the city's Rio Grande Zoo, the BioPark includes 36 acres of plants, an aquarium and an extensive collection of insects at the BUGarium. The 12 separate gardens attract 1.5 million visitors each year. The BioPark is also working with partner agencies, such as the state's forestry division, to establish “off-site” populations of threatened, rare or endangered native plants.

My husband Jeff (also an MG Intern) and I first toured the garden in 2009 and were amazed at the vibrancy and lushness of the flowers blooming under a sweltering summer sun. We were similarly impressed when we toured it again in June of 2021, including the 10,000-square-foot conservatory. One wing of the glass building houses plants native to Mediterranean climates and the other features xeric plants from North American deserts.

Medicinal plants used by curanderos (Spanish folk doctors) and a butterfly garden especially entice the tourists. The BioPark is notable for constructing the first dragonfly sanctuary pond in the nation. We were also invited to observe iconic artwork unique to the Southwest, such as the kokopelli flute player, kachinas (Native American religious symbols), howling coyotes and roadrunner birds.

My favorite spot is directly to the right of the entrance where we stepped into the Spanish Moorish Garden. Fountains and turquoise tile bring the look and feel of a cool retreat, with shade provided by trees and walls. Plants such as rosemary, pomegranates and lavender abound here. It opens into a small round garden with raised beds of roses called Jardin Redondo, where 70 different colorful varieties surround a central planter. Jeff most liked seeing an area with desert roses bred for arid climates, which he says brings to mind a verse, “the desert shall rejoice in blossom.”

The next stop is the Ceremonial Garden where trees form a large shaded arbor with clematis, climbing roses and wisteria. This is reportedly a favorite venue for weddings. Another popular spot is the Children's Fantasy Garden, which highlights larger-than-life features like a 14-foot topiary dragon, a gigantic watering can, six-foot “earthworms” burrowing through castle walls and a walk-through “pumpkin.” Those young at heart also enjoy the G-scale miniature railroad and the recreation of a 1930s era farmstead with a resident horse, goats, steer, sheep and chickens.

The Sasebo Japanese Garden brings cooling relief with waterfalls and koi ponds which portends numerous



visitors when our Waterfront Botanical Garden in Louisville opens its Japanese garden in the future. All of these special gardens are part of the general admission fee. Annual events in the BioPark include Bulbs in

Bloom, an Orchid Show and one of the nation's top-rate holiday light displays.

Since we fly into town every couple years on our way to visit Jeff's folks in southern Colorado, we look forward to many more strolls through this fantastic garden.



All photos -
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