

## 36 HOURS PALM SPRINGS, CALIF.

With its kitsch, color and joyous queer scene, Palm Springs is all in on earthly pleasures. December through March is the city's sweetest spot: Highs average in the 70s, and there's just enough rain to replenish seasonal waterfalls and encourage cactus blooms. Deep in the driest corner of California, the Coachella Valley is a land of oases, from its sacred mineral springs to its fabulous pool culture. In winter, the population swells as snowbirds flock south and grateful tourists soak up the sunshine and Rat Pack nostalgia. But Palm Springs is not trapped in time: A futuristic pyramid art installation awaits at Sunnyslands Center & Gardens, the glamorous winter home of the Nixon-era diplomat-philanthropist Annenberg family; a new hot spring spa opened downtown last year; and one of the city's hardest-to-book restaurants, Bar Cecil, is opening a lounge next door in the spring.

FREDA MOON

### Friday

#### 3 P.M. | DELVE INTO THE DESERT

Start at the Moorten Botanical Garden (admission \$7), on the south end of Palm Springs, for an intriguing introduction to the area's dramatic desertscape. At the one-acre property (the Moorten family's multi-generational labor of love), meander through the region's resilient succulents, cartoonish cacti and desert trees. Then, visit downtown's Palm Springs Art Museum (admission \$20), which has an expansive collection of California Modernist and contemporary art. Along with Ansel Adams photographs, Frank Gehry furniture and Richard Neutra drawings, the museum is hosting an exhibition of David Hockney works (through March 31) and frequently presents live music like the Palm Springs Gay Men's Chorus.

#### 5 P.M. | STAY CLASSY

The supermarket-size Market Market, a few minutes' drive from the museum, is a vintageemporium with dozens of individual vendors. In one stall, find pastel-hued tie-dyed overalls; in the next, housewares like cactus-shaped napkin rings or a Russell Wright-designed seashell green dining set. The in-house Palm Springs Bottle Shop sells eclectic gifts, like a gin made with forged desert botanicals. For dinner, head next door to Bar Cecil, which opened in 2021 and quickly became one of the city's hardest-to-get reservations. Arrive early to claim a first-come, first-served spot among the 12-high-backed, cerulean bar stools. The art-filled space, known for its martini, serves exceptional renditions of classic dishes, like deviled eggs topped with flower petals (\$14), a lobster in Duxie pork chop with bright broccolini and potatoes au gratin (\$45), and a raspberry Pavlova (\$35).

#### 8 P.M. | HOTEL BAR-HOP

Fill between some of the town's most interesting hotel bars, where much of the local nightlife happens. Start on the north end, at the rose-and-champagne-centric and neon-lit La Reissien at Fleur Noire Hotel. Take your glass to the hotel's poolside courtyard, which has fire pits and walls adorned with lush flower motifs. Around the corner, the Barbara Bar at Trise Motel is the product of a hit renovation reality TV show. The motel is as colorful, fun-loving and over-the-top as its creator, the "Real Housewives of Palm Springs" alum Trise Mattel. Hop in a car to wind down at the Parker Palm Springs' Center Reformation, an appealingly dark and moody bar with a confessional in the corner and a small, excellent list of wines in three sizes (all starting at \$11), which allows for sampling, drinking or indulging.

### Saturday

#### 8 A.M. | BIKIE FOR BREAKFAST

Pick up an e-bike at Bike Palm Springs (half-day rentals from \$25; maps available) to cruise midcentury-modern neighborhoods on a self-guided tour. Along your route, stop into Peninsula Pastries, a few blocks south, where glass cases display softball-size chocolate (chocolate-cranberry-filled choux pastries, \$9.50) and pear-almond tarts (\$8.50). Then ride east—dipping into neighborhoods like Deepwell Estates and Twin Palms Estates—to Nature's Health Food & Cafe for an unconventional take on the date shake, a century-old Coachella Valley tradition that originated at Shields Date Garden in nearby Indio. Thick, deeply flavorful and less cloying than the original, this vegan rendition (\$9) uses Shields's date crystals, chewy pieces of



Clockwise from top: Tilting the Hi-View Trail in Joshua Tree National Park; a butterfly-nestled midcentury modern house in the Twyla Palms Estates tract; a Smoke Tree Stables ride in Murray Canyon; "Forever Marilyn," based on "The Seven Year Itch"; cocktails at the art-filled Bar Cecil.

fresh date, soy ice cream and banana. Take your treats to go or sit at the cafe's pink tile mosaic tables.

#### 10 A.M. | THRILL TO HISTORY

Ride to the Smithsonian-affiliated Agua Caliente Cultural Museum (admission \$10) to learn about the region's Indigenous and geological history. The museum, opened in 2023 by the Agua Caliente Band of Cahuilla Indians, shares a cultural plaza with the tribe's new 75,000-square-foot Spa at Séc-he—the area's largest and most elaborate hot spring spa and the only one in downtown Palm Springs. (Because of its size and \$155 day pass, it's an all-day experience.) The museum starts with an immersive animation of the Cahuilla creation story in a 360-degree theater, where the benches shake when the earth moves. The museum's exhibits span from time immemorial to recent history, including scale replicas of the Indian Canyons, Cahuilla basketry and black-and-white photography from the early years of Euro-American settlement.

#### 11 A.M. | SHOP PALM CANYON DRIVE

The city's main drag, Palm Canyon Drive, is an approachable stretch of old-school hat shops, New Age crystal vendors, locally owned boutiques and galleries. Drop into Wahl Sals Japan Living, run by a couple who visit family in Japan annually and import their favorite home goods, including novelty chopsticks, prized craftsman-made knives, exceptional sakes and celebrated Japanese whiskeys. Then visit the Michael Weems Collection, a gallery with captivating art prints (including evocative Joshua Tree photographs and American Modernist color studies), porcelain trays illustrated with Palm Springs architecture, cheeky tote bags with slogans like "Palm Springs... Sunny Skies... Shady People" and queer art with philosophies hiding in plain sight.

#### NOON | GO SPICY, THEN SLEEP

From the street, the family-owned Mexican seafood restaurant Crudo Cervecheria doesn't look like much. But out back, tables are set in a large flower-and-ecadure-filled courtyard. Stick to the excellent ceviches and tacos on the wide-ranging menu, like the fiery scallops negres, sliced thin in a sauce of charred chiles and topped with pickled onions (\$22), and fried cod tacos on

tender housemade corn tortillas (\$18). For a midday indulgence, add a pomegranate-jalapeno margarita (\$11). Then drive 20 minutes north to Desert Hot Springs, a dusty desert town where hot mineral springs are hidden in walled sanctuaries like the Gold House, a cactus-and-palm-filled compound with canary yellow cushioned lounge chairs, a yoga lawn, a dry sauna and steaming water bubbling from the property's spring. Two-hour passes (\$40) offer a restorative break.

#### 3 P.M. | VENTURE TO THE OLD WEST

Palm Springs is the gateway to Joshua Tree National Park. To glimpse the Scottish wonder of the trees that give the park its name, drive a half-hour north to the Hi-View Trailhead for a one-hour (round-trip) hike from the outer edge of the park, where you'll find dramatic views of the park's surreal landscape (no fee for trail). Then take a gorgeous, winding drive 15 minutes into the boulder-strewn hills to Puppy + Harriet's, a soulful, old-school roadhouse in one of Southern California's stranger enclaves: Piersonville, a living movie set and planned community built in the 1940s with an Old West (circa 1880) theme. Bands don't play until the evening (Paul McCartney is among the big-name acts to have performed there), but the bar-restaurant is worth a stop to soak up the atmosphere with Harriet's tri-tip chili (\$11) and a cold beer.

#### 7:30 P.M. | SELECT YOUR SPREAD

Opened in October, Lola Rose Grand Mezze at the long-anticipated Thompson Palm Springs serves a Persian-accented Middle Eastern menu in a choose-your-own-adventure spread. The \$60 per person is more than enough for two. Choices include tabbouleh (the crisp-shelled Iranian rice dish), baby beet in a pistachio vinaigrette with harissa goat cheese, green beans and a texturally thrilling quinoa "granola," and a not-to-be-missed slick-skinned "celebration bread." For a transportive postdinner cocktail, head to the airline-themed PS Air Bar, where the narrow bar has fuselage-shaped walls, a silver ceiling with cotton ball clouds and fan windows. The servers also shay down the aisle in captain's uniforms and the serving-cart-like bar pours aviation-inspired cocktails like the "Jet Lag" (featuring espresso vodka, \$16).

### Sunday

#### 8 A.M. | MEET THE BOSS

Stop into the Latina-owned Cafe La Jefa, where flamenco and palm frond wallpaper brightens a corner of the Flanery Exchange marketplace. Get a breakfast sandwich on brioche with bacon and chipotle aioli with a side of homestyle potatoes, \$19, dicker de leche French toast (\$17.50), or bagels and pastries supplied by Townie Bagels. Then shop at Covel (opens at 9 a.m.), a boutique of house-designed jewelry and accessories like a cactus-printed bandana or a midcentury-style necklace with a turquoise-studded sun pendant. Next door, at the stationary store Beto Design Studio, the illustrator Angie Chan sells her designs, including a national-park-themed travel journal with nature-inspired washie tape.

#### 9:30 A.M. | HIKE SACRED CANYONS

Drive 15 minutes south to Indian Canyons (admission \$12), a trio of palm oases the Cahuilla consider sacred. Less crowded than the better-known Tahquitz Canyon, which is within walking distance of downtown, each is distinct. Palm Canyon is the state's largest reserve of California fan palms. In Andreas Canyon, a crystalline stream flows year-round and an easy one-mile loop winds beneath red cliffs, cooling birds and eucalyptus trees. (For trail maps and advice from a tribal ranger, stop at the Palm Canyon Trading Post first.) Murray Canyon is a moderate-to-ambitious hike but can also be explored on guided horserack tours (\$385, approximately 90 minutes) from Smoke Tree Stables.

#### 11:30 A.M. | PERCH ON THE PORCH

The brunch spot Wilma & Frieda, whose wraparound porch overlooks a fountain-size statue of the actor and onetime mayor Sonny Bono, is perpetually packed. Expect binged portions of diner classics like fluffy biscuits blanketed in sausage, bacon and thyme graty (\$19.50); griddled meatloaf (\$17.50); and California-isms like chilaquiles (salsa-soaked tortilla chips) topped with spicy chorizo, queso fresco and avocado (\$19.50). After brunch, stroll north on Palm Canyon Drive, taking in the city's echoes of Hollywood: the Palm Springs Walk of Stars, a bronze-cast Lucille Ball on a bench, and the oddly captivating "Forever Marilyn," a 26-foot-tall statue of Marilyn Monroe.



#### KEY STOPS

Learn about the Agua Caliente Band of Cahuilla Indians at the **Agua Caliente Cultural Museum** and visit the birthplace of their civilization at **Indian Canyons**.  
Dine and imbibe at the beautiful, art-filled **Bar Cecil**.  
Soak in mineral hot spring water at the **Good House**, a tranquil, plant-filled sanctuary and spa in Desert Hot Springs.

#### WHERE TO EAT

**Peninsula Pastries** bakes French delicacies and breads, and breakfast cocktails.

**Nature's Health Food & Cafe** whips up an unconventional take on the date shake.

Order ceviche and tacos in **Crudo Cervecheria's** courtyard. Among the city's newest restaurants, **Lola Rose Grand Mezze** offers elegant and distinctive Middle Eastern dishes.

**Wilma & Frieda** serves huge, hearty rifts on diner classics and breakfast cocktails.

**La Reissien** serves roasts and champagne from a closet-size, pink-downed bar to a floral-themed courtyard at Fleur Noire Hotel.

**Barbara Bar** at Trise Motel offers a glimpse into the creative mind of the drag star Trise Mattel.

The **Counter Reformation**, inside the Parker Palm Springs hotel, is a wine-and-tapas bar that's a dark and moody break from the party scene.

**Puppy + Harriet's**, a desert roadhouse, has walls papered in yellow photographs. Georgia O'Keeffe-esque paintings and concert posters.

Board the isolation-themed **PS Air Bar**, where servers dress as captains and cotton ball clouds hang overhead.

#### WHERE TO STAY

A throwback to the 1950s Hollywood era, the **Colony Palm Hotel and Gardens** (starting in the mid-\$300s per night) is understated and effortlessly elegant.

Starting in the mid-\$200s, **Holiday House**—by the duo behind Bar Cecil—is a blue-hued, adults-only retreat with a thrilling art collection.

The 32-room (from the low \$200s) **Arrive Palm Springs** feels a young, fun, low-key party vibe. The hotel has bikes available and a pool bar serving all-day brunch.

Central Palm Springs has no shortage of **short-term rentals**. From midcentury-modern homes to comfortable condos with pools, tennis courts and gyms, the latter are a good option for families on a budget, since many Palm Springs hotels are adults-only.