

# TRAVEL



## Bangkok

With its gilded temples, tuk-tuk taxis, spicy cuisine and racy nightlife, Bangkok is full of contradictions, congestion and centuries-old exotic allure.

## TIME TO GET AWAY

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SECTION C

# DESERT COOL



**PALM SPRINGS**  
Mid-century modern  
vacation homes  
offer everything  
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The 'Ultimate Midcentury Oasis' is a Palm Springs vacation home. — SUBMITTED PHOTO



The Elrod House in Palm Springs. — JULIUS SHULMAN PHOTOS



The poolside area of the Dinah Shore House.

## Low-slung beauties

**VACATION HOMES:** Mid-century modern architecture beckons in the desert

BY FABIAN DAWSON  
POSTMEDIA NEWS SERVICE



Rick Hutcheson, mayor pro-tem of Palm Springs. — SUBMITTED PHOTO

Built during a time of architectural rebellion that is now known as Desert Modernism, the house if you can call it that, was remodelled last year and tucked away behind the manicured hedges of Deepwell in Palm Springs.

A meandering path that cuts across a lush oasis frequented by hummingbirds leads you to the front door, which opens up into an expansive 1,400-sq.-ft artfully decorated entertainment area, complete with wet bar and several options for dining and lounging.

The rich African wood that envelops the main room takes you to a private theatre that seats six in lush leather recliners. That's adjacent to a private swimming pool complete with a patio graced by desert grass and an outdoor living area.

A gourmet granite-counter-top kitchen with stainless steel appliances holds court on one side of the home and provides a buffer for a private suite.

The other end of the classic mid-century U-shaped masterpiece comprises two suites. Bathrooms here echo with the sound of waterfalls running from the

ceiling that drain through hidden crevices in the tiled floors or via an over-sized tub, depending on whether you feel like a rain shower or a luxury soak.

Everything in this house (complete with its own art gallery) is constructed with a precision to capture the majestic brown-rock vista and ensure a few days, maybe a week or even a month of elegant informality.

Welcome to the 'Ultimate Mid-century Oasis,' a Palm Springs vacation home that is guaranteed to soothe your senses without scalding the bank account.

Renting this meticulously maintained jaw-dropper is like having the presidential suite of a five-star hotel, without the price tag.

It goes for about \$425 US a day. Split that between two families — there is plenty of room for that in this 3,600-sq.-foot rancher which has everything — and your holiday dollar goes even further.

The oasis is but one of hundreds of vacation homes built during the middle years of the last century when a construction renaissance powered by industry, innovation and ingenuity rose to enhance the desert beauty.

These private family-sized resorts now dot the Coachella Valley floor throughout the nine

cities of the Southern California desert playground we know as Palm Springs.

"The great thing about a vacation home is that you can come to Palm Springs, stay in one of the best neighbourhoods, live in a private home that is fully furnished and experience the desert life as if you're a resident," said Rick Hutcheson, the pro-tem mayor of Palm Springs and managing partner of Vacation Palm Springs.

"Many of our guests come back several years in a row, trying different homes, different styles, and different neighbourhoods. The next thing you know, they're buying a mid-century home and we're bringing them rental guests of their own," said Hutcheson, who has listed scores of these low-slung, ingeniously designed desert getaways for rent on vacationpalmssprings.com

A typical Palm Springs Modern vacation home (aka PSMOD) is bright, open, casual and fun with bedrooms that open on to patios and glass walls which reveal constantly changing tableaux of palm trees and mountains.

Everywhere you look is a stunning vista. And don't bother asking if they have pools, because here they are a necessity, not a luxury.



Interiors and exteriors of mid-century modern vacation homes in the Palm Springs area.

“These mid-century modern homes are open-air living museums of architecture,” said Robert Imber, president of PS Modern Tours, offering daily van excursions to transport you into an era of Modernist influence exerted by the designs of George Alexander, Richard Neutra, John Lautner, William Cody, Albert Frey and Donald Wexler, among others.

“Lighting, textures and colours is what makes Palm Springs Mod unique and special,” said Imber, who is the desert’s expert on mid-century modern homes.

Mid-century modern architecture made famous by the glamour retreats of American industrialists and Hollywood royalty like Frank Sinatra is now so integral to the identity of the Southern California desert that Palm Springs Modernism Week in February has become a hugely popular annual event.

Dubbed “the coolest confab of modernism aficionados anywhere”, designers of contemporary furniture and decorative arts display classic designs while visitors and delegates are treated to an architectural smorgasbord of private homes, public buildings and mid-mod masterworks that have been turned into hotels, like the ‘Orbit In’.

The latest addition to pay homage to

the mid-century modern architecture in Southern California is the Annenberg Retreat at Sunnylands.

Scheduled to open in November 2011, the experience at this historic centre set in a nine-acre garden of 50,000 desert plants begins in the great room with its spectacular view of Mt. San Jacinto.

Words do little to explain this commitment to American ideals lined with gentle waterfalls and lava rock quarried from Utah. So you will have to see it.

Sunnylands incorporates a historic house, an education hub and a conference centre designed to develop programs that will have an impact on society, said Mary Perry of the Annenberg Foundation Trust.

In a region with more than 300 days of sunshine, architecture and mid-century vacation homes bring a unique holiday silhouette to the desert, explained Mark Graves of the Palm Springs Desert Resort Communities Convention and Visitors Authority.

“Here the outdoors is indoors and that adds to the spontaneity of what we like to call desert cool.”

- Signature events in the desert playground. **C5**
- Magic waters heal in Desert Hot Springs. **C6**