

Palm Springs: The Oasis You're Seeking

BY KIRK WILLIAMSON

A jewel of a desert oasis set in California's storied Coachella Valley, Palm Springs proves to be quite the active (and relaxingly passive) getaway for the Midwestern queer. Weary of the weather? How does near-constant sunshine strike you? The flat Illinois plain leaving you nonplussed? Try a vigorous hike through the Indian Canyons or an exhilarating 8,000 ft. zip up the Palm Springs Aerial Tramway. Don't like wearing clothes? Well, they've got you covered there, too.

Palm Springs' early history can be traced back to the Cahuilla (pronounced kah-WE-uh) Indians, who have inhabited the area for hundreds of years. A true taste of this history and the Cahuillas' respect for the natural beauty of the area can be had with a hike through the Indian Canyons on the Agua Caliente Indian Reservation. Try your feet at hiking trails ranging from

easy to strenuous and marvel at pristine streams, abundant California fan palms and more than 150 species of plants. In the Andreas Canyon, you'll find the Indian Grinding Mortar, a special rock used by women of the area for grinding acorns, wild oats and other indigenous ingredients. Judging by the depth of some of the mortars in the rock, this site had been in use for up to 600 years!

Should you find yourself overheated from the hike, you may want to head across town to the Palm Springs Aerial Tramway. The tram, which rides along 3-inch diameter cables suspended from four towers along the way, rises to an altitude of 8,516 feet and fully rotates, offering 360-degree views of your journey to the top. On average, temperatures at the top can be 30 degrees cooler than in the valley. You

might remember seeing this world-famous tram on such TV shows as *Mission Impossible*, *Beverly Hills 90210* or from a 1985 episode of *General Hospital*. Only this dramatic vista could provide an adequate backdrop for Robert Scorpio's battle against his foe. But, I digress...

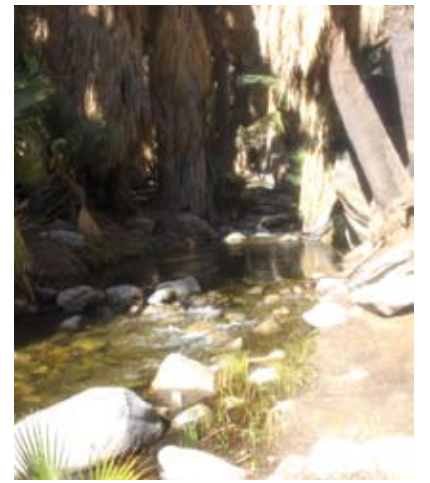
A proper way to take in the best variety of sights and sounds is to experience VillageFest.

Every Thursday night, downtown Palm Springs stays open a bit late and spills out onto expansive Palm Canyon Drive. At VillageFest you'll take part in a vast array of artists, entertainers, purveyors of fresh fruits and vegetables, flowers, jewelry, snacks and sweets. What better way to sample local delicacies than to top it off with a pleasing evening stroll?

Palm Springs is the birthplace of Desert Modernism, a mid-twentieth century offspring of the Modernism movement inspired by the stunning mountain views and the desert plain. This style of design pervades in Palm Springs' whimsical yet solid domiciles by such famed architects as Albert Frey, William Krisel and Donald Wexler.

Robert Imber, an impassioned champion of Palm Springs' classic architecture (and a genuine character, to boot) offers extensive car tours of homes, resorts and business districts. Be prepared to be star-struck as you cruise through the Las Palmas district where you will see current or former homes of such celebs as Kirk Douglas, Lily Tomlin, Dinah Shore, Jack Warner and Elizabeth Taylor. Make sure not to miss The Honeymoon House, which played host to a certain honeymooning King of rock and roll and his teenaged bride. There was a whole lotta shakin' goin' on that night!

Speaking of shaking at night, there are certainly many opportunities for you to do just that. Palm Springs' LGBT nightlife is bristling with entertainment, friendly faces and lip-smacking cocktails. Hunt-



In the Indian Canyons. Photo by Kirk Williamson

ers (yep—as in Hunters; they have a Palm Springs location as well) offers show-your-undies drink specials on Wednesday nights, Fur Fridays for the hirsute honeys and PINK! Girls' night on Saturday. Surely, you will find whatever it is you are looking for at this Palm Springs fixture.

Toucan's Tiki Lounge is a sight to behold, should you choose to believe your eyes afterwards, that is. Step into the grass-hut themed megabar and hula yourself up to the bar on Wednesday nights for Judge Judy bingo. It's all the fun and frolic of everyone's favorite judicial curmudgeon with liquor thrown in for good measure. On Tuesday nights, beware of the all-too-tempting two-for-one drink specials. Keep in mind, though, that one drink alone is quite large and surprising low-priced. Throw a second drink on top of that and you've got yourself a party. Make sure to get yourself a cab shortly afterwards.

If you partake in two-for-one Tuesdays at Toucan's, I highly recommend a morning trip to Pinocchio's in the Desert. Their elegant selection of Benedicts (including Salmon Benedict, Lox Benedict and Crab Cake Benedict) will set you right in a soothing deluge of hollandaise. Their bottomless champagne for \$3.95 will provide that hair of the dog you may be seeking, as well.

It's not all about the Benedicts, baby. Palm Springs boasts a veritable buffet of culinary choices. The new, upscale Trio serves up a sea food stew with clams, mussels, shrimp and cod in a tomato and fennel vegetable broth. Enjoy (and indulge in) their Trio Mac and 5 Cheese (fontina, cheddar, bleu, Romano and goat cheeses, to be exact) topped with tomatoes and bread crumbs. If you hunger for art, Trio will delight with walls full of modern art, all for sale and benefitting The Art Institute at Palm Springs High School.

Other right bites include Azul, a tapas-inspired lounge and patio downstairs from the famed George's Alibi Video Bar. Swing in the sunshine on charming, swinging park benches as you feast on their fried blue crab sandwich, their battered Portobello mushrooms or their ever-changing variety of flatbreads. Wing on down to Wang's for contemporary Chinese in an opulent setting or pull up a chair at Hamburger Mary's table (yep—as in Hamburger Mary's; those Wright brothers are all over the country by now!) for their critically-acclaimed burgers, salads, fresh salmon and island-chillin' Mojitos.

So if relaxing poolside in one of the gayest cities in the world is at all appealing to you, start planning your trip today at www.visitpalmsprings.com.



View from the Aerial Tramway. Photo by Kirk Williamson

The Private Option

Whether you're after fun in the sun or a quiet, relaxing respite, Palm Springs offers a bountiful bevy of clothing-optional men's resorts (and even a few for women). Here are just a few sunny spots where we encourage you to hang out.

Century Palm Springs

www.centurypalmsprings.com

At the height of hip, Century offers a meticulous eye for modern detail that carries through from the comfortable décor to the sparkling, heated pool. Lay back and drink in unobstructed mountain views and enjoy complimentary cocktails with the boys each day at 6 p.m. Century's commitment to green living is not only reflected in the color scheme, but also takes into account their amenities: state-of-the-art LED lighting, shampoo that has not been tested on animals and high-efficiency water heaters are but a few of Century's efforts to preserve our planet.

Tortuga Del Sol

www.tortugadelisol.com

This award-winning gay men's resort, decorated in a charming Southwestern motif, strives for a big backyard feel. A cool pool, hammocks and a 10-man spa will make you feel like an honored guest at your best bud's patio party. The laid-back attitude will make you want to stay all season, as some guests actually do. Make sure to ask to see the tortoise, the unofficial mascot of Tortuga Del Sol (tortuga means "turtle" in Spanish).

INNdulge

www.inndulge.com

Owners John Williams and Jean-Guy Lachance have transformed this historic inn into the award winning resort it is today. These awards include Best Clothing Optional Resort by Out Traveler in 1996. The owners of INNdulge want to make sure your stay is as genuinely "Palm Springs" as it can be. They offer a "Citrus 101," a handy guide that will help you enjoy a nice grapefruit, and not mistakenly bite into a Meyer lemon. They really have thought of everything.

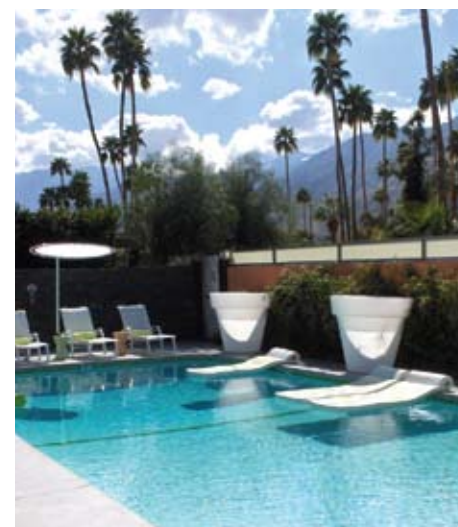


Citrus 101 at INNdulge. Photo by Kirk Williamson

East Canyon Hotel and Spa

www.eastcanyonps.com

East Canyon is a luxury hotel and spa that certainly doesn't skimp on the luxury. The a la carte spa menu includes heated stone massage, aromatherapy massage and dual-therapist massage. You know what they say—"Four hands are better than two." After your sublime rubdown, stroll the grounds and enjoy the tiled sauna and several heated hot tubs, pick grapefruits right off the trees and breathe in the breathtaking bougainvillea scaling the walls of the compound.



Poolside at Century Palm Springs. Photo by Kirk Williamson

All Worlds Resorts

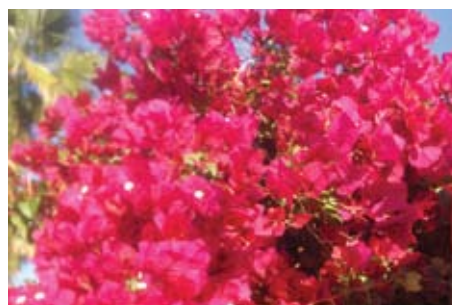
www.allworldsresorts.com

Yes, THAT All Worlds. The rooms range from raunchy to resplendent. Sip champagne in the Elizabeth Taylor suite or simply purchase a day pass if you don't necessarily intend on staying the whole night.

The Triangle Inn

www.triangle-inn.com

Designed by famed architect Hugh Kaptur in the Desert Modernism style, The Triangle Inn remains one of Palm Springs' most proud structures. Experience the sense of community at their exhaustive continental breakfast station, recline by the pool and retire to your suite, each one featuring fully stocked kitchens or kitchenettes and fine English toiletries by Gilcrest and Soames. When you end your stay and they say "Y'all come back!", they truly mean it. And you will.



The bougainvillea at East Canyon. Photo by Kirk Williamson

Casitas Laquita

www.casitaslaquita.com

Out & About rated this inn as "one of the top ten most romantic guesthouses (resorts, inns, hotels) on the planet for lesbians." The casitas of this Spanish Colonial boutique style resort were refreshed and renewed just last year with subtle, soothing colors that add to the relaxing mood. Groove to the cool jazz, contemporary and soft rock of Sassy Sisters, who will play for all your special events poolside in the wine cellar.