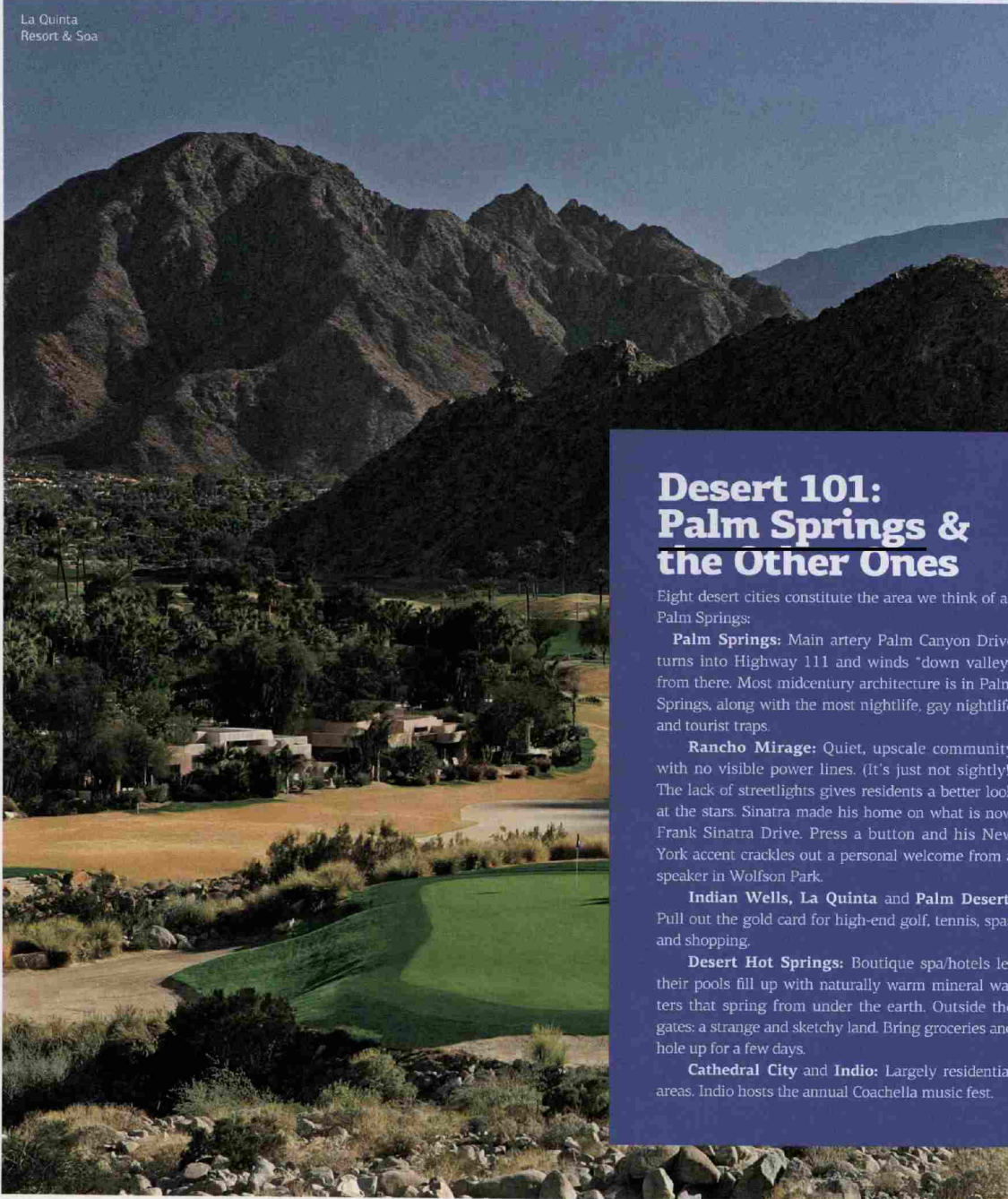


Travels

By Lisa Marie Hart

La Quinta
Resort & Spa



Desert 101: Palm Springs & the Other Ones

Eight desert cities constitute the area we think of as Palm Springs:

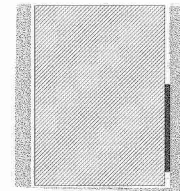
Palm Springs: Main artery Palm Canyon Drive turns into Highway 111 and winds "down valley" from there. Most midcentury architecture is in Palm Springs, along with the most nightlife, gay nightlife and tourist traps.

Rancho Mirage: Quiet, upscale community with no visible power lines. (It's just not slightly!) The lack of streetlights gives residents a better look at the stars. Sinatra made his home on what is now Frank Sinatra Drive. Press a button and his New York accent crackles out a personal welcome from a speaker in Wolfson Park.

Indian Wells, La Quinta and Palm Desert: Pull out the gold card for high-end golf, tennis, spas and shopping.

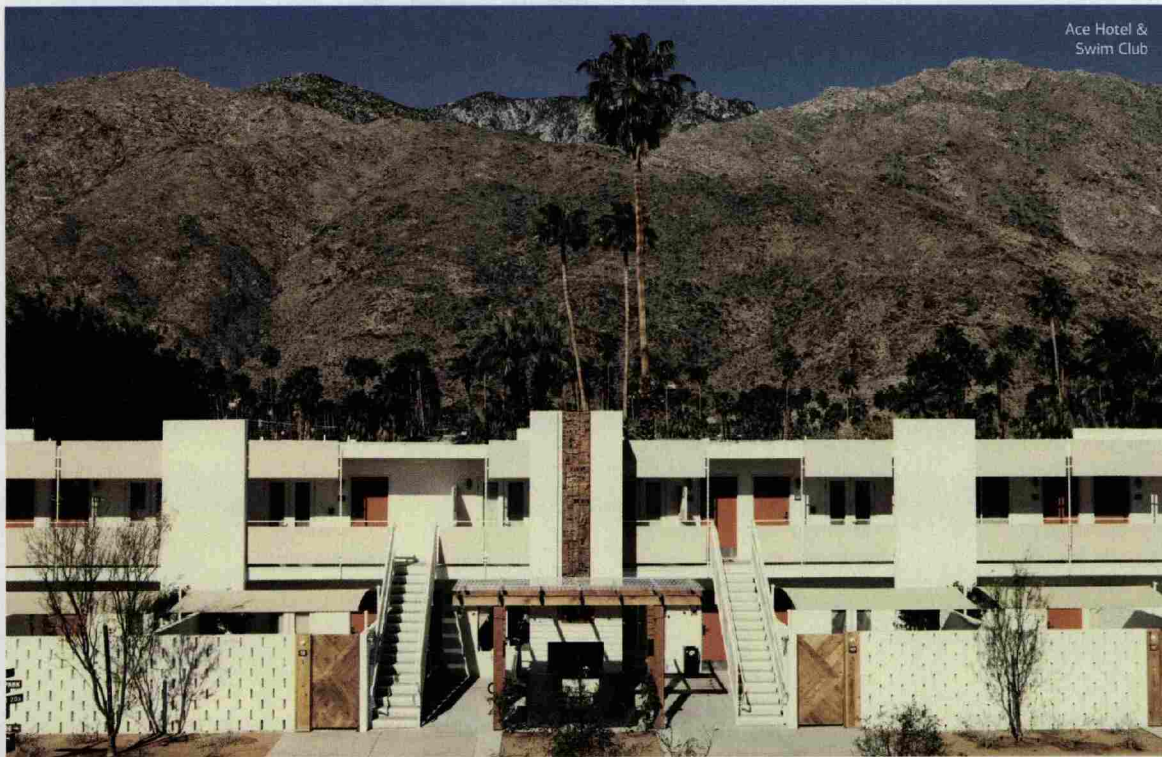
Desert Hot Springs: Boutique spa/hotels let their pools fill up with naturally warm mineral waters that spring from under the earth. Outside the gates: a strange and sketchy land. Bring groceries and hole up for a few days.

Cathedral City and Indio: Largely residential areas. Indio hosts the annual Coachella music fest.



November2010SanDiegoMagazine.com43

Page 1 of 6



New Is Old Again: **Getting Retro in Palm Springs**

DRIVING ON INTERSTATE 10 east toward Highway 111, there's a winding stretch of land that time has written off. Jagged gray-brown mountains jut up from the dry land, cracking under a merciless sun. The pavement steams; a wild wind rises in a sudden gust and dies. Save for a few speed-limit signs and random turnoffs, this expanse must have looked the same to the Cahuilla Indians centuries ago, as well as the first privacy-seeking stars of the Old Hollywood heyday in the late 1930s. Likely, it always will. Too remote to develop, too fried to try.

Then there they are. The silent, white marching band of windmills, saluting the

desert breeze, generating power for the Coachella Valley. Four thousand strong along these hills, and Palm Springs awaits in the distance.

Some say the "good energy" that finds its way over the San Jacinto mountains falls right inside the Coachella Valley and stays inside forever. Maybe it's true. The weather's fantastic, the pace is slow, and no matter which way you turn the wheels, you're driving toward a mountain view. Yet Palm Springs survives as a strange land of contrasts. And the lines blur when it comes to the old and the new.

Many hotels got a jump start in the '50s

and '60s as word spread of this hot haunt for celebrities. By the 1980s, they were battling riotous chaos when the town became America's favorite spring-break pleasure palace. Mayor Sonny Bono even banned thong bikinis and downtown cruising. Things got real quiet until real estate took off again after the turn of the century, and fashionable designers marched in and left their signature stamp on loads of revitalized midcentury hotels. Out here, what's old is old, and what's new is usually old underneath. Scratch the paint just a little and Palm Springs' brief but layered history reveals itself in varied colored chips.

44SanDiegoMagazine.comNovember2010

» TRAVELS | Palm Desert



Palm Springs Art Museum

Old Palm Springs

Play

Midcentury architecture: Get your fill of bold angles and big glass on a Segway tour of what guide Robert Imber calls "the greatest concentration of fine midcentury architecture anywhere" (760-318-6118). Or D.I.Y with a "Palm Springs Modern Tours" map from the landmark Visitors Center on Highway 111. (Its *Jetsons*-esque canopy covered the Enco service station in 1965.) Better still, drop by any of the open houses on weekends in season.

Palm Springs Art Museum: Founded in 1938 and filled with contemporary California, classic Western American and Native American art, the museum offers a look into old, old, *old* Palm Springs. A steep hiking trail off the back parking lot affords scenic views of O'Donnell Golf Course (the valley's oldest; Bob Hope and Clark Gable held memberships). 101 Museum Drive, 760-322-4800, psmuseum.org.

Lounge acts: The piano blares; a lady with blonde cotton-candy hair hits a faded Broadway high note. In the legendary Casablanca Room piano lounge at **Melvyn's**, the nightly crowd is all ages and 100 percent entertained. 1200 West Ramon Road, 760-325-2523, inglesideinn.com/melvyns_restaurant.htm. Most local desert rats drive right by **Club Trinidad**, unaware of the cheap drinks and time-warped stage shows within this former Rat Pack hangout. 1900 East Palm Canyon Drive, 760-327-1161, clubtrinidad.com.

Shopping: The downtown strip offers out standing midcentury shopping. Load up on sputnik chandeliers, boomerang ashtrays and Eames-era serving dishes for fondue parties.

Leading the pack: **20 First**, 1117 North Palm Canyon Drive, 760-327-5400; **Dazzles**, 1035 North Palm Canyon Drive, 760-327-1446; **Vintage Oasis**, 373 South Palm Canyon Drive, 760-778-6224.

Eat

Sherman's: A New York deli transplant since 1953. Craving pastrami and eggs? Homemade matzo ball soup? You got it. 401 East Tahquitz Canyon Way, 760-325-1199, shermansdeli.com.

Spencer's: Not the hippest place in town, but a mature, local favorite for the tree-shaded patio that lights up with twinkling orbs after dark. 701 West Baristo Road, 760-327-3446, spencersrestaurant.com.

Lord Fletcher's: A pricey Olde English prime rib house and bar. Novel British pub décor covers every inch of Frank's former fave. 70-385 Highway 111, Rancho Mirage, 760-328-1161, lordfletcher.com.

Stay

FYI: Many hotels tack on a daily "resort fee" at checkout, to the tune of \$20-\$27.

✱ Flip to page 50 to see our picks for NEW Palm Springs.

OUTDOOR ADVENTURES & HIKES

The desert views, air and weather beg to be savored from an outside perspective. And your air-conditioned hotel room awaits at the end of the day.

THE LIVING DESERT: Don walking shoes for a day exploring this zoo and gardens where desert animals hunker down, comfortably camouflaged in natural habitats. Seriously, what's cuter than a meerkat? Lots of meerkats! 47900 Portola Avenue, Palm Desert, 760-346-5694, livingdesert.org.

PALM SPRINGS AERIAL TRAMWAY:

The world's largest rotating tramcars whisk riders a steep 2.5 miles up the mountain for a much cooler breath of fresh air. Eat, drink or make merry on the trails of Mount San Jacinto State Park; rent snowshoes or cross-country skis in season. 760-325-1391, pstramway.com.

INDIAN CANYONS:

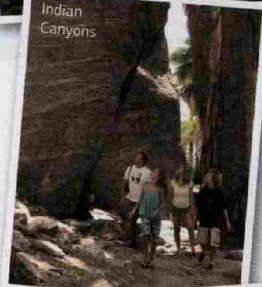
Eight bucks a person buys all-you-can-feast-your-eyes-upon natural beauty. Trails teem with palms, boulders and occasionally magic waterfalls. Book it on horseback in advance. 800-790-3398.

RENT A VESPA:

No motorcycle license necessary to swing onto the back of a 50cc original Italian scooter and tool around town. Cab it out to EagleRider Motorcycle Rentals at the J.W. Marriott, and away you go. 74855 Country Club Drive, Palm Desert, 760-779-5001, eaglerider.com.



Palm Springs Aerial Tramway



Indian Canyons



EagleRider Vespa rental

PHOTOS COURTESY OF PALM SPRINGS BUREAU OF TOURISM

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Orbit In: Just nine rooms with mid-century furnishings surround a saltwater pool and private Jacuzzi. Lovable for its cruiser bikes, cocktail hour, poolside breakfast, robes, Internet and mountain views; walkable to downtown. The Frey suite has an outdoor shower. 562 West Arenas Road, 760-323-3585, orbitin.com.

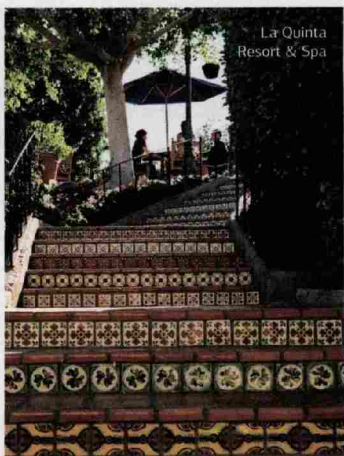
La Quinta Resort & Club: Opened in 1926, the oldest resort in the Palm Springs desert area has a celebrity guestlist that

Five Signs You're in Palm Springs

1. The area's favorite cooling device—fine-spray misters—rains down on you and your alfresco lunch.
2. Forecast for the day: hot and sunny. The German tourists strolling Palm Canyon are redder than ever and loving it.
3. Even on weekdays, no one seems to have a job. Coffee by day, cocktails by night.
4. The craziest drivers aren't texting; they're over 70.
5. You never want to go home. Where was that real estate office?

spans its many decades. Families, groups and couples come to golf/spa/tennis it up. 49-499 Eisenhower Drive, La Quinta, 760-564-4111, laquintaresort.com.

Palm Springs Tennis Club: A kitschy hideout next to downtown's mountain. Get groovy with wood paneling, your own balcony and kitchenette. 701 West Baristo Road,

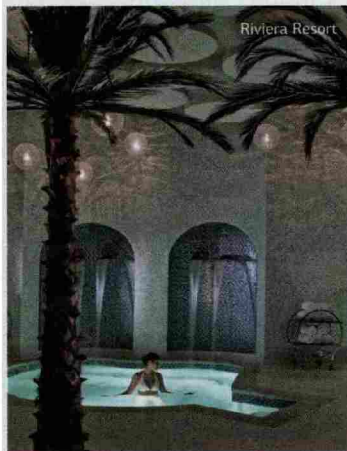


La Quinta Resort & Spa

» TRAVELS

760-325-1441, palmspringstennisclub.net.

Private midcentury estates: Dream big while sleeping at the Elvis Honey-moon Hideaway, Sinatra's Twin Palms Estate or the Lucy House. Even residential compounds without history-making owners offer walls high enough that anything goes. Ask for a sunken living room with circular fireplace and lose-your-shoes shag carpet, just because you can. midcenturypalmsprings.com or vacationpalmsprings.com.



Riviera Resort

New Palm Springs

Play

Shopping: For bargains, hit the designer outlets north of town in **Cabazon**. For atmosphere, stroll the designer esplanade of Palm Desert's **El Paseo**.

Casinos: Gambling types lose themselves in the air-conditioned magnetism of the **Spa Resort Casino** downtown (401 East Amado Road, 888-999-1995, sparesortcasino.com) or the **Agua Caliente Casino Resort & Spa** in Rancho Mirage (32-250 Bob Hope Drive, 888-999-1995, hotwatercasino.com).

Spas: Look to Desert Hot Springs for a Zen-themed spa retreat. Book at a Palm Springs hotel spa for something cutting-edge: **Riviera Resort's SpaTerre** offers global rituals and a cocktail or ice cream with your pedicure (1600 North Indian Canyon Road, 866-588-8311, priviera.com/riviera_spa.aspx). Couples treatments are popular at **La Quinta Resort & Spa** (49-499 Eisenhower Drive, La Quinta, 760-564-4111, laquintaresort.com) and **Agua**

Caliente Casino Resort & Spa (32-250 Bob Hope Drive, 888-999-1995, hotwatercasino.com), where guests linger longer in romantic courtyards.

Eat

Cheeky's: Rise and shine with organic eggs and a five-slice flight of bacon. 622 North Palm Canyon Drive, 760-327-7595, cheekysps.com.

Tyler's: Fresh, hot fries; thick, sloppy burgers. Put your names in and work that tan. 149 South Indian Canyon Drive, 760-325-2990.

Dress down: Matchbox: Lively scene overlooking the strip. Wood-fired, thin crust pizzas. 155 South Palm Canyon Drive, 760-778-6000, matchboxpalm Springs.com.

Dress nice: Roscoe Grill: A dim, narrow den for the quietly stylish. Steaks, seafood and pasta, just south of downtown. 665 South Palm Canyon Drive, 760-322-6500, roscoegrill.com.

Dress up: Morgan's in the Desert: Well worth the trek down the valley for chef Jimmy Schmidt's creative farm-to-table dishes and rustic décor, all stone and wood. Sample artisanal cheeses and desserts from a crafted steak-and-seafood menu that celebrates the season. Post-meal, snag a cigar from the bar; there's a patio fire pit with your name on it. 49-499 Eisenhower Drive, 760-564-7600, morgansinthedesert.com.

Seasonal Pleasures

In: October through May: Expect blissful weather (some rain in spring), restaurant waits and two-night minimums at most hotels. Check out McCallum Theatre's entertainment schedule. Temperatures: 60-95 degrees. 73000 Fred Waring Drive, 760-340-2787, mccallumtheatre.com.

Off: June through September: Snowbirds turn their SUVs back north; the area hushes. Restaurants, spas and hotels offer discount rates to lizard types who can take the heat now radiating up from the ground in waves. Temperatures: 70-110 degrees.

Stay

Ace Hotel & Swim Club: This former Howard Johnson hotel is now relaxed, social and night-owl friendly—even for dogs. Minimalist urban décor mixes in clever amenities (record players and fire-pit patios) and a popular "roadside diner fare" eatery. Cavort in the saltwater pool, or hop on a bike for a sunset ride. 701 East Palm Canyon Drive, 760-325-9900, acehotel.com.

Riviera Resort & Spa: An over-the-top renovation made it an instant hit with locals (for the restaurant and lounge) and anyone else who hearts 1960s Vegas décor and bikini-clad servers by a huge aqua pool. 1600 North Indian Canyon Drive, 760-327-8311, psriviera.com.

All booked up? The **Parker Palm Springs** (designed by the renowned "happy chic" modernist Jonathan Adler; 4200 East Palm Canyon Drive, 760-770-5000, theparkerpalmsprings.com) and the **Viceroy Palm Springs** (415 South Belardo Road, 760-320-4117, viceroypalmsprings.com) remain prime choices among city slickers because of their rooms, restaurants and lounges. Rounding out the "it" list are the Spanish Colonial **Colony Palms Hotel**, once owned by a 1930s mobster and now redesigned by Los Angeles-based Martyn Lawrence-Bullard (572 North Indian Canyon Drive, 800-557-2187, colonypalmsshotel.com), and **The Horizon Hotel**, an updated private estate circa 1952 (1050 East Palm Canyon Drive, 760-323-1858, thehorizonhotel).

ON THE OUTSKIRTS

Master the scene in Palm Springs, then come back for the same heavenly weather in a completely different setting.

DESERT HOT SPRINGS: The soothing mineral water that bubbles below has drawn tourists since the 1950s. Small hotels promote a Zen atmosphere. Calm your spirit in waters said to heal. Two favorite hideouts: **The Spring** and **El Morocco Inn & Spa**. deserthotsprings.com.

PIONEERTOWN: Not an urban legend, a real "pioneer" town sits 35 miles north, where Hollywood built it in 1946. Roy Rogers and other actors from The Cisco Kid era lived in this village as an extension of the set while filming. The sideshow: **Pappy & Harriet's Palace**, a honky-tonk bar with rugged live music and grub. 53688 Pioneertown Road, 760-365-5956, pappyandharriets.com.

JOSHUA TREE NATIONAL PARK: About an hour northeast, the sun-scorched expanse of wild rock formations and cartoony Joshua trees is an easy day trip. 74485 National Monument Drive, Twenty Nine Palms, 760-367-5500, nps.gov/jotr. Camp out or book a suite cabin fit for a 1950s Mexican cowboy at **Spin & Margie's Desert Hideaway**, 760-366-9124, deserthideaway.com.

TOWN TAKEOVER ANNUAL EVENTS

Plan to partake of (or avoid) these events, as the town gets swarmed with like minds on a mission.

JANUARY: Palm Springs Film Festival; Bob Hope Classic charity golf tournament

FEBRUARY: Modernism Week (midcentury architecture à go-go); Riverside County Fair & Date Festival

MARCH: Kraft Nabisco Championship Golf & Dinah Shore Weekend; PNB Paribas Open tennis tournament (big names on the court in Indian Wells)

APRIL: The White Party, Coachella Valley Music & Arts Festival

OCTOBER: American Heat Palm Springs Motorcycle & Hot Rod Weekend (one loud, motor-rewing weekend)

NOVEMBER: Palm Springs Pride, Palm Desert Golf Cart Parade

YEAR ROUND, 6-10 P.M. THURSDAYS: Downtown Palm Springs closes Palm Canyon Drive to traffic for VillageFest: arts and crafts vendors, live music and street-fair food.

The Scene

Getting All Up in It: When the sun dips behind that mountain, Palm Springs nightlife stirs. Palm Canyon Drive gets trampled underfoot by looky-loo tourists with Cold Stone Creamery on the brain. The cool kids with more polish prefer hotel-hopping the stylized lounges, bars and restaurants. (See the "Stay" section of New Palm Springs for popular pop-ins.)

Getting Away from It All: Outside Palm Springs proper, the golf and tennis resorts, country clubs and sprawling hotel complexes of Palm Desert, La Quinta and Indian Wells offer a no-need-to-leave-the-complex retreat experience.