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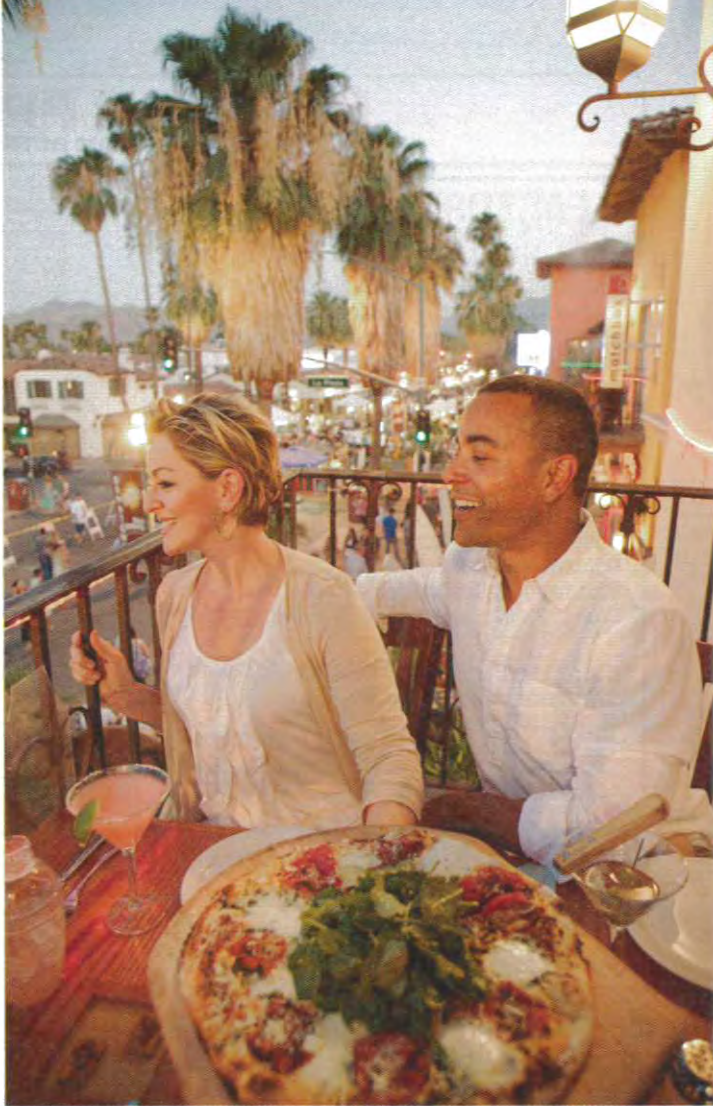


Palm Springs ³⁰
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TOP, dine above or join the fun street scene at Villagefest. BOTTOM, a 1960s gas station now houses a visitor center.

Palm Springs Eternal



Lounge by the pool, hike in an oasis, or hit the festivals. Why choose when you can do it all?

By Deborah Franklin

**PHOTOGRAPHY
BY DAVID COLLIER**





No wonder generations of movie royalty

have flocked here for the winter. Just a two-hour drive from Hollywood, the rugged San Jacinto Mountains tower at the edge of Palm Springs, Calif., like a movie backdrop, shielding the desert resort from coastal storms. Back when Charlie Chaplin, Mary Pickford, and other silent-film stars spent secluded weekends here in the 1910s and '20s, gated courtyards and shaded Spanish-style bungalows and haciendas kept fans and photographers at bay. But by the 1960s when Frank Sinatra's Rat Pack and other celebrities bought or built homes here, the glass walls, wraparound windows, and glittering pools of that era's best architects took a more open, modern turn, reflecting the postwar bravado of the young and swank. Even as the decades wore on, the town always retained a hipper vibe than the newer communities down valley. Today what's old is once again very cool thanks to a fresh generation of desert aesthetes who have passionately restored dozens of hotels and custom homes to their early



A hiker admires the California fan palms along the creek in Andreas Canyon.



A 3,000-pound bronze horse gazes at a 1966 Chrysler in the Palm Springs Art Museum.

glory. With plenty of affordable lodging, even in winter high season, Palm Springs makes an excellent escape whether you're keen on culture, avid for outdoor fun, or just eager to trade gray, soggy days for sunshine. In the heart of winter, typical weather brings an inviting blue sky with daytime temperatures around 70 degrees.

While most celebrity residents keep a low profile these days, you're likely to spot big-name actors and directors strolling between the town's five movie venues during the annual Palm Springs International Film Festival, held for 12 days in early January. The well-regarded event is a great place to see the year's best foreign films and documentaries as well as mainstream American flicks—for a total last year of 193 movies from 68 countries. Buy one of the different passes offered, or get to the box office an hour before any screening for a chance to pur-

chase last-minute rush tickets for single shows.

If pop culture—especially design and architecture from 1930 through the early 1970s—is your infatuation, plan to arrive during Palm Springs Modernism Week, February 16 through 26, 2012. The annual citywide celebration, now in its seventh year, draws thousands of international visitors who recognize Palm Springs as a showcase for the streamlined blend of indoors and outdoors that marks midcentury modern design. See the piano-shaped pool in Frank Sinatra's former residence or tour the rarely opened Albert Frey house to view the built-ins at the famed architect's 1964 home, including steel-framed, floor-to-ceiling glass pocket doors, and even a huge hillside boulder incorporated as an interior wall. Home tours highlight the week, along with lectures, documentaries, a gathering of classic Airstream trailers, '50s-themed cocktail receptions, and shows of period fashions.

One particular place has the whole region buzzing: Sunnyslands, a grand 200-acre estate in nearby Rancho Mirage, opens officially in February. The late publishing mogul, philanthropist, and diplomat Walter Annenberg and his wife, Leonore, entertained U.S. presidents and movie icons in this cheery modern house from 1966 until Walter's death in 2002. Beginning in mid-February, you can walk the labyrinth in the nine-acre desert garden and tour the visitor center filled with Rodin and Giacometti sculptures, 18th-century silver-gilt basketry, and other pieces from the extensive Annenberg art collection. The home itself is scheduled to open for tours around March 1.

The Palm Springs Art Museum downtown has an allure all its own. The second Sunday of the month is free and offers art- and culture-related documentaries and feature films in the theater; entry is also free from 4 p.m. to 8 p.m. every Thursday. The diverse collection includes Western landscapes by William Keith, prints by Andy Warhol, and a glowing cast-glass gown by contemporary sculptor Karen LaMonte. December through April, the works of 19th-century luminist painter Lockwood de Forest—known for the handling of light in his superb landscapes—will grace the walls. After perusing the exhibits, enjoy a glass of wine and tasty light fare at the museum's lower-level Muse Café, which opens onto a romantically lit outdoor sculpture garden.

Or wander over just a block east to Villagefest, the Thursday evening downtown street scene on Palm Canyon Drive that's part pop-up market, part block party. Don't miss the half-dozen varieties of locally grown dates, freshly squeezed grapefruit juice, and honey from nearby farms, as well as vendors selling paella and handmade tamales.

Meanwhile, only two blocks north, a growing uptown district is tugging the city's heart with shops that double as galleries. L.A. designer Trina Turk's boutique is filled with her '60s- and '70s-inspired desert-chic fashions for women and home decor. Modernway stocks high-end vintage furniture from top designers of decades past; even if you can't take home a Pierre Cardin coffee table or a bronze tea cart styled like Ben-Hur's chariot, you'll enjoy imagining them in your living room. Or you can check out Dazzles for more portable, affordable treasures. The secondhand shop draws set designers from Hollywood, who come for the vast collection of rainbow-hued Bakelite kitchenware, bracelets, and pins as well as 1960s lamps and Lucite tables.

Starting at 5:30 a.m., you can join the tan and sleekly groomed of all ages for organic Peruvian iced coffee and flaky pastry at Koffi. Or order "custard cheesy scrambled eggs" and a hearty tasting flight of five styles of bacon at thoroughly modern Cheeky's.

Work off that breakfast in Indian Canyons, a complex of canyons where trails, wildlife, and picnic spots await. If you're looking for an easy hike in a lush oasis amid California fan palms, try Andreas Canyon. Tahquitz Canyon, whose 60-foot waterfall had a cameo in the 1937 film classic *Lost Horizon*, is a short stroll from downtown. Or take a short drive to the north end of town, where you can ascend through five ecological zones in 10 minutes. The world's largest rotating aerial tramcar swoops up some 6,000 feet above the Sonoran Desert to an alpine forest with 54 miles of trails. When winter



weather sets in, you can rent cross-country skis or snowshoes at the tramway's top terminal for a long afternoon of frolicking in the frozen stuff, and still descend to the valley floor in time to enjoy a game of tennis or a round of cocktails outside.

Later that evening, after a full day of outdoor pursuits or poolside reading or both, take in a bit of swank downtown at Le Vallauris. Starters might include vichyssoise,

escargots, or a walnut-dressed salad of Belgian endive, baby frisée, and dry desert fig terrine with pear, followed by main courses such as succulent duck roasted in honey and black pepper. For decades, the restaurant's patio, surrounded by trees, has been a grand place to watch the desert sky at sunset as music from the piano in the bar floats on the breeze. Styles in fashion and food come and go—and come again—but Palm Springs remains hip for the ages. ●

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If you're going . . .

Request the *Southern California and Las Vegas TourBook* and *Palm Springs-Indio Area* map at AAA.com or any AAA branch. To find a place to stay, visit AAA.com/hotels. For more information, contact the **Palm Springs Visitors Center**: 2901 N. Palm Canyon Dr., (800) 347-7746, visitpalmsprings.com. Area code is 760 except as noted.

MEMBER DEAL AAA Travel offers a AAA Getaway at the Four Diamond Hyatt Grand Champions Resort, Villas and Spa in nearby Indian Wells. From \$100. Members receive discount cards for the restaurant and spa. To learn more, call (888) 219-4222.

TO DO AND SEE **Palm Springs International Film Festival** Jan. 5–16, 2012. psfilmfest.org. **Palm Springs Modernism Week** Feb. 16–26, 2012. modernismweek.com. **Sunnylands** Call for opening dates. 37977 Bob Hope Dr., Rancho Mirage, 328-2829, sunnylands.org.

SHOPPING **Dazzles** 1035 N. Palm Canyon Dr., 327-1446. **Modernway** 745 N. Palm Canyon Dr., 320-5455, psmodernway.com. **Trina Turk Boutique** 891 N. Palm Canyon Dr., 416-2856, trinaturk.com.

EATS **King's Highway** 701 E. Palm Canyon Dr., 325-9900. **Le Vallauris** 385 W. Tahquitz Canyon Way, 325-5059.



TOP, Modernway offers a 1950s ceramic lamp for \$675. BOTTOM, King's Highway boasts a chicken club sandwich and garlic fries.